

# Voor Onze Jongens

## Understanding and reducing young men's support for anti-democratic parties from a designer's perspective


**Graduation report**
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In collaboration with
**Voor Ons Nederland**



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# PREFACE

Daar is ie dan: mijn afstudeerproject. Het is eindelijk af. Wat een feest. En ja, het voelt ook echt als een feestje, want god, wat ben ik er klaar mee. Maar dat dekt niet de hele lading. Het was namelijk ook heel leuk. Het onderwerp is schitterend fascinerend. Ik denk dan aan de jongens die ik gesproken heb, de vriendschappen bij Voor Ons Nederland, de talloze gesprekken: “Waar studeer je dan op af?”, “Ja, uhhh, waarom steeds meer praktijkgeschoolde jongemannen stemmen op partijen met antidemocratische ideeën, en hoe je dat tij kan keren.” En dan die verbaasde blik: “Huh, jij studeert toch aan de Technische Universiteit, wat heeft dat daarmee te maken?” Dat ga ik allemaal missen. Ik ben blij, ik ben voldaan, en ik ben bovenal eindelijk ook echt trots.

Maar dit had ik NATUURLIJK nooit allemaal alleen kunnen doen.

Ik wil allereerst mijn begeleiders bedanken. Annemiek, ik kan me het eerste moment dat wij elkaar spraken nog heel goed herinneren: we werden allebei emotioneel over de haat die mensen wordt aangepraat, en over hoe graag we daar iets aan wilden doen. Die diepe klik was er vanaf het begin, en die heb ik altijd gevoeld.

En ook zeker naar jou, Gert Hans. Zoals je weet, en zoals ik je ook verteld heb, vond ik je in het begin best wel een beetje intimiderend: een echte grote jongen die de linker-, rechter-, achter- en voorkant van het bedrijfsleven al had gezien. Maar jij hebt mij echt geholpen. Je bent enorm slim, en je hebt me geleerd om op een andere, meer gestructureerde maar ook versimpelde manier naar dingen te kijken. De vraag “waarom, waarom, waarom?” is mij niet in de kouwe kleren gaan zitten, en die neem ik nog altijd mee. Maar we hebben ook diepe gesprekken gehad, over wat het is om succesvol te zijn, hoe mensen naar je kijken, en hoeveel je daar eigenlijk om moet geven. Want uiteindelijk is het voornamelijk belangrijk dat jij doet wat je leuk vindt.
Annemiek, Gert Hans: dankjulliewel.

Ten tweede: Carlijn van Donselaar en het hele team van Voor Ons Nederland. Jezus, wat heb ik een leuke tijd met jullie gehad. Ik heb zelden zo veel gelachen, en me zelden zo fijn gevoeld in een omgeving. Carlijn, ik wil je bedanken voor je aandacht en voor je openheid. Ik heb veel van je geleerd, vooral dat je echt lol kan hebben in je werk, dat je jezelf kan blijven ook al ben je een chaoot, en dat dat soms júist in je voordeel kan werken.

Ten derde: de jongens. De jongens die hebben meegeholpen aan mijn project. Wat vond ik het leuk om met jullie te werken. Ik heb geleerd jongens te waarderen, hoe links, rechts, hetero, gay, verlegen, druk, Marokkaans of Nederlands jullie ook zijn. Jullie hebben me laten inzien dat jullie lief zijn, ook al komt dat er niet altijd uit. Jullie hebben me weer in mijn eigen visie doen geloven: mensen doen geen slechte dingen omdat ze slecht zijn, maar omdat ze dat per ongeluk zo aangeleerd hebben gekregen.

En als laatste: mijn vriendin, Josefien. Dankjewel voor het me door deze tijd heen loodsen. Dankjewel voor het zeggen “ik ben trots op je”, iets wat ik zelf op sommige momenten nog nauwelijks tegen mezelf kon zeggen. Ik hou heel erg veel van jou.

Ik weet niet per se of dit is hoe een voorwoord normaal gaat, maar dit is hoe ík het wil, en dat vind ik belangrijk.

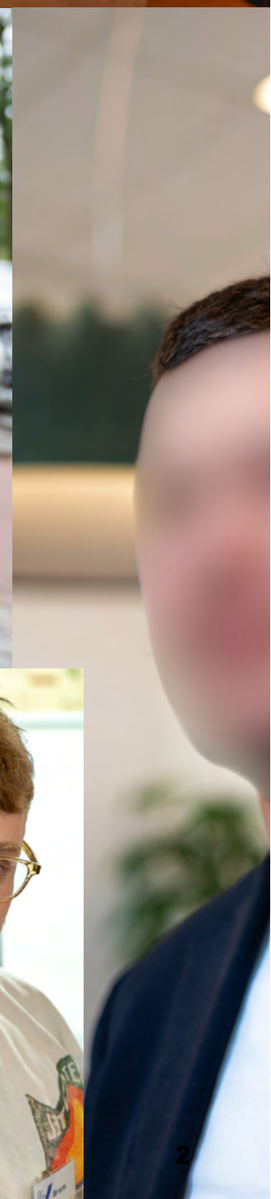
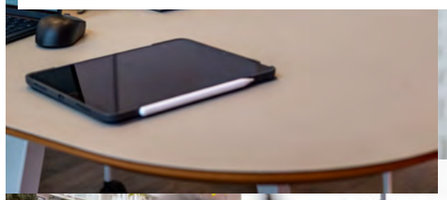
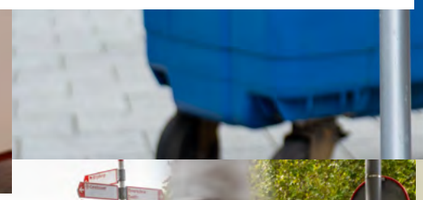
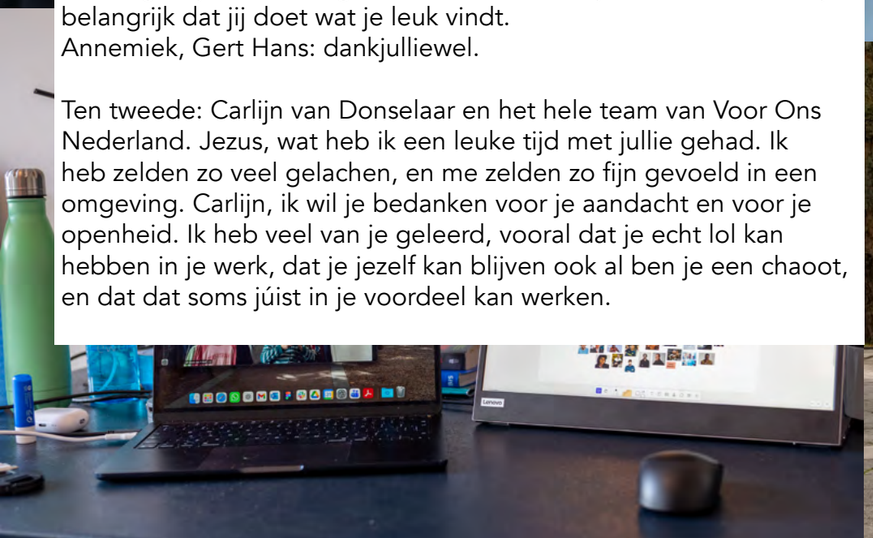
De grootste tip die ik je geef tijdens het lezen: wees niet vooringenomen. Lees, en probeer te begrijpen. Zie deze jongens als je eigen zoon. Want die wil je toch ook altijd begrijpen?

Liefs,

Bram







# SUMMARY

Voor Ons Nederland works to protect Dutch democracy against the growing pull of anti-democratic parties, and one group is consistently overrepresented among their supporters: practically educated young men. This project set out to understand why. The research question guiding it was: why do practically educated young men (aged 16–22) in the Netherlands vote for, or feel drawn to, anti-democratic parties, and how do they differ from those who do not? Following the Double Diamond design process (Design Council, 2005), the project moved through four phases: Discover, Define, Develop and Deliver. It combined desk research with semi-structured interviews, group settings and observation. In total I spoke with roughly fifty young men, 25 being practically educated, alongside teachers and academic experts on polarisation, political psychology and youth culture.

The Discover phase showed that practically educated young men are not a uniform group, and that public explanations such as “the manosphere” only partly account for what draws a smaller subgroup specifically toward anti-democratic parties. The clearest difference between this subgroup and their peers was not what they privately believed, but the social environment around them: many voiced views in their friend group that did not match their own convictions in one-on-one conversation. In the Define phase, Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) were used to explain this gap between private belief and expressed behaviour as a matter of group belonging rather than ideology. Mapping the culture of these ‘right-wing’ friend groups produced a framework of five roles: The Radical, The Follower, The With-holder, The Challenger and The Impressionable. One role stood out as the most promising design target: The With-holder, the young man who privately disagrees but stays silent under group pressure. The resulting design challenge was to motivate The With-holder to become The Challenger, so that The Impressionable feels encouraged to adopt non-normative positions too, ultimately reducing support for anti-democratic parties.

In the Develop phase, intervention directions were compared against criteria drawn from all the findings done previously. A public communication campaign was selected as the strongest direction and developed into one concept with four connected parts: Blijf Bij Jezelf, a commercial built around a single, recognisable act of speaking up; Voor Onze Jongens, a dedicated brand positioned as a credible sender rather than a corrective outsider; Met Onze Jongens, a podcast that gives young men a voice of their own; and Care, Connect, Change, a phased campaign strategy that builds trust before asking anything of its audience.

The Deliver phase tested this concept with the target group directly: through interviews and conversations across several schools, an Instagram poll for the podcast concept, and expert review of the campaign strategy. Every response was then judged against the criteria set earlier in the project. The campaign was recognised as authentic and relatable, and its core message was understood and believed by the young men who saw it, though a sharper call to action and a more focused central message stand out as the clearest points for further development. Design alone cannot resolve why young men drift toward anti-democratic parties, but this project shows it can give The With-holder a socially safer way to speak up among his peers. It closes with a concrete implementation plan and recommendations for Voor Ons Nederland to take the concept further.

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# ENJOY READING!



# REPORT STRUCTURE

This chapter explains how the report is structured. Figure 1 shows a visual of this structure.

The report follows the four phases of the Double Diamond Model (Design Council, 2005): Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver. Each time the report moves into a new phase of the Double Diamond, this is clearly indicated.

The structure of the report also broadly follows the chronological progression of my own design process, allowing you to follow the project as it unfolded.

Throughout the report, you will occasionally meet a Playmobil version of myself. Think of me as your personal tour guide through this report.



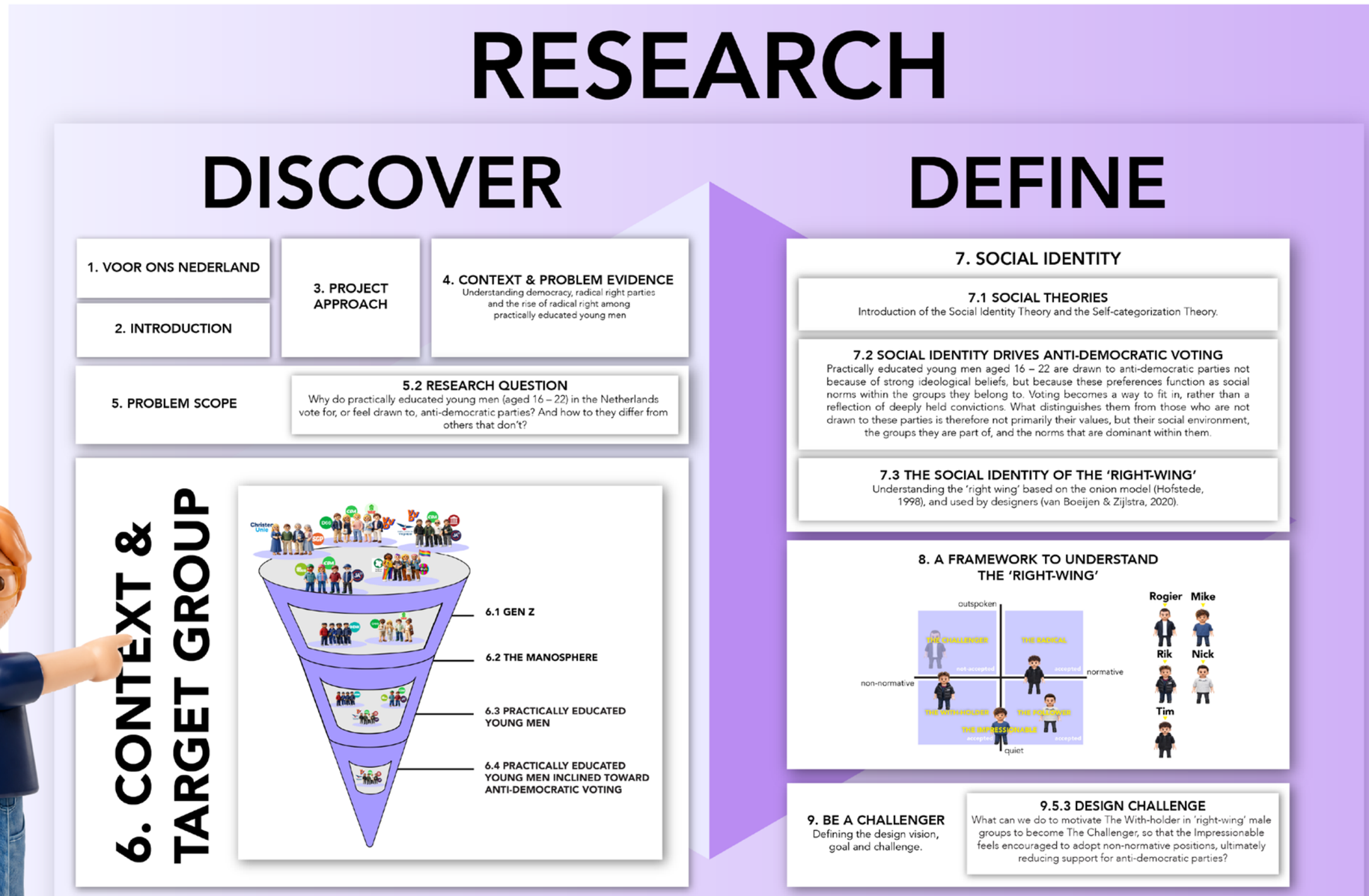



figure 1 - The structure of this report

# DESIGN

## DEVELOP

### 10. MOTIVATING THE WITH-HOLDER

10.1 THE ONION FLOWER FRAMEWORK



10.2 REACHING YOUNG MEN

### 11. INTERVENTION DIRECTION

11.1 INTERVENTION CRITERIA

11.2 THREE INTERVENTIONS DIRECTIONS

11.3 TAKING THE CAMPAIGN APPROACH

### 12. DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

12.1 ELEMENTS OF A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

12.2 FUNCTIONS OF A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

12.3 IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS OF MY CAMPAIGN

12.4 CAMPAIGN CRITERIA

### 13. SELECTION OF FINAL CONCEPT



### 14. FINAL CONCEPT

14.1 BLIJF BIJ JEZELF - THE CAMPAIGN



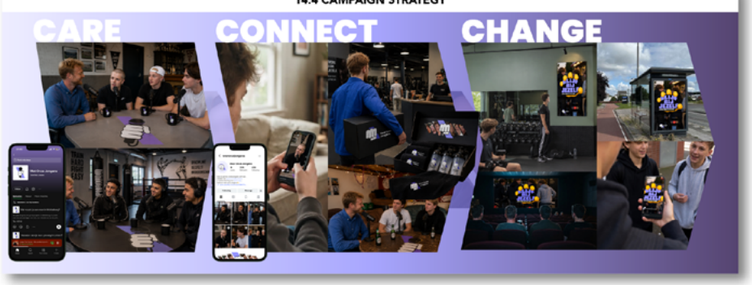

14.2 VOOR ONZE JONGENS - THE BRAND

Voor Onze Jongens

14.3 MET ONZE JONGENS - THE PODCAST



14.4 CAMPAIGN STRATEGY




## DELIVER

### 15. IMPLEMENTATION




### 16. EVALUATION METHOD




### 17. RESULTS

### 18. CONCLUSION, IMPROVEMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### 19. LIMITATIONS & DISCUSSION

### 20. PERSONAL REFLECTION

I now know that I get energy from genuine connection with the people I design for, as I experienced during the interviews: the listening, entering conversations without prejudice, and continuing to seek connection. I want to keep making that same kind of connection through imagery too: making visuals and photographs is something I've proven to be good at, and something I'd like to keep developing, because above all it brings me joy.

### 21. EPILOGUE

Let each other finish. Give each other a compliment, even when you disagree. Take young men seriously without excusing everything. Because standing on the sidelines with your feet planted in the grass, passing judgment on everything, changes nothing. If anything, that's exactly how the problem keeps growing.

If we want boys to change, we need to make sure there's also a way back. A path where they aren't immediately written off, but are challenged to think more carefully.

Because only once someone feels heard does room to move actually appear.



# 1. VOOR ONS NEDERLAND

The organisation for which this graduation project is being carried out is Voor Ons Nederland (VON) (n.d.; see figure 2). Founded in 2025, VON is a civic movement that aims to strengthen democracy and reduce polarisation in the Netherlands. Rather than functioning as a political party, VON positions itself as a broad societal movement that seeks to mobilise what it calls the 'milde meerderheid' (mild majority): people who believe that reasonableness and mildness will lead to progress, but who often feel underrepresented in an increasingly polarised public debate, dominated by the most extreme people and opinions.

One of the movement's most prominent founders is former VVD politician Klaas Dijkhoff. Together with several other founders, he started VON out of a concern that trust in politics, institutions, and fellow citizens is declining.

To address this, VON develops initiatives that encourage democratic participation and strengthen trust in democracy. For example, VON conducts public opinion research through the VON Panel (see figure 3) and develops campaigns that, for example, expose populist rhetoric and political manipulation (see figure 4). VON also collaborates with researchers, foundations for democracy and policymakers to test evidence-based approaches for reducing polarisation and increasing public support for democratic values.

I chose to conduct my graduation project at VON because it is an organisation that is actively trying to create societal impact. It is not merely researching social issues, nor is it advocating a particular political ideology, like political parties. Instead, it focuses on finding practical ways to strengthen democracy and fight polarisation.

One of the challenges VON currently faces concerns young men. The organisation sees that support for radical right parties with anti-democratic ideas is growing within this group, but has limited insight into the underlying reasons. Why are these young men attracted to such parties? What concerns, frustrations, or needs drive their political choices? And how can VON connect with them?

This graduation project was developed to help answer those questions.



figure 2 - The logo of Voor Ons Nederland (n.d.)

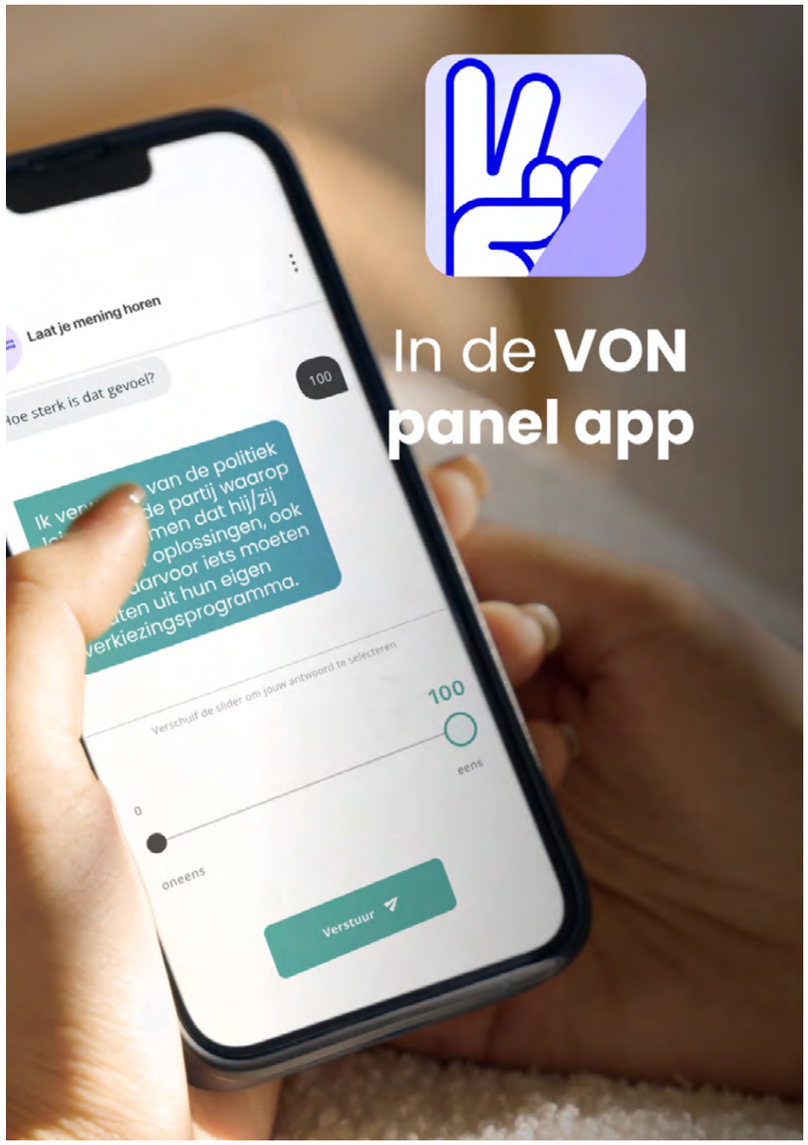



figure 3 - The VON Panel App (Voor Ons Nederland, n.d.)




figure 4 - The 'Nederland wil' - campaign (Nederland Wil, n.d.)

# 2. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, growing concern has emerged around young men in the Netherlands. They are increasingly portrayed as becoming more conservative, more traditional, and more susceptible to anti-democratic ideas, often in connection with the rise of the manosphere. Some commentators even suggest that "something is going badly wrong" with young men, as television maker and presenter Arjen Lubach puts it (Lubach, 2025; see figure 5). At the same time, documentaries such as Inside the Manosphere by Louis Theroux and award-winning series such as Adolescence have brought this issue further into the public spotlight (Elffers, 2025; Redactie NPO Cultuur, 2025; see figure 6).

These concerns do not emerge in a vacuum. We are living in a political time in which the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV), led by Geert Wilders, has become one of the largest parties in the Netherlands, nazi-terms such as 'omvolking' have entered mainstream political debate (Forum voor Democratie, 2026) and political parties look like they function more like cults than democratic institutions (Vos, 2026). In that sense, this is undeniably a turbulent political moment. But what exactly do young men have to do with it?

One thing is clear: the public conversation about men has become deeply negative. As Joris Luyendijk argues in De Claudia Show (Claudia de Breij, 2026):

"In the progressive Netherlands, nothing positive is ever said about men." - Joris Luyendijk

That observation resonates with a broader cultural feeling: men, and especially young men, are often discussed as a problem to be explained, corrected or feared. They appear in public debate as angry, politically dangerous, or morally confused. But does this image actually reflect reality? And is there truly reason for concern when it comes to the political development of young men?

This research starts from that tension. On the one hand, there is a growing public narrative that young men are moving further toward anti-democratic politics. On the other hand, it remains unclear to what extent this narrative is accurate, exaggerated, or even self-reinforcing. Are anti-democratic parties in fact growing in the Netherlands? To what extent do these parties pose a challenge to a free and democratic society? Do practically educated young men indeed vote more often for anti-democratic parties than others? And if so, what explains this tendency? More importantly, is there also an opportunity to guide this group away from anti-democratic voting and toward more conventional democratic politics?



figure 5 - Thumbnail of LUBACH's episode on young men (LUBACH, 2025)



figure 6 - Cover of Louis Theroux's documentary: Inside the Manosphere (Netflix Tudum, 2025)

# 3. PROJECT APPROACH

This chapter presents the complete project approach. A schematic version of this approach per phase is shown in table 1. Local method summaries are repeated at the start of the chapters where their results are discussed.

## 3.1 DOUBLE DIAMOND AS PROJECT STRUCTURE

The project followed the four phases of the Double Diamond: Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver (Design Council, 2005). Discover diverged to understand the wider context and the target group. Define converged this evidence into an explanatory framework and design challenge. Develop diverged again by exploring design intervention directions and design criteria, then converged on a total concept. Deliver specifies implementation and evaluation.

## 3.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary research objective in the Discover phase was to understand why practically educated young men aged 16 to 22 (the target group) may vote for, or feel drawn to, anti-democratic parties and how they differ from peers who do not. The study used a broad-to-specific sequence: Generation Z; the manosphere as a contextual phenomenon; practically educated young men; and the subgroup inclined toward anti-democratic voting. A visual of this research method is shown in figure 7.

| PHASE | CENTRAL QUESTION | MAIN METHODS | | PHASE OUTPUT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| DISCOVER | What is happening, for whom, and why? | • Desk research<br>• Expert interviews<br>• Interviews with young men | • Teacher interviews<br>• Observation. | Research findings and an answer to the research question. |
| DEFINE | Which mechanism is both important and designable? | • Theoretical interpretation<br>• Social Identity Theory | • Self-Categorization Theory | An answer to the research question and the Design challenge. |
| DEVELOP | Which intervention best satisfies the design challenge? | • Brainstorms<br>• Focus group | • Expert interviews<br>• Campaign analysis | Total concept. |
| DELIVER | Is the concept understandable, credible, desirable, and implementable? | • Target-group evaluation<br>• Evaluation with VON | • Evaluation with VON's supporter base | Validated implementation proposal and recommendations. |

table 1 - The project approach per phase

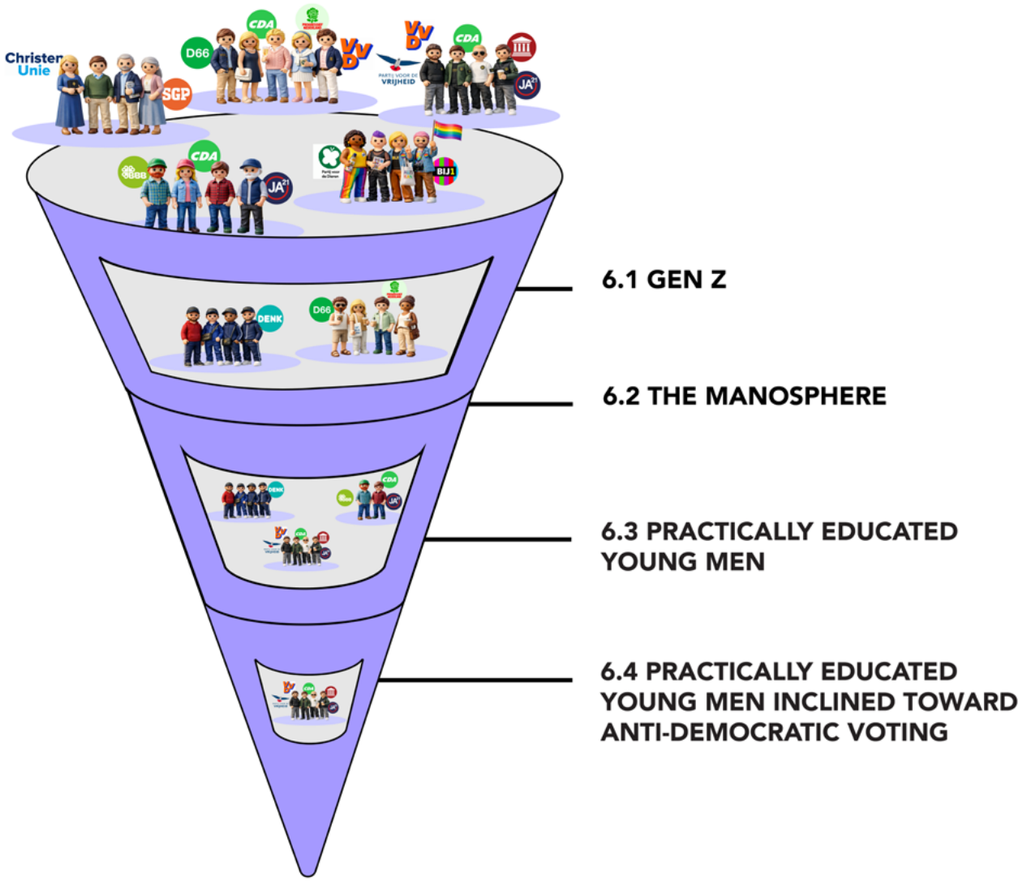



figure 7 - The research method of the Discover phase

## 3.3 PARTICIPANTS & DATA SOURCES

This project drew on six kinds of source: literature, experts, the target group itself, people who work with the target group daily, brainstorms and observation in a group setting. The combination matters. The subgroup at the centre of the research proved hard to reach, so no single source could carry the findings on its own. Each was therefore used to check the others: what young men said in an interview was weighed against what teachers observed, what experts described, and what happened when those same young men were together in a room. Table 2 lists every source, why it was selected and how it was used.

| SOURCE | WHO / WHAT | N | WHY SELECTED & HOW USED | APPENDIX |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| LITERATURE | Academic literature, institutional reports, election data, news-articles and campaign cases<br>*Desk research* | - | Selected for what it shows about democracy, Gen Z, polarisation and the manosphere. Used to frame the problem. | x |
| RESEARCH EXPERTS | Quita Muis (expert Polarisation), Bert Bakker (expert Political Psychology), and Judith van de Wetering (expert Youth Polarisation)<br>*Semi-structured interviews* | 3 | Selected for their knowledge of polarisation, politics and young participation. Used to place the target group in a wider context. | A |
| TARGET GROUP | Practically educated young men (16–22 years old)<br>*Semi-structured interviews*<br>*6 individual + 1 group interview, 60–90 min* | 9 | Selected so that the group covered different political views and backgrounds. Main source for their values, role models and group dynamics. | B |
| TEACHERS | Vocational teachers at Curio | 2 | Selected because they work with the target group daily. | C1, C2, C4 |
| OBSERVATION | Schoolberaad at vocational school Curio | - | Showed how the target group acts in a group, instead of one-on-one with me. | C3 |
| DESIGN EXPERTS | Jannes Pool (Public campaign strategist), Susanna Osinga (Social designer)<br>*Semi-structured interviews* | 2 | Selected for their experience with campaigns, social design and behaviour change. Used as input for intervention criteria. | E1, E4 |
| BRAINSTORMS | Fellow IDE students (2) and a colleague at Voor Ons Nederland (1)<br>*2 brainstorm sessions* | 3 | Used to generate intervention directions; one session introduced the Onion Flower framework. | E2, E3 |
| YOUTH WORKER | Jeppe Kok, founder of Tienskip<br>*Semi-structured interview* | 1 | Selected because he brings young people into democratic conversations in practice. Used as input for intervention criteria. | E5 |
| TEACHER | Teacher at Albeda Zuid<br>*Semi-structured interview* | 1 | Selected for his view on how these themes are discussed in class. Used to weigh education against a campaign as intervention. | E6 |
| CO-CREATION | Sparring session with Rik, a With-holder | 1 | Rik fits the With-holder quadrant. Used to gather reactions to five existing campaigns on masculinity. | F1, F2 |
| FOCUS GROUP | Young men at a Tienskip event | 9 | Used as a second, deeper observation, to get more insight into what motivates this group. First their workshop, then a discussion on campaign communication. | F1, F4 |
| EVALUATION OF FIRST CONCEPTS | Young men via WhatsApp + colleagues at VON | 10 + 3 | Used as a first comparison of the three storyboards. WhatsApp kept the setting informal and the reactions honest. | G2 |
| FINAL CONCEPT EVALUATION | Young people on the street + Head of Campaign & Strategy at VON | 250 + 1 | Used as a final, large-scale evaluation of the final concept's feasibility, viability, usability and desirability | I1, I2 |

table 2 - Participants and data sources, why they were selected and how they were used

## 3.4 DATA COLLECTION

Four methods were used, each for something the others could not show.

Desk research established what is at stake and what is already known: democratic principles, election data, and research on Gen Z and the manosphere.

Semi-structured interviews were the main method. They let the traget group describe their environment, values, political preferences and media use in their own words. Experts and teachers were interviewed the same way, but to hold those accounts against what people who study or teach this group actually see.

Group settings showed how these young men speak when their friends can hear them. Since the research turned out to be about group norms, that is not a supplement but the situation itself.

Observation, at a Schoolberaad at Curio and a full day at Tienskip, recorded group behaviour.

All conversations were held in Dutch and captured in written notes rather than transcripts; quotes were translated by the author. Every source is listed in table 2.

## 3.5 ANALYSIS

The interview notes were analysed inductively. AI was used as an analysis tool: it grouped the material into recurring themes, which I then checked against the original notes and reworked. A theme was kept when it recurred across sources, spoke directly to the research question, or pointed at something a designer could act on.

Two principles guided this. The analysis stayed close to participants' own language, because the words these young men use are themselves part of the finding. And sources were used to check each other rather than confirm each other: what a young man said alone was weighed against what teachers observed and against what happened when those same young men were together. Where sources disagreed, the disagreement was kept; the gap between what is said individually and what is said in a group became one of the main findings of this project. Literature and expert perspectives were used to challenge and qualify the emerging patterns, not to replace the participants' own explanations.

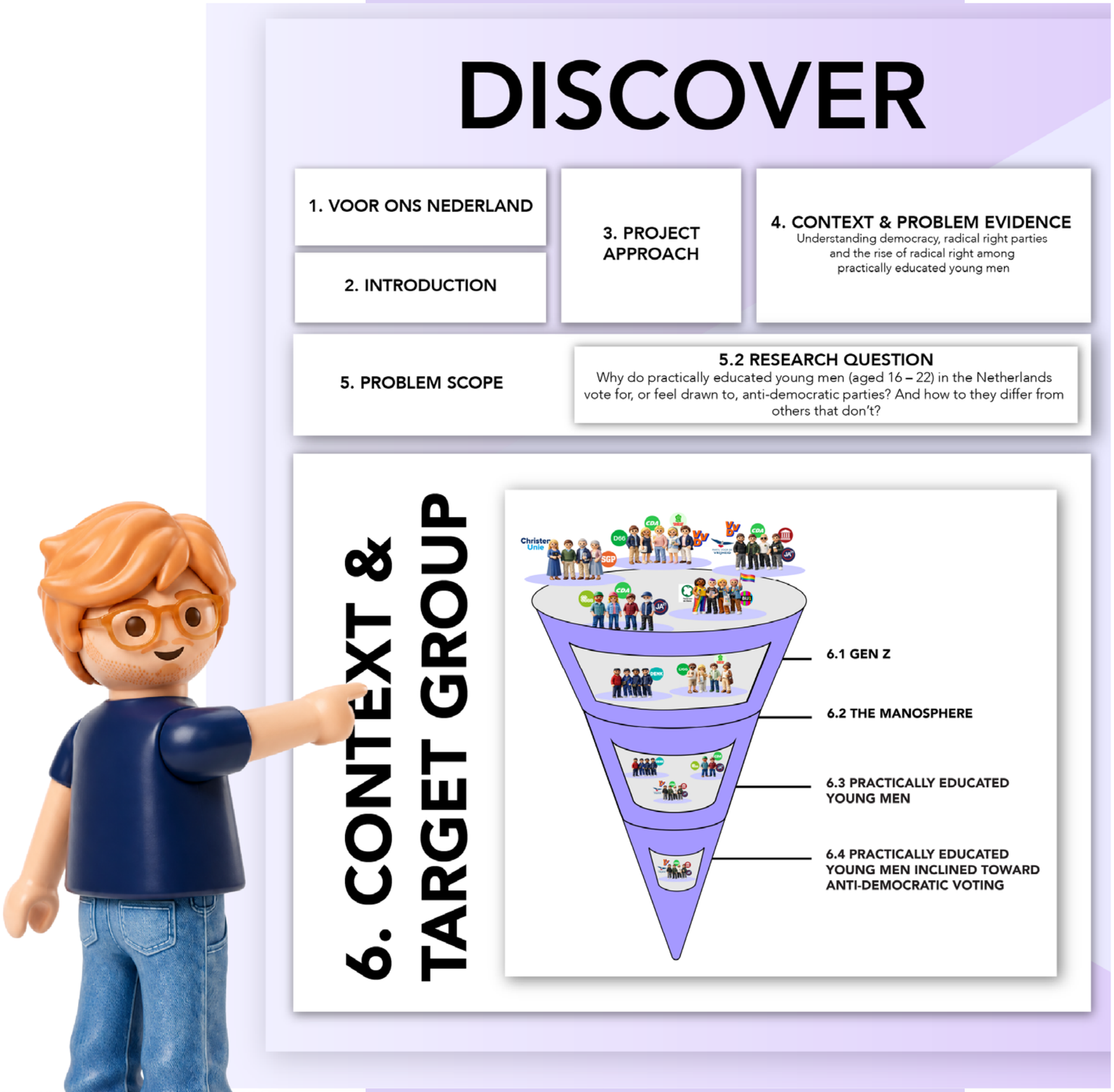
## 3.6 SYNTHESIS

Analysis produced patterns; synthesis turned them into something designable.

In the Define Phase, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987) explained why these young men express views that do not match their own values. The group culture was mapped with Hofstede's onion model (1998), as applied in design by Van Boeijen and Zijlstra (2020), and the interview material was translated into an author-developed framework of five roles within the group, which lead to a design challenge.

In the Develop phase, the following  synthesis steps were taken. The Onion Flower framework (Van der Klauw, 2026) was applied to the target group to establish which parts of their identity are most central. Together with the Discover findings and an exploratory analysis of existing public communication campaigns, this produced a set of intervention criteria (A1–D4). Three intervention directions (workshops in schools, coaches, and a public communication campaign) were compared against those criteria, and a campaign approach was selected.

From there the campaign itself was worked out. The campaign analysis was used to establish what a public communication campaign consists of and which functions it can perform, and awareness and activation were chosen as the two functions this campaign carries. The intervention criteria were then translated into fourteen specific campaign criteria (S1–S14). Three campaign concepts were developed and visualised as storyboards, evaluated with young men over WhatsApp and with colleagues at Voor Ons Nederland, and compared in a Harris profile (Harris, 1961). Blijf Bij Jezelf scored best and was developed into the final concept: the campaign Blijf Bij Jezelf, the brand Voor Onze Jongens, the podcast Met Onze Jongens, and the campaign strategy.




# DISCOVER

The Discover phase builds the evidence base of this project. It starts with the wider context: what democracy is, which parties put pressure on it, and who votes for them. From there the focus is narrowed step by step: first to the generation the target group belongs to, Gen Z, then to the manosphere as the most visible public explanation for young men's behaviour, then to practically educated young men in general, and finally to practically educated young men inclined toward anti-democratic voting. The approach behind each chapter is set out in a table at its start.

## THE PHASE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Build the evidence base: understand what is happening, for whom, and why. |
| QUESTIONS | » Is support for anti-democratic parties growing, and among whom?<br>» What characterises practically educated young men, and the subgroup drawn to these parties?<br>» How do they differ from peers who are not drawn to them? |
| SOURCES | Literature; three research experts; nine practically educated young men; two vocational teachers; observation at a vocational school. |
| METHOD | Desk research, semi-structured interviews, one group interview, observation. |
| ANALYSIS | Inductive thematic analysis; sources used to check one another rather than to confirm one another. |
| OUTPUT | Research findings and an answer to the research question. |

# 4. CONTEXT & PROBLEM EVIDENCE

This chapter contains the literature-based findings that establish what is at stake, define the relevant political terms, and lead to the project research question.

## THE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Set out the democratic, political and demographic context of this project. |
| QUESTIONS | » What is democracy, and what does it protect?<br>» Which parties are treated as anti-democratic in this project, and why?<br>» Is support for them growing, and which young people are overrepresented in their support? |
| SOURCES | Academic literature, institutional reports, election data, party programmes and news articles. |
| METHOD | Desk research. |
| ANALYSIS | Party proposals weighed against the eight principles of democracy; election data compared across years, age groups and education levels. |
| OUTPUT | Problem scope and the research question. |

## 4.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOCRACY

For my project, it is important to understand what is at stake, our democracy, the cornerstone of a peaceful and fair society.

Freedom House (2024), a non-profit organisation that researches and promotes democracy, political freedom and human rights worldwide, describes democracy the following way:

"

*Democracy is the only system of government that holds leaders accountable to the people and protects their rights. While it is not perfect, it is the form of government that best enables people to live freely and with dignity. It also creates the strongest incentives for leaders to serve the interests of the public rather than their own.*

*Unlike authoritarian systems, which concentrate power in the hands of a few or a single ruler, democracy distributes power more broadly. It encourages deliberation and compromise and requires competing interests to resolve their differences without resorting to violence. In contrast to the secrecy and oppression that characterize dictatorships, democracies aim to provide transparency and justice.*

*Another important characteristic of democratic systems is their ability to correct themselves. No democracy is without flaws and none have fully lived up to their ideals. Some have even seriously violated their own principles. However, democratic systems contain institutions and procedures that allow people inside and outside government to challenge undemocratic behaviour and work to reverse it. When one part of the system fails, other parts can help repair it and contribute to building fairer and more equitable institutions.*

"

ProDemos (n.d.) presents the eight characteristics of representative democracy, shown to the right. In this project, these will be referred to as the eight principles of democracy.

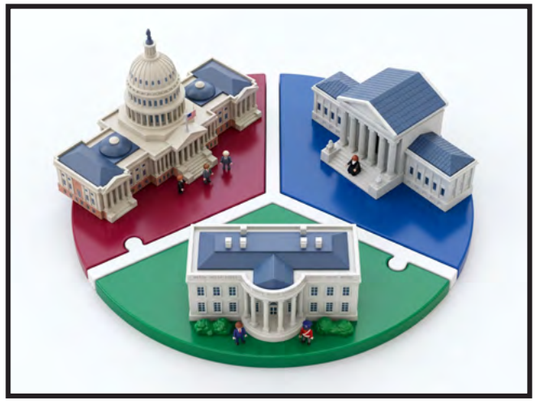
ProDemos (n.d.) is known in the Netherlands as the 'House for Democracy and the Rule of Law.' The organisation explains how democracy and the rule of law function in the Netherlands and demonstrates how citizens can actively influence these systems. ProDemos achieves this by offering educational programs, guided tours for schools, teaching materials, and activities related to politics and governance at the local, national, and European levels.



**1.** There is a representative body that is directly elected by the population.



**2.** There are free, fair and secret elections in which independent groups or parties must be able to compete with each other for power.



**3.** There is a separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. This separation is meant, among other things, to ensure that too much power does not end up in the hands of a small group.



**4.** Political equality is pursued for everyone, meaning that the government does not treat one group of people as superior or inferior to another.



**5.** There is a constitution, and it is upheld. If this is not the case, arbitrariness can arise and the rule of the strongest prevails.



**6.** The freedom of citizens is protected, most notably expressed in freedom of speech.



**7.** There is a civil society consisting of organisations that represent the interests of citizens independently of the government. Without this, arbitrariness can arise and the rule of the strongest prevails.



**8.** There are free media. These monitor politics, expose problems in society and inform citizens about them, as citizens have the right to this transparency.

## 4.2 A RADICAL RIGHT PARTY

Gerrit Voerman & Léonie de Jonge (2025) of the Montesquieu Institute describe a radical right party as follows.

"

*A radical right party is a political party that is ideologically characterized by a combination of nativism, authoritarianism and populism.*

*Nativism refers to the idea that the state primarily belongs to the native or "own" people, and that cultural homogeneity and national sovereignty should be protected from external influences, such as migration or supranational institutions like the European Union.*

*Authoritarianism refers to a strong emphasis on order, security and authority, often accompanied by calls for stricter punishments, more police and a strong government that firmly addresses behaviour that deviates from societal norms.*

*Populism refers to the framing of politics as a struggle between a homogeneous and virtuous "people" and a corrupt or alienated elite, where instruments of direct democracy are seen as a way to return power to the citizens.*

"

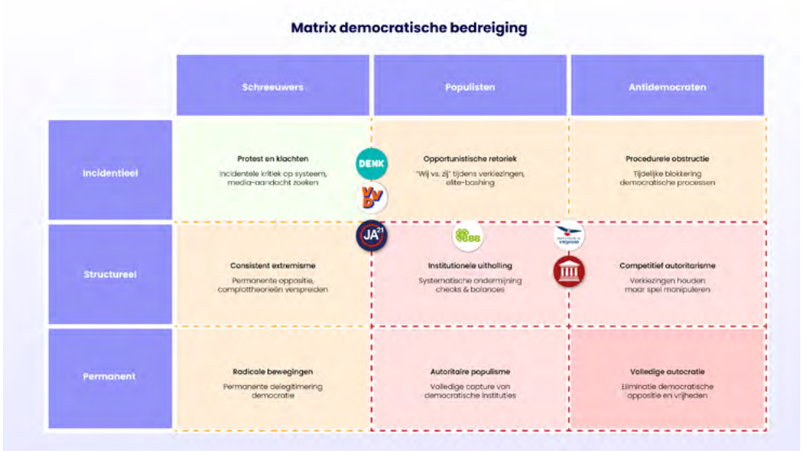



figure 8 - Matrix of democratic threat

**Note.** Figure based on internal data from Voor Ons Nederland (personal communication, 2026).

Voerman and De Jonge classify Forum voor Democratie (Forum for Democracy, FvD), led by Lidewij de Vos; Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV), led by Geert Wilders; and het Juiste Antwoord (The Right Answer, JA21), led by Joost Eerdmans, as the Dutch radical right parties. While this classification is accurate, JA21's position differs when examining indicators related to democratic values.

According to both the Democracy matrix of Vrij Nederland and Voor Ons Nederland's matrix for democratic threat (see figures 8 and 9), JA21 scores lower on indicators of democratic erosion than PVV and FvD. Within the framework used by Voor Ons Nederland, JA21 is therefore not classified as a core anti-democratic party, but rather as a "yeller". Meaning that JA21 may at some times express certain anti-democratic positions, but it does not undermine the rule of law or democratic institutions to the same extent as PVV and FvD. The remainder of this report focuses primarily on anti-democratic parties, specifically the PVV and FvD, rather than the radical right as a whole. However, much of the existing literature examines the broader radical right, and these insights are taken into account where relevant.




figure 9 - Democracy matrix of Vrij Nederland (Noten, 2025)

## 4.3 ANTI-DEMOCRATIC PARTIES AS A THREAT TO SOCIETY

PVV and FvD can be considered harmful to society because some of the policies they propose undermine the democratic principles illustrated in chapter 4.1. Critically expressing concerns about the functioning of democracy is legitimate and an essential part of a healthy democratic debate. However, when political parties promote policies that directly undermine democratic principles this can weaken the democratic system itself and thereby harm Dutch society as a whole.

In the 2025 election program of Forum voor Democratie (2025), the party proposes, among other things:

**ALLOWING PARLIAMENTARY INTERROGATIONS OF JUDGES.**
This conflicts with the *3rd principle of democracy*, the separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches. This separation exists to prevent excessive concentration of power and to ensure that each branch of government can function independently.

**REQUIRING UNIVERSITIES TO REMAIN "NEUTRAL" AND FREE FROM WHAT THE PARTY DESCRIBES AS "WOKE IDEOLOGY".**
This conflicts with the *6th principle of democracy*, the protection of citizens' freedoms, particularly freedom of expression and academic freedom. Government intervention in academic debate may restrict the freedom of scholars and institutions to explore and express ideas.

**ABOLISHING SUBSIDIES FOR NGOS AND ORGANISATIONS WITHIN CIVIL SOCIETY.**
This conflicts with the *7th principle of democracy*, the existence of a civil society independent from the state. Civil society organisations represent the interests of citizens and provide checks on government power. Weakening them may reduce pluralism and citizen representation outside formal politics.

**POLICIES THAT ARE HOSTILE TOWARD TRANSGENDER PEOPLE.**
This conflicts with the *4th principle of democracy*, political equality, which requires that the state does not treat groups of citizens as inferior to others.

**A NATURALIZATION FREEZE AND RESTRICTIONS ON MIGRANTS' ACCESS TO SOCIAL WELFARE.**
These proposals may conflict with the *4th principle of democracy*, political equality and the *5th principle of democracy*, the protection of rights through the constitution, if policies lead to unequal treatment before the law or restrict fundamental protections for certain groups.

The Party of Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, 2025) proposes several comparable measures in their election program of 2025:

**A COMPLETE HALT TO ASYLUM APPLICATIONS AND THE ABOLITION OF APPEALS IN ASYLUM CASES.**
This conflicts with the *5th principle of democracy*, the rule of law and adherence to the constitution, because access to legal appeal procedures is an important safeguard against arbitrary government decisions.

**MAJOR CUTS OR THE DISMANTLING OF THE DUTCH PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM (NPO).**
This conflicts with the *8th principle of democracy*, the existence of free and independent media, which are necessary to monitor political power and inform citizens.

**THE ABOLITION OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION WHILE ALLOWING OTHER FORMS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO REMAIN.**
This conflicts with the *5th principle of democracy*, the existence and protection of a constitution that is upheld. The Dutch Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, and policies that treat religions differently would therefore conflict with this constitutional protection.

**DEPORTING FOREIGN STUDENTS AND LECTURERS WHO TOLERATE OR SUPPORT DEMONSTRATIONS.**
This conflicts with the *6th principle of democracy*, the protection of civil liberties, particularly freedom of expression and freedom of assembly.

The PVV also differs from most political parties in its internal structure. The party has no internal membership democracy and formally has only one member, Geert Wilders. This is legal under Dutch law; however it seems also very much in conflict with the *1st principle of democracy*. Various media reports, including from de Volkskrant (Righton & Meindertsma, 2026), have also described an authoritarian culture by Geert Wilders within the party's organisation. All of this suggests that the PVV is an internal dictatorial party.

The policies in question may seem minor, and one could argue that changing a few policies does not necessarily mean that democracy will disappear. However, when clear boundaries established by law and democratic principles are no longer respected, those boundaries can gradually erode. Once this erosion begins, it becomes easier to introduce more far-reaching and impactful measures. This process is also described by Ilja Leonard Pfeijffer (2026) in his book "Absolute Democratie," in which he argues that true democracy is now being dismantled in the name of democracy itself. He explains that entities that appear democratic, such as Forum for Democracy (as the name suggests), often do not operate democratically at all.

Examples of this democratic erosion can be observed in other countries. In the United States, for example, former president Donald Trump proposed abolishing the Department of Education and supported measures to withdraw funding from universities such as Harvard when they conducted research or promoted ideas he opposed (Svrluga, 2025). Processes of democratic erosion rarely happen overnight. They often start with seemingly minor interventions, such as restricting certain academic topics, but can gradually expand into fundamental institutional changes that erode democratic safeguards. You could see it as a Jenga tower (see figure 10): whenever a few blocks (democratic policies) are removed, the democracy keeps standing, however upon removing more blocks (democratic policies), it will eventually collapse.

Thus, democracy and a free and fair society to prevail, support for parties with anti-democratic ideologies should be avoided.



figure 10 - The Jenga Tower of democracy

## 4.4 THE GROWTH OF THE RADICAL RIGHT

Since 1994, radical right parties in the Netherlands have repeatedly gained electoral support, as illustrated by the growth of these parties in figure 11. Parties, such as the Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV) led by Geert Wilders, Forum voor Democratie (FvD) led by Lidewij de Vos, Lijst Pim Fortuyn ( LPF) of Pim Fortuyn, and earlier the Centrum Democraten (Centrum Democrats, CD) led by Hans Janmaat have all attracted voters at different moments in time (Parlement.com, n.d.). These parties have developed a track record of promoting ideas that undermine core democratic principles, a topic I will explore in more detail later in this report.

As also seen in figure 11 the growth of the anti-democratic in the Netherlands slowed after 2023. The democratic social-liberal party D66 led by Rob Jetten won the elections, while the PVV lost support compared to previous elections. However, this does not mean that radical right support disappeared. While in 2025, the share of votes for PVV in comparison to 2023 stagnated from 23.5 percent to 16.7 percent, FvD increased from 2.2 percent to 4.5 percent (Parlement.com, n.d.). This pattern suggests that when support for one radical right party declines, another may gain momentum. Recent opinion polls suggest that support for FvD may be increasing again. As of 20 April 2026, estimate polling (Louwerse, n.d.) indicate the FvD could receive between 7 and 10 percent of the vote in the national elections.

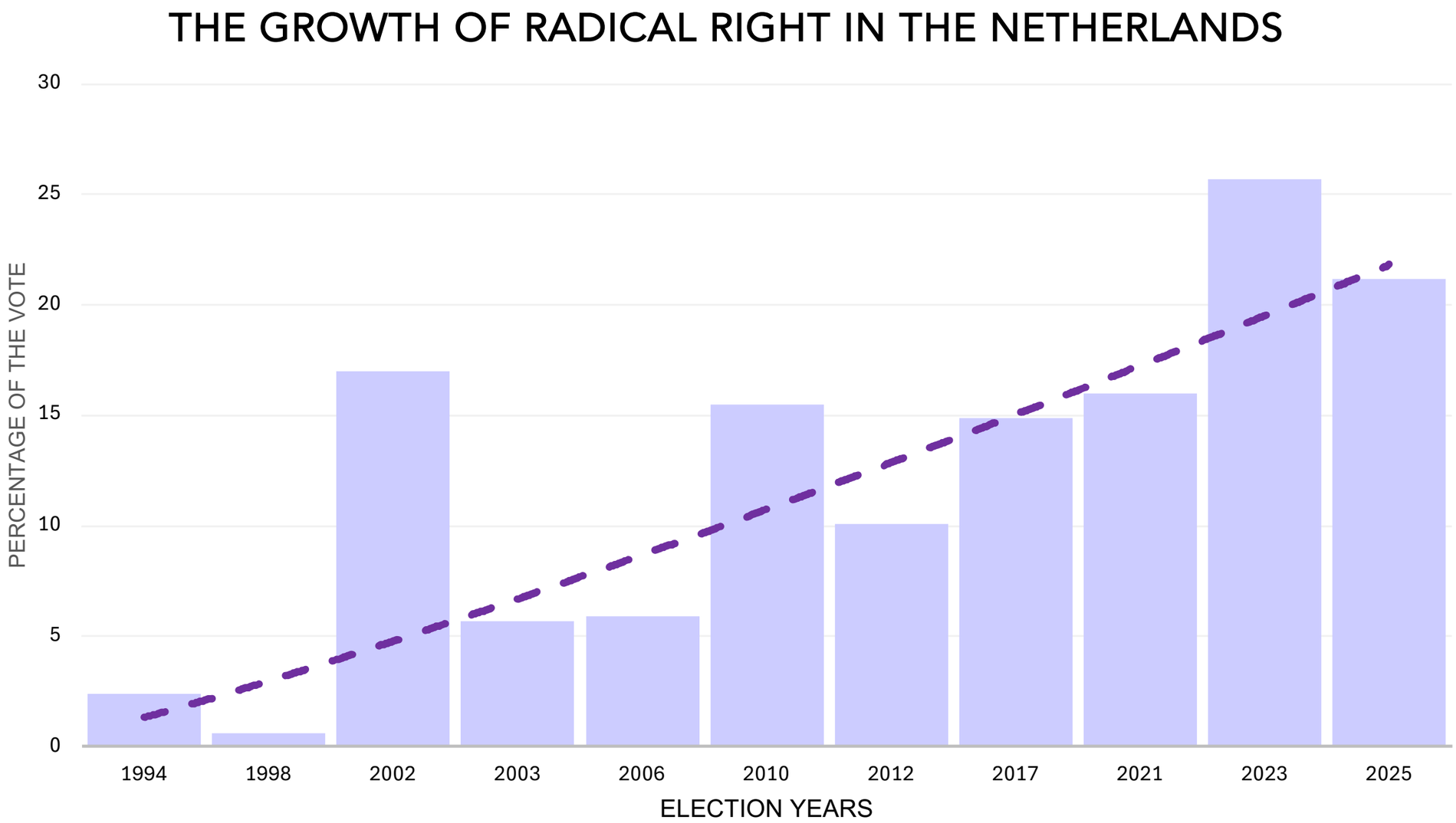



figure 11 - Vote share of radical right parties in Dutch parliamentary elections (1994–2025)
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on data from Parlement.com (n.d.).

## 4.5 THE GROWTH OF THE RADICAL RIGHT AMONG YOUNG MEN

### 4.5.1 YOUNG MEN VS. YOUNG WOMEN

As shown in figure 12, young men between the ages of 18 and 30 (Lubbers & Spierings, 2024) are increasingly voting for radical right parties such as FvD and PVV. The figure also highlights a growing so-called "gender gap": over the years, young women have tended to vote more for progressive left-wing parties, while young men more often support radical right parties. This graph focuses on the 18–30 age group. Recent voter research by the NKO (Huijsmans et al., 2026) shows that in 2025, the gender gap for 18–24-year-olds is 21.4% for anti-democratic voting and 24.2% for left-progressive voting. For 18–30-year-olds, these figures are 11% and 13%, respectively. So we can say this gender gap is larger under voters between the ages of 18 and 24.

### 4.5.2 EDUCATION AS A DIVIDING LINE IN VOTING BEHAVIOUR

The PVV electorate consists disproportionately of practically educated voters compared to other parties (Otjes & Rooduijn, 2025). Only around 20 percent of PVV voters have a theoretical (HAVO or VWO) diploma, whereas this percentage is roughly 55 percent among voters of other parties.

Confirming these thoughts, the book Diplomademocratie (Bovens & Wille, 2025) argues that education level has become the new social divide. Theoretically educated and practically educated individuals increasingly live in separate worlds, with different concerns and different views on the major issues of our time.

Taken together, these findings suggest that support for radical right, and thus partly anti-democratic parties is indeed increasing among young, practically educated men between the ages of 18 and 30.

## 4.6 A STILL IMPRESSIONABLE GROUP

Political attitudes of young people appear to be relatively volatile. For example, in the Dutch student elections of 2023, held among students aged 12 to 18 in secondary education, FvD received a striking 13.5 percent of the vote (Prodemos, 2023). However, by 2025 this support had dropped sharply to 3.2 percent (Prodemos, 2025). A decrease of 76% percent in only 2 years. These shifts suggest that young people's political preferences can change quickly and may be particularly unstable over short periods of time.

This is particularly interesting because, while older voters tend to remain relatively consistent in their voting behaviour, young people are more volatile (van der Meer, et al., 2015). This aligns with the Impressionable Years Hypothesis (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989), which suggests that core attitudes, political beliefs, and values are primarily shaped during late adolescence and early adulthood, roughly between the ages of 15 and 26. During this period, individuals are more open to influence and change, after which their attitudes tend to stabilise and become more resistant to change over time.

For example, young people who grow up during an economic crisis are more likely to develop a lasting distrust of institutions. Similarly, those who experience strong political or cultural movements during this phase are more likely to carry those beliefs with them into later life.

The key insight here is that what individuals believe later in life is not solely the result of rational decision-making in adulthood, but is also strongly shaped by experiences during these formative years.

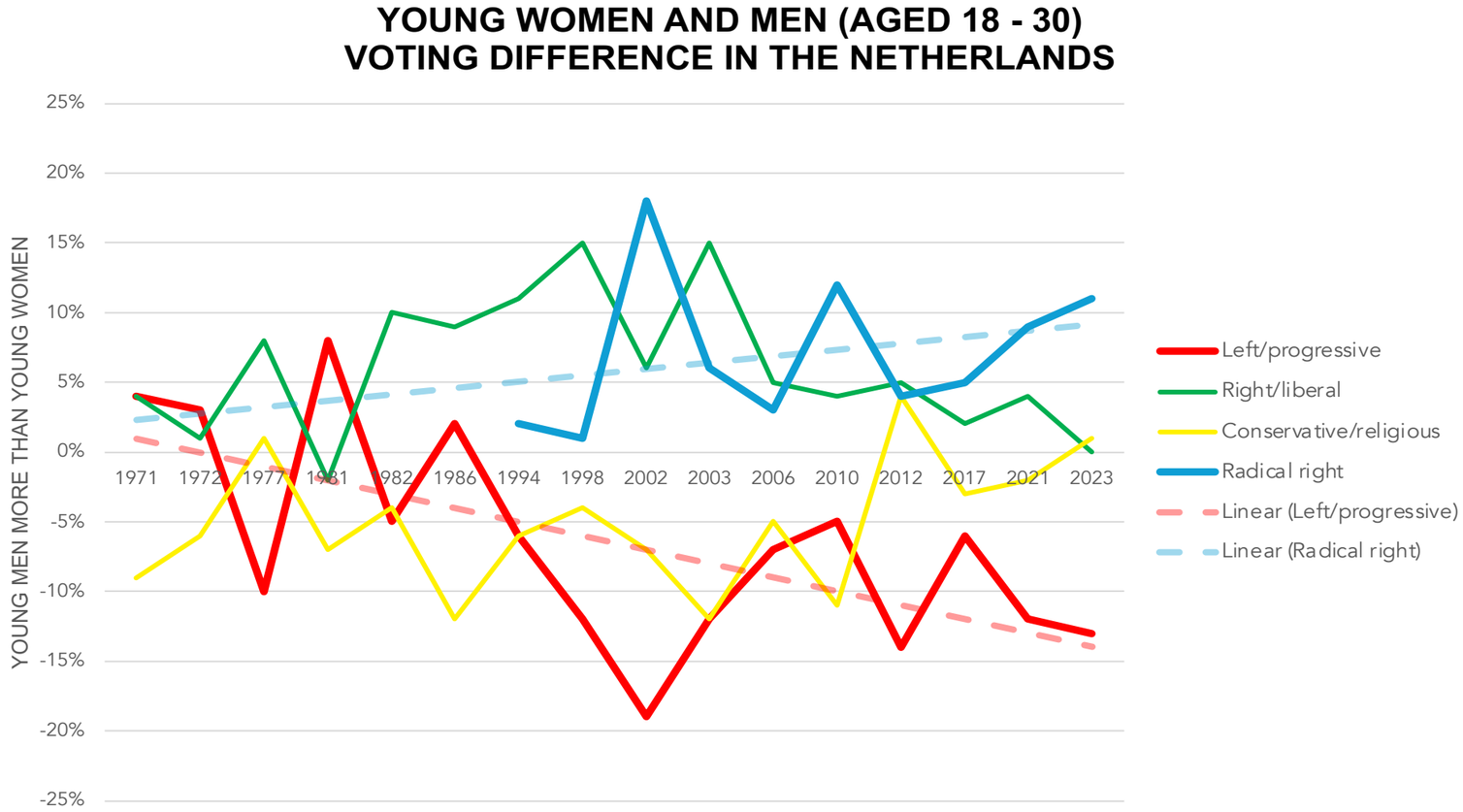



figure 12 - The growing gender-gap in voting
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on Lubbers & Spierings (2024)

# 5.PROBLEM SCOPE

Taken together, these developments show that anti-democratic parties are a growing presence in Dutch politics since the 1990s. Today, parties like the PVV and FvD promote ideas and policies that put pressure on democratic principles and, in turn, on the Dutch free and fair society.

Support for these parties is not evenly spread across the population. Young men in practical education tracks are relatively overrepresented among voters of anti-democratic parties compared to young women. And this divide is growing.

At the same time, this does not necessarily mean that this generation has completely turned away from democratic parties. Young people are still in a phase of life where their political views and beliefs are being shaped. The Impressionable Years Hypothesis (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989) suggests that many core political attitudes are formed during late adolescence and early adulthood.

For this reason, support for anti-democratic parties among young, practically educated men should not only be seen as a concern, but also as an opportunity, an opportunity to guide these young men toward supporting democratic parties instead.

## 5.1 PROJECT GOAL

The goal of this project is to better understand why some practically educated young men in the Netherlands are drawn to anti-democratic parties, and to turn those insights into an intervention that can help reduce support for parties with anti-democratic ideas.

Rather than seeing this group as inherently extreme or politically fixed, this project starts from the idea that their views are shaped by their social environment, their search for identity, and their need for belonging. By exploring these underlying dynamics, the project aims to identify how design can respond in a way that is both realistic and effective. In collaboration with Voor Ons Nederland, the project therefore seeks not only to analyze this political and social issue, but also to contribute to a practical approach that can make democratic alternatives feel more relevant and appealing to this group.

## 5.2 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

To develop an effective intervention, it is first necessary to understand why some practically educated young men are drawn to anti-democratic parties, while others are not. This resulted in the following research question:

*Why do practically educated young men (aged 16–22) in the Netherlands vote for, or feel drawn to, anti-democratic parties, and how do they differ from those who do not?*



# 6. CONTEXT & TARGET GROUP

This chapter narrows the target group step by step: from Gen Z, the generation almost every public claim about young men is really about, to the manosphere, the explanation public debate reaches for most, to practically educated young men themselves, and finally to the subgroup inclined toward anti-democratic voting. Each step tests a claim against evidence before narrowing further.

## 6.1 GEN Z

### THE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Place the target group in a wider generational and political context. |
| QUESTIONS | » What is Generation Z?<br>» How does Generation Z relate to politics and society?<br>» How are the attitudes and behaviours of Generation Z developing?<br>» Which factors shape the attitudes and behaviour of Generation Z?<br>» What implications do these developments have for understanding young men? |
| SOURCES | Desk research & interviews with experts Bert Bakker, Quita Muis, and Judith van de Wetering |
| ANALYSIS | Themes were compared across literature and expert perspectives; contradictions and subgroup differences were retained. |
| OUTPUT | A conclusion of how Generation Z relates to democracy and politics, and of how well the public image of this generation matches it. |

Before narrowing the focus to practically educated young men, I first wanted to understand the generation to which they belong. By exploring Generation Z (Gen Z) through a literature study and interviews with experts Quita Muis (expert Polarisation), Bert Bakker (expert Political Psychology), and Judith van de Wetering (expert Youth Polarisation), I was able to place the target group within a broader societal and political context. In this chapter the most interesting themes are examined.

**WHAT IS GEN Z?**

Generation Z (Gen Z) refers to the cohort of people born from 1997 onwards, following the Millennial generation (Pew Research Center, 2019). This generation is characterized by having grown up in a fully digital world, where the internet, smartphones, and social media have been present throughout most or all of their lives. As a result, they are often described as true "digital natives."

In addition, their formative years have been shaped by major societal developments such as economic uncertainty, rapid technological change, and shifting social norms. These shared experiences distinguish Generation Z from previous generations and influence their attitudes, behaviour and worldview.

**6.1.1 A NEW FORM OF PILLARIZATION IS EMERGING, PARTICULARLY AMONG GEN Z**

Quita Muis (Universiteit van Nederland, 2024) suggests that, similar to the historical pillarization in Dutch society; Protestant, Liberal, Social Democratic, and Catholic, new forms of pillars, or so-called bubbles, are beginning to emerge, especially among Gen Z. These divisions are less clearly structured along the earlier traditional political lines, but instead take shape through distinct lifestyles. See figure 13 for a visual of different emerging groups in Dutch society.

This formation of groups contributes to a growing "us versus them" mindset, organized around identity groups, a phenomenon also referred to as identity-based polarisation (Muis, 2024).

**6.1.2 GEN Z AS A WHOLE IS NOT ANTI-DEMOCRATIC**

According to research by Schumacher et al. (2025), there is no clear anti-democratic tendency among gen Z in general. According to this research, if such a tendency were present, we would not expect young people to be more politically active than adults, nor to report

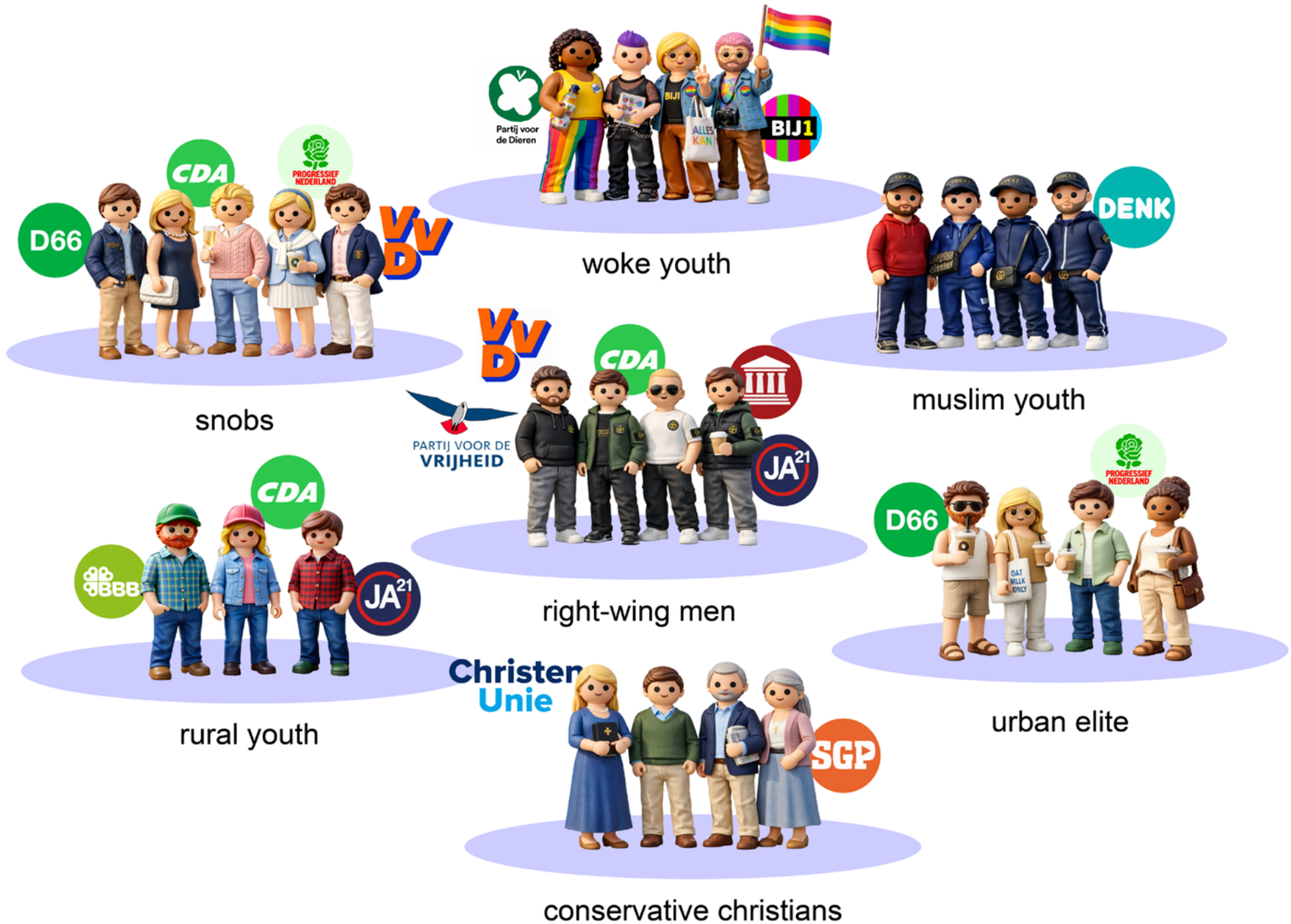



figure 13 - Different emerging groups in Dutch society.
**Note.** Figure created by the author as a personal impression, based on own interviews and observations rather than on literature. The groups and party logos are indicative, not measured.

relatively high levels of satisfaction with democracy. However, these findings apply to Generation Z as a whole and may obscure important differences within this group.

For instance, 'Adolescentenpanel Democratische Kernwaarden en Schoolloopbanen' (Huijsmans et al., 2024), an annual survey on democratic attitudes in secondary education, reveals a significant discrepancy between practically and theoretically educated 16-year-old students. Among students in practical education (VMBO), only 54% report that living in a democracy is important, compared to approximately 80% of students in theoretical education (HAVO & VWO). Furthermore, students in the practically educated group are significantly less likely to intend to vote, suggesting a relatively weaker democratic orientation within this group.

This pattern is further supported by an interview I conducted with Bert Bakker, who also indicated that there could be an anti-democratic tendens in the practically educated group, if there is enough evidence. Together, these findings suggest that while there is no overarching anti-democratic tendency among Gen Z, in certain subgroups, particularly practically educated youth, there might be anti-democratic tendency.

### 6.1.3 GEN Z IS NOT ACTIVELY ANTI-DEMOCRATIC, BUT ALIENATED WITH THE VALUE OF DEMOCRACY

For many young people, democracy appears to be less of an abstract normative ideal and more of a taken for granted system (Huijsmans et al., 2024). One explanation is that the experience of living in an anti democratic society during the Second World War is becoming increasingly distant, and young people know less about this historical period (Van Berkel, 2018). An example of this can be seen in a video by journalists from De Telegraaf (2026), in which young people are asked what the Holocaust is, and many are unable to give the correct answer (see figure 14). As a result of this , the perceived existential threat to democracy is smaller among younger generations than among older ones.

The core issue therefore does not appear to lie in a rejection of democracy or of the values it represents, such as freedom of expression, which is strongly supported by students regardless of educational background (Huijsmans et al., 2024). Rather, it seems to lie in a distance from the political system and a limited awareness of what democracy concretely means for them and what is at stake if it were to dissapear.

### 6.1.4 GEN Z IS LESS INTERESTED IN POLITICS, BUT IS MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVISTIC

Young people are less interested in "politics" but at the same time more politically active (Schumacher et al., 2024). This suggests that institutions are less central to them than specific issues. Mobilization is more likely to take place around topics such as climate change, migration and identity than around the political system itself, which is often seen as something that more or less functions anyway. The same pattern can be observed in the way young people identify as left or right. Among younger generations, this identification is more strongly rooted in attitudes toward issues such as climate and migration, whereas older generations tend to define left-right positions more in classical socio-economic terms (Hakhverdian & Schakel, 2025).

Viewed through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943) (see figure 15) this pattern is also understandable. For many young people there is relatively little fear that physiological needs, like shelter and water, will totally disappear. As a result, concerns more easily shift toward higher levels of the hierarchy, such as Love & Belonging. At this stage, political engagement often revolves less around things that protect these core needs, and more around the groups with which someone identifies and where they feel they belong, f.e. groups as seen in figure 13.The activism and voting behaviour that emerges can therefore sometimes be almost a byproduct of their social group.




figure 14 - Teenagers' reactions to the question:
"What is the holocaust?" out an interview of de Telegraaf (2026)




figure 15 - Maslow's hierarchy of needs
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on Maslow (1943)

### 6.1.5 GEN Z SHOWS A GROWING GENDER GAP IN VOTING, NOT IN VALUES

Several studies, including the European Values Study, suggest that Gen Z, in the Netherlands, is somewhat more conservative than the generation before them, with young women still being more progressive and young men being more conservative (Van Putten, 2025). Additionaly, according to the annual 'God in Nederland' study (Bernts et al., 2024), after decades in which each new generation was less religious than the previous one, this pattern appears to be changing for the first time. Young people from Generation Z view religion and churches more positively than millennials. Approximately 27% of Gen Z identify themselves as religious, compared to about 22% among millennials.

At the same time, voting patterns among young people show a different and more complex picture. Such as earlier mentioned, young women (aged 18 – 30) are increasingly voting for left-progressive parties, while young men in the same age group are more likely to support radical parties (Lubbers & Spierings, 2024).

This seems contradictory. If both groups are becoming slightly more conservative, one might expect them to also vote more conservatively. However, this is not what we see. Instead, a growing gender gap in voting behaviour emerges, with men and women moving in opposite political directions at the ballot box. This phenomenon is illustrated in figure 16.

Some experts argue that men's relatively higher support for anti-democratic parties can partly be explained by political opportunity structures. In my interview with Quita Muis, she suggests that the presence and visibility of anti-democratic parties make them a more accessible option for young men. In this view, voting for these parties may function more as a political outlet than as a reflection of a deep ideological shift. A similar dynamic may apply to young women, for whom left-progressive parties offer a clear political alternative.

This interpretation is supported by research from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (Kunst et al., 2025), which shows that attitudes toward migration in the Netherlands have not become significantly more negative over the past twenty years and have even become slightly more positive on average. Despite this, anti-democratic parties with strong anti-immigration positions, have gained electoral support.

Finally, research by the Clingendael Institute (Houtkamp et al., 2026) shows that young men do not express stronger support for authoritarian symbolism, such as MAGA-related ideas, than older men and women. However, only young women tend to have a far greater ressentment for MAGA-related ideas. This suggests that young women are more clearly rejecting anti-democratic ideas than other groups.

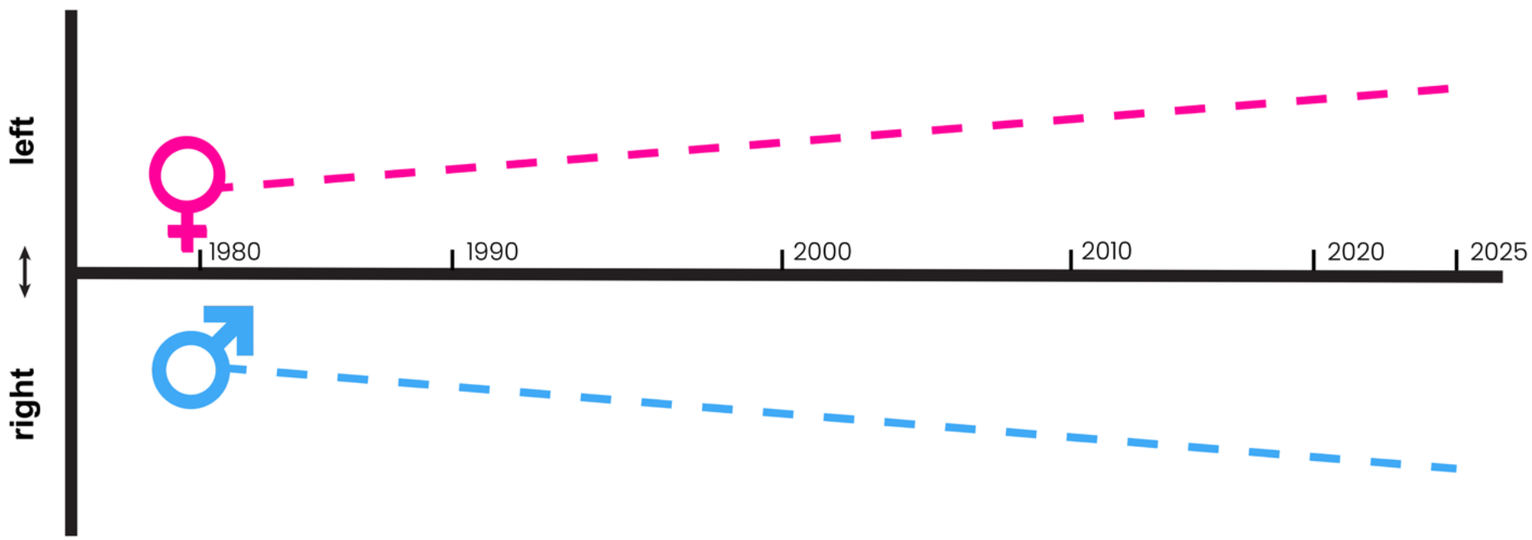



figure 16 - Gender gap in voting vs. gender gap in cultural values
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on his interpretation of the data of Lubbers & Spierings (2024) & Van Putten (2024)

### 6.1.6 GEN Z IS EXPERIENCING DECLINING MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

Research by the Netherlands' Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS, 2026) shows that young people are increasingly reporting poorer physical and mental health. Although these trends apply to both genders, women still report higher levels of health problems than men.

This research also points to a clear socioeconomic pattern: lower levels of prosperity are associated with poorer mental health outcomes. In addition, findings from CBS (2026) suggest that many young people experience limitations in their social activities, likely as a result of declining mental health.

Interestingly, in my interview with Quita Muis , she argues that there are no clear objective causes for this recent decline, such as major economic disruption. Instead, it appears to be driven more by a broader feeling of discontent and uncertainty about the future among young people.

### 6.1.7 GEN Z FEELS IT IS IMPORTANT TO HOLD ON TO YOUR OPINION, EVEN IF IT IS NOT FACTUAL

Research of van de Wetering et al. (2026) shows that in the Netherlands 6 out of 10 young people agree that it is important to stay true to your beliefs, even when evidence is presented that contradicts them. This shows that a large part of Gen Z is not affected by facts and thus feelings about a topic play a larger role.

### 6.1.8 GEN Z STRONGLY FEELS AFFECTIVE POLARISATION, WITHOUT THERE BEING STRONG FACTUAL POLARISATION

Eight out of ten young people believe that opinions in society are becoming increasingly divided (van de Wetering et al., 2026). This perception is often referred to as affective polarisation, where people feel a growing distance between groups. However, this does not fully align with evidence showing that groups are not necessarily becoming more different in their underlying views, a phenomenon known as factual polarisation.

As discussed in the previous trend, young people do not appear to be diverging significantly in their core values. This is supported by research from Muis (2024), which suggests that society is less polarized in terms of values than is often assumed, and that the commonly cited "polarisation panic" is largely overstated.

Muis also argues that the belief that society is becoming polarized can itself contribute to further division. She describes this as a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the expectation of polarisation reinforces the very dynamics people fear.

This dynamic can for example also be observed among young people along educational lines. A narrative is emerging that "high-educated" (theoretically educated) and "low-educated" (practically educated) groups stand in opposition to one another. However, this perceived divide does not arise solely from real differences in opinions, but from the fact that people increasingly identify with stereotypes associated with their educational group.

As Muis (2024) illustrate these stereotypes generally revolve around two dimensions:

» Cognitive competence
For example, the idea that "less educated people are less intelligent" or that "highly educated people live in a bubble."

» Morality
For example, the perception that "highly educated people are elitist" or that "less educated people are narrow minded."

As a result, an "us versus them" dynamic emerges. Over time, such perceptions can become so strongly internalized that they begin to produce actual substantive polarisation, illustrating the self fulfilling prophecy of polarisation thinking.

### 6.1.9 GEN Z BECOMES MORE POLITICALLY ACTIVE AS CONCERN ABOUT POLARISATION INCREASES

Recent research on young people's perspectives on polarisation shows that the more concerned young people are about polarisation, the more politically active they tend to become (van de Wetering, 2026). They are more likely to vote and to become members of political parties.

However, this relationship may not be one-directional. It is also plausible that young people who are already politically engaged, for example as members of a political party, are more aware of political tensions and therefore more likely to feel concerned about polarisation. In that sense, the dynamic appears to work both ways: concern about polarisation can stimulate political engagement, while political engagement can, in turn, increase awareness of polarisation. This may also help explain why theoretically educated students tend to express greater concern about polarisation than practically educated students, as political engagement is generally higher among the former group (Huijsmans et al., 2024). Interestingly, this was also discussed in the radio show WNL, In de Kantine (Omroep WNL, 2026), where historian Geerten Waling argues that 'polarisation is largely imposed on people by a highly educated elite,' and that practically educated individuals experience little to no impact from it.

### 6.1.10 SOCIAL MEDIA HAS A POLARIZING EFFECT, BUT THE IDEA OF FILTER BUBBLES IS TOO SIMPLISTIC

The idea that people are trapped in "filter bubbles" is often overstated. Research shows that most individuals are not fully isolated in homogeneous information environments and continue to encounter a variety of viewpoints (Guess et al., 2018). Similarly, the Royal Society argues that online information environments are shaped not only by algorithms, but also by users' own choices and interactions (Aruguedas et al., 2022).

This distinction is important. Rather than being passively confined to algorithmically curated bubbles, individuals actively seek out like-minded communities. Echo chambers therefore emerge not only through algorithmic filtering, but also through self-selection and social interaction (Kaijzel, 2024). Repeated interaction within these communities reinforces shared beliefs and can create a common sense of reality.

However, this does not mean there is no cause for concern. Although most people are exposed to a diversity of perspectives, smaller and more politically engaged groups are more likely to cluster in homogeneous online networks, where existing beliefs can become increasingly reinforced and intensified.

In addition, political discourse and media coverage often emphasize the most extreme voices, presenting issues in simplified, black-and-white terms rather than reflecting the complexity of public opinion (Bjornsgaard & Dukic, 2023). As a result, nuanced viewpoints are often overshadowed by extreme emotionally appealing messages.

In sum, polarisation cannot be explained by filter bubbles alone. Instead, it arises from the interaction between algorithms, user behaviour, social dynamics, and a media environment that disproportionately amplifies extreme and emotionally charged content. Together, these processes can create the impression that polarized opinions are more widespread than they actually are.

## CONCLUSION ON GEN Z

Taken together, the trends discussed in chapter 6.1 suggest that Gen Z is often understood through a distorted public narrative. Young people are frequently portrayed as politically disengaged, increasingly anti-democratic, and more conservative than previous generations. Yet a closer look at their underlying values, attitudes, and forms of participation paints a more nuanced picture. Rather than representing a generation that has fundamentally shifted to the hard-right or hard-left in thinking as well as voting, their voting behaviour does not always reflect deeply rooted ideological convictions, but are often shaped by broader generational dynamics, social pressures, and the contexts in which political meaning is formed.

At the same time, Gen Z seems to experience society as highly polarized. Young people increasingly perceive themselves and others as belonging to separate social or ideological "bubbles," which strengthens an us-versus-them logic. However, this perception of deep division is not always supported by equally deep differences in values. In many cases, the sense of polarisation appears stronger than the actual distance between groups. This is important, because it suggests that polarisation is not only a matter of real disagreement, but also of social imagination: young people come to see themselves as divided because that is how their generation is repeatedly described and represented.

This gap between representation and reality is especially relevant in media and political discourse. Public debates often construct an exaggerated image of Gen Z as fragile, politically apathetic, easily radicalized, or increasingly drawn to conservative and far-right positions. Young men in particular are frequently discussed through the lens of the manosphere and anti-democratic tendencies, as if these developments speak for an entire generation. Yet such portrayals risk turning a partial phenomenon into a generational identity. When young people are repeatedly told that their generation is drifting rightward, losing trust in democracy, or becoming more extreme, this discourse may begin to shape how they understand themselves and one another.

In that sense, the public framing of Gen Z may function as a self-fulfilling prophecy. If both left- and right-wing media continuously present young people as polarized and ideologically opposed, they may reinforce precisely the divisions they claim to describe. Labels such as "woke youth" or "right-wing boys" do not merely reflect social reality; they can also produce it by encouraging identification with political camps and by hardening the boundaries between groups. The danger, then, is not only that Gen Z is misunderstood, but that this misunderstanding actively contributes to greater polarisation among young people themselves. What is presented as an existing generational truth may, through repetition and media amplification, become increasingly real in practice.

This also helps explain why Gen Z can appear contradictory. On the one hand, many young people are not deeply attached to formal politics or traditional institutions. On the other hand, they are not indifferent: they are more engaged with social issues than earlier generations. Their political involvement is therefore less visible in conventional party-political terms, but no less significant. At the same time, this generation is growing up under conditions of social pressure, mental strain, and cultural pessimism, in which feelings of dissatisfaction about the future are widespread, even though these feelings of dissatisfaction are not really factually seen or approved. These conditions may make young people particularly sensitive to narratives that offer belonging, recognition, or a clear identity, especially when public debate increasingly frames politics in polarized and emotional terms.

Overall, this chapter shows that Gen Z should not be reduced to the simplistic image that often dominates public discourse. Rather than being inherently disinterested, conservative, or anti-democratic, young people appear to be more politically complex, more internally diverse, and in some respects less polarized than is commonly assumed. The real problem may therefore lie not only in how Gen Z behaves politically, but in how Gen Z is talked about. If media and political discourse continue to portray young people in exaggerated and oppositional terms, they may help create the very polarisation they describe.

One phenomenon that nevertheless deserves particular attention in this study is the influence of the manosphere on young men. Because this development is so often presented as evidence of a broader rightward shift among youth, the following chapter examines it more closely.

## 6.2 THE MANOSPHERE

### THE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Assess the role and appeal of the manosphere for the target group. |
| QUESTIONS | » What is the manosphere?<br>» How do young men encounter it?<br>» How widespread is its influence? Is it as large as the public debate suggests?<br>» If it appeals, what is it that appeals? |
| SOURCES | Desk research & interviews with Quita Muis and Judith van de Wetering |
| ANALYSIS | The public narrative, the empirical evidence and the observed online reception were compared. |
| OUTPUT | A conclusion on how large the influence of the manosphere is, and how it works. |

In this chapter I will examine the manosphere. A phenomenon that has grasped our attention with documentaries like 'Inside the Manosphere' and the award-winning serie 'Adolescents' (Elffers, 2025; Redactie NPO Cultuur, 2025). And a phenomenon that is often placed hand in hand with young men.

**WHAT IS THE MANOSPHERE?**

Educate Hate (UK Department for Education, 2025, p5), a United Kingdom government initiative that provides teachers, school leaders, and parents with resources to help prevent radicalisation and extremism among young people, defines the manosphere as the following:

"

*The manosphere is an international collection of online communities including websites, forums, blogs, and social media accounts that discuss the issues relating to men, masculinity and men's role in society. As popularity of these communities has grown, so has the rise of extremely misogynistic content that is consumed on forums which have become dominated by sexist, anti-women, anti-feminist, and misogynistic views – often justifying or promoting violence.*

"

**THE DUTCH MANOSPHERE**

The manosphere is not only a phenomenon in the United Kingdom or the United States, also in the Netherlands it has found it's footing. Research from Argos, De Groene Amsterdammer, and the Data School (Goldenberg et al., 2025) shows that the Dutch manosphere is not a small, hidden subculture, but a broad and visible network embedded in mainstream social media platforms such as TikTok and Instagram.

Young people often encounter this content gradually through themes like motivation, fitness, and self-improvement, a flowchart is shown in figure 17. Within this content, fairly consistent traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity are promoted, portraying men as leaders and protectors, and women as more emotional and supportive. Because this type of content performs well in terms of reach and engagement, it is actively amplified by platform algorithms.

#### 6.2.1 THE NEGATIVE EFFECT OF THE MANOSPHERE IS EXEGGERATED

Despite the concerning characteristics of the manosphere, research from the United Kingdom (YouGov, 2023) paints a more nuanced picture. Among boys aged 13 to 15, 23% report a positive view of Andrew Tate, while 53% view him negatively and 25% are unfamiliar with him. That maybe seems like a large margain, however, positive

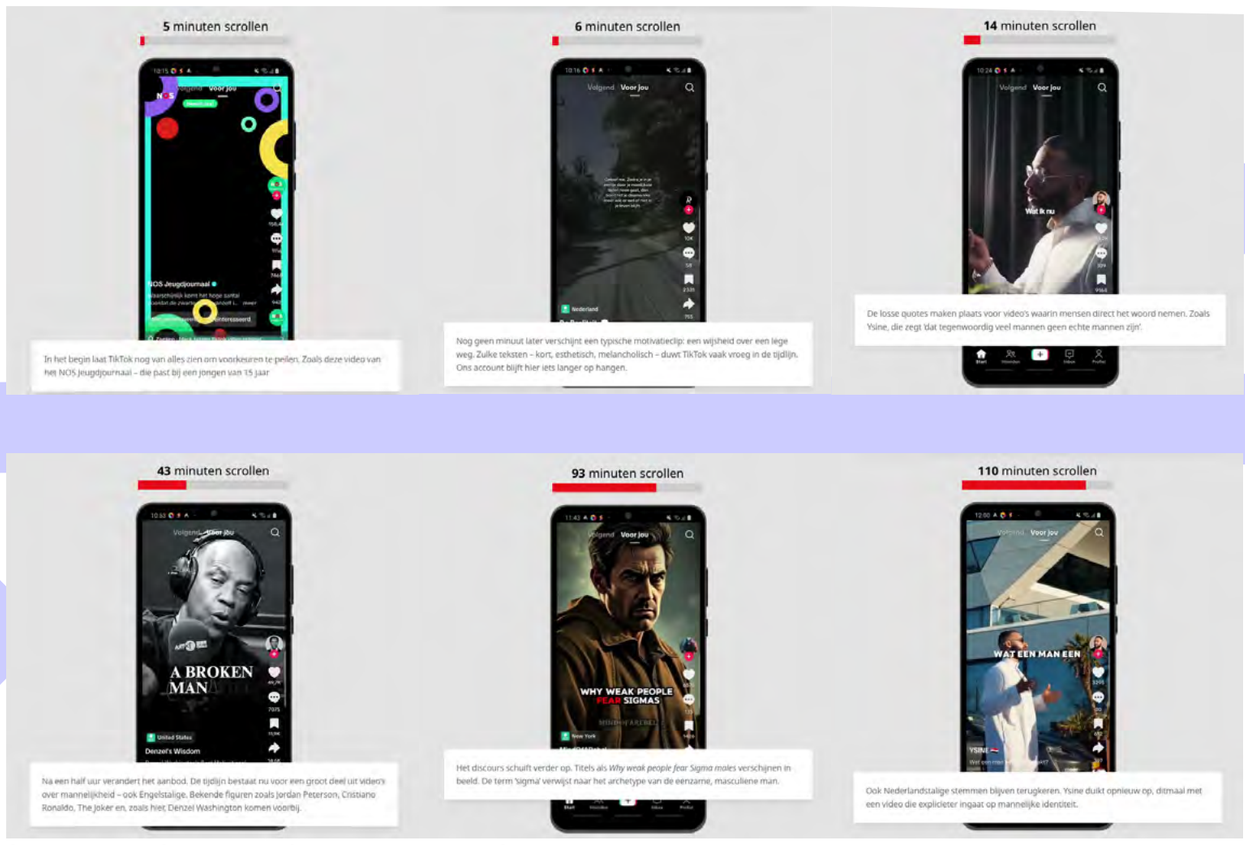



figure 17 - A flowchart of the manosphere funnel.
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on Goldenberg et al. (2025)

perceptions are more strongly linked to his perceived success (28%) than to his views on women (11%). This suggests that his appeal is not primarily rooted in misogynistic or anti-democratic ideas, but rather in themes such as discipline and success. This interpretation is supported by research from Ipsos (Van der Schelde & v, 2024), which shows that young men (aged 18 - 24) in the Netherlands remain relatively progressive on issues related to gender equality.

In addition, Quita Muis and Judith van de Wetering also confirmed in the interviews that the effect of the manosphere is exeggerated.

However, the manosphere should be approached with caution. Recent research (van Wetering et al., 2026) shows that young people, both boys and girls, who are more frequently exposed to manosphere content tend to hold more traditional views on gender. It remains unclear whether this content actively shapes these attitudes, or whether individuals who already hold more traditional views are simply more likely to engage with it.

Social media therefore requires careful consideration, as much of the manosphere operates within online environments. Research by the Dutch government also highlights that such online environments can significantly accelerate processes of radicalisation among young people (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2025), also research of Nederlands Jeugdinstituut (2025) shows that social media can further accelerate polarisation thinking.

### 6.2.2 THE MANOSPHERE FUNCTIONS MORE AS A SAFETY NET THAN AS A COHERENT IDEOLOGY FOR YOUNG MEN

Rather than fundamentally shaping beliefs, the manosphere appears to attract young men who are already searching for status, identity, and direction. According to interviews with Judith van Wetering and Quita Muis, figures such as Andrew Tate do not necessarily make young men more anti-democratic or misogynistic, but instead provide a framework that resonates with pre-existing concerns and aspirations.

Muis and van de Wetering both argue that broader societal factors, such as housing shortages, economic uncertainty, and perceived cultural pressures like immigration, already shape how young men experience and interpret society. Within this context, the manosphere offers narratives that provide meaning and structure to these experiences. It creates a sense of direction and clarity in an otherwise complex social environment.

As such, the manosphere can be understood less as a coherent or internally consistent ideology, and more as a loosely connected set of narratives that function as a support structure for young men who feel uncertain about their place in society. As illustrated in figure 18, the appeal of the manosphere does not primarily lie in the adoption of misogynistic ideas, but rather in the more practical and guiding perspectives it offers.

Also Simon van Teutem (2026) adresses in the Financial Times that the manosphere is certainly strongly ideological, but its core appeal

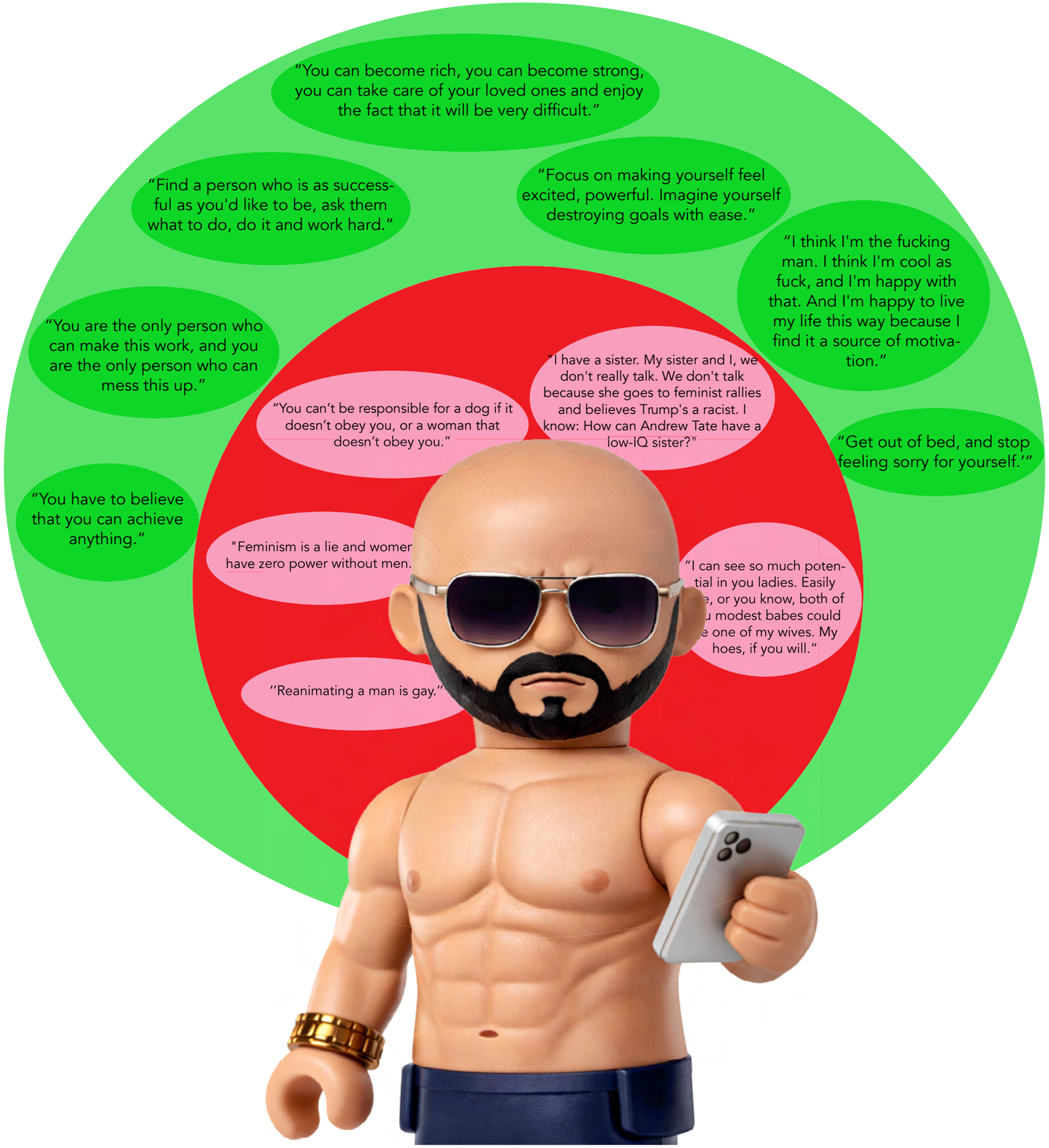



figure 18 - The manosphere and it's appeal.

to young men is about agency, about giving men a nagivable path through a existing world that grades them hard on succes but offers them little guidance on how to achieve it.

### 6.2.3 THE ANTI-MANOSPHERE OFTEN REACHES A LARGER AND MORE POSITIVE AUDIENCE THAN THE MANOSPHERE

Although manosphere influencers have attracted attention in public debate, both their reach and the sentiment surrounding their content appear to be more limited than is often assumed. For example, Dutch manosphere accounts such as @art_realtalk (n.d.) on Instagram generally receive fewer views than creators who mock manosphere content, such as @mauritsbuurman (n.d.). More importantly, the reactions to manosphere content itself are often less supportive than the public debate suggests. Rather than being widely celebrated, such content frequently receives critical, dismissive, or mocking responses. By contrast, videos that criticize the manosphere tend not only to attract more views, but also more approving and supportive comments. See figure 19 for a side-to-side comparison.

This suggests that anti-manosphere sentiment may be more socially visible and more broadly shared online than pro-manosphere sentiment. In that sense, the manosphere appears less as a dominant online movement and more as a phenomenon that is often ridiculed, challenged, or rejected in public-facing social media spaces. However, because its most controversial expressions receive disproportionate attention from mainstream media and public commentators, the manosphere can still appear far more influential and widespread than it actually is. This gap between its actual online reception and its public representation may contribute to an inflated sense of its impact on young men's attitudes and worldviews.




figure 19 - A mocking manosphere post and a serious manosphere post.
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on the instagram pages of @art_realtalk (n.d.) and @mauritsbuurman (n.d.)

## CONCLUSION ON THE MANOSPHERE

Looking at my research and taking into account what experts say, the influence of the manosphere appears to be somewhat exaggerated. In my view, the manosphere is a phenomenon that is easy for the media to represent: it is visually recognisable, highly controversial, and therefore attracts a great deal of attention. As a result, it can seem much larger and more influential than it actually is. In this discussion, it is important not to forget that many young men still hold broadly progressive views.

At the same time, there is also considerable resistance to the manosphere. It is often mocked or dismissed by humourous influencers rather than taken seriously. These creators frequently receive far more positive engagement than manosphere influencers themselves, which may also contribute to making manosphere ideas look ridiculous to other young men. In that sense, the visibility of the manosphere may even have a positive side. Because it is so visible, it can also be easily recognised, criticized, and rejected. For some audiences, it may even function as a clear example of what not to be or how not to behave.

For that reason, I would argue that the visibility of the manosphere is not only negative, but can also have a useful effect. Through satire and criticism, it can help shape social norms by showing behaviour that others do not want to associate themselves with. What I find more concerning, however, is the tendency of some commentators to present the manosphere as if it were a much larger and more substantial problem than it may actually be. So maybe, Andrew Tate deserves a hug, like figure 20 shows.

Finally, I want to stress that this is my own interpretation of the manosphere; there are, of course, many different perspectives on the issue.



figure 20 - Me hugging Andrew Tate

## 6.3 PRACTICALLY EDUCATED YOUNG MEN

### THE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Understand the everyday world, group dynamics, values, media use, and political engagement of practically educated young men. |
| QUESTIONS | » What characterizes practically educated young men?<br>» Which factors shape their attitudes and behaviour?<br>» How does their social environment influence the way they think and act? |
| PARTICIPANTS & METHOD | Semi-structured interviews with nine practically educated young men (six individually, three in a group) and with two vocational teachers, plus observation of students during a 'Schoolberaad'. |
| ANALYSIS | Inductive thematic analysis based on recurrence, relevance, and design significance. |
| OUTPUT | An understanding of what shapes this group in daily life. Together with chapter 6.4, this leads to the joint conclusion at the end of chapter 6.4. |

Before zooming in on the subgroup of practically educated young men who are inclined toward anti-democratic voting, it is important to first understand the broader group they are part of. To properly understand this group, it is essential to identify where they differ from the wider population of practically educated young men. This helps to distinguish which characteristics are specific to this subgroup, and which are shared more broadly across the group as a whole.

As expected, there is no single archetype of a practically educated young man. Rather, there is a broad spectrum of different types of men, belonging to different groups, an rough representation of these groups is shown in figure 21. That said, several recurring dominant themes emerge when examining the group as a whole. The following insights are based on conversations with nine practically educated young men with different political views, ranging from radical right sympathies to more progressive, teachers who work closely with this group, discussions, and observations during a 'Schoolberaad' at vocational school Curio (n.d.), where practically educated students came together to discuss the future of their school. I deliberately chose this personal approach because I did not want to study them from an ivory tower perspective, but to understand their world through direct experience.

#### 6.3.1 YOUNGER BOYS ARE LOUDER AND MORE PHYSICAL, OLDER BOYS CALM DOWN

Teachers note that there is a noticeable shift between younger and older male students. Boys around 12 to 14 years old tend to express themselves in more physical and outspoken ways. There is a lot of pushing, shouting, and testing of boundaries, often driven by a need to prove themselves. Among older students, roughly 15 to 18 years old, this behaviour becomes less dominant. They are generally calmer, more reflective, and less involved in conflict.

#### 6.3.2 MASCULINITY AND STATUS MATTER A LOT IN MALE GROUPS

Teachers note that within groups of young men at school, masculinity plays a big role in how they relate to each other. There is a clear sense of hierarchy, where status is often tied to how "manly and not-gay" someone is perceived to be. Behaviours that fall outside of this image are quickly judged and can lead to someone being seen as weaker or less worthy of respect. This creates a social dynamic where many boys feel pressure to perform a certain version of masculinity. Moreover, female students themselves indicate that some boys engage in early forms of sexualised online behaviour. For example, they mention that sharing explicit images via platforms such as Snapchat is relatively common within this group.

#### 6.3.3 BASIC KNOWLEDGE IS OFTEN LACKING

Teachers note that in practical education, there are often gaps in basic skills such as reading, writing, or telling time. This has a broader impact than it might seem at first. When these foundational skills are underdeveloped, it becomes much harder to grasp more abstract concepts like how democracy works or what political systems actually mean. As teacher Erik Winkelmann puts it; "If students struggle with something as basic as telling time, it becomes very difficult for them to understand something as complex as democracy.''

#### 6.3.4 POLITICS IS OFTEN SEEN AS ENTERTAINMENT, RATHER THAN SOMETHING IMPORTANT

From my interviews and teachers' perspective we notice that for many students, politics is not something they engage with on a deeper level. Instead, it is often approached in a more surface-level, almost entertainment-like way. Politicians are judged less on their ideas and more on how they come across. Figures like Geert Wilders are often described as funny, direct, or someone who simply says what he thinks. What stands out is that this perception exists even among students who might be directly affected by his political views. The appeal lies more in style and personality than in content.

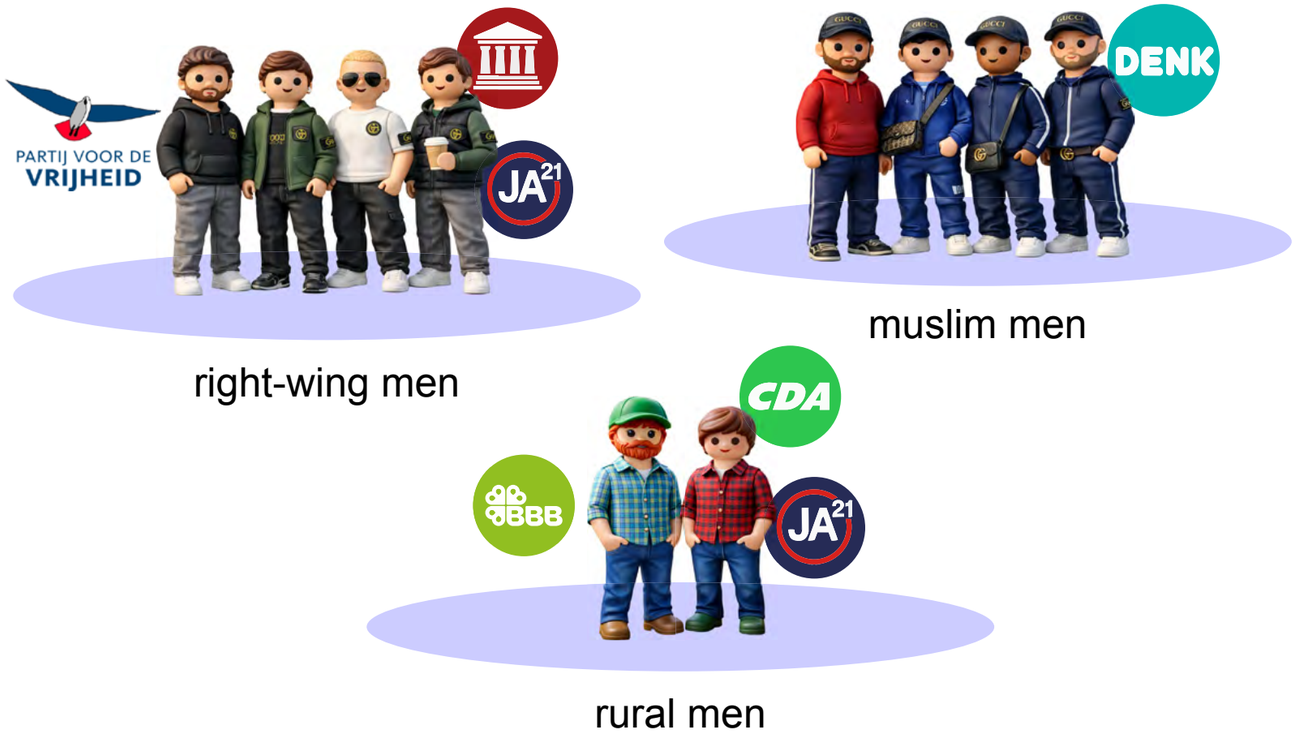



figure 21 - Rough representation of practically educated young men.
**Note.** Figure created by the author as a personal impression, based on own interviews and observations rather than on literature. The groups and party logos are indicative, not measured.

### 6.3.5 SHORT-TERM THINKING IS COMMON

From my interviews and teachers' perspective a lot of younger students (untill the age of 16) tend to focus on what is directly in front of them. There is relatively little attention for long-term consequences or for how different issues are connected. This short-term mindset also shapes how they interpret societal problems and political messages. Complex cause-and-effect relationships are often not fully considered, which can make simple or direct narratives more appealing.

### 6.3.6 EMPATHY AND SOCIAL AWARENESS ARE LACKING

Teachers note that empathy and social awareness are not always strongly present yet. Many students are still developing the ability to put themselves in someone else's position or to understand the broader impact of their actions. According to teacher Erik Winkelmann, this partly relates to cognitive development. At the same time, it is something that tends to grow over time. As students get older, they generally become more aware of others and more capable of nuanced thinking.

### 6.3.7 AT SCHOOL, FITTING IN IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING YOURSELF

From my interviews and observations, and teachers' perspective the social environment at school is strongly shaped by the need to fit in. Students who have more open-minded or different views often adapt their behaviour to match the dominant group. This means that what you see at school is not always a full reflection of what someone actually thinks. For this group real connections and more authentic friendships often exist outside of school. Within school, friendships can sometimes feel more functional, a way to navigate the social structure rather than a deep personal bond. There is a clear pressure to conform, and stepping outside of that can lead to exclusion.

### 6.3.8 INTEREST IN POLITICS IS GENERALLY LOW, BUT CAN SUDDENLY INCREASE

In general, political interest among these students is quite low. It is not something they actively engage with in their daily lives. However, this can shift quite quickly under the right circumstances. For example, during school elections, there can be a sudden spike in interest and involvement. This suggests that the lack of engagement is not necessarily fixed, but more dependent on context and how accessible or relevant politics feels in that moment.

### 6.3.9 TEACHERS FEEL LIKE STUDENTS LIVE ISOLATED LIVES

Teachers feel that a number of students spend a large part of their time in relatively closed environments, for example gaming or being on social media. While this is not unique to this group, it can lead to a certain level of disconnection from the outside world. Real-world interactions and broader societal engagement can become less present in their daily lives.

### 6.3.10 MANY OLDER STUDENTS SEEM PASSIVE OR UNINTERESTED

There is a noticeable group of 16 - 18 year old students who come across as passive or disengaged. They show little initiative and often appear indifferent to what is happening around them. Compared to how previous generations are sometimes described, they also seem less outspoken and less driven to express strong opinions. This passivity can influence how they relate to school, society, and politics.

### 6.3.11 HOME ENVIRONMENT AND FAMILY VALUES PLAY A BIGGER ROLE IN OPINION-FORMING THAN SOCIAL MEDIA

The beliefs and values of these students are often strongly shaped by their home environment. Family plays a central role in how they see the world, and in some cases religion is also an important influence. These backgrounds can shape opinions on topics like politics, identity, and social issues. For example, more conservative views are often rooted in what students have grown up with, rather than something they have developed independently.

### 6.3.12 DIFFERENCES IN BEHAVIOUR ARE MOSTLY VISIBLE BETWEEN PRACTICAL EDUCATIONAL TRACKS

Teachers and students themselves indicate that differences in behaviour are often more pronounced between different educational tracks within practical education (MBO) than between individual students. For example, students training to become office workers and those training to become barbers often represent very different types of young men.

### 6.3.13 MALE STUDENTS TEND TO BE MORE PRACTICALLY ORIENTED THAN FEMALE STUDENTS

Teachers observe that male students are generally more focused on practical tasks and hands-on activities. They often prefer learning by doing rather than through abstract or theoretical explanations. This can influence how they engage with school subjects, but also how they relate to broader societal topics, which are often more abstract in nature. As a result, topics like politics or democracy may feel more distant or less relevant to them.

### 6.3.14 HIGH LEVELS OF PHONE USE SHAPE DAILY BEHAVIOUR

A recurring observation among teachers is the high level of phone use among students. Much of their time is spent on social media, messaging, or consuming short-form content. This affects attention spans and the way information is processed. It also plays a role in how students encounter information about the world, including political content, which is often fragmented, fast-paced, and shaped by algorithms.

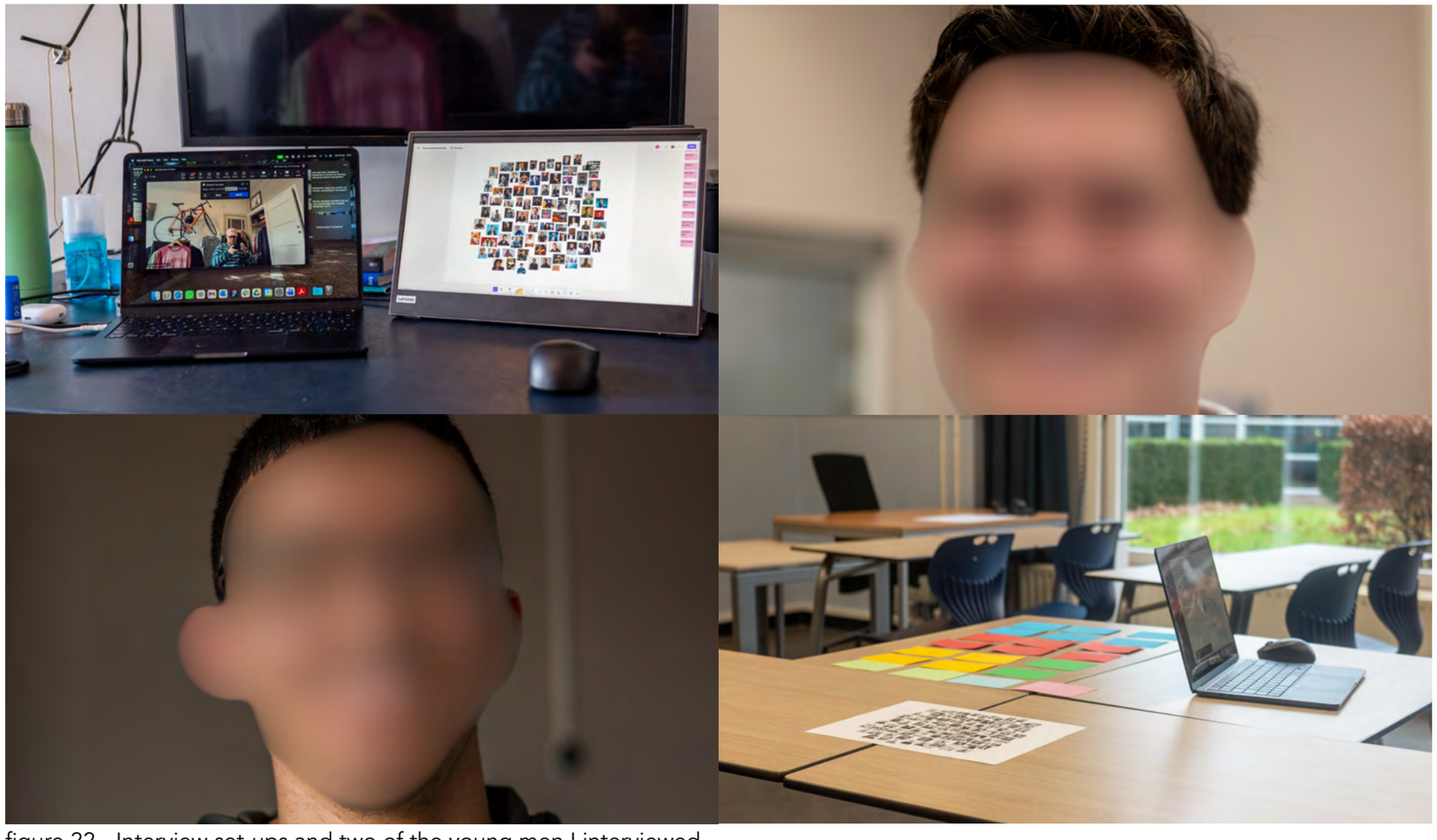


figure 22 - Interview set-ups and two of the young men I interviewed.

### 6.3.15 SOCIAL MEDIA FEEDS ARE LARGELY SIMILAR ACROSS YOUNG MEN.

The content they encounter is typically centered around their hobbies and interests, with sports, especially football, appearing as a recurring theme. Also most of them follow common news-sources, like 'NOS', 'De Telegraaf' and 'De Speld'. Also so-called brainrot content is widely spread among young men. Brainrot content is fast, fragmented, and highly stimulating media, often chaotic or ironic, designed to capture attention instantly rather than provide depth (Filiponne, 2025). An overview of different social media feeds across young men is shown in figure 23.

### 6.3.16 RESPECT IS ALWAYS A CORE VALUE

Respect comes up as a core value in all my interviews, although it means different things to different men. For some it is about treating others properly, for others it is about politeness, loyalty, letting people be themselves, or normal behaviour. It functions as a kind of moral baseline across the group.

### 6.3.17 THERE IS OFTEN A TENSION BETWEEN TOLERANCE AND TRADITIONAL VALUES

Many boys say in principle that everyone should be able to be themselves. At the same time, some hold traditional views on gender, family, or homosexuality. This makes their thinking neither purely progressive nor purely conservative, but rather hybrid: tolerant in tone, traditional underneath.

### 6.3.18 INFORMATION INTAKE IS OFTEN PASSIVE AND FRAGMENTED

Almost no one seems to follow news or politics in a very structured way. Information comes in through: TikTok, Instagram conversations parents friends occasional news fragments. As a result, a fragmented worldview often emerges: impressions and feelings are present, but with less coherence or depth.

### 6.3.19 FREEDOM, AND WITH IT THE VALUE OF DEMOCRACY, IS HIGHLY IMPORTANT

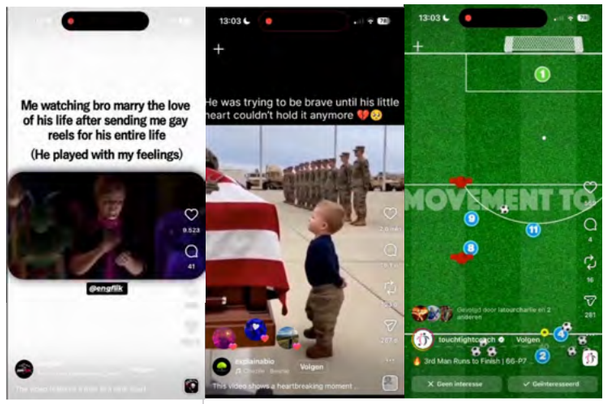
Across all young men I spoke with, freedom, particularly freedom of speech, was seen as very important. They strongly value democratic principles and express clear opposition to figures they associate with repression. For example, Donald Trump was viewed very negatively, similar to how they spoke about figures like Stalin and Hitler. Some described Trump as a repressor and, in certain cases, even as a dictator.

### 6.3.20 DAILY LIFE IS MAINLY CLOSE AND CONCRETE

Almost all young men I spoke with live strongly within their immediate environment: work, school, friends, family, sports, hobbies. Abstract topics tend to remain more distant.

**FEED 1**
Example of the feed of Nick.

A 21-year old man inclined toward anti-democratic voting



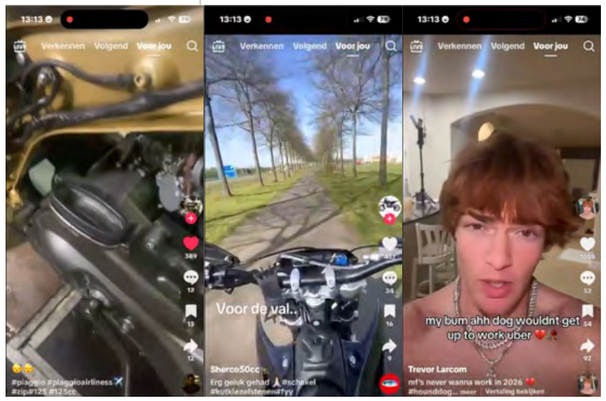

**FEED 3**
Example of the feed of Rik.

A 18-year old man, inclined toward the progressive-left.



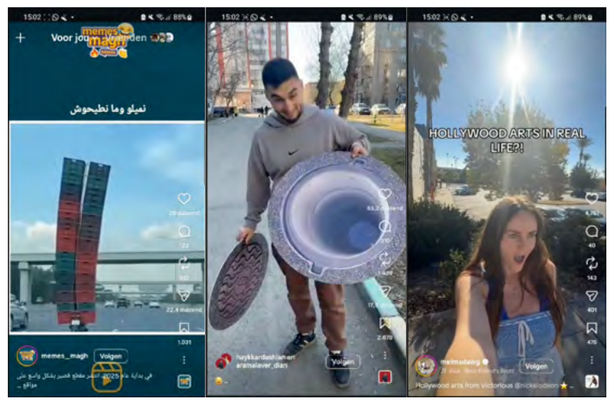

**FEED 2**
Example of the feed of Mike.

A 18-year old man, who does not have any clue on politics.




**FEED 4**
Example of the feed of Amir.

A 18-year old man, who votes whatever.




**FEED 5**
Example of the feed of Tim.

A 19-year old man, inclined toward anti-democratic voting

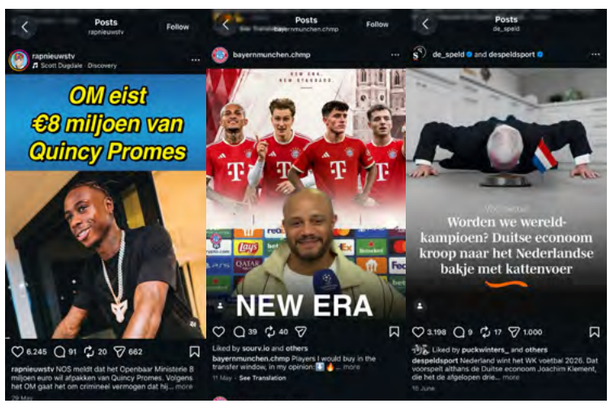



figure 23 - Social media feeds of different practically educated young men

## 6.4 PRACTICALLY EDUCATED YOUNG MEN INCLINED TOWARD ANTI-DEMOCRATIC VOTING

### THE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Understand how this subgroup's political preference comes about, and whether they actually differ from peers who are not drawn to these parties. |
| QUESTIONS | » What characterizes practically educated young men who are inclined toward anti-democratic voting?<br>» How do they develop their political preferences?<br>» To what extent do they differ from other practically educated young men?<br>» Which social dynamics contribute to their attraction toward anti-democratic parties? |
| PARTICIPANTS & METHOD | Two in-depth interviews with the practically educated young men inclined toward anti-democratic voting, supplemented by shorter contacts, interviews with other young men, teacher input, and observation. |
| ANALYSIS | Inductive thematic analysis based on recurrence, relevance, and design significance. |
| OUTPUT | An understanding of why this subgroup differs from their peers. Together with chapter 6.3, this leads to the joint conclusion at the end of this chapter. |

Now that we have explored Gen Z and practically educated young men more broadly, it is time to focus on practically educated young men who are inclined toward anti-democratic voting, the target group in my research. A rough representation of this group is seen in figure 24.

It is important to note that accessing the group of practically educated young men who are inclined toward anti-democratic voting, proved to be very difficult. I actively tried to get in touch with this group, through contact with around five teachers, outreach via other practically educated students, distributing flyers at vocational schools (MBO) and more. In total, I think I came into contact, both directly and indirectly, with approximately 50 young men belonging to the target group. However, I was only able to conduct in-depth interviews with two of them. In contrast, students with more progressive sympathies were relatively easy to approach and generally more willing to participate.

#### 6.4.1 THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT IS THE STRONGEST DRIVER OF POLITICAL VIEWS

The key difference seems to lie in their environment. These young men are more likely to be surrounded by others who share similar political views. When asked whether anyone in their friend group held left-wing views, the answer was: "No one, maybe the girls." Within these environments, certain perspectives are reinforced, shaping how individuals interpret information and form opinions.

#### 6.4.2 YOUNG RIGHT-WING MEN ARE NOT FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MEN

Surprisingly, I did not find major differences in the everyday lives of practically educated young men who sympathize with anti-democratic parties compared to other young men. They do not exist in completely separate anti-democratic social media echo chambers, with only FvD or PVV propoganda, nor do they show significantly less respect toward other groups, which were things I initially expected to find.

For example, I spoke with a young man, Tim, who fits more closely with the archetype I initially expected, someone who is discontent, searching for meaning, and somewhat positive toward figures like Andrew Tate. However, I also spoke with Daan, a happy and content young man who showed no positive attitude toward Andrew Tate, has a clear sense of meaning in life, and is doing well.

Upon asking what they vote they then verified they would both vote for a anti-democratic party and they started repeating frames they heard from politicians like Thierry Baudet and Geert Wilders. But I did not find strong individual differences compared to other men.




figure 24 - Rough representation of practically educated young men, inclined toward anti-democratic voting. **Note.** Figure created by the author as a personal impression, based on own interviews and observations rather than on literature. The groups and party logos are indicative, not measured.

### 6.4.3 A VOTE FOR THE PVV OR FVD OFTEN MORE ABOUT OPPOSING THE CURRENT SYSTEM THAN SUPPORTING ITS FULL IDEOLOGY

What is important to note is that many individuals do not see their vote as an endorsement of all anti-democratic policies, but primarily as a way to push back against existing politics.

### 6.4.4 RELUCTANCE TO SPEAK ABOUT RADICAL RIGHT SYMPATHY REFLECTS DISCOMFORT WITH POLITICAL BELIEFS

Another striking observation is that young men with anti-democratic sympathies are often reluctant to talk about their views. Both through direct experience and through what other students shared, it became clear that this group tends to avoid conversations about politics. Many expressed discomfort or even shame. I often heard responses such as: "No, I do not want to talk about that, I am too radical," or "I do not like talking about that, it is too deep."

This reluctance suggests that their views are not always openly owned or easily articulated, and that there may be a perceived social stigma attached to expressing them. As Rik puts it:

"They also think themselves their beliefs are immoral and thus avoid the conversation."

This reluctance may also have been influenced by my position as the researcher. It is possible that I was not perceived as part of their social world, which may have made it more difficult to build trust and discuss sensitive political topics. Conversely, young men with more progressive views appeared more willing to speak openly, perhaps because they perceived me as someone more similar to themselves.

### 6.4.5 RADICAL RIGHT POLITICAL OPINIONS ARE OFTEN ADOPTED RATHER THAN INDEPENDENTLY FORMED

I did not find clear, internly developed reasons that fully explain why individuals support anti-democratic parties. Rather, their arguments often reflect the framing used by politicians. Commonly mentioned concerns include the importance of Dutch culture, expectations around the explict use of Dutch language, concerns about asylum centers and distrust in political promises. These can feel like internal reasons, however they were all frames of anti-democratic politicians, like Geert Wilders, for example:

*"I now speak more English than Dutch with people."*
*"A large group of immigrants does not adapt."*
*"Our Dutch culture is being diluted."*
*"When we are abroad, we adapt to them, they should do the same for us."*
*"Full is full."*

The direct copying of political framing was much less evident among men who do not have sympathy for anti-democratic parties. This likely reflects the simpler and more accessible language often used by anti-democratic politicians.

### 6.4.6 ANTI-DEMOCRATIC SYMPATHY DOES NOT REQUIRE ADMIRATION OF ANTI-DEMOCRATIC POLITICIANS

What is also interesting is that the politicians from whom they adopt these frames are not necessarily seen as role models or even as particularly good people. For example, young right-wing men see Geert Wilders as an 'non-admirable' person and even as a 'racist'. They also all oppose Donald Trump and his policies of suppressing.

### 6.4.7 "PUZZLING INFORMATION" TO CONFIRM BIAS

When encountering information, for example through social media, young men in general do not always engage with it critically. Instead, they tend to interpret and combine pieces of information in a way that confirms their existing beliefs, something they themselves describe as "puzzling the pieces together." This process leads to an interpretation of reality that reinforces their prior views, a phenomenon known as confirmation bias.

This pattern is not exclusive to anti-democratic groups. However, within populist ways of thinking, these connections are often made more directly, as complex societal issues are reduced to simple and easily understandable explanations.

An example of this can be seen in Tim. He comes across a post from NOS stating that the housing shortage is high. Shortly after, he sees a post from Rapnieuws in which Geert Wilders claims that this is caused by asylum seekers. Without having deeper knowledge of the issue, and influenced by his social environment, Tim connects these pieces of information and adopts this explanation as truth. Namely, that asylum seekers are the cause of housing shortage.

### 6.4.8 PERCEIVED LABELLING LEADS TO MISUNDERSTANDING

Another pattern I observed is that young men in more right-wing or anti-democratic environments often feel labeled as racist, and tend to explicitly distance themselves from that label by saying, "I am not racist, but... ." This points to a tension between self-identification and external labeling, where individuals feel misunderstood by how others categorize them. What is interesting is that individuals themselves have never been said to be a racist by others, but they feel like they are.

Interestingly, they themselves also apply negative labels to others. For example, they describe the LGBTQ+ community as "unknowing" or "naive." However, I rarely heard explicitly harsh or extreme statements about other groups.

### 6.4.9 PROGRESSIVE PRACTICALLY EDUCATED YOUNG MEN REPORT MORE CONTACT WITH YOUNG RIGHT-WING MEN THAN VICE VERSA

That said, I did observe that more progressive practically-educated young men tend to have more contact with those holding more right-wing views, while the reverse seems less visible. Interestingly, it is possible that some of these right-wing individuals are not fully aware that others in their social circle hold more progressive views. They see their group as 'right-wing' and that is acceptable, the nuances are not talked about.

### 6.4.10 PERCEIVED LABELLING HELPS FASTEN POLARISATION

There are also important misconceptions at play. Not every young man within these environments, or within friend groups where right-wing views dominate, actually holds anti-democratic beliefs. Some may vote for more mainstream right-wing parties such as VVD or CDA, or may not have strong political views at all. As portrayed in figure 24. However, the overall group identity is often perceived, both internally and externally, as "right-wing," and this overarching label tends to overshadow individual differences.

When individuals are repeatedly categorized in this way, regardless of their personal views, it can contribute to affective polarisation. As a result, some may eventually gravitate toward parties like PVV or FvD, not necessarily out of strong ideological alignment, but more as a form of protest or counter-reaction.

### 6.4.11 INDEPENDENT THINKING LEADS TO MORE NUANCE

What does stand out is that when young men begin to form more independent views, rather than adopting those of their surroundings, their perspectives often become more nuanced or shift over time to a less right-wing thought pattern. In other words, what is considered "normal" within a given environment is often internalized.

## CONCLUSION ON PRACTICALLY EDUCATED YOUNG MEN

Overall, the findings of chapter 6.3 and 6.4 show that practically educated young men cannot be understood as a single, politically fixed group. Rather, they form a diverse and often uncertain group whose attitudes are strongly shaped by their immediate social environment. Across the broader group, recurring themes include a search for recognition, a strong need to fit in and a desire to prove themselves according to the norms of the group they belong to. Politics is usually not a central part of their daily lives, and whether it becomes relevant often depends less on personal ideological conviction than on whether it is made relevant within their social surroundings. Their opinions therefore appear to be shaped less by abstract political reflection and more by belonging, repetition, and what feels normal in the social world around them.

This also helps explain why these young men often present themselves differently depending on the setting. In group contexts, they are more likely to reproduce dominant norms, express themselves in stronger terms, and hide uncertainty or nuance. In one-to-one conversations, by contrast, they often appear more reflective and open. This suggests that the views expressed in groups should not automatically be read as deeply rooted convictions. Instead, group dynamics seem to reward conformity and certainty, while more personal settings create space for doubt, nuance, and independent thought.

The same pattern is visible among practically educated young men who are inclined toward anti-democratic voting. What stands out is not that they are fundamentally different from other practically educated young men, but that they are more often embedded in environments where right-wing views are normalized and reinforced. Their support for anti-democratic parties does not appear to stem primarily from a coherent ideological worldview, but rather from social surroundings, repeated exposure to certain frames, and dissatisfaction with the current political system. In many cases, a anti-democratic vote seems to function less as a full endorsement of all anti-democratic ideas and more as a way of identifying with a broader ‘right-wing’ environment.

An important part of this process appears to be confirmation bias. The young men I spoke with often did not critically evaluate political information in a structured way, but instead seemed to assemble fragments of information in ways that confirmed what they already felt or what their environment already suggested. They themselves described this as “puzzling the pieces together.” In practice, this means that separate pieces of information, encountered through social media, conversations, or headlines, are selectively connected into a narrative that confirms existing assumptions. This pattern is not unique to young right-wing men, but it does seem especially relevant here because populistic anti-democratic frames often offer simple, direct, and emotionally satisfying explanations for complex problems. In that sense, confirmation bias strengthens the influence of the social environment: young men do not simply absorb ideas from their surroundings, but actively interpret new information in ways that keep those surroundings ideologically coherent.

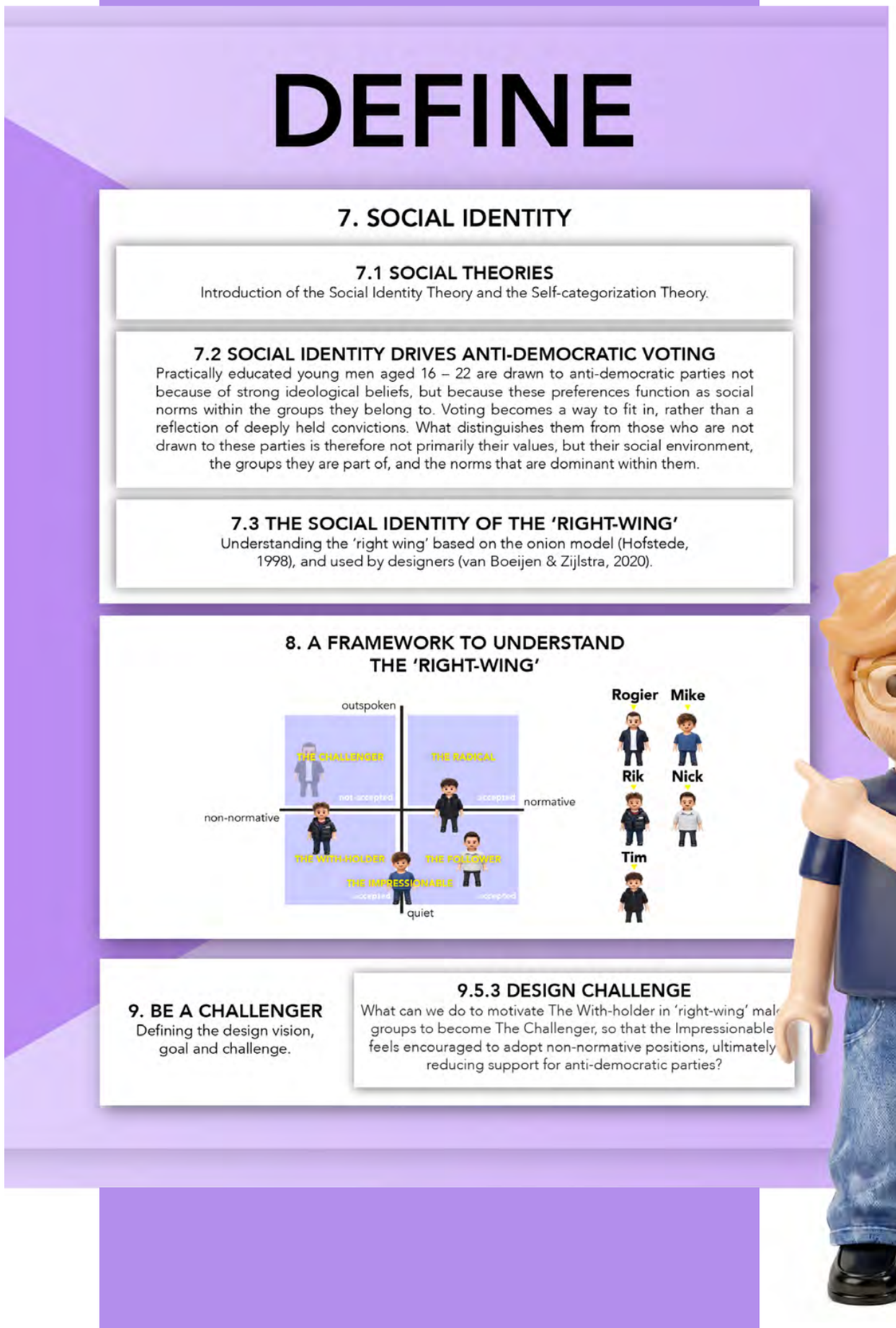
Another striking finding is the difficulty I had in accessing this group. Although I came into contact, directly and indirectly, with many practically educated young men who were inclined toward anti-democratic voting, only two were willing to participate in in-depth interviews. By contrast, more progressive young men were much easier to approach and generally more willing to talk. Moreover, several right-wing young men explicitly avoided political conversation, saying things such as, “I don’t want to talk about that, I’m too radical”. This reluctance is significant. It may suggest that these views are not always confidently owned or fully articulated, and that some young men themselves experience discomfort, shame, or moral uncertainty in relation to their political positions. In other words, their political identity may be performed in certain social settings, but not always fully internalized or easily defended when questioned individually. This does not mean they reject those views altogether, but it does suggest that their identification with anti-democratic positions may be more fragile than it first appears.

At the same time, social media alone does not seem sufficient to explain these attitudes. In a digital environment full of fragmented, fast-moving, and often forgettable content, trends appear less durable than is often assumed. What seems much more influential is the offline social environment: friends, family, school culture, and the immediate peer group. In a world of digital overload, these offline relationships become especially important because they offer recognition, certainty, and belonging. The social environment is therefore more “sticky” than social media itself.

Taken together, these findings suggest that anti-democratic sympathy among practically educated young men should not be understood as an inherent personal characteristic, nor as the simple result of online radicalization. It is better understood as something that develops within a specific social context, where political frames are repeated, group norms are reinforced, and information is filtered through strong confirmation bias. Political attitudes in this group are closely tied to belonging, conformity, and the desire to maintain coherence with one’s environment. This makes Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) a particularly useful framework. From this perspective, anti-democratic sympathy is not merely the outcome of individual conviction, but part of a wider group identity in which political preferences function as markers of belonging. Seen in this way, it is not the individual young man alone who should be central to the analysis, but the social group through which his political identity is formed, reinforced, and made meaningful.



figure 25 - One of the young men I interviewed.




# DEFINE

The Define phase is where interpretation takes over from data collection. The findings from the Discover phase were given an explanation and translated into something a designer can act on. It gives answer to the research question and the design challenge that follows from it.

The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987) are introduced. These theories help explain something that kept recurring in the interviews: why these young men express views that do not match their own values, and how belonging to a group shapes what someone says and does. Together with the findings, this theoretical framework produced the answer to the research question: what distinguishes these young men from their peers is not the person, but the environment he stands in and the norms that dominate it. To make that environment concrete, the group culture was mapped with Hofstede's onion model (1998), as applied in design by van Boeijen and Zijlstra (2020), and the patterns from the interviews were translated into a framework which introduce five archetypes within the group.

This framework was then used in chapter 9 to formulate the design challenge.

## THE PHASE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Translate the findings from the Discover phase into an explanatory framework that leads to the design challenge. |
| QUESTIONS | » Why do these young men express views that do not match their own values?<br>» How does belonging to a group shape what someone says and does?<br>» How can this understanding be turned into a design challenge |
| SOURCES | Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987) |
| SYNTHESIS TOOLS | Hofstede's onion model (Hofstede, 1998), and used by designers (van Boeijen & Zijlstra, 2020) |
| OUTPUT | A framework explaining the difference between personal views, perceived group norms and expressed behaviour, an answer to the research question and the design challenge that follows from it. |

# 7. SOCIAL IDENTITY

## 7.1 SOCIAL IDENTITY  THEORIES

### 7.1.1 THE SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

Social Identity Theory, developed by social psychologists Henri Tajfel & John Turner (1979), provides a useful lens for understanding the dynamics observed in my research. Social identity refers to the part of an individual's self-concept that is derived from the groups to which they belong. The theory explains the conditions under which social identity becomes more important than personal identity, and how this shapes behaviour.

According to this theory, individuals do not have a single identity, but multiple identities associated with the different groups they are part of. As a result, people may behave differently depending on the social context. For example, someone may identify as a sports team member, a family member, or part of a local community, with each identity becoming more or less relevant depending on the situation.

The theory describes three key mental processes.

The first is **social categorization**, the process by which individuals organize themselves and others into social groups. This helps people make sense of the social world. In practice, this can lead to simplified distinctions such as "I am right-wing, they are left-wing" or "I am straightforward, they are naive." Social categorization emphasizes similarities within groups and differences between groups.

Importantly, which identity becomes dominant depends on the social context. For example, a young man inclined toward anti-democratic voting may describe himself in my interview as a peaceful and thoughtful individual, while presenting himself among friends as more outspoken or confrontational. These identities are not contradictory, but context-dependent.

The second process is **identification**. When individuals identify with a group, they begin to adopt the behaviours and norms they associate with that group. For example, someone who identifies as anti-asylum center may attend protests or engage in discussions that reinforce that identity.

The third process is **social comparison**, in which individuals compare their own group to others in terms of status and value. To maintain a positive sense of self-worth, people tend to view their own group more favorably than others.

If a positive evaluation is not possible, people will generally choose one of three strategies.

The first is individual **mobility**. This refers to the phenomenon where individuals leave their current group and move to a group with a higher social status.

Second, they may try to **improve the status of their group** as a whole by changing one of the elements used in the comparison between groups.
Finally, there is the possibility of **improving the group's status** through collective action. In this case, a group directly competes with another group with the aim of changing the social order.

### 7.1.2 THE SELF-CATEGORIZATION THEORY

Later, John Turner et al. (1987) developed the Self-Categorization Theory, which explains how individuals come to define themselves in terms of group membership rather than as unique individuals. According to this theory,  people cognitively categorize both themselves and others into social groups, such as "us" versus "them."

When a particular group identity becomes salient, individuals shift from defining themselves as unique persons to defining themselves as members of a social category. Turner et al. (1987) refer to this process as **depersonalization**. Depersonalization does not imply a loss of individuality. Rather, it refers to a change in the level at which the self is perceived. Individuals increasingly view themselves in terms of group membership and become more likely to adopt attitudes and behaviours that are perceived as normative for the group. A visualization of this process of depersonalization is portrayed in figure 26.

As a result, attitudes and behaviour become aligned with perceived group norms. What is said, expressed, or acted upon is guided less by personal beliefs and more by what is considered appropriate within the group. In this way, individuals do not simply belong to a group, but actively become representatives of it in specific social contexts.

### 7.1.3 SOCIAL IDENTITY & SELF-CATEGORIZATION

While Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) focuses more on relationships between groups, such as intergroup comparison, status, and the formation of in-group and out-group distinctions, Self-Categorization Theory focuses more on the cognitive and behavioural processes within groups. In other words, Social Identity Theory explains why group identities become important and why individuals are motivated to think in terms of "us" versus "them." Self-Categorization Theory then explains how this group-based thinking translates into behaviour, showing how individuals come to adopt the norms, attitudes, and actions of the group in specific contexts (Turner et al., 1987).

In this sense, Social Identity Theory explains the underlying motivation for group-based thinking, while Self-Categorization Theory explains the behavioural outcome of this process.

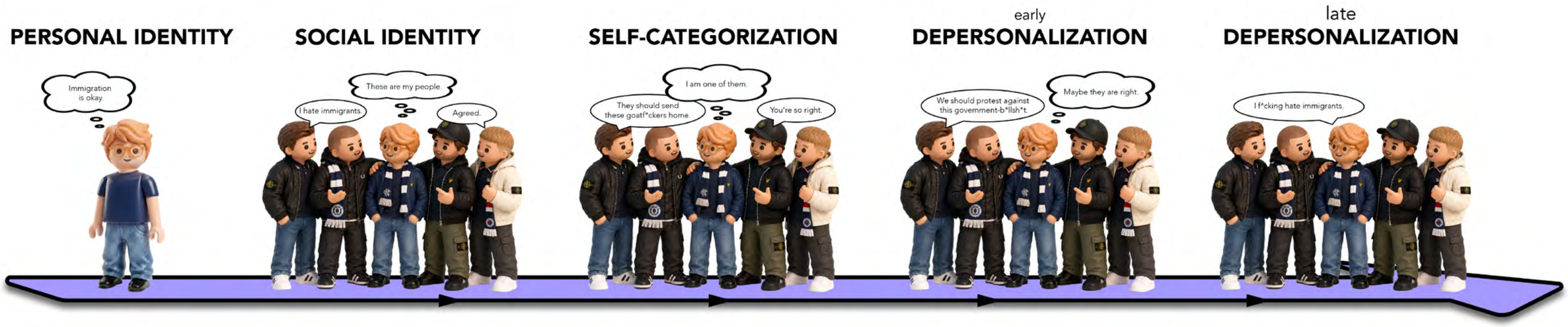



figure 26 - The process of depersonalization.

# *Why do practically educated young men (16 – 22) vote for, or feel drawn to, anti-democratic parties? And how to they differ from others that don't?*

What became clear throughout this study is that practically educated young men who are inclined to vote for anti-democratic parties are often not strong ideological supporters of these parties. Their views are rarely deeply internalized or well-developed. Instead, their political preferences are better understood as a reflection of the social environments in which they operate.

Many of these young men are part of social groups in which support for anti-democratic parties is widespread and perceived as the norm, what I refer to as 'right-wing' groups. Within these groups, a strong perceived consensus dominates: individuals who are inclined toward voting for anti-democratic parties assume that everyone shares the same views and voting behaviour. When asked whether others in their group think differently, the answer is often that "everyone thinks the same," even when this is not necessarily the case.

This dynamic can be explained through Social Identity Theory, which shows how individuals derive part of their identity from the groups they belong to. By positioning themselves within a right-wing in-group, and implicitly contrasting this with left-wing out-groups, group norms gain importance. Self-Categorization Theory then explains how this translates into behaviour: individuals adopt and reproduce these norms in order to align with the group. In this way, voting becomes less an expression of personal conviction and more a signal of social alignment.

A more nuanced picture emerges when looking closer. Young men who do not support anti-democratic parties, but who are part of these same 'right-wing' groups, clearly recognise the presence of more outspoken radical right individuals. This suggests that differences in views do exist, but remain largely unspoken. As a result, the group appears more homogeneous than it actually is, reinforcing the illusion of consensus and making it easier for individuals to conform.

Within these groups, political preferences are often adopted without a clear understanding of what these parties actually stand for. Knowledge tends to remain superficial, often limited to general statements such as opposition to asylum centers or the belief that politicians like Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet "stand for the real Dutch people." The adoption of frames and language used by radical right politicians is clearly visible. However, these frames often show limited alignment with individuals' own underlying values, such as equality, mutual respect, and freedom of speech.

This indicates that the appeal of anti-democratic parties does not primarily lie in strong ideological conviction, but rather in shared cultural patterns within the group. These patterns are reinforced through processes such as confirmation bias, where information is interpreted in ways that align with existing group narratives, even when individuals have only a partial understanding of the issues at hand.

Interestingly, this dynamic resembles patterns seen in the influence of the manosphere. While the social identity of the manosphere may be characterized as misogynistic, its appeal is often not rooted in misogyny itself, but in offering direction, status, and a sense of belonging. Similarly, the appeal of 'right-wing' groups lies less in their political content and more in their accessibility and their ability to provide social belonging.

At the same time, signs of tension are visible. Some young men express discomfort or even shame regarding their anti-democratic sympathies. Unlike more progressive views, which are often expressed more openly, these views are discussed with hesitation. This suggests that individuals are not always fully aligned with the group norms. From the perspective of Self-Categorization Theory, this can be understood as partial depersonalization: individuals align with the group in behaviour, but their personal identity has not been fully overridden. This internal tension may even contribute to what can be described as normative overdrive, where individuals compensate for uncertainty by expressing more extreme versions of group norms.

Taken together, these findings provide a clear answer to the research question:

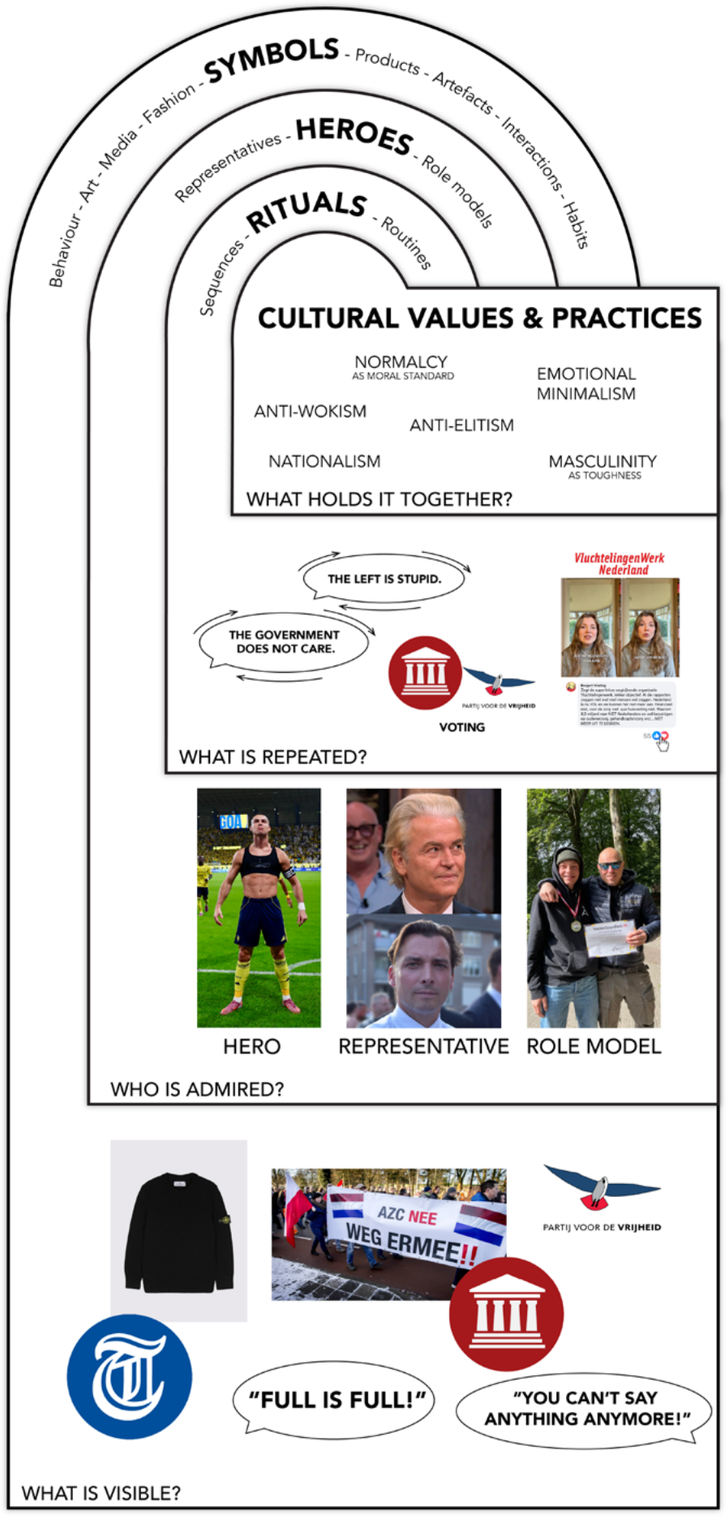



figure 27 - The Social Identity of the 'right-wing'
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on the onion model of Hofstede (1998), and used by van Boeijen & Zijlstra (2020)

## 7.3 THE SOCIAL IDENTITY OF THE 'RIGHT-WING'

Building on the answer to my research question in the previous chapter, it is important to further understand the social identity of the group to which these practically educated young men, who are inclined toward anti-democratic voting, belong. In this project, I refer to this social group as the 'right-wing'.

In this chapter, I aim to illustrate the social identity of the 'right-wing', based on the onion model (Hofstede, 1998), and used by designers (van Boeijen & Zijlstra, 2020) (see figure 27). These insights are derived from interviews, complemented by my own interpretations. The model distinguishes between four layers: symbols, heroes, rituals, and underlying cultural values and practices.

### 7.3.1 SYMBOLS

At the most visible level, this identity is expressed through a range of symbols. These are not always explicitly political, but signal belonging in subtle ways. Examples include clothing such as a Stone Island sweater, references to protests against asylum centers, and the presence of political party logos such as PVV and FvD. Most trusted media-outlets, like De Telegraaf, also play a role. In addition, certain recurring phrases function as symbolic markers, such as "Full is full." and "You can't say anything anymore." which reflect and reinforce normative viewpoints.

### 7.3.2 HEROES

The layer of heroes reveals that admiration within this group is not primarily directed toward politicians. While figures such as Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet are recognised as representatives of the group's political stance, they are not necessarily admired on a personal level. Instead, admiration is more often directed toward figures like Cristiano Ronaldo, who embodies success, discipline, and status. At a more personal level, the father figure frequently emerges as an important role model, representing authority, and guidance.

However, despite the limited personal admiration of political figures , they still play an important role in shaping the group's discourse. Young men tend to adopt and paraphrase the frames, language, and talking points used by these politicians. In this way, politicians function less as heroes to look up to, and more as sources of framing, providing the narratives and vocabulary through which group members interpret and discuss social and political issues. This shows that political influence in the group does not come from admiring politicians, but from picking up their ideas and the way they talk.

### 7.3.3 RITUALS

Rituals within the group consist of repeated patterns of interaction that reinforce shared norms. These can be observed in everyday conversations, both offline and online, where phrases such as "the government does not care" or "the left is stupid" are repeated and normalized. Voting for parties such as PVV or FvD is then also seen as the normative ritual. Online, similar dynamics are visible in interactions with content, for example when factual information from organisations such as VluchtelingenWerk Nederland is met with dismissive or hostile responses in comment sections and liked by the group. These repeated interactions function as moments of reinforcement, where group norms are reproduced and, at times, intensified.

### 7.3.4 CULTURAL VALUES & PRACTICES

At the core of this social identity are underlying cultural values and practices that hold the group together. A central value is normalcy as a moral standard, where what is considered "normal" also defines what is seen as acceptable. Closely related is anti-elitism, characterized by a distrust of institutions, media, and perceived "woke" or progressive influences. This is accompanied by a broader anti-woke sentiment, where social change is often viewed with skepticism. Masculinity, expressed through toughness and emotional restraint, also plays a role, alongside a tendency toward emotional minimalism, where deeper or more introspective conversations are generally avoided. Nationalism can be present as a background orientation, emphasizing belonging to the for them Dutch culture. At the same time, it is important to note that there is unspoken diversity within the group. Not all individuals fully agree with these positions, but such differences often remain unexpressed, reinforcing the appearance of a more uniform identity than actually exists.

Together, these layers illustrate how the social identity of this group is constructed and maintained, not primarily through strong ideological conviction, but through shared symbols, admired figures and repeated interactions.

# 8. A FRAMEWORK TO UNDERSTAND THE 'RIGHT-WING'

## 8.1 DEVIATING FROM GROUP NORMS

Deviating from the social identity of a group you feel you belong to feels enormously difficult, as individuals fear social consequences such as being judged or excluded. This creates a tension: individuals may not fully align with the normative views, yet still reproduce them in social settings. Interestingly enough, the young men I spoke with in my interviews often viewed speaking up and challenging the status quo as admirable. In some cases, they even expressed a desire to do so themselves, but felt that there was not enough space or safety within the group to act on it. But then again, no-one in these groups speaks up, so they would not know.

This suggests that the perceived risk of speaking out may be greater than the actual social consequences. The real barrier may not be rejection itself, but the possibility of realizing that one does not fully belong within the group. Speaking up therefore becomes not only a social act, but also a confrontation with one's own identity and place within the group.

## 8.2 A PERSONAL REFLECTION

This dynamic also resonates with my own experience. I often felt that my more socially progressive views were looked down upon within the group of fraternity boys I belonged to. As a result, I hesitated to express my opinions and instead went along with the group, even making sometimes remarks I internally disagreed with. However, when I eventually started speaking up, I found that the group did not reject me. On the contrary, they were intrigued and interested. I felt more accepted for being myself and even noticed that my openness subtly shifted the group dynamic toward a more socially oriented perspective. This gave me a strong sense of confidence and helped me find my own place. However it also showed me that maybe I am not really part of this group, "Do I really belong here? Are these my people?"

## 8.3 THE FRAMEWORK

In studying the right-wing male bubble, I identified five distinct archetypes within this group, see figure 28. In this framework I was able to place each of the young men I interviewed within one of these quadrants in the c-box; the playmobil figures represent them. This framework also appears to be applicable beyond this specific context, as I found that it similarly fits other groups, such as muslim male groups or left-progressive groups. The framework is the result of an iterative exploration: I tried out multiple axes and terms to describe this bubble, and kept the version that produced the clearest distinctions between the young men I spoke with. See Appendix D1.

The archetypes are as following:

**THE RADICAL (OUTSPOKEN + NORMATIVE)**
The Radical openly and confidently expresses views that align with what is perceived as normative within the group, often in a more extreme or explicit form. This individual plays a key role in setting and reinforcing group norms by articulating them clearly and repeatedly. Through their outspoken behaviour, they can shift the boundaries of what is considered acceptable, contributing to the normalization of more radical positions.

**THE FOLLOWER (QUIET + NORMATIVE)**
The Follower aligns with the dominant norms as expressed by The Radical and accepts them without severe internal conflict. They are generally less outspoken, but may occasionally voice similar views in a milder form. More often, they reinforce The Radical through agreement or silence, helping to normalize these views within the group.

**THE WITH-HOLDER (NON-NORMATIVE + QUIET)**
The With-holder does not agree with the dominant group norms and may recognise certain views as inappropriate or conflicting with their personal identity. However, they remain silent and may at times even engage in "normative overdrive", repeating views they do not believe. Unlike The Follower, The With-holder does not believe the dominant views, but may still reproduce them. They often have more developed and well-considered views, partly because they engage more deeply with perspectives outside this group. However, by remaining silent and occasionally conforming, they contribute to the continuation of the dominant norm.

**THE IMPRESSIONABLE (IN BETWEEN NON-NORMATIVE & NORMATIVE + QUIET)**
The Impressionable represents individuals whose views are not yet clearly formed and who do not experience strong alignment or resistance toward group norms. They tend to remain quiet and observant, rather than actively participating in discussions. Because their personal beliefs are still developing, they are particularly susceptible to social influence, making them more likely to adopt the dominant norms, over time.

**THE CHALLENGER (NON-NORMATIVE + OUTSPOKEN)**
The Challenger holds views that deviate from the dominant group norm and is willing to express them openly. This individual speaks up when they disagree, offering alternative perspectives and questioning what is being said. Rather than being excluded, The Challenger is often seen as a strong and independent individual who stands their ground. Their presence adds nuance to the conversation and shows that disagreement can exist within the group without leading to exclusion. Although the group's social identity suggests that this behaviour is not accepted, individual responses show that Challengers are often accepted in practice.

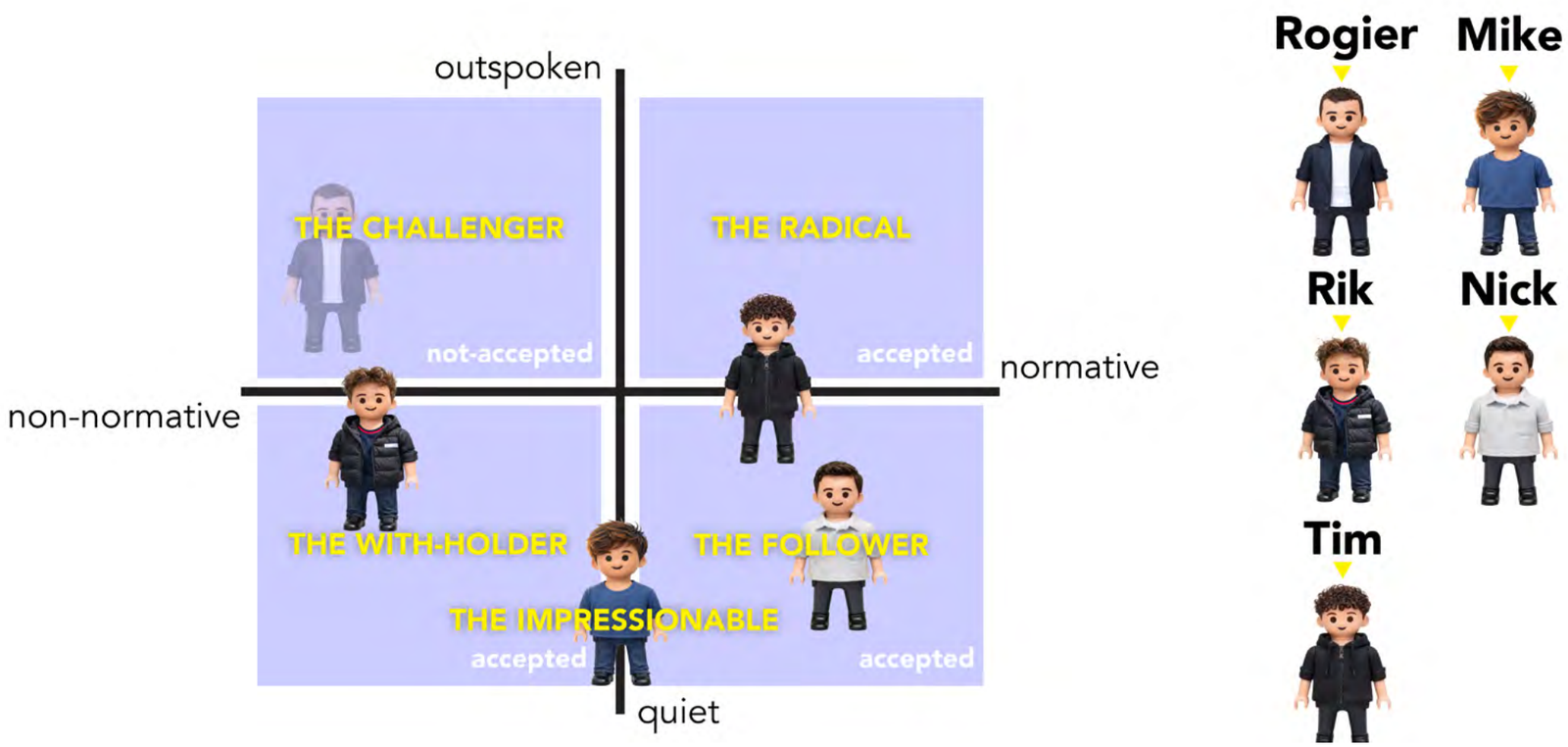



figure 28 - Framework to understand male 'right-wing'-groups.

# 9. BE A CHALLENGER

## 9.1 THE CURRENT PATHWAY

Within the framework lies an opportunity to make practically educated young men who find belonging in a 'right-wing' group more inclined to vote for democratic parties instead of anti-democratic ones.

As it currently stands, new individuals entering the group, such as the Impressionable, are likely to adopt the dominant normative behaviour of the group over time, most strongly expressed by The Radical. From there they may remain in the role of The Follower, or gradually move toward becoming The Radical themselves, particularly if the group norms weigh heavily on them and they begin to internalise the underlying beliefs of radical right thinking. At that point they could go into normative overdrive. This pathway is illustrated in figure 29.

## 9.2 AN ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY

There is also an alternative path, shown in figure 30. It leads from With-holder to Challenger, away from anti-democratic voting toward democratic voting. That route is significantly more difficult to take. Within the group, non-normative behaviour is not perceived as the social standard, and there are no outspoken non-normative individuals to serve as role models. As a result, moving in this direction feels like stepping into the unknown.

In the absence of visible alternatives, individuals are likely to follow the path of least resistance and align with the dominant group norm portrayed by The Radical. This highlights the key issue: the lack of visible Challengers within the group. There is no clear example of someone to look up to, no sense of "that is who I want to be." When group norms do not align with personal values, individuals are more likely to move into the position of The With-holder, remaining silent rather than becoming The Challenger.

## 9.3 WHY A WITH-HOLDER RARELY SPEAKS UP

Rik, a With-holder I spoke with, does feel the urge to speak up, but holds back because he does not feel encouraged or safe to do so, largely because he expects that his views will not be accepted. As he puts it, his goal is "to make people in my circle less narrow-minded, to help them see the light." The intention to challenge the norm is there, even if it is not always acted upon.

When the urge does surface, it does not always lead to confrontation within the group. Individuals may choose a different path and distance themselves altogether. This was illustrated by Rogier, who stepped away from a friend whose views he considered too extreme. Rather than addressing the issue directly, he broke contact and left, leaving the group dynamics unchanged. That behaviour aligns with Social Identity Theory, in which mobility becomes a strategy when the group's social identity is perceived as negative.

## 9.4 OPPORTUNITY

What is particularly striking is that being a Challenger is not necessarily socially rejected. In the interviews it became clear that individuals who express different views are often accepted, and sometimes even admired by members of the group. The role models these young men chose were people who did things their own way and were seen as courageous for it. This suggests that while normalcy is perceived as a dominant social norm, it is not necessarily a deeply held personal value within the group.

That insight reveals a clear design opportunity, visualised in figure 30. If more With-holders were to take on the role of The Challenger, the perceived group norm could shift. As Challengers become more visible, the Impressionable may begin to see that position as viable and acceptable. Over time this could lead to a change in normative behaviour, moving from alignment with a group-driven social identity toward alignment with personal values, and with that toward more democratic voting.

## 9.5 DESIGN VISION, GOAL AND CHALLENGE

The design vision describes the situation this project is aiming at, the design goal what the design itself has to achieve, and the design challenge the question the design has to answer.

### 9.5.1 DESIGN VISION

Young men can hold an opinion that differs from their group and say so, without it costing them their place in it. In such a group, disagreement is visible and ordinary, so that someone joining it sees more than one way of belonging.

### 9.5.2 DESIGN GOAL

The design should make one act of independent expression feel socially safe and worth doing for the With-holder, and make that act visible to the rest of his group.

### 9.5.3 DESIGN CHALLENGE

What can we do to motivate The With-holder in 'right-wing' male groups to become The Challenger, so that the Impressionable feels encouraged to adopt non-normative positions, ultimately reducing support for anti-democratic parties?

This narrows the focus within the target group. Rather than addressing every practically educated young man inclined toward anti-democratic voting, the design zooms in on those who go along with the norm without believing it: the With-holder. He is aware of alternative perspectives, yet accepts and reproduces the dominant norm, and although he does not actively challenge or change the group, he feels an underlying urge to do so.

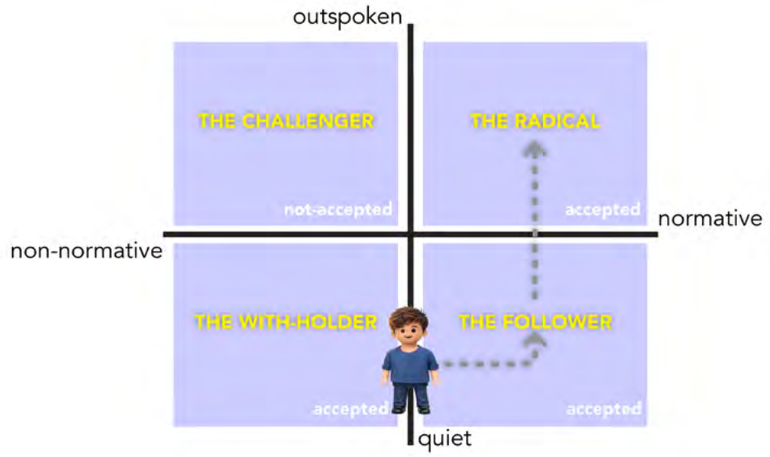



figure 29 - The pathway of new individuals upon entering a 'right-wing' group, where there is no challenger present.

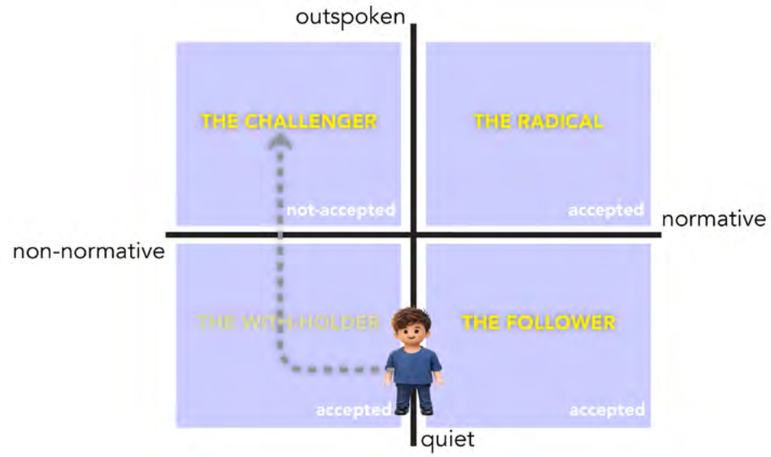



figure 30 - A potential pathway of new individuals upon entering a 'right-wing' group, where there is a challenger present.




# DEVELOP

The following chapters set out how the Develop phase moved from the design challenge to a final concept.

## THE PHASE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Understand what could motivate the With-holder, and what kind of intervention could work. |
| QUESTIONS | » Which intervention can address the design challenge?<br>» What does that intervention have to do in order to work for this group? |
| ACTIVITIES | Two brainstorms; a co-creation session with Rik; a focus group with nine young men at Tienskip; expert interviews with Jeppe Kok, Jannes Pool, Susanna Osinga and a citizenship education teacher at Albeda Zuid; an analysis of existing campaigns. |
| OUTPUT | Intervention criteria, three possible intervention directions, three campaign concepts in commercial form, and the final concept. |

Where Discover and Define were about understanding the problem, Develop is about finding out what kind of intervention could answer it. Following the Double Diamond (Design Council, 2005), the phase first diverges to open up the solution space and only then converges on one direction.

The exploration drew on three perspectives. Young men, through a co-creation session and a focus group. Experts on campaigning, behaviour change and youth participation, who showed what tends to go wrong when adults address young men. And existing public communication campaigns, analysed for what they do and deliberately do not do. Those insights with the findings from the Discover phase became criteria; the criteria produced three intervention directions; comparing the directions against the criteria produced the campaign approach, and from there three campaign concepts and one total concept.

# 10. MOTIVATING THE WITH-HOLDER

## 10.1 THE ONION FLOWER FRAMEWORK

After completing the first two phases (Discover & Define), I still felt that I lacked a deep understanding of young practically educated men. Although I had interviewed nine young practically educated men, spoken with teachers, and continuously reflected on the findings, I did not yet feel I fully understood what truly motivates these young men.

This became particularly apparent during an early brainstorming session with two fellow Industrial Design Engineering students, where we struggled to generate concepts that genuinely resonated with the target group. We realised that, despite the research, we were still designing partly based on assumptions rather than a thorough understanding of what mattered most to these young men.

During this brainstorming session, I came across the Onion Flower framework, developed by Van der Klauw (2026) in an unpublished manuscript written at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering and used here with the author's permission (Appendix E2). It offered a useful way of understanding identity and motivation, and I applied it throughout the ideation process to better understand the target group and identify meaningful entry points for the design.

### 10.1.1 UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY THROUGH THE ONION FLOWER

The framework consists of two main elements: the petals (see figure 31) and the layers (see figure 32).
The petals represent different aspects of a person's identity, such as friendship, politics, culture, health, or gender. Their size reflects the relative importance of each aspect within someone's identity.

The petals are positioned across three layers: Self-Perception, Expression, and Environment. Together, these layers illustrate how identity is shaped both internally and through interaction with the social environment. Because the layers continuously influence one another, identity is understood as dynamic rather than fixed. A single petal may exist across multiple layers simultaneously: someone may privately value an aspect of their identity, express it publicly, and have it reinforced by their environment.

Figure 33 shows the Onion Flower framework applied to my own identity.

### 10.1.2 APPLYING THE FRAMEWORK TO YOUNG MEN

Applying the Onion Flower framework to the target group showed that it can be used for more than mapping identity. It also helps identify which aspects of a person's identity are most likely to motivate engagement and behavioural change: larger petals occupy a more central role in everyday life and therefore offer the strongest entry points for communication.

Plotted for the young men in this study (figure 34), politics turned out to be a relatively small petal. Most participants expressed little intrinsic interest in political issues, and politics played only a limited role in their daily lives. Friendship & Brotherhood and Culture, by contrast, emerged as far more prominent.

That has direct consequences for the design. Rather than trying to increase political interest, the concept enters through the aspects that already matter to this group. By working through friendship and group dynamics, it invites reflection on how opinions are formed and how group norms shape behaviour.

Used this way, the Onion Flower becomes a practical design tool: it helps determine not only what should be communicated, but through which part of someone's identity that message is most likely to land. This aligns closely with Social Identity Theory, which holds that attitudes and behaviour are strongly influenced by the groups people belong to. Rather than challenging young men's political identities head-on, the framework suggests starting from identities they already value, creating a more natural route toward self-reflection and independent thinking.

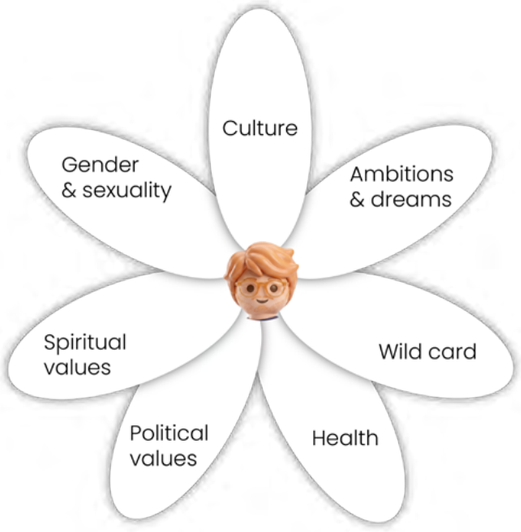



figure 31 - The petals with prototypical aspects of a person's identity.
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on the Onion Flower Framework of Van der Klauw (2026)

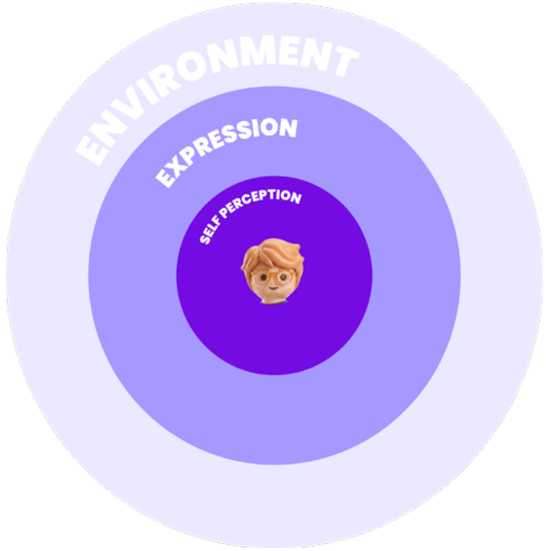



figure 32 - The layers.
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on the Onion Flower Framework of Van der Klauw (2026)

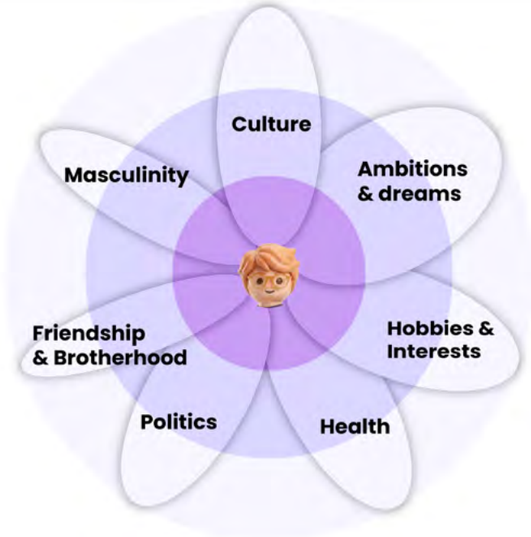



figure 33 - The Onion Flower applied to myself, with each petal sized to its importance in my own life.
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on the Onion Flower Framework of Van der Klauw (2026)

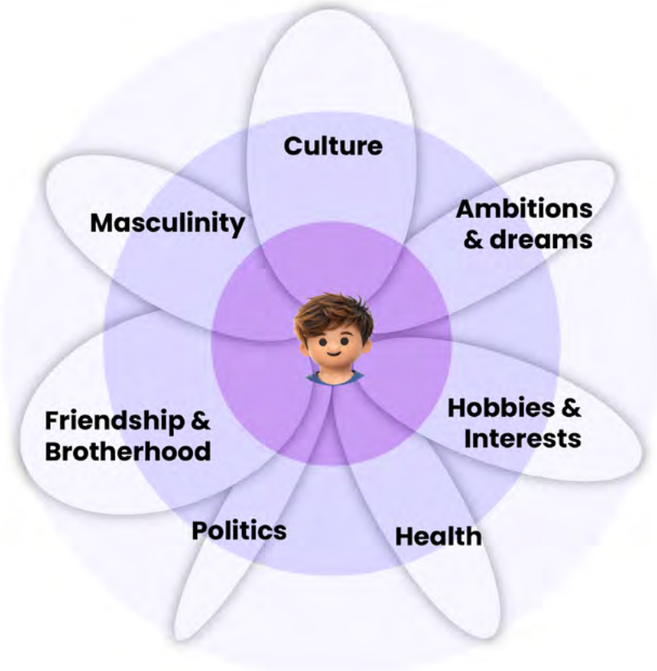



figure 34 - The Onion Flower of a practically educated young man in a 'right-wing' group.
**Note.** Figure created by the author based on the Onion Flower Framework of Van der Klauw (2026)

## 10.2 REACHING YOUNG MEN

To deepen my understanding of young men and their motivations, I conducted three semi-structured interviews: with social designer Susanna Osinga, with campaign strategist Jannes Pool, creator of 'Man, zeg er wat van', and with Jeppe Kok, founder of Tienskip. I also held a session with Rik, one of the young men I had spoken with during the Discover phase and who largely fits the With-holder role, in which I showed him five existing campaigns about masculinity and asked what he made of them. Most importantly, I spent a full day at a Tienskip event in Stadskanaal, attended by roughly 200 students from Ubbo Emmius secondary school. There I worked with a group of nine young men who expressed relatively right-wing views: first facilitating one of Tienskip's workshops in order to observe their humour, language and group dynamics, and afterwards discussing existing campaigns with them. These experiences provided valuable additional insights, but one observation remained central throughout the design process: trust comes before behavioural change.

### 10.2.1 TRUST AS A PREREQUISITE FOR BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

Without trust, there is very little room for influence. Young men who feel misunderstood or believe they are being corrected rather than listened to tend to shut down. This is not necessarily because they disagree with the message itself, but because they do not trust the messenger.

The same applies to facts. Research by Van de Wetering (2026) shows that 6 out of 10 young people cling to their own opinion, even when confronted with contradictory evidence. When trust is absent, facts are not perceived as information that can help shape an opinion, but rather as a personal attack. Therefore, the question is not only how to persuade someone, but first how to make them willing to listen.

### 10.2.2 FEELING HEARD

According to both Jeppe Kok and the young men I interviewed at Tienskip, trust begins with feeling heard. Young people want their concerns to be taken seriously, even when these concerns are based on limited experiences or incomplete information. In my experience with young men, trust develops when someone shows genuine curiosity, asks questions, and refrains from immediately adopting a judgemental stance. Adopting such a stance can often backfire, causing young men to disengage from the conversation and retreat further into their existing beliefs.

Humour plays an important role in this process. Laughing together, allowing room for jokes, and not constantly judging what is being said creates space for open conversation. This involves more than just words. Attitude, facial expressions, and body language also contribute significantly. The principle of humour is one of the core foundations of the *Man, zeg er wat van* campaign.

During my conversations, I once again noticed that many right-wing young men seem to be constantly on the defensive. Phrases such as "I'm not racist, but..." or "I'm not homophobic, but..." came up regularly. These statements appeared to stem less from conviction and more from the expectation that they would be judged before they had the opportunity to explain themselves. Many of these young men do not primarily seek debates about facts. Instead, they want the freedom to express their experiences and frustrations without being rejected as individuals.

### 10.2.3 THE MESSENGER SHAPES TRUST

Who delivers the message appears to be at least as important as the message itself. Young people are more likely to listen to people they know and trust than to groups they perceive as outsiders.
According to Jeppe Kok and many young men I spoke, like Rik, messages associated with what they perceive as *Links Nederland* (the left-wing Netherlands) tend to trigger distrust. This is not always because of the content itself, but because the message is experienced as criticism coming from a group with which they do not identify. In terms of polarisation theory, the message is coming from an out-group.

### 10.2.4 RECOGNISE AND APPRECIATE WILLINGNESS

Recognition and appreciation also proved to be important factors. Young people respond positively when even their slightest effort, openness or willingness to engage is acknowledged. This recognition must come from a position of equality rather than from a patronising or educational stance. The strong need for validation that many of these young men experience diminishes when they feel recognised and respected. As a result, they become more willing to critically reflect on their own views.

### 10.2.5 FROM CONNECTION TO SELF-REFLECTION

Only once trust has been established does space emerge for self-reflection. During my conversations, I observed that young men became more critical of their own beliefs when they were first given the opportunity to share their perspectives. This shift did not occur because they were persuaded by arguments, but because a safe trustworthy space had been built.

The most important lesson from these conversations is therefore that behavioural change does not begin with persuasion, but with connection. Trust must come before influence. Only when young men feel heard and respected does the space emerge for them to reconsider existing beliefs and speak out against a group norm when it conflicts with their own convictions.



figure 35 - Campaign 'Man zeg er wat van' (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2025)


figure 36 - An impression of the Tienskip event.

# 11. INTERVENTION DIRECTION

## 11.1 INTERVENTION CRITERIA

The intervention criteria draw on three sources: the Discover findings, the additional findings from chapter 10, and an exploratory study of existing public communaction campaigns alongside several I designed myself (Appendix G1). That designing was itself a way of arriving at the criteria, since making something and seeing what held up produced knowledge analysis did not.

The result is a broad set of intervention criteria (table 3), grouped into four themes and numbered A1 to D4. From here on, they are used to show which requirement a design decision responds to. Each criterion is paired with the reason it exists, along with the sub-chapter that reason comes from, so every requirement traces back to something observed. Like the Develop phase itself, the criteria first diverge and then converge: broad while the direction is still open, sharper once it is set. Later in the Develop phase, they are therefore translated into specific campaign criteria.

### EMOTIONAL APPEAL

| # | CRITERION | WHY |
|---|---|---|
| A1. | Provides the target group with a sense of recognition and appreciation. | Young men respond positively when even a small openness is acknowledged, and their need for validation diminished once they felt recognised (10.2.4) |
| A2. | Acknowledges feelings, frustrations and concerns without judging. | Feeling heard increases openness, while immediate correction produced defensiveness. (10.2.2) |
| A3. | Avoids guilt and shame. | Many young men already feel pre-emptively labelled ("I'm not racist, but…") and guilt or shame pushes them further into defensiveness. (6.4.8) |
| A4. | Uses humour to lower the risk of social disagreement. | Without humour, disagreeing means moralizing. A joke lets someone step out of line while keeping his place in the group. (10.2.2) |

### RELATION WITH THE TARGET GROUP

| # | CRITERION | WHY |
|---|---|---|
| C1. | Feels relatable to the everyday experiences and realities of the target group. | Almost all young men live strongly within their immediate environment; abstract topics stayed distant. (6.3.20; 6.3.13) |
| C2. | Enters through friendship and culture rather than through politics. | Politics was a small petal in the Onion Flower Framework, while friendship and culture were far more central. (10.1.2) |
| C3. | Invites voluntary engagement rather than being imposed. | Pressure of participation produces the opposite result. Several participants described reacting to instruction by digging in further. (10.2.1) |
| C4. | Focuses on young men, but specifically on the With-holder. | The With-holder already disagrees privately, so the campaign has to enable an act rather than change a conviction. |

### CREDIBILITY

| # | CRITERION | WHY |
|---|---|---|
| B1. | Does not feel like an attempt to correct the target group. | Young men who feel corrected rather than listened to shut down, and once that happens no reflection and thus behavioural change can follow. (10.2.1) |
| B2. | Comes from a sender the target group perceives as trustworthy. | Messages by non-trusted senders, like "Links Nederland", triggers distrust. (10.2.3) |
| B3. | Uses language the target group already uses. | Daily life is mainly close and concrete, thus the concept needs to play into this. (6.3.20) |

### INTENDED MESSAGE

| # | CRITERION | WHY |
|---|---|---|
| D1. | Encourages the target group to think independently and act according to their own beliefs. | Where young men began forming views independently rather than adopting them, their positions became more nuanced. (6.4.11) |
| D2. | Demonstrates that it is possible to remain true to yourself within a group. | Challengers were in practice often accepted and even admired, so the perceived risk of speaking up was greater than the actual social cost. (9.4) |
| D3. | Provides the target group with a clear course of action. | With-holders described the urge to speak up, but not how to do it without turning the moment into a confrontation. |
| D4. | No prior knowledge needed | Political knowledge among these young men was superficial, often limited to general statements. A message that assumes more than that excludes most of the people it is meant for. (6.3.3; 6.4.5) |

table 3 - Intervention criteria

## 11.2 THREE INTERVENTION DIRECTIONS

The design challenge did not point to one obvious answer. Helping a With-holder say what he already thinks could be supported in very different ways, and each would place the intervention in a different part of his life. Three directions came up during the exploration, but I did not work all three out in detail. One of them held on to me from the start, and holding the three against the criteria showed me why. What follows is therefore a comparison of directions, not of finished concepts.

### 11.2.1 DIRECTION 1: WORKSHOPS IN SCHOOLS

The first idea was educational. Vocational schools already have citizenship education, and a workshop could use that space to make my framework visible. Students would look at how opinions form inside a group: an anonymous vote on a statement, followed by the same vote out loud, so the class can see for itself that the group is less unanimous than it sounds. The teacher can then provide feedback and act as a discussion leader.

On several criteria this scores well. It creates room for independent reflection (criterion D1) and it can give students a concrete way of handling such a moment (criterion D3). On that second point it is stronger than any other direction, because a workshop lets them practise the response rather than only see it.

It fails on the criterion that turned out to weigh heaviest. A lesson is compulsory, and these young men respond to obligation by digging in (criterion C3). It also arrives as instruction from an adult in an institutional role, which is exactly the position that produces resistance rather than reflection (criterion B1). At Tienskip I saw this happen within a minute: a teacher stepped in to correct the group and the conversation was simply over. And it enters through school and politics, two of the smallest petals in the Onion Flower, rather than through the parts of their identity that actually matter to them (criterion C2).

### 11.2.2 DIRECTION 2: COACHES

The second idea took the credibility problem seriously. If a message from an institution reads as an out-group and a teacher reads as authority, then the answer might be to work through the adults these young men already trust. Not teachers, but football coaches, gym trainers and youth workers: the men they see several times a week, who have status in their eyes, and who are not associated with school or politics. They would be given something small to work with, a conversation guide or a set of questions, to use when something is said in the changing room.

On paper this is the strongest of the three on credibility. It comes from someone inside their world rather than outside it (criterion B2), it enters through brotherhood, one of the largest petals in the Onion Flower (criterion C2), and it happens in the group rather than in private, so it could shift what the group believes about itself (criterion D3).

It fails on who has to carry it. A coach is trusted precisely because he is not there to correct anyone, and asking him to raise political subjects spends that trust on someone else's behalf. Many would decline, and the ones who agreed would have to be trained, which turns them into representatives of an organisation and removes the very thing that made them credible (criterion B2).

### 11.2.3 DIRECTION 3: A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

The direction that had held on to me from the start was a public communication campaign, and it is worth saying first what it cannot do. There is no teacher, no dialogue and no shared experience, its effects are hard to attribute, and it will always be weaker than a workshop: it can show a way of responding, but it cannot let anyone practise one (criterion D3).

What it has is that it never needs to be imposed. It reaches young men in their own environment, on their own terms, and they are free to look away, which is exactly why they might not (criterion C4). It can enter through friendship and culture instead of politics (criterion C2), it can contain humour (criterion A4), it can come from a sender built not to read as an out-group (criterion B2), and it can do the one thing neither other direction can do at any scale: show a single visible example of the behaviour, in a situation the viewer recognises (criterion D3). In groups where no Challenger exists, that example is what is missing.

It also fits the organisation that would have to carry it. Voor Ons Nederland already runs public campaigns, has its own channels and an existing supporter base, and employs people whose daily work is communication. An assesment of the intervention direct is shown in table 4.

| DIRECTION | WHERE IT IS STRONG | WHERE IT FAILS | VERDICT |
|---|---|---|---|
| WORKSHOPS IN SCHOOLS | Depth and guidance. Students can practise the response rather than only see it (D1, D3). | Compulsory, and pressure produces the opposite result (C3). Arrives as instruction from an authority (B1) and enters through school and politics (C2). | Valuable as a follow-up route, not as the main intervention. |
| COACHES | Strongest on credibility, because the messenger is already inside their world (B2). Enters through brotherhood, a large petal (C2), and works in the group rather than in private (D3). | Asking a coach to raise political subjects spends the trust that made him credible, and training him turns him into a representative (B2). Reach depends on hundreds of individual clubs and quality varies with the person delivering it. | Rejected. |
| PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN | Voluntary, can enter through friendship and culture, can be funny, can come from a sender that does not read as an out-group, and can make the behaviour visible (C4, C2, A4, B2, D3). | No depth or dialogue triggered immediately. Weaker on D3, because it can show a response but not let anyone practise one. | Selected. |

table 4 - Assessment of the intervention directions

## 11.3 TAKING THE CAMPAIGN APPROACH

Rice and Atkin (2009) define a public communication campaign as follows:

*A public communication campaign can be defined as a purposive attempt to inform or influence behaviours in large audiences within a specified time period using an organized set of communication activities and featuring an array of mediated messages in multiple channels, generally to produce non-commercial benefits to individuals and society.*

Three parts of that definition shaped everything that followed.

The first is "an organised set of communication activities" across "multiple channels". A campaign is not a commercial. A commercial can be part of one, but the definition assumes several activities that each do something different. That matters here, because the design has more than one job to do and no single object can do them all.

The second is "large audiences". This is where a campaign differs most from the two rejected directions. A workshop and a coach both act on one young man, or one group, at a time. A campaign acts on the environment around him as well. For a problem that turned out to be about perceived norms rather than personal conviction, that difference is not a detail. Changing what a group believes about itself is as important as changing what one member of it thinks, and of the three directions a campaign seemed best placed to do both.

The third is the fork between "inform or influence". This campaign does not need to inform. The research showed that these young men are not short of information but hold on to their position regardless of it, so a campaign built on explaining would spend most of its budget on the one thing least likely to work. Its job is to influence, multiple specific functions of campaign are introduced in chapter 12.2.

That wider reach also has effects the design cannot produce directly. During my internship in the Dutch House of Representatives I saw how often media attention drives political and societal change. Campaigns such as #GeenHogereBTW (figure 37) and Wij Eisen de Nacht Op (figure 38) show how communication can mobilise people, open up a public debate and contribute to political change (Wij eisen de nacht op, n.d.; Geen hogere btw!, n.d.). It reaches into places the intervention itself cannot enter.

A citizenship education teacher at Albeda Zuid (Appendix E6) told me that his lessons come alive when students bring in a topic themselves rather than when he introduces it. A campaign can put a subject into circulation and let the classroom pick it up, which makes education a follow-up route rather than a competing one.




figure 37 - Campaign #GeenHogereBTW leads to parlementiary questions of D66-leader Rob Jetten in the House of Representatives (Geen hogere btw!, n.d.)




figure 38 - Campaign 'Wij Eisen de Nacht Op' leads to large-scale protests (Omroep West, 2025; Van Woensel Kooy, 2025)

# 12. DEFINING THE CAMPAIGN

## 12.1 ELEMENTS OF A CAMPAIGN

A public communication campaign consists of multiple elements. There is no fixed list of these; the overview below is my own, based on the campaigns and commercials I analysed throughout this project. By comparing what these campaigns did and did not include, I identified the elements that kept returning and that seemed to determine whether a campaign came across as coherent. These recurring elements are set out in table 5, and each of them is developed and designed in the chapters that follow. Of these elements, the commercial is the one this project develops and tests first.

| ELEMENT | WHAT IT IS | EXAMPLE |
|---|---|---|
| THE SENDER | The party that owns the campaign and is visibly behind it. The audience forms a judgement about the sender before it processes the message. | Nike behind Just Do It, SIRE behind Verlies elkaar niet, the Dutch government behind Man, zeg er wat van. |
| THE CORE MESSAGE | The single idea the campaign wants people to take away, usually compressed into one line. | "Just Do It."<br>"Man, zeg er wat van." |
| THE COMMERCIAL | The central piece of content in which the message is shown rather than stated. Most other material is derived from it. | The commercial, the hero video, the launch commercial. |
| TOUCHPOINTS | All the places where the campaign is encountered: television, social media, billboards, cinema, packaging, events, sponsorship. | A poster in a bus shelter, a pre-roll on YouTube, a banner in a stadium, merchandise. |
| SEQUENCE | The order and timing in which the parts appear, from teaser to launch to follow-up. | A campaign that builds recognition for weeks before making its request. |
| AMBASSADORS | Everyone visibly associated with the campaign and passing it on: ambassadors, athletes, influencers, partners, hosts. | Nike's athletes, an influencer collaboration, a partner organisation. |

table 5 – The elements of a public communication campaign

## 12.2 FUNCTIONS OF A PUBLIC COMMUNICATION CAMPAIGN

A public communication campaign can perform several functions at once, but most are built around one. That observation comes from my own analysis of existing campaigns, which can be found in Appendix G1. Naming these functions made it possible to decide what this campaign should be responsible for and what it should leave alone. Seven of them are set out in this chapter, each with an existing campaign as an example.

### 12.2.1 ACTIVATION




An activation campaign is a campaign that encourages people to take a specific action or adopt a desired behaviour. Rather than merely raising awareness, its primary goal is to motivate the target audience to act. The Dutch government campaign 'Man, zeg er wat van' (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap, 2025) is a good example of an activation campaign. The campaign encourages bystanders to speak up when they witness inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour. Its main objective is to activate people to intervene, thereby translating awareness into concrete action.

### 12.2.2 NORM-SETTING




A norm-setting campaign is a campaign that aims to establish, reinforce, or change social norms by communicating what behaviours are considered unacceptable within society. The 'Limburg trekt een streep' campaign is a clear example of a norm-setting campaign. Through this campaign, the Province of Limburg (Leenders, 2025) communicates that threats and intimidation directed at public officials are unacceptable. Rather than focusing on changing individual behaviour directly, the campaign seeks to establish a clear social norm by signalling which behaviour is and is not tolerated.

### 12.2.3 FUNDRAISING




A fundraising campaign is a campaign that aims to generate financial support for an organisation or cause by encouraging people to donate or contribute resources. This is perhaps the most straightforward type of campaign. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-NL, n.d.) provides a good example by allowing people to purchase a tangible product while simultaneously making a donation to support its conservation work. By offering something in return, the campaign makes donating more appealing and accessible.

### 12.2.4 COMMUNITY-BUILDING




A community-building campaign is a campaign that aims to strengthen relationships between people and foster a sense of belonging around a shared identity, place, or cause. Rather than focusing on individual behaviour change, its primary objective is to create or reinforce social connections and encourage ongoing participation within a community. The 'Burendag' campaign by the Oranje Fonds and Douwe Egberts (2026) is a good example of a community-building campaign. By encouraging neighbours to organise activities together, the campaign helps build stronger local communities and strengthens social bonds between residents. This is likely the primary reason the Oranje Fonds is involved in the campaign. Douwe Egberts, on the other hand, is probably participating mainly to increase its brand awareness while supporting a social initiative.

### 12.2.5 AWARENESS




An awareness campaign is a campaign that aims to increase people's awareness of a particular issue, behaviour, or social problem without necessarily attempting to change behaviour directly. The 'Verlies elkaar niet' campaign by SIRE (2023) is a good example of an awareness campaign. Rather than providing factual information, the campaign encourages people to reflect on their own behaviour and the impact it has on others. Its primary objective is not to educate audiences with new information, but to create a sense of awareness and self-reflection that may eventually encourage positive change.

### 12.2.6 MOBILISING




A mobilisation campaign is a campaign that seeks to encourage collective action by motivating large groups of people to participate in a shared activity or cause. The Dutch government's 'Elke stemmer verdient een standbeeld' campaign (Redactie Adformatie, 2026) is a good example of a mobilisation campaign. Its objective was to encourage people to vote in the municipal elections by emphasising that voting is something many others are doing as well. While mobilisation campaigns are closely related to activation campaigns, they differ in their focus. Activation campaigns primarily encourage individual action, whereas mobilisation campaigns aim to create momentum by motivating many people to act together, reinforcing the idea that participation is a collective norm.

### 12.2.7 INFORMATIONAL




An informational campaign is a campaign that aims to provide people with knowledge or practical information about a specific issue, enabling them to make informed decisions or take appropriate action. The Dutch government's 'Laat je niet interneppen' campaign (Ministerie van Justitie en Veiligheid, n.d.) is a good example of an information campaign. It provides information about common forms of online fraud and offers practical advice on how to recognise scams and respond to them. The primary objective is to increase knowledge and with this change behaviour.

## 12.3 IMPORTANT FUNCTIONS OF MY CAMPAIGN

Of the seven functions, my campaign focuses on two. It has to make the mechanism recognisable, and it has to invite one small act. Awareness and activation are therefore the functions the design is built around.

Awareness comes first, because these young men do not see the situation they are in. Inside the group it feels as though everyone thinks the same. Asked whether anyone in his friend group held different views, one participant answered: "No one, maybe the girls." Before anything can be asked of them, the campaign has to make visible that the difference is there. And it has to show that rather than explain it, since explaining is the one approach the research ruled out.

Activation follows, because awareness on its own changes nothing here. The problem is not that these young men have never considered speaking up. Several described wanting to. What is missing is a concrete, socially survivable version of the act, which means the campaign has to show one rather than argue for one.

## 12.4 CAMPAIGN CRITERIA

Knowing that the campaign has to do two things, make the mechanism recognisable and invite one small act, does not yet say what it has to be in order to do them. The broad design criteria answer that in general terms, but they describe an intervention of any kind. Now that the direction is a campaign, they can be made specific.

The broad criteria set out what the intervention has to achieve and why, each grounded in the research. The campaign criteria are their operational counterpart: what a campaign has to do in order to satisfy them. The campaign criteria are shown in table 6.

These criteria will be carried through the following chapters and used to substantiate the decisions made there.

STRUCTURAL — cannot be repaired without redesigning the concept

| # | CRITERION | OPERATIONAL MEANING | GROUNDED IN |
|---|---|---|---|
| S1 | Told from the With-holder's perspective | The main character is the young man who privately disagrees but says nothing. Asked whose story it is, a viewer names the one who hesitates. | Criterion C4. |
| S2 | The behaviour is shown | The commercial shows the act happening, performed by one of the boys in the group, rather than a voice-over describing it. | Criteria D2 and D3. |
| S3 | A sender from inside their world | The campaign does not read as coming from an institution. The audience takes the sender to be someone in their own world rather than an outsider correcting them. | Criteria B1 and B2. |
| S4 | A situation they recognise | The situation in the commercial, the way the boys speak to each other and the tone of the scene are ones the target group recognises from their own lives. | Criteria C1 and C2. |
| S5 | Nobody is written off | The commercial does not present the friend group, or the boy who makes the remark, as the problem. The remark is treated as something that gets said, and the friendship continues afterwards. | Criteria A2 and C3. |

MECHANISM — determines whether the act looks doable, but adjustable in a revision

| # | CRITERION | OPERATIONAL MEANING | GROUNDED IN |
|---|---|---|---|
| S6 | Humour | The humour in the commercial lowers tension without humiliating a person or a minority group, and harmful behaviour is never the punchline. | Criteria A3 and A4. |
| S7 | Pride rather than shame | The commercial leaves the viewer with pride, confidence and lightness rather than guilt. Nobody watching feels caught out. | Criteria A1 and A3. |
| S8 | One central message | The campaign carries one behavioural message, and a viewer can paraphrase it after seeing the commercial once without being told what it was about. | Criterion D1. |
| S9 | A small and feasible action | The response the commercial shows is something a viewer could plausibly do in his own friend group the same week. | Criterion D3. |

HYGIENE — met by any competent execution, but fatal if missed

| # | CRITERION | OPERATIONAL MEANING | GROUNDED IN |
|---|---|---|---|
| S10 | Language they already use | The commercial is spoken in Dutch, in short sentences and familiar words, with no term a 16-year-old in vocational education would have to look up. | Criterion B3. |
| S11 | No prior knowledge needed | The campaign can be understood without any knowledge of political parties, social identity theory or the research behind it. | Criterion D4. |

REACH — concerns how and where the campaign appears

| # | CRITERION | OPERATIONAL MEANING | GROUNDED IN |
|---|---|---|---|
| S12 | Lands within seconds | The situation in the commercial is recognisable within the first few seconds, and a viewer can say what the campaign is about and who is behind it almost immediately. | Information reaches them in fragments, between fast and highly stimulating content, with little time given to any single item. |
| S13 | Works in digital formats | The campaign still works when the commercial is cut to a short vertical clip, reduced to a still, or watched without sound. | Almost all societal information reached these young men through TikTok and Instagram rather than through news they sought out. |
| S14 | Works in physical spaces | The campaign remains recognisable in a cinema, a gym, a football setting, on a poster or on a mobile display, and is legible from a few metres. | The offline environment proved the more durable influence on what feels normal, so repeated physical contact matters. |

table 6 – Campaign criteria

# 13. SELECTION OF FINAL CONCEPT

## 13.1 FIRST CAMPAIGN-CONCEPTS

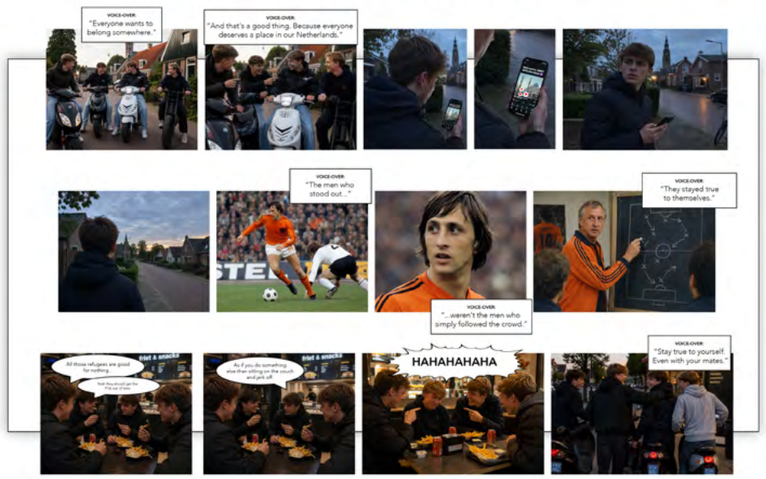
For the first concept of the campaign I chose to work out the commercial. The commercial is the part in which the desired behaviour can actually be shown rather than described, and the best element that can be put in front of the target group and discussed with them. In this phase the commercial was therefore tested in storyboard form: three versions, so that different interpretations of the message could be compared before anything was created as final. The remaining elements are developed in the chapters that follow, where the sender, the touchpoints and the sequence are worked out around the concept that came out of this test.

Testing a storyboard has clear limits. It shows whether the message is understood, whether the situation feels recognisable and whether the response looks socially possible. It cannot show whether repeated exposure changes what a group believes about itself, whether the sender remains credible over a longer period, or whether the sequence from care to change holds up in practice.

Working from the campaign criteria, I developed three campaign concepts and visualised each as a storyboard for a commercial in commercial form. The full design process behind them, from the first sketches to the versions shown here, can be found in Appendix G2 Each concept explored a different way of encouraging a With-holder to act as a Challenger. Your Own Opinion focused on the importance of having an opinion of your own, Stay True to Yourself on staying true to yourself within a friend group, and What Do You Think on reflecting on what you think apart from your friends. The central message was the same in all three; what differed was the narrative and the framing around it.

These storyboard were then evaluated with young men by sending them the visuals over WhatsApp and asking for their honest reactions (Appendix G3). WhatsApp was chosen because it is a setting they already use, which made the responses more spontaneous than a formal test would have produced.

**STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF**




**WHAT DO YOU THINK**
beyond your mates?




**YOUR OWN OPINION**



### 13.1.1 CAMPAIGN 1: YOUR OWN OPINION

The first storyboard, 'Your Own Opinion', introduces several young men through short voice-over statements that acknowledge their concerns and express respect for them (see figure 39). The story then shifts to a group of friends sitting on bikes and scooters, where one boy makes an ignorant remark about immigrants. Another boy responds in a corrective but humourous way, leading to the central message that, while your friends matter, your own opinion matters too. The storyboard ends with the line: "You don't have to go along with your mates to belong."

Held against the campaign criteria, the concept does two things well. The desired act is shown rather than described: a boy in the group answers the remark, and the friendship survives it (criterion S2). And the closing line states the behavioural message plainly enough that respondents could repeat it in their own words (criterion S8)

The rest of the criteria expose one underlying problem. The storyboard has no main character. It opens with five faces and five voice-over lines, so there is nobody whose hesitation the viewer follows, and nobody to recognise himself in (criterion S1). Everything the feedback identified follows from that. Because there is no protagonist, the meaning has to be supplied from outside, which is why the voice-over carries so much of the story and why one respondent called it "very staged" (criterion S4). Because the voice-over speaks about these young men rather than from among them, it reads as adults addressing them, which is precisely the position the criteria rule out (criterion S3). And because those lines arrive before any situation exists, some of them landed without a referent: "We trust you" produced the reply "Trust us with what?", which means the concept carries more than one message where it should carry one (criterion S8). The same reservations came up when I presented the storyboard to colleagues at Voor Ons Nederland.

The main weakness is therefore not the message but the position it is spoken from. The intention is visible in every frame, and visible intention is what makes a campaign feel like a campaign. The act itself works; the framing around it does not.

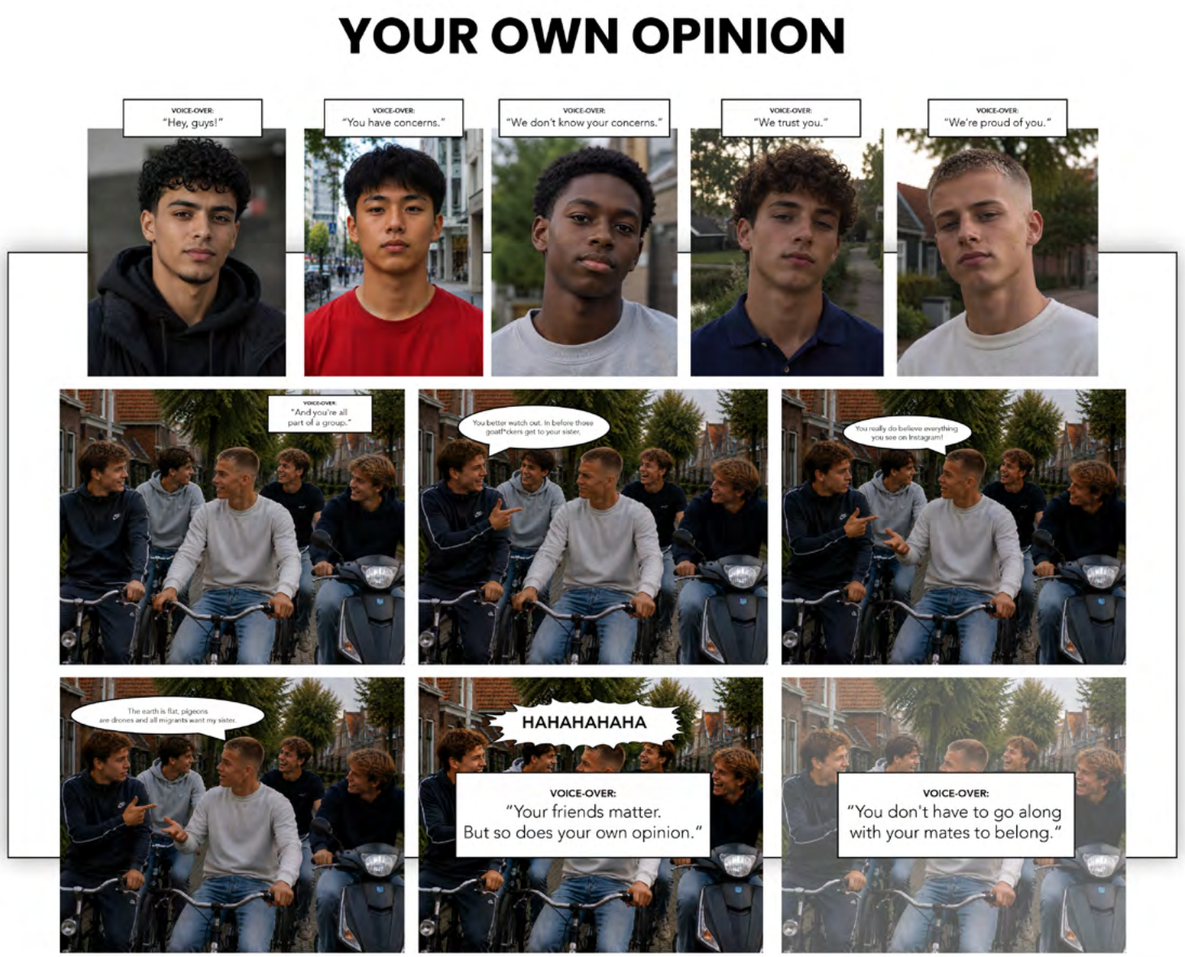



figure 39 - Storyboard of 'Your Own Opinion'

### 13.1.2 CAMPAIGN 2: STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF

The second storyboard, 'Stay True to Yourself', received the most positive feedback (see figure 40).

The story begins with a group of boys on scooters and fatbikes in a Dutch village. The voice-over says, "Everyone wants to belong somewhere," and continues by explaining that this is a positive thing, because it gives everyone a place in Dutch society. The main character then sees a polarising post on his phone, which his friends like, causing him to doubt it because it does not reflect his own beliefs. The storyboard then introduces Johan Cruijff as a cultural reference. The voice-over says, "The men who stood out were never the ones who simply followed the crowd." Cruijff serves as an example of someone who remained true to himself instead of conforming to others. The story then returns to a snackbar, where one of the boys makes a harsh comment about refugees. Rather than responding aggressively or morally, the same boy challenges the remark in a humourous way. The group laughs, the friendship remains intact, and the storyboard ends with the line: "Stay true to yourself. Even with your mates."
Held against the campaign criteria, this is the only one of the three concepts that meets criterion S1. There is a main character, he is the one who privately disagrees, and the viewer follows the situation through his hesitation when the post appears on his phone. Almost everything respondents praised follows from that single decision. Because there is someone to follow, the story does not need to be explained from outside, which is why they described it as "a real story" rather than a message. Because that person is in a village, on a fatbike, in a snackbar, the setting is theirs (criterion S4). And because he is the one who eventually answers the remark, the act is performed by a member of the group rather than narrated (criterion S2), the humour lets him disagree without claiming to know better (criterion S6), and the friendship continues afterwards rather than being presented as the problem (criterion S5).

The message came across as intended. Respondents summarised it as staying true to your own values and not going along with something when it feels wrong, which is a close paraphrase of the behavioural objective and therefore satisfies criterion S8. One participant said he would watch it as a commercial and expected others his age to do the same.

Two reservations remain, and both concern the Johan Cruijff sequence. Respondents liked it, and it was named as a smart choice because it offers a recognisable and masculine reference without feeling preachy. But it introduces a second large element alongside the friend group scene, and the two compete for the one message the campaign is supposed to carry (criterion S8). More fundamentally, it works against the logic of criterion S1. If the point of the concept is that the impulse comes from the young man himself, then holding up a hero to be emulated pulls in the opposite direction: it turns an act of independence into an act of imitation.

A voice-over is still present in this version, and on the face of it that sits awkwardly next to the objection raised against campaign 1. The difference is what it does. Here it sets up the situation and then withdraws, leaving the meaning to be carried by the scene, whereas in campaign 1 it supplied the meaning itself. Respondents did not experience it as being addressed from outside, and that is the test criterion S3 sets.

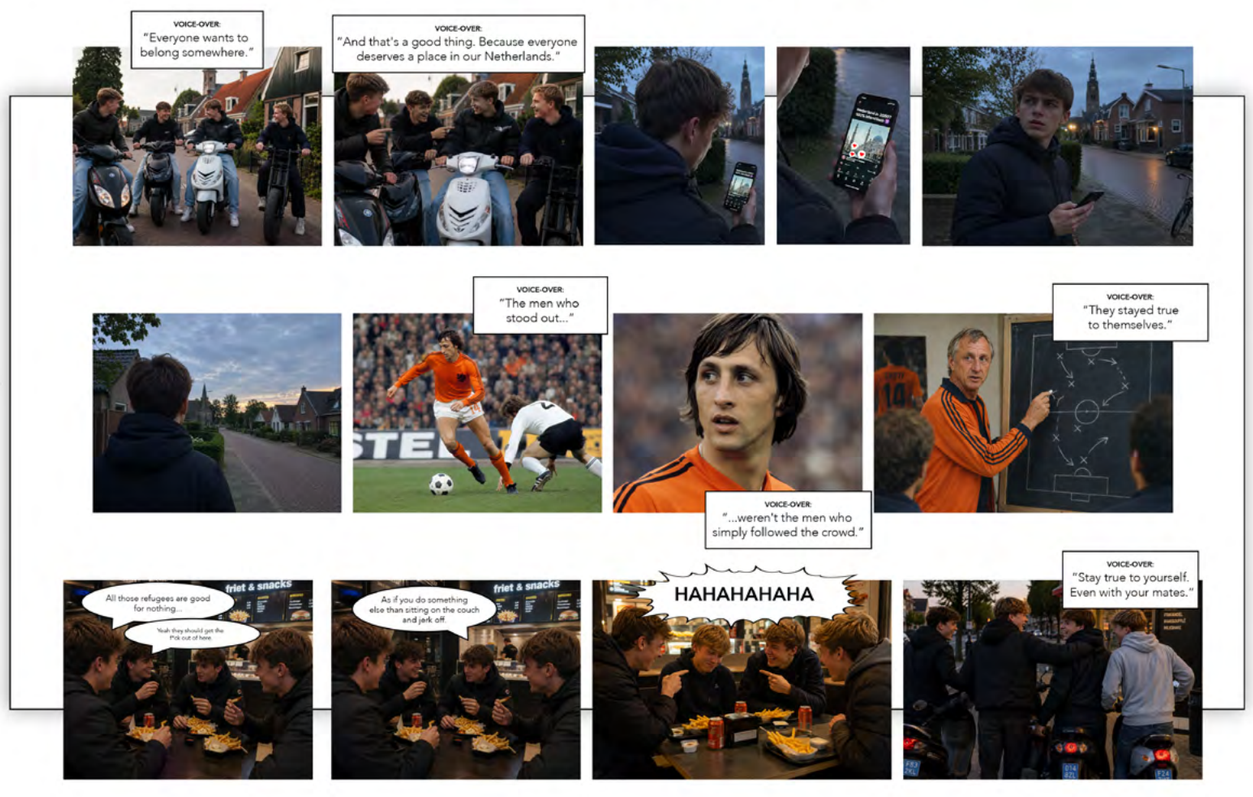



figure 40 - Storyboard 'Stay True to Yourself'

### 13.1.3 CAMPAIGN 3: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

The third storyboard, 'What Do You Think?', takes a broader approach. It opens by showing different groups of people across the Netherlands, representing different friendships, backgrounds and social worlds (see figure 41). The voice-over explains that there are many different groups in society and that this diversity is something positive. The focus then shifts to one specific group of boys sitting together. One boy makes an ignorant remark, after which another responds in a light-hearted and humourous way. The group laughs, and the storyboard ends by asking the viewer: "What do you think? Beyond your mates?"

Held against the campaign criteria, the second half of the storyboard does what it needs to. The act is performed by someone inside the group rather than narrated (criterion S2), the humour lets him disagree without taking a moral position (criterion S6), and the group laughs together afterwards, so the friendship is not treated as the problem (criterion S5). The closing question is the strongest line in the concept. Respondents interpreted it as encouraging young men to form their own opinion instead of repeating what others say, which is a close paraphrase of the behavioural objective, and the question form invites exactly the reflection the criteria ask for (criterion S8).

The first half works against that. There is no clear main character (criterion S1). The commercial opens on society rather than on a person, so by the time the group appears the viewer has been positioned as an observer of Dutch diversity rather than as someone inside a friend group. Recognition therefore arrives late and only partially (criterion S4). And because the reflection is requested by a closing question rather than reached by someone on screen, the invitation still comes from outside the group (criterion S3).

The result is comprehension without engagement. Participants described the storyboard as "fine" but it produced no strong reaction, and that is a failure on a criterion easy to overlook. The concept is meant to leave a viewer with pride, confidence or lightness (criterion S7), and "fine" is none of those. Understanding a message and being moved by it are different outcomes, and only the second produces a change in behaviour.

The closing question was the element worth keeping. Its logic, that the question is not whether your mates agree but what you yourself think, survives into the final campaign in the supporting line. What needed to change was the storyline leading up to it: narrower rather than broader, closer to one recognisable group and one person inside it.

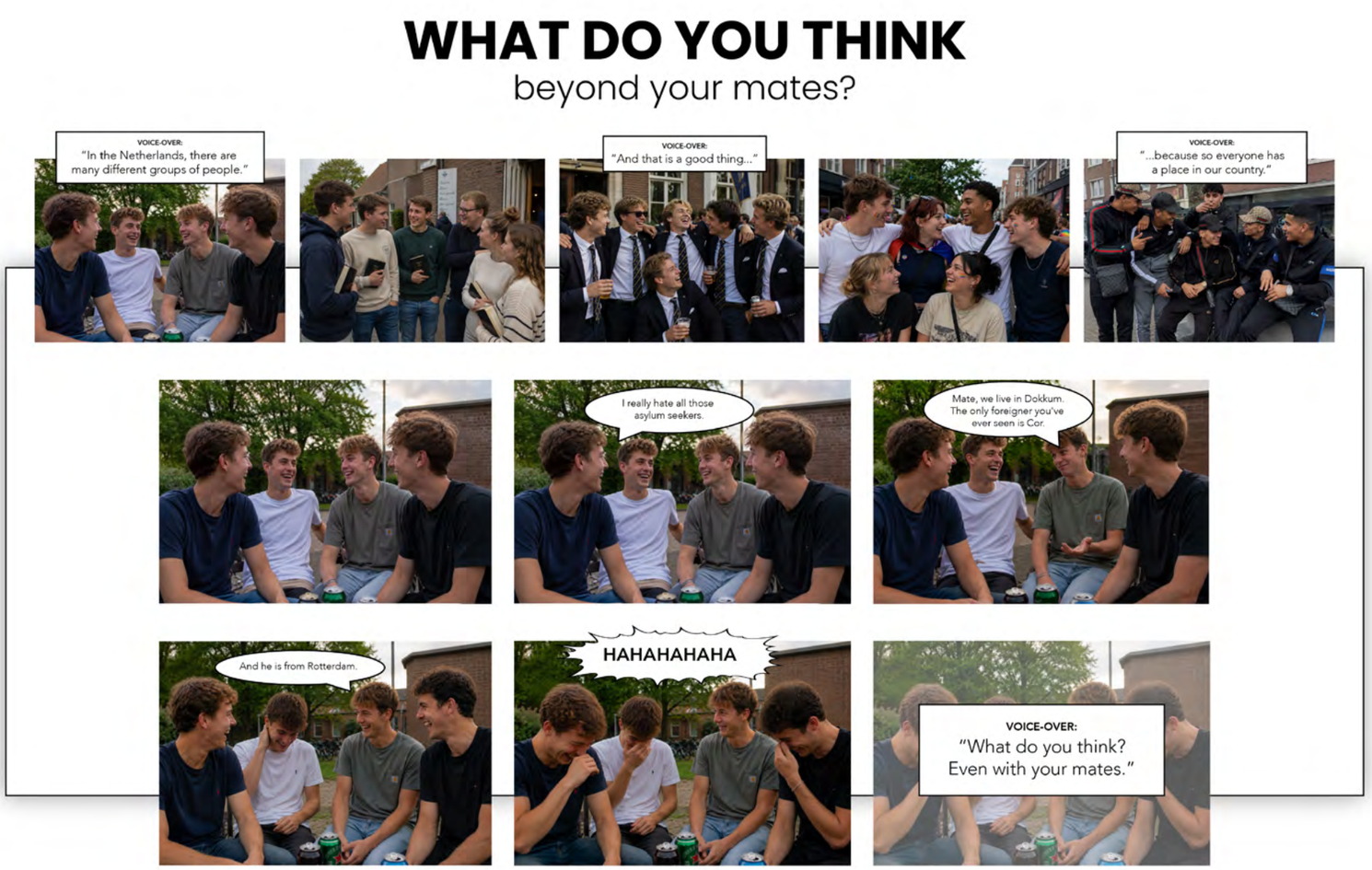



figure 41 - Storyboard 'What do you think'

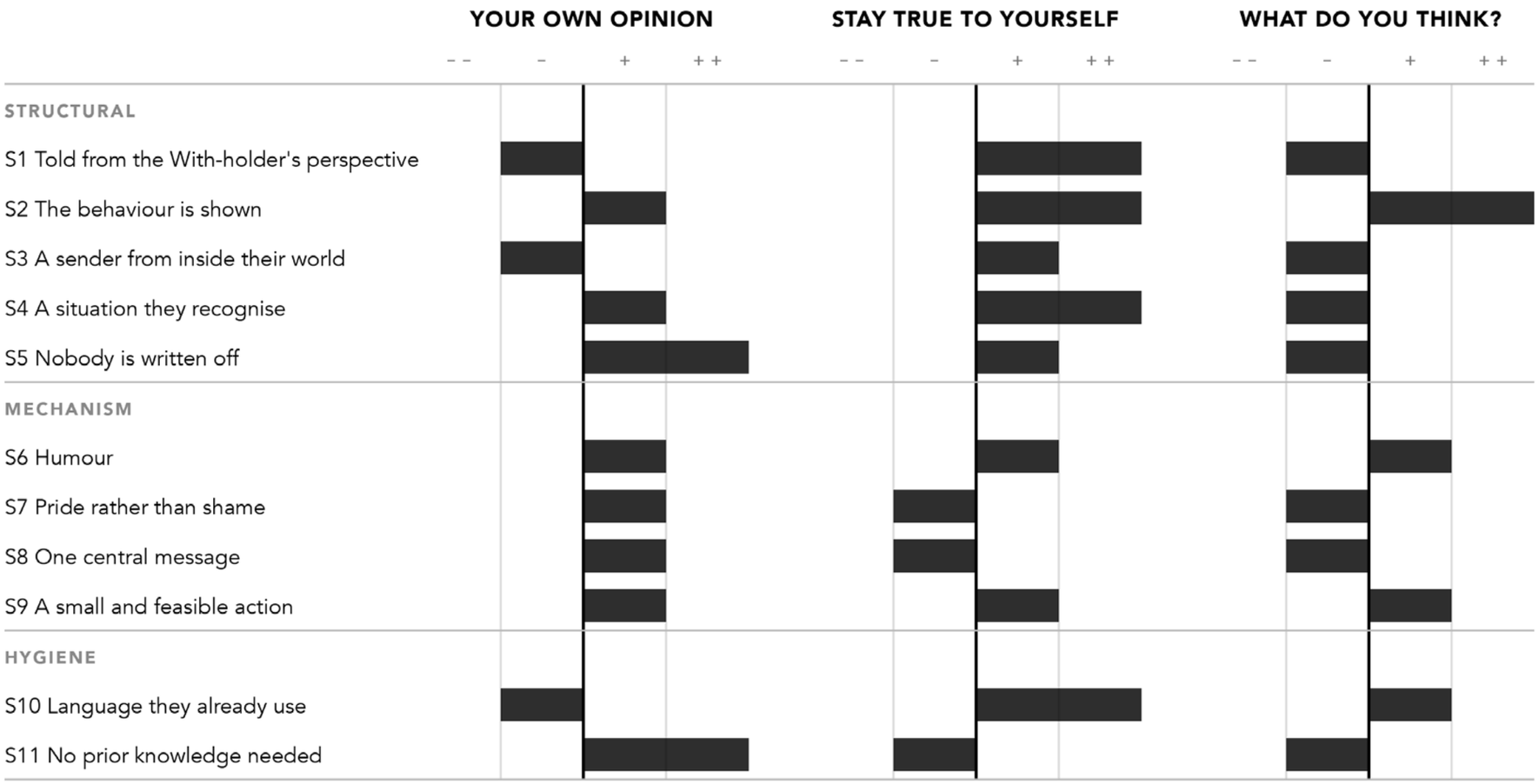
## 13.2 SELECTING THE CAMPAIGN

The three storyboards were evaluated with the target group over WhatsApp (Appendix G3) and then assessed against the campaign criteria in a Harris profile (Harris, 1961), shown in figure 42. The scores combine two sources. Where participants from the target group said something directly about a criterion, their reaction determines the score. Where they did not, the score is my own judgement, formed by making these concepts and seeing which choices held up. That mix is a limitation of an early evaluation, and it is one of the reasons the final concept was tested again later more thoroughly.

### STAY TRUE TO YOURSELF

Looking at figure 42, Stay True to Yourself, in Dutch; *Blijf Bij Jezelf*, scores the best in the Harris Profile and therefore becomes the foundation of the final campaign.
Selecting it did not mean keeping it as it was. Voor Ons Nederland pointed out that the campaign should become smaller and more focused. Rather than combining two large elements, the story should concentrate on one clear and recognisable situation, so that young men can see themselves, their friends and their own social dynamics in it rather than a cultural reference alongside them. That is a correction, because two big elements compete for the single message (criterion S8). It is also what led to the removal of the Johan Cruijff sequence, for reasons set out in the next chapter.

Finally, what this test can and cannot support. Sending storyboards over WhatsApp works as an early validation round. It showed which direction appealed most, which message came across most clearly and where confusion remained. It cannot show whether the situation feels realistic enough to be acted on, whether the response looks socially possible inside the viewer's own friend group, or whether repeated exposure changes anything. Those questions require testing in person and in context, which is set out in the evaluation plan.




S12, S13 and S14 are not included, because they could not be assessed on the basis of a storyboard.

figure 42 – Harris profile of the three campaign concepts
**Note**. Figure created by the author based on Harris (1961).

# 14. FINAL CONCEPT

The final concept is a public communication campaign, built out of four parts. The four chapters that follow work out one part each, and between them they cover the elements a public communication campaign consists of, as set out in chapter 12.1.

### BLIJF BIJ JEZELF - THE CAMPAIGN




The campaign itself: the commercial, the logo and the tagline. This is where the core message sits.

### VOOR ONZE JONGENS - THE BRAND



The sender. Rather than sending the campaign from Voor Ons Nederland directly, it is sent by a co-brand aimed specifically at young men, so that the message comes from somewhere closer to the group it addresses

### MET ONZE JONGENS - THE PODCAST



The main touchpoint. It is how the sender introduces itself, and its participants can be seen as the ambassadors of the campaign. The episodes also produce material the rest of the campaign can use.

### THE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY




The sequence: the order in which the parts appear, and the places they appear in, from social media and the podcast to gyms, football pitches, cinemas and bus shelters.

## 14.1 BLIJF BIJ JEZELF - THE CAMPAIGN

An overview of the campaign can be found on page 58.

### 14.1.1 THE COMMERCIAL

As the concept developed into the final campaign, several changes were made. I revised the commercial, designed a logo and selected a new tagline. The full commercial can be found on page 59. An in-depth analysis of the commercial in relation to the campaign criteria can be found in Appendix G3.

The adjustments were made to strengthen the overall logic of the campaign and to ensure that all elements aligned more clearly with its central message: staying true to yourself within the dynamics of a friend group.
One of the most significant changes was the removal of the Johan Cruijff sequence. There were four reasons for this decision.

1. Obtaining the rights to use his name would most likely be difficult.
2. Using his voice did not feel appropriate, because it would have to align perfectly with the vision of the campaign; if it did not, it would weaken the message.
3. Including the sequence would have made the commercial too long.
4. Most importantly, the use of a role model ultimately conflicted with the core idea of the campaign.

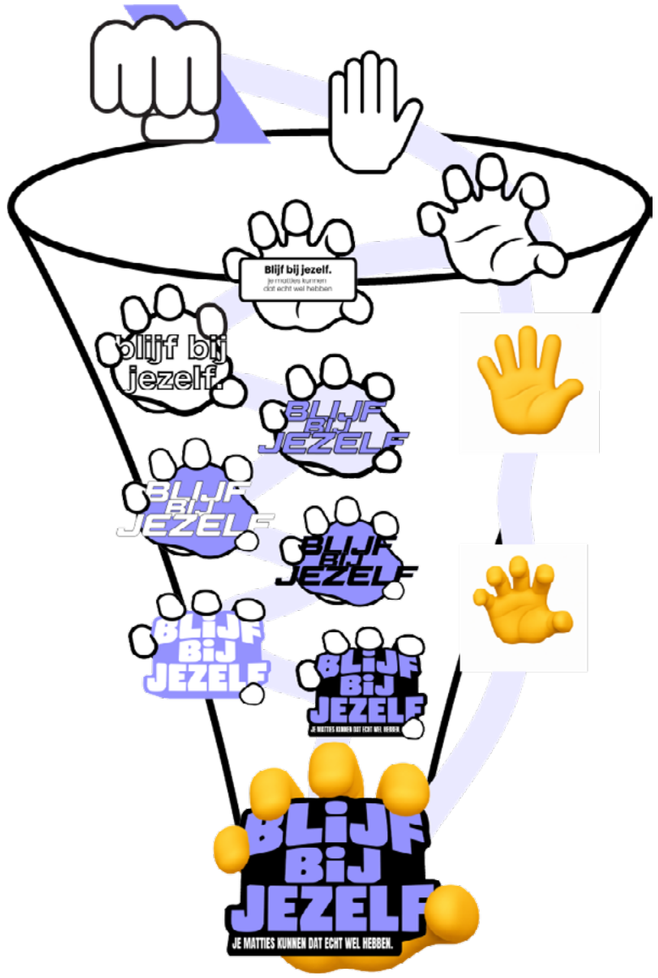
Although role models can be valuable for young men, because they offer someone to admire and emulate, 'Blijf Bij Jezelf' is based on a different principle. The campaign argues that change should come from within young men themselves. It is not about copying the behaviour of someone else, but about recognizing your own boundaries, values, and beliefs. For that reason, removing the Johan Cruijff sequence made the campaign more consistent with its own message.

### 14.1.2 THE LOGO

The logo of the campaign reinforces this same idea. The hand in the Blijf Bij Jezelf logo symbolizes the act of pulling yourself back. Just as the hand visually grabs and retracts, the campaign suggests that young men can reclaim themselves when they feel pulled too far by the group.

In this way, the logo translates an abstract idea into a concrete visual action. "Blijf Bij Jezelf" can sound vague, but the hand makes it tangible: it suggests regaining control and returning to what you genuinely think and feel.

The logo was designed against its own set of criteria, derived from the campaign criteria and listed in chapter 12.4. The design development is shown in figure 43.




| CRITERION | WHAT IT MEANS | RELATED TO |
|---|---|---|
| MEANINGFUL | Feels meaningful and not random. | S4. |
| RELATABLE | Fits the everyday world of the target group. | S4. |
| NON-JUDGMENTAL | Feels light, friendly, and not preachy or moralising. | S3. |
| EMPOWERING | Expresses self-confidence and speaking up for yourself. | S7. |
| CREATIVE AND DISTINCTIVE | Feels original, visually interesting, and not plain or generic. | x |
| BOLD AND CLEAR | Uses strong typography and one clear visual idea. | S8 and S14. |
| PROFESSIONAL | Looks well-designed and of high quality. | S3. |
| ON-BRAND | Connects clearly to the identity of Voor Ons Nederland. | x |
| VERSATILE | Works across social media, print, and other digital and physical applications. | S13 and S14. |

figure 43 – Design development & criteria of the Blijf Bij Jezelf logo

### 14.1.3 THE TAGLINE

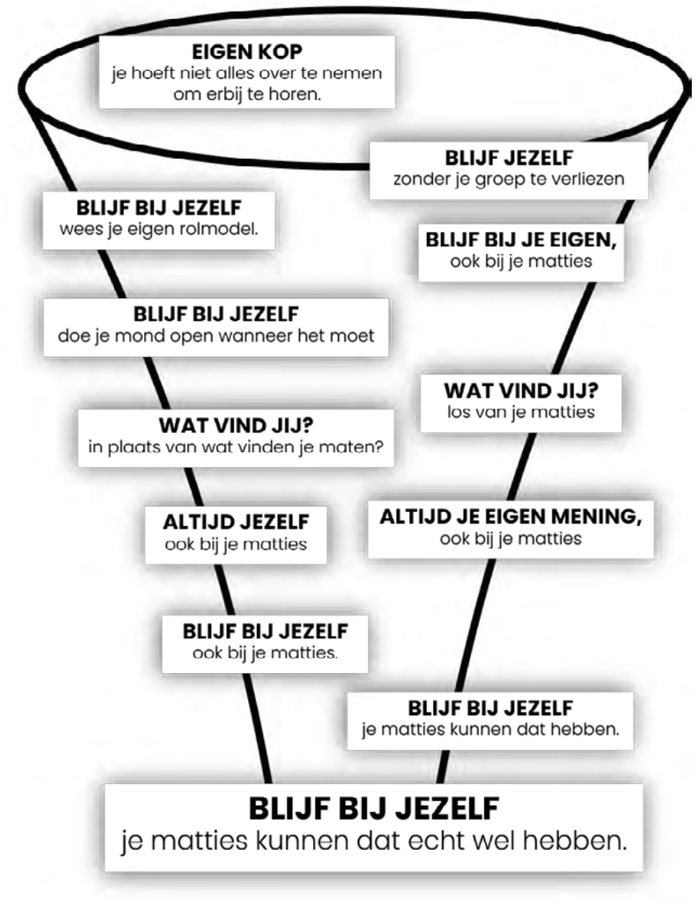
The tagline ‘Blijf Bij Jezelf’ was deliberately kept simple. It avoids sounding overly political, academic, or moralistic, and instead speaks to a feeling that many young men can immediately recognise. The campaign does not ask them to become activists within their social circles. Rather, it asks them to remain aware of their own position and values and speak up when necessary.

Sometimes this can be expressed in very small ways: by asking a question, making a short comment, or simply refusing to go along with something. In that sense, the campaign gives young men permission to stay loyal to their friends without losing themselves.

The supporting line, ‘Je matties kunnen dat echt wel hebben’ (Your mates can really handle that), is an essential part of the campaign. It reinforces the idea that speaking up does not have to threaten the friendship or disrupt the group. Instead, it suggests that friends can handle honesty, and that setting a boundary is both acceptable and respected.

This is important because many young men may remain silent when they fear that speaking up will lead to rejection. The supporting line helps reduce that fear by presenting honesty not as a threat to friendship, but as something friendship can withstand.

The tagline was developed against its own criteria, derived in the same way from the campaign criteria and listed in chapter 12.4. The development is shown in figure 44.




| CRITERION | WHAT IT MEANS | RELATED TO |
|---|---|---|
| RELATABLE | Connects to the world of young men and the language they use. | S4 and S10. |
| DIRECT | Easy to understand immediately. | S8 and S12. |
| ACTION-ORIENTED | Gives a clear encouragement or direction. | S8 and S9. |
| REASSURING | Reduces doubt or social tension. | S6. |
| NON-PREACHY | Does not feel like a lesson or correction. | S3. |
| EMPOWERING | Strengthens self-confidence and independent thinking. | S7. |
| SOCIALLY SAFE | Shows that being yourself does not mean losing your group. | S5 and S8. |
| MEMORABLE | Easy to remember and repeat. | S8 and S12. |

figure 44 – Development & criteria of the tagline




# Blijf Bij Jezelf

The campaign that encourages young men to speak up in front of their mates.

'Blijf Bij Jezelf' is a campaign by VoorOnzeJongens that stems from an important insight from my research: boys do not vote for radical right parties because they fully support them, but often because they think their friends do.

In a group of friends, a norm quickly develops. A joke is made, someone takes it a step further, and before you know it, it seems as though everyone thinks the same way. Especially if you are still figuring things out, or do not yet know exactly what you think about something, it is easy to adopt the behaviour of the group. Not because you are necessarily convinced, but because it feels safe to go along with it.

But here is the reality: not everyone in such a group thinks the same. Some boys do feel that certain remarks are too harsh, too hurtful, or too simplistic, but they keep quiet. They laugh along, say nothing, or sometimes even reinforce a norm they do not actually fully support. Because going against the group feels risky.

'Blijf Bij Jezelf' wants to offer those boys a helping hand. The campaign shows that it is not strange to occasionally say something that goes against the group norm. Not by lecturing your friends in a dull or preachy way, but because sometimes a short joke, a light remark, or a small response is already enough to show: I'm not really okay with this, and this is not how I see it.

In doing so, the campaign does not portray the friend group as bad. On the contrary: precisely because friends matter, there should be room within a group not to always go along with everything. Boys do not need to become moral crusaders or outsiders. They only need to feel strong enough to stay close to themselves.

If more boys dare to do that, what feels normal in a group slowly starts to change as well. Narratives fuelled by anti-democratic parties, for example about minorities, women, migration, or "the elite", become less easy to sustain. Not because someone convinces the whole group with a big political argument, but because a moment of doubt is introduced. Because someone signals: we do not all have to repeat this unquestioningly. In that way, boys who do not yet really have an opinion can also see that there is an alternative.

'Blijf Bij Jezelf' shows that your friends can often handle that just fine. That a group does not immediately fall apart when someone expresses a different view. And that staying true to yourself does not mean being against your friends, but having the courage to remain honest within the group.

## Logo




## Touchpoint


VOICE-OVER:
"Everyone wants to belong somewhere."
VOICE-OVER:
"And that is something beautiful, because it means there is a place for everyone in the Netherlands."
NEDERLAND 2050
You better watch out. In before those goatf*ckers get to your sister.
Yo, all those migrants are not to be trusted.
Oh yeah, the earth is flat, pigeons are drones and all migrants want my sister.
You really do believe everything you see on Instagram!
HAHAHAHAHA
VOICE-OVER:
"Stay true to yourself."
VOICE-OVER:
"Your mates can really handle that."
BLIJF BIJ JEZELF
Voor Onze Jongens

## 14.2 VOOR ONZE JONGENS - THE BRAND

As described in chapter 10.2.1 I came to see trust as a prerequisite for behavioural change among young men. If a campaign is meant to influence attitudes or behaviour, it first needs to be delivered by a sender that feels trustworthy. For that reason, I chose to build a brand, close to young men, rather than develop only a standalone campaign from Voor Ons Nederland, from a brand that is not connected with young men. This resulted in a sub-brand of Voor Ons Nederland; Voor Onze Jongens, or in English; ForOurBoys. An overview of the brand can be found on page 63.

### 14.2.1 THE BRAND & NAME

Voor Onze Jongens is positioned as a dedicated initiative aimed specifically at boys and young men. It follows the broader democratic mission of Voor Ons Nederland, which seeks to prevent people from being drawn toward anti-democratic movements, hatred, and polarisation, and ultimately from voting for political parties with anti-democratic ideas. However, Voor Onze Jongens translates this mission into a tone of voice, visual language, and campaign structure that feel closer to the world of young men. Because of that, the message is more likely to be accepted and understood by the intended audience.

Voor Onze Jongens functions as an umbrella brand for this campaign and for possible future initiatives aimed at young men. The name itself was chosen deliberately. The word "Voor" ("For") makes clear that the brand is not against young men, but on their side. "Onze" ("Our") creates a sense of connection: it suggests that these boys are part of us, and that we should care about them. The choice of "Jongens" ("Boys") rather than "Mannen" ("Men") was also intentional. Although the target group partly consists of young men, the word men feels heavier, more adult, and more loaded. It can also carry a harsher or more negative undertone, especially in discussions about topics such as toxic masculinity. By using the word boys, the brand feels lighter, warmer, and more positive. It is less accusatory and less distant, which better matches the attitude of Voor Onze Jongens: not judgmental, but approachable.

### 14.2.2 THE PHILOSOPHY

The philosophy behind Voor Onze Jongens is to embrace young men regardless of their political views, background, or identity. Rather than judging them or immediately trying to change their opinions, the brand starts from understanding, respect, and the idea of giving something back. See figure 45 for a statement of this philosophy. This approach was inspired by the Truth anti-smoking campaign (Animal Think Tank, 2025) (see figure 46), which did not communicate like a traditional public health campaign, but instead presented itself as a recognisable youth-oriented movement with its own tone, style, and cultural presence. It attracted rather than shocked, unlike many other anti-smoking campaigns. In a similar way, Voor Onze Jongens is designed to feel connecting, rather than shocking.

To better convey this sense of embracing young men, and why I believe it is such a valuable approach, I want to point to one example: Rob Jetten's interaction with Jayden on the Dutch talk show Eva




**We ❤ Boys**

Heck, we love boys and girls. Our philosophy isn't left girls or right boys. It's not even really about politics. It's about young men growing up in a world full of noise, pressure and polarisation. We're not here to judge them or tell them what to think. We're here to back them, help them think for themselves, and keep them from getting pulled into hate. Because we don't fight the boys who get caught up in it. We embrace them, we care for them, we love them.

figure 45 - Philosophy of Voor Onze Jongens




**We ♥ Smokers**

Heck, we love everybody. Our philosophy isn't anti-smoker or pro-smoker. It's not even about smoking. It's about the tobacco industry manipulating their products, research and advertising to secure replacements for the 1,200 customers they "lose" every day in America. You know, because they die.

figure 46 - Philosophy of the Truth anti-smoking campaign (Animal Think Tank, 2025)

(2025; see figure 47). Jayden was an anti-migration protester who voiced genuine concerns about migration in a street interview during a demonstration in which also the D66 headquarters was attacked. Although he clearly distanced himself from the hostile behaviour of other protesters, he still held on to his concerns about migration. Rather than ignoring him and condemning him for still being present at that demonstration, Rob Jetten, then the frontman of D66, chose to engage him in conversation on live television. In doing so, he met Jayden with openness and respect. To me, this is exactly the kind of response the country needs: not immediate rejection, but serious engagement with the concerns behind the anger. The fact that the clip was widely viewed on YouTube and received largely positive reactions suggests that this approach resonated with many people.

### 14.2.3 THE VISUAL IDENTITY

The visual identity of Voor Onze Jongens deliberately remains connected to the style of Voor Ons Nederland. I chose not to completely reinvent the visual language, because Voor Ons Nederland already functions as a brand with a strong and recognisable identity. In addition, I do not think this should become a brand necessarily followed only by young men. It should also be followed by the existing supporter base of Voor Ons Nederland, because it can help that audience develop a more nuanced understanding of young men. Which is then also helpfull for a more positive public discourse on young men.

By keeping certain visual elements consistent, such as the bold white typography, purple accent colour, diagonal graphic shapes, and the use of a hand symbol, Voor Onze Jongens remains recognisable as part of the same brand family.

This continuity is important for several reasons. First, it shows that Voor Onze Jongens is not an isolated project, but part of a broader democratic mission. Second, it creates trust and recognizability for people who are already familiar with Voor Ons Nederland. Third, it leaves room for future growth. If Voor Ons Nederland later wants to develop more sub-brands or initiatives for specific groups, the visual system is flexible enough to support that expansion.

At the same time, Voor Onze Jongens needed a distinct identity of its own. The target group is more specific, and the tone had to feel younger, more direct, and more culturally connected to young men. These design choices make the brand feel less institutional and more approachable. It should not look like a political advertisement, but rather like something that belongs more naturally to the visual world of young men themselves. That is why the brand was made darker overall, and why I also changed the direction of the slash in the logo: it still signals a connection to Voor Ons Nederland, but also marks Voor Onze Jongens as its own initiative.

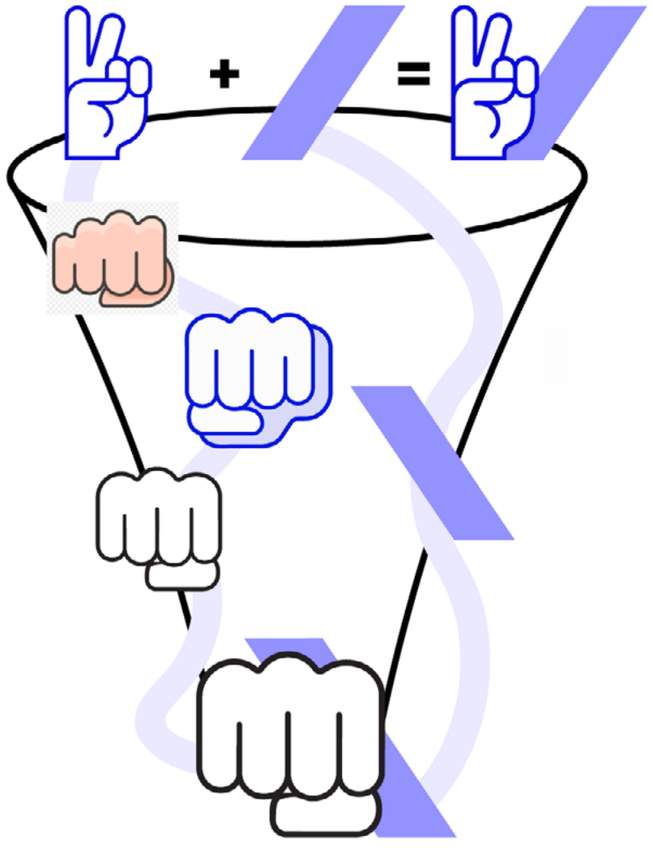


figure 47 - Rob Jetten and Jayden in conversation on Talkshow Eva (Eva, 2025; Boere & Van Mersbergen, 2025)

### 14.2.4 THE LOGO

The main logo of Voor Onze Jongens is based on a fist bump. I chose this symbol because it is a familiar and recognisable gesture among boys and young men. A fist bump can represent friendship, recognition, and respect. It is physical and masculine, which makes it suitable for a brand that wants to speak to young men without becoming either too soft or too confrontational. The logo was designed against the same criteria as the Blijf Bij Jezelf logo, shown in chapter 14.1.2. The development of the logo is shown in figure 48.

The fist also contains an interesting tension. A fist can easily be associated with anger or violence, but in this context it is transformed into a symbol of solidarity. It is not a fist that punches, but a fist that greets. This fits the philosophy of the brand: masculine energy does not need to be rejected, but can be redirected. Strength, in this context, can also mean having the courage to stay true to yourself.
The visual style of the fist makes the symbol more accessible. The rounded shapes, thick outline, and simplified cartoon-like form prevent it from feeling threatening. Instead, it becomes a friendly but strong icon. The emoji version of the fist adds another layer. Emojis are part of the everyday digital language of young people, and by drawing on that visual language, the brand becomes more informal, emotionally direct, and suitable for online use. The combination of the fist and the heart communicates the core attitude of Voor Onze Jongens: loving masculinity. Examples of merchandise carrying the Voor Onze Jongens logo can be found in Appendix H3.



| CRITERION | WHAT IT MEANS | RELATED TO |
|---|---|---|
| MEANINGFUL | Feels meaningful and not random. | S4. |
| RELATABLE | Fits the everyday world of the target group. | S4. |
| NON-JUDGMENTAL | Feels light, friendly, and not preachy or moralising. | S3. |
| EMPOWERING | Expresses self-confidence and speaking up for yourself. | S7. |
| CREATIVE AND DISTINCTIVE | Feels original, visually interesting, and not plain or generic. | x |
| BOLD AND CLEAR | Uses strong typography and one clear visual idea. | S8 and S14. |
| PROFESSIONAL | Looks well-designed and of high quality. | S3. |
| ON-BRAND | Connects clearly to the identity of Voor Ons Nederland. | x |
| VERSATILE | Works across social media, print, and other digital and physical applications. | S13 and S14. |

figure 48 – Design development & criteria of the Voor Onze Jongens logo



# Voor Onze Jongens

VoorOnzeJongens is a sub-brand of VoorOnsNederland. It was created from the same broader goal: a stronger democracy, in which fewer people are drawn into anti-democratic parties, hatred, and polarisation. But whereas VoorOnsNederland focuses on the broad mild majority, VoorOnzeJongens focuses specifically on a group that is becoming increasingly important to the future of our democracy: young men.

More and more young men are voting for radical right parties with anti-democratic policies. This is a risk to our free democratic society.  Still, VoorOnzeJongens does not believe that you can reach these boys by writing them off or pushing them aside. Something many progressive parties are currently doing, take, for example, Oxfam Novib's campaign: "Not all men, but always a man."

On the contrary: if you want to prevent boys from drifting further away, you have to embrace them.

VoorOnzeJongens therefore starts from a simple belief: we care about our boys. Not because everything they say or think is always right, but because you do not reach them by rejecting them. Boys are growing up in a time where extreme negatives are often portrayed. They do not need patronising campaigns from the outside telling them what they are doing wrong. They need something that feels close to them, that understands their world, and that shows them you can be strong without shouting along with the crowd.

That is why VoorOnzeJongens gives something back to boys. The brand develops initiatives that help young men think for themselves, find their own position, and stay close to their values. The podcast Met Onze Jongens gives boys a voice of their own and shows what they are dealing with, where their worries come from, and how nuanced they often are. The campaign Blijf bij Jezelf encourages boys to form and speak out on their own opinions, even when that feels difficult in a group.

VoorOnzeJongens is therefore not a standalone campaign, but a platform from which more initiatives for boys can grow. Always with the same attitude: not condemning, but understanding. Not preaching, but connecting. Not losing boys to cynicism and hate, but continuing to involve them in a democratic society in which there is room for doubt, humour, friendship, independent thinking, and their unfiltered opinions.

VoorOnzeJongens is here for our boys. Because we do not want to lose them. And because our democracy needs them.

# Logo

Voor Onze Jongens

Voor Onze Jongens

Voor Onze Jongens

The logo can be placed inside a container, based on the diagonal visual element.

Voor Onze Jongens

On a dark background, the text is white.

Simplified version of the logo for small-scale use.

(❤️)

Emoji version, used in text. It serves as the online symbol for the appreciation of young men; to add even more emotional meaning, a heart can be added.

# Colors

Supporting and text color | **White**
**#ffffff**

Primary color | **Deep purple**
**#301b51**

Primary color | **Soft purple**
**#9492fe**

Supporting and text color | **Black**
**#161616**

# Typography

**Poppins Bold** – for titles
Poppins light – for body text

## 14.3. MET ONZE JONGENS - THE PODCAST

Met Onze Jongens (With Our Boys) was developed as an extension of the Voor Onze Jongens brand. An overview of the brand can be found on page 65. The podcast format was chosen because the campaign is not only about delivering a message, but also about giving young men a voice. In political and social debates, young men are often discussed as a group, yet they are rarely given the space to explain how they see themselves and the world around them. A podcast creates room for longer, more nuanced conversations about identity, masculinity, social media and above all, growing up as a man in this day and age. I also had an alternative idea for a podcast-serie, this idea is shown in Appendix H2.

### 14.3.1 A SUITABLE FORMAT

A podcast is particularly suitable because it allows for depth, openness, and conversation in a way that other media formats often cannot. Rather than reducing young men to short statements or stereotypes, it offers space for reflection and dialogue. This is especially important within the context of Voor Onze Jongens, which aims not only to communicate with young men, but also to involve them directly.

In addition, podcasts are becoming increasingly popular in the Netherlands. Research by Markteffect (2025; see figure 49) shows that podcast listening continues to grow and is particularly common among audiences aged 18 to 36.

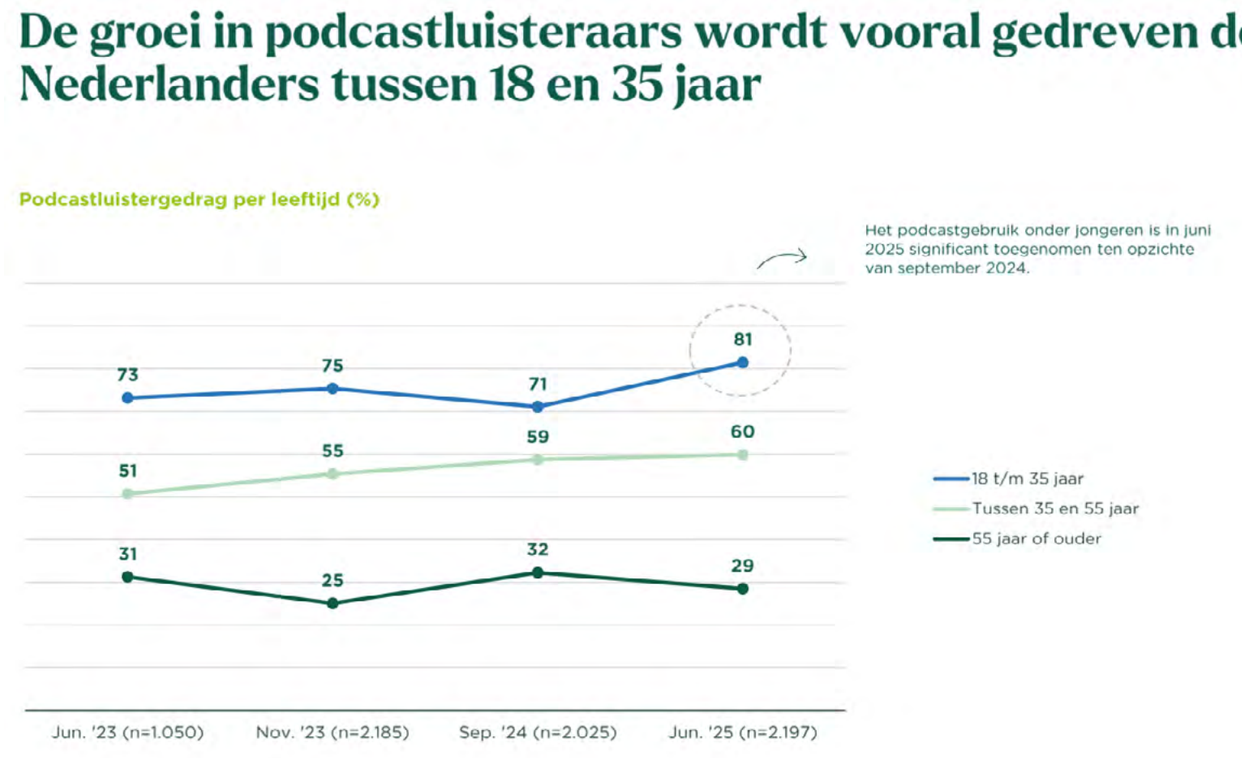



figure 49 - The growth of podcast listeners in the Netherlands (Markteffect, 2025)

The title Met Onze Jongens is especially meaningful because of the word “Met” (“With”). It signals that Voor Onze Jongens is not speaking about young men from above, but speaking with them. This reflects the broader philosophy of the brand: if the goal is to reach young men, they must feel included in the conversation.

At the same time, the podcast is not intended only for young men themselves. It also speaks to current followers of Voor Ons Nederland and to wider audiences, with the aim of presenting young men in a more positive and nuanced light. By listening to honest and open conversations with them, these audiences are invited to see young men differently, not as stereotypes, problems, or headlines, but as complex, thoughtful, and relatable individuals.

### 14.3.2 A GAP IN THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE

This podcast also responds to something that is missing in the current media landscape. When young men are discussed, the conversation is usually about them rather than with them. If we look at the manosphere, for example, and documentaries such as Louis Theroux’s Inside the Manosphere (Elffers, 2025), the focus is mainly on its most radical figures. Rarely does the conversation truly engage with the young men who are vulnerable to being drawn into these spaces.

Attention almost always goes to the extremes, as we also see in the hit series Adolescence, while nuanced portrayals of young men remain largely absent. This is understandable, since research shows that extreme content performs well on social media (Bjornsgaard & Dukic, 2023), but it also leaves little room for more balanced and realistic representations. That is exactly what this podcast aims to offer: a nuanced image of real young men, showing that they are not nearly as bad as they are often made out to be.

### 14.3.3 PARTICIPANTS

The participants for the podcast will be recruited through a collaboration with Tienskip (n.d.). Through this partnership, young men who are willing to take part in the conversations can be identified and invited, either during a Tienskip event itself or at a later stage. This collaboration helps ensure that the participants are approached through an environment that already connects with young people in a relevant and accessible way.

An important part of this concept is that participants will be paid for their contribution. Their time and willingness to share personal experiences should be valued in the same way as the contributions of everyone else involved in the podcast. This is not only a matter of fairness, but also of trust. When young men sense that something is unequa, they are more likely to withdraw or shut down. Valuing their contribution financially therefore helps create the respectful and open setting that the podcast depends on.

### 14.3.4 PART OF THE WIDER CAMPAIGN

The podcast is not only a platform for conversation, but also a valuable source of material for the broader campaign. Stories, quotes, and insights from the episodes can be translated into short clips, social media content, posters, or future campaign concepts. In this way, Met Onze Jongens functions both as a platform where young men can speak for themselves and as a source of authentic campaign material grounded in real voices and lived experiences.

### 14.3.5 THE LOGO AND VISUAL IDENTITY

The logo of Met Onze Jongens builds on the same hand-and-fist system as Voor Onze Jongens, but shifts its meaning by adding a microphone. In this version, the hand becomes a symbol of voice. It suggests that young men are not only being represented visually, but are also being invited to speak. The microphone stands for listening, expression, and ownership of one’s own story.



# Met Onze Jongens

The podcast in which boys talk
about what it means to be a boy.

Met Onze Jongens is a Dutch podcast by VoorOnzeJongens in which we visit groups of boys across the Netherlands. From Middelburg to Maastricht, from Amsterdam to smaller villages, we seek out the bubbles in which boys grow up, hang out, talk, and shape themselves.

In each episode, a presenter joins a different 'bubble' of boys. The conversation is about being a boy, masculinity, friendship, school, work, sport, and everything the boys themselves bring to the table. Sometimes serious, sometimes funny, sometimes uncomfortable. Exactly the way these kinds of conversations often are.

The main goal is to help others better understand what is going on in the lives of our boys in the Netherlands. Who are they?

What worries them? What do they laugh about? What are they unsure about? And how do they see the world around them?

That is why we do not just talk about boys, but above all with boys. Not as a problem group, but as guests with their own stories, opinions, and doubts. The podcast shows that young men are often much more nuanced than the image that sometimes exists of them.

Met Onze Jongens is therefore a way of getting closer to the world of young men. Without judgment, without wagging a finger. Simply by showing up, joining them, and listening.

## Logo










The logo can also be used in combination with a photo of the podcast setup.



Simplified version of the logo for small-scale use.

## Podcast-intro

*Based on the presenter visiting male students in Leiden.*

"Hey, I'm Roy. By now I've been a boy for about 28 years, so I think I can cautiously call myself something of an expert in being a 'jongen'.

In this podcast series, I visit other people with lived experience in all corners of our beautiful little country. Not to lecture them, but to hear how they think about friendship, masculinity, peer pressure, politics, jokes that may go just a little too far, and the constant search for: who am I, really?

Today I'm in Leiden with our real male students. When people think of students, they quickly think of heavy drinking to fit in, acting tough for the group, and treating women like 'sperma-emmers' .

But what are these guys really like? And how do they themselves see it? What do they think of their own behaviour? How are they a man?

That's what I'm setting out to explore today.

Welcome to Met Onze Jongens."

## 14.4 THE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

The campaign strategy of Voor Onze Jongens, Met Onze Jongens and Blijf Bij Jezelf is structured around three phases of the rollout: Care, Connect and Change. The three names describe what the campaign does in each phase, and in what order, not what the target group does. A visual overview of the strategy is shown on page 68. A timeline is shown in figure 50.

This campaign strategy is inspired by the logic of the traditional customer journey, but adapted to the goals of a social campaign. In commercial marketing, a journey often moves from awareness and consideration to purchase (see figure 51). Voor Onze Jongens, however, is not asking its target group to buy a product or a service.

Care, Connect and Change describe the order in which the sender builds its position, not a route that each young man follows. Almost nobody in the target group will pass through the three phases in sequence. Most will encounter the campaign for the first time in the third phase, on a screen in a gym or in a cinema, without having heard a single podcast episode.
That is why the phases accumulate rather than replace one another. The podcast does not stop when the activation begins, and the social media channels keep running throughout. By the time Blijf Bij Jezelf appears, the sender has a history: an account with followers, episodes to listen back to, and a presence in places the viewer already recognises. A young man who meets the campaign cold does not need to have followed that build-up in order to benefit from it. He only needs to be able to check who is behind it and find something there.

### 14.4.1 PHASE 1: CARE

The first phase begins with the podcast Met Onze Jongens, which is still visibly connected to Voor Ons Nederland. At this stage, the podcast functions as the first introduction to the world of Voor Onze Jongens, before the separate brand is fully launched. The purpose of this phase is not yet to campaign, but to show care, curiosity, and genuine interest in the lives and culture of young men.

Importantly, the podcast is not aimed exclusively at young men themselves. It is also intended for the existing audience that already follows Voor Ons Nederland. In this way, the podcast serves a dual purpose: it introduces a new tone and focus within the broader brand, while also inviting a wider audience to listen to young men in a more open and nuanced way.
During this early phase, snippets from the podcast are shared through the Voor Ons Nederland Instagram and TikTok account. This allows the content to circulate within an existing network before Voor Onze Jongens is fully established as an independent platform. In doing so, the campaign starts by building familiarity and trust rather than immediately asking anything from the target group.

### 14.4.2 PHASE 2: CONNECT

After the release of the second podcast episode, the campaign enters Phase 2: Connect, marked by the launch of Voor Onze Jongens as an independent brand. At this point, the dedicated social media channels of Voor Onze Jongens are introduced. This gives the initiative more room to develop its own tone of voice, visual identity, and style of communication. While Voor Ons Nederland remains the broader parent brand, Voor Onze Jongens can position itself as its more informal and youth-oriented younger brother.

Through Instagram and TikTok, the brand shares short podcast fragments, stories from the young men featured in the episodes, and other content that reflects the everyday world of the target group. This helps increase visibility for the podcast, but also allows Voor Onze Jongens to stand on its own as a recognisable identity. Not all of this content would naturally fit the main Voor Ons Nederland account, because the tone of Voor Onze Jongens is younger, more personal and more embedded in the daily lives of young men.
This social media strategy is also tactical. Whereas the main Voor Ons Nederland account has to remain broader and somewhat more institutional, Voor Onze Jongens can act more like a youth-oriented brand. It can actively enter the digital environment of the target group, for example by directly following the young men the brand wants to reach. In that sense, the brand does not wait to be discovered, but deliberately moves toward the young men it wants to reach.

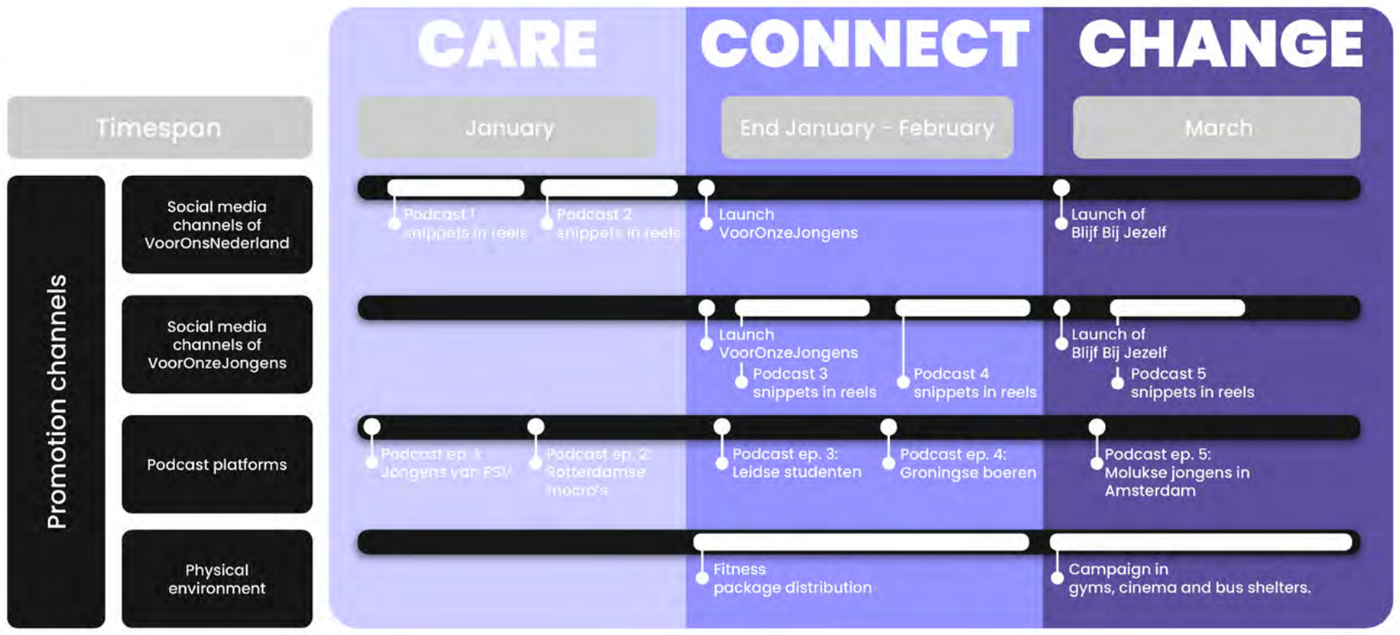


figure 50 - Timeline of the campaign

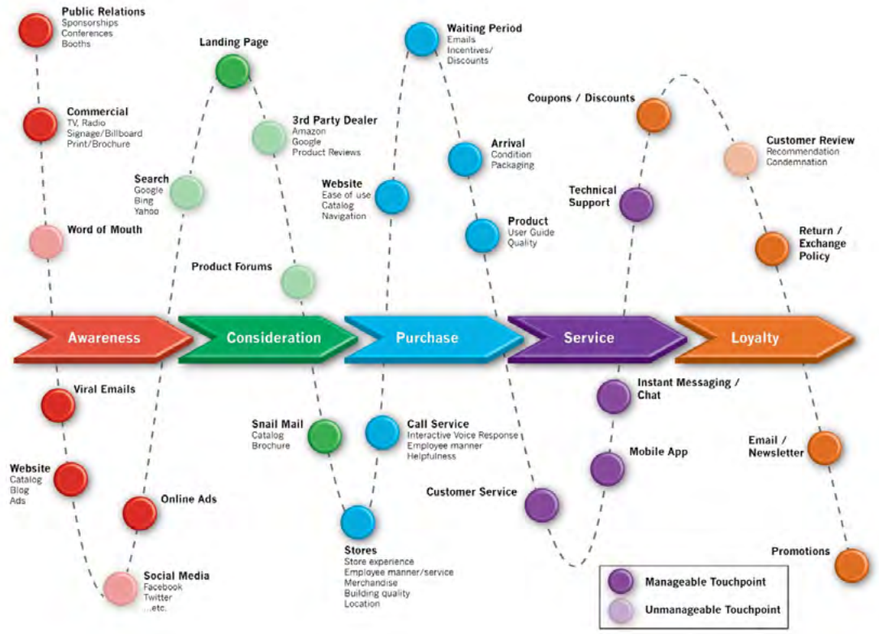


figure 51 - Typical customer journey (Berghuis, 2024)

At the same time, this phase also expands into the offline world. Voor Onze Jongens visits places where young men already spend time, such as gyms, and distributes useful branded items such as shaker bottles, training bibs, or similar merchandise directly to the boys it wants to reach. This is not only a way of promoting the brand, but also a way of giving something back.

Going to football pitches and gyms is also a strategic choice, as these are by far the two most popular sports activities among young men, according to results from the Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu (2024).

This offline approach is especially important because young people are already overloaded with online content. Social media messages can easily be ignored with a quick scroll, whereas an unexpected physical encounter in a familiar setting has a greater chance of being remembered. By meeting young men in spaces that are already part of their daily lives, Voor Onze Jongens can create a more direct and personal form of brand recognition.

The selection of these locations can also be strategically informed by official election results and the local political context. The campaign should primarily be implemented in areas where support for radical-right parties is relatively strong, as these are the locations where behavioural change among young men is most needed. For example, Velsen is a relevant location for this campaign because, in the 2026 municipal elections, Forum voor Democratie emerged as the largest party in the municipality with 20.36% of the vote (5,996 votes) (Kiesraad, n.d.). The Kiesraad election database can be used to compare results at municipal level and identify other locations where the campaign theme may be especially relevant.

### 14.4.3 PHASE 3: CHANGE

The third and most important phase is the actual campaign rollout. This is the stage in which Blijf Bij Jezelf is launched as the central campaign message. By this point, Voor Onze Jongens should already have built a certain level of recognition through the podcast, Instagram content, and offline contact with young men. That recognition matters, because the behavioural message is more likely to land when it comes from a brand that the target group has already seen or interacted with before.

In this phase, the campaign introduces its core message: stay close to yourself, think for yourself, and do not let the group pull you into something you do not actually stand behind. The message is simple, but it becomes effective precisely because of the groundwork laid in the earlier phases. The campaign does not appear out of nowhere; instead, it emerges as the next step within a brand world that young men have already begun to recognise.
The campaign is then distributed through the same environments that were developed in the previous phases. Online, this can include short campaign videos on social media. Offline, the campaign can appear in gyms, football courts, cinemas, and other places where young men spend time. In gyms, for example, posters or digital screens can connect the message of ‘Blijf Bij Jezelf’ to an environment already associated with strength, discipline, and self-development.

Cinema is also a strategically valuable channel. Research from the Bioscoopmonitor (NVPI & Nederlands Filmfonds, 2026) shows that young people aged 12 to 23 are going to the cinema more frequently. Although the report also suggests that men go to the cinema slightly less often than women, the broader increase among young audiences still indicates that cinema attendance is likely growing among young men as well. In addition, cinemas are one of the few environments in which audiences are expected to watch a commercial from beginning to end. Unlike online content, the message cannot simply be swiped away. More importantly, cinemas bring groups of young men together in the same physical space, allowing them to experience the campaign collectively rather than individually on their phones. This shared viewing experience creates a unique opportunity for reflection and conversation within the peer groups the campaign aims to influence.

In the longer term, I would like the campaign to become part of discussions in citizenship education, not through the teacher’s initiative, but through the students’ own initiative. In a conversation with a citizenship education teacher at Albeda Zuid (Appendix E6), he explained that his class is usually not very engaged; however, when students bring in topics themselves, they become much more responsive.

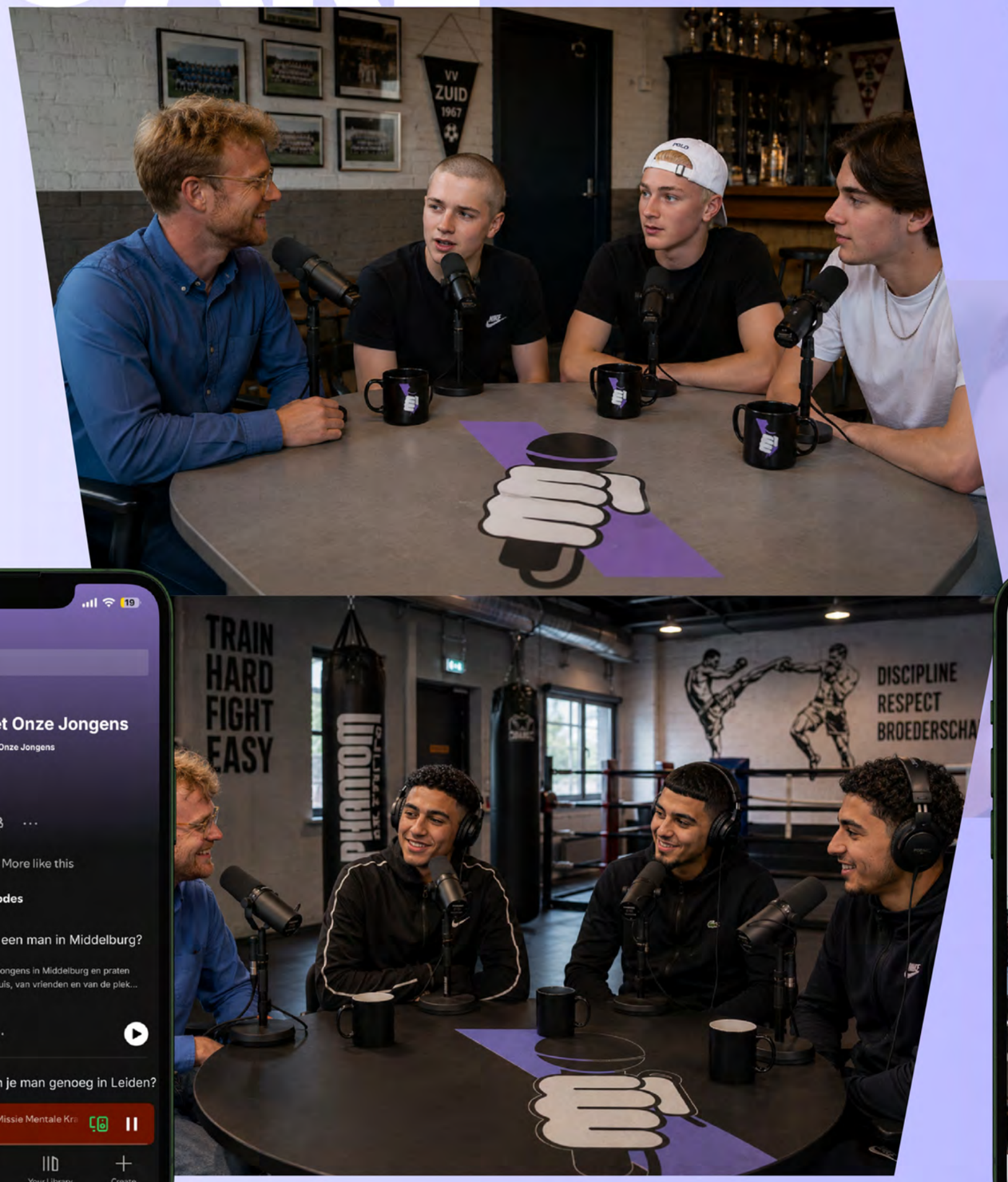
In this way, Blijf Bij Jezelf becomes more than just a slogan. It becomes the outcome of a larger campaign system in which trust, recognition, and connection are carefully built before any attempt is made to influence behaviour.



figure 52 - Advertisement in a gym

# CARE

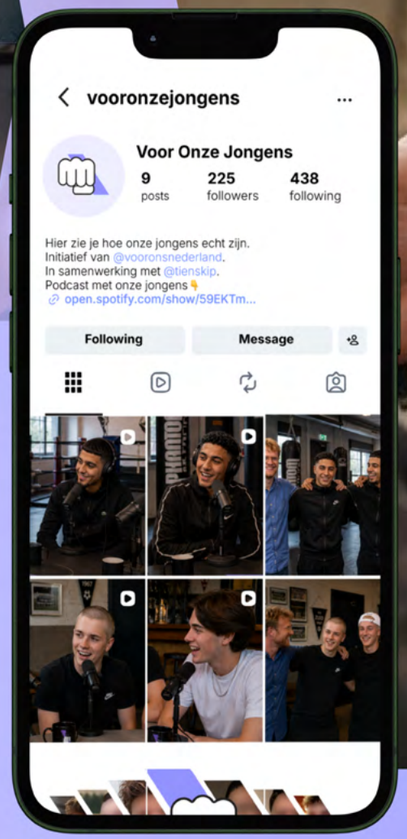
# CONNECT



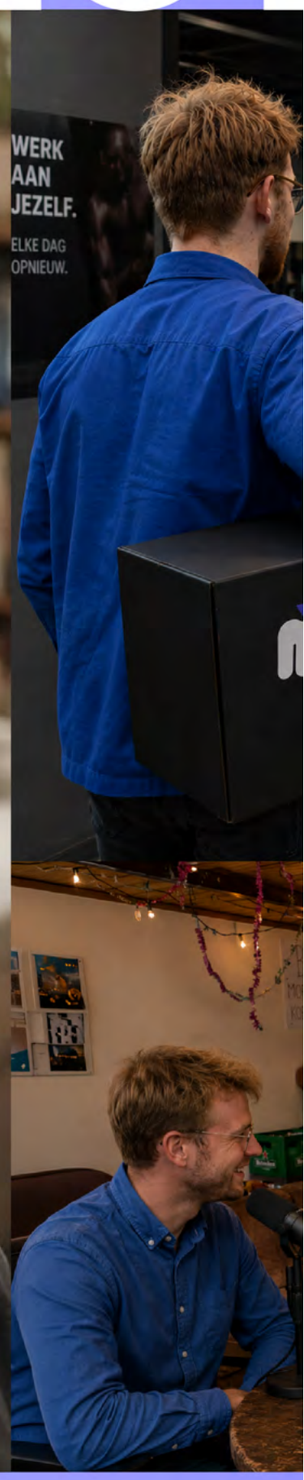








# CHANGE


Voor Onze Jongens


BLIJF BIJ JEZELF
JE MATTIES KUNNEN DAT ECHT WEL HERKEN.


BLIJF BIJ JEZELF
JE MATTIES KUNNEN DAT ECHT WEL HERKEN.




BLIJF BIJ JEZELF
JE MATTIES KUNNEN DAT ECHT WEL HERKEN.


BLIJF BIJ JEZELF
JE MATTIES KUNNEN DAT ECHT WEL HERKEN.




# DELIVER

Develop produced a total concept. Deliver turns it into something that can actually run, then asks whether it should.

The first half plans the concept into a three-month rollout: which channel goes first, when the brand and podcast follow, when the physical environment enters, and what budget and targets sit behind it (chapter 15). The second half tests it. Around two hundred young people passed an improvised set-up on the street and around five schools in Rotterdam; twenty-five who looked long enough were then interviewed. The podcast was tested through an Instagram poll, and the strategy with Voor Ons Nederland itself, all against the same four lenses behind the criteria in chapter 22 (chapter 16).

The result was a diagnosis more than a verdict: every response scored met, partly met or not met (chapter 17). Usability and desirability were held back by the same problem, a split message and an AI-generated sender that undercut trust, so the mechanism itself carries no formal verdict yet. Feasibility and viability stayed open because they depend on budget and confidence Voor Ons Nederland does not yet have.

Chapter 18 draws the conclusion and sets out improvements and recommendations. Chapter 19 covers the limitations and discussion, naming what could not be tested and being explicit about the choices made along the way.

## THE PHASE APPROACH

| | |
|---|---|
| GOAL | Turn the concept into a runnable plan, and establish whether it works for the people it is meant for. |
| QUESTIONS | » Is the concept understandable, credible and desirable?<br>» Can Voor Ons Nederland produce and sustain it?<br>» Is the mechanism plausible, and what needs to change? |
| SOURCES | ~200 young people observed on the street and around five schools in Rotterdam, 25 interviewed in depth; 83 Instagram followers; Voor Ons Nederland's Head of Strategy & Campaigns. |
| METHOD | Observation and interviews at an improvised display; an Instagram poll for the podcast; an interview for the strategy. |
| ANALYSIS | Every response mapped onto a criterion and scored met, partly met or not met, with evidence and the change required. |
| OUTPUT | A diagnosis per criterion, a revised commercial, and recommendations. |

# 15. IMPLEMENTATION

This chapter turns the strategy into a concrete plan for a first run: what is published where, in what order, at what cost, and what would count as a result. The plan shown in figure 53 is indicative, and the amounts in it are planning estimates. The precise budget, and where each amount comes from, is set out in Appendix H1 and in the Excel file supplied with this report. The budget used in the implementation plan is based partly on my own research and partly on estimates provided by a campaign strategist at VON.

## 15.1 A THREE-MONTH RUN

The plan covers three months, one per phase. Care runs through January, Connect from the end of January into February, and Change in March. Four channels carry the campaign, and each enters at a different moment.

The Voor Ons Nederland Instagram and TikTok accounts carry the campaign from the start. In January they publish snippets from the first two podcast episodes, in February the launch of Voor Onze Jongens, and in March the launch of Blijf Bij Jezelf. This channel goes first because it already has an audience, so the podcast reaches people before a new brand has to be built.

The Voor Onze Jongens accounts open at the start of Connect, with the launch of the brand itself. From there they carry snippets from the third and fourth episodes, the launch of Blijf Bij Jezelf in March, and snippets from the fifth.

The podcast runs continuously from January to March, with roughly one episode every two to three weeks.

The physical environment enters in Connect with the distribution of fitness packages, and expands in Change into gyms, cinemas and bus shelters.

## 15.2 THE PODCAST LINE-UP

Five episodes are planned, each with a different group of young men. The groups are indicative rather than fixed: the boys of PSV, Moroccan-Dutch young men in Rotterdam, students in Leiden, farmers in Groningen and Moluccan young men in Amsterdam illustrate the kind of spread the series is after. Participants would be recruited with the help of Tienskip, which already brings young people together across the country and can make the introductions.

Participants receive a fee in the order of 50 euros per episode. Their time and their willingness to talk about personal subjects should be valued in the same way as every other contribution to the podcast, and paying for it is also a matter of trust: young men who sense that an arrangement is unequal are more likely to withdraw.

The presenter can either come from within Voor Onze Jongens or be someone brought in from outside.

The episodes are spread across the three phases rather than released as a season, so that the podcast keeps running while the campaign moves on. By the time Blijf Bij Jezelf launches, there is a back catalogue rather than an archive.

## 15.3 BUDGET

The total budget for the run is roughly €70,000, divided as shown in figure 53. Two thirds of it goes to placement rather than production: €30,000 for physical advertising including the fitness packages, €20,000 for cinema and €5,000 for social media advertising, against €15,000 for producing the commercial, the identity assets and the first podcast episodes.

That distribution follows from the strategy. This campaign depends on being encountered repeatedly in the right environments rather than on a single expensive film, so the money sits where the encounters happen.

Every amount, together with the assumption it rests on, is set out in Appendix H1 and in the accompanying Excel file.

## 15.4 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The key performance indicators are: 10,000 podcast listens, 1,250,000 social media views, 250,000 cinema views, 500,000 campaign impressions in physical environments and 250 packages distributed.

These are reach targets, and they measure whether the campaign was seen rather than whether it worked. That distinction matters, because the campaign defines success differently: a young man recognising a moment of group pressure and pausing before going along with it. None of the figures above captures that. Effectiveness would ultimately show up somewhere else entirely, in anti-democratic parties losing support at the ballot box, but no single campaign can claim that result for itself.

Reach targets are still worth setting, for two reasons. They establish whether the campaign got the exposure the mechanism needs, since a perceived norm cannot shift on a single viewing. And they are the only numbers available within three months. What they cannot do is stand in for effect, which is why they are paired with the evaluation set out in chapter 16 rather than presented as its result.

## 15.5 CONDITIONS AND RISKS

Paid distribution may be restricted. Both Meta and TikTok apply rules to political and social issue advertising, and a campaign on this subject may fall under them. That would affect the social media line most directly, and it makes the organic performance of the accounts more important than the plan assumes.

The physical route depends on partners. Gyms and football clubs have to agree, and the fitness package distribution needs people on location. Neither is a media buy that can simply be ordered. The political nature of the message adds a second hurdle: a partner has to be willing to be publicly associated with it, and many will hesitate regardless of what they think of the campaign itself.

Podcast guests depend on recruitment. Five episodes assume access to five different groups of young men, which Tienskip can help arrange but cannot guarantee. Participants should be approached early and given clarity about how the material will be reused.

One month of Care may be short. The strategy rests on trust preceding the behavioural message, and January leaves room for two episodes before the brand launches. That is enough to establish that the sender exists, but probably not enough to establish that it is trusted. If the run can be extended, extending Care is the most valuable place to spend the extra time.

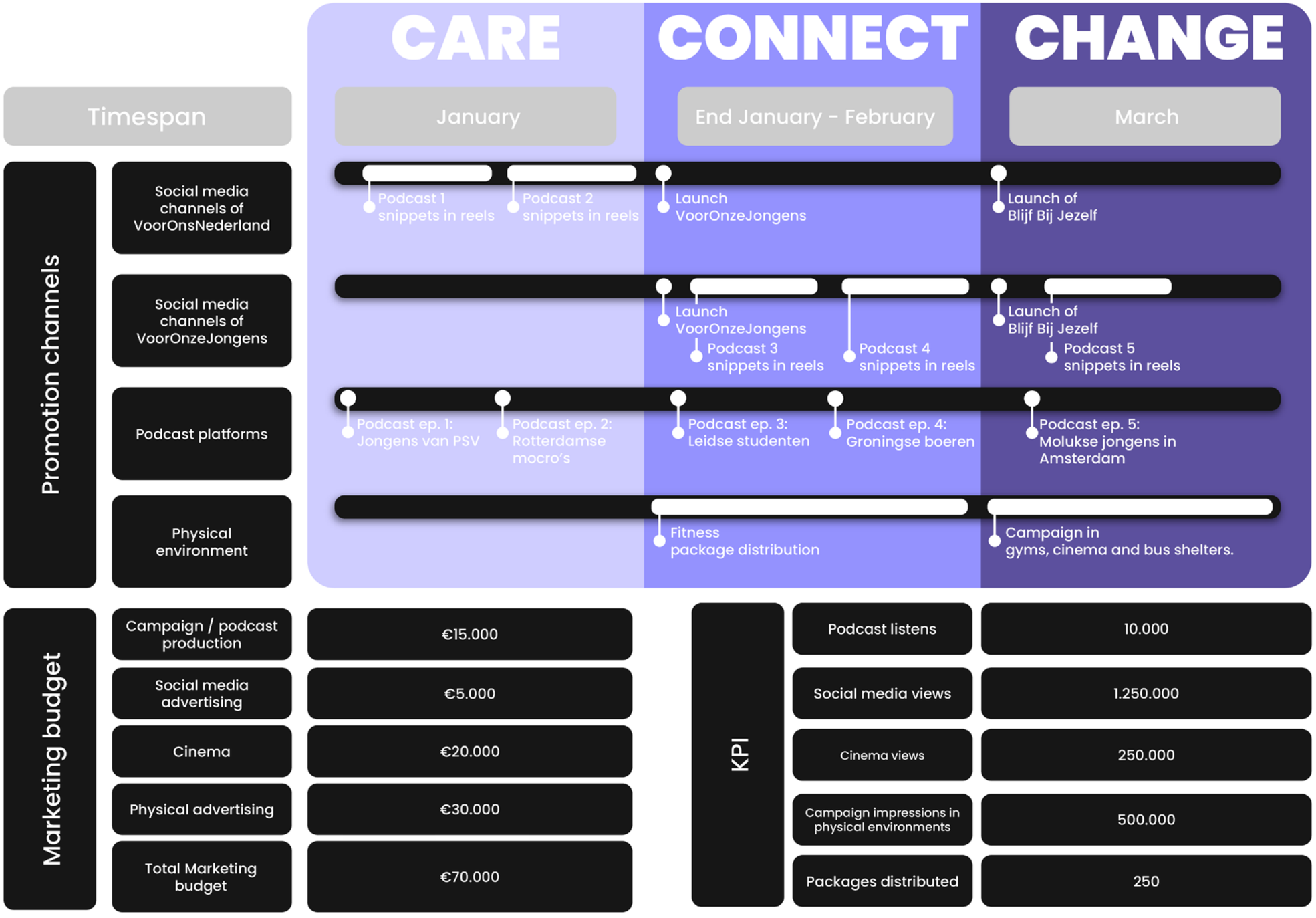



figure 53 - Implementation plan

# 16. EVALUATION METHOD

To establish whether the campaign is desirable, usable, feasible and viable, and whether the concept meets the campaign criteria. Three campaign elements (campaign & campaign strategy, the podcast and the commercial) are evaluated.

These three elements were chosen because they are the most concrete and accessible parts of the concept to test at this stage. Each of these three elements exists in a form real people can actually react to; a video, a podcast pitch, a strategy that can be judged directly by the organisation that would have to run it, without needing a finished production or a live campaign first. The commercial also carries the Voor Onze Jongens brand within it, since its identity, logo and tone of voice are all visible in the video itself, so evaluating the commercial evaluates that brand at the same time, rather than requiring a separate test for it.

The commercial is evaluated by field research in Rotterdam.
The podcast is evaluated by a participation poll on a personal Instagram account.
The campaign & campaign strategy is evaluated by the Head of Strategy, Campaign and Public Affairs of Voor Ons Nederland.

## 16.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The evaluation is organised around four lenses.

- **DESIRABILITY.** Do these young men act on this? Does it feel recognisable and credible, who do they take the sender to be, and does it make them more willing to say something in their own group?
- **USABILITY**. Is it understood? What do they take the message to be, whose story do they think it is, and does anything need explaining?
- **FEASIBILITY**. Can it be produced and placed? Does it survive being cut into other formats, and can Voor Ons Nederland deliver and sustain it?
- **VIABILITY**. Is it worth doing? Is the mechanism plausible, does the sequence hold together, what could go wrong, and are the budget assumptions realistic?

See tables 8 - 11 for the criteria, research questions, evidence sought and way of assesment.

## 16.2 PARTICIPANTS

For evaluating the commercial, eight conversations were held over two days in the week of 15 September 2026, with 25 participants in total, at and around five schools: three general-secondary schools (vmbo/havo/vwo), a Hogeschool Rotterdam campus (university of Applied Sciences) and STC (a vocational school). On observational level approximately 200 young people passed by the test set-up. Of these 200 I had in-depth interviews with 25. See figure 54 - 62 for pictures of these sessions.

| GROUP | GENDER | AGE | EDUCATION | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | MALE | 16-17 | HAVO | 5 |
| 2 | MALE | 16 | HAVO | 2 |
| 3 | FEMALE | 17 | VWO | 3 |
| 4 | MALE | 17 - 21 | MBO | 3 |
| 5 | MALE | 17 & 19 | MBO | 2 |
| 6 | MALE & FEMALE | 17 - 21 | MBO | 4 |
| 7 | MALE | 16 | VMBO | 2 |
| 8 | MALE | 14 | VWO | 4 |

table 7 - Breakdown of the participants

The original aim was to at least interview fifteen practically educated young men aged 16 to 22 with right-wing views. In practice, only ten participants matched that profile; the remaining fifteen were general-secondary students, who served as a comparison group rather than the intended target group.

A breakdown of the participants is seen in table 7.

For evaluating the podcast, approximately 350 followers of the instagram @bramvthoff came in contact with the format. Where 34 people worked with a simple yes/no, why form.

For evaluating the campaign & campaign strategy I held an extensive interview with the Head of Strategy, Campaign and Public Affairs of Voor Ons Nederland.

## 16.3 METHOD

### 16.3.1 THE COMMERCIAL

The commercial was not shown from a real mobile advertising display or riding abri. Instead, the abri encounter was reconstructed with an improvised set-up, an iPad placed on a barstool with a music box, playing the one-minute video on a continuous loop, positioned on the street, so that the setting matched the intended placement as closely as was practicable in this round (figures 54 - 62).

Engagement at the abri was not solicited. Passers-by were not stopped and asked directly what they thought of it, in the manner of a classroom exercise; reactions were first observed at a distance, and only those who looked for noticeably longer than a passing glance were then approached and asked questions by the interviewee. This was a deliberate choice: it mirrors how the campaign will actually be encountered once placed for real, where most people will glance and move on, and only genuine interest will lead someone to look more closely. Separately, three groups (around twelve participants in total) were specifically and directly approached for a conversation on the street, rather than reached through this observe-then-approach route. Together, these two routes account for the 25 participants, described in table 7.

Every conversation, however the participant was reached, followed the same order. Participants watched the commercial without being told what it was about, and their first, unprompted interpretation was recorded before any evaluative question. Questions about recognition, sender, humour and intention followed, then questions about language and comprehension. Alongside these, a question form (Appendix I1.1) guided what was asked. However, in reality mainly the first impression was picked off.

### 16.3.2 THE PODCAST

The podcast concept was introduced through an Instagram Story on Voor Ons Nederland's account, chosen because it reaches the podcast's first intended audience: VON's own existing supporters. Viewers were asked whether they would listen to a podcast like this, and then invited to explain their reasoning (see figure 63).

### 16.3.3 THE CAMPAIGN & CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

The campaign & campaign strategy was evaluated with Carlijn van Donselaar, Head of Strategy & Campaigns at Voor Ons Nederland. The conversation mostly addressed feasibility and viability questions: does she see this fitting within VON's overall picture? Is the budget realistic? This was evaluated one-on-one with a presentation with accompanying questions (see Appendix I1.2 for notes of this session).

## 16.4 RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Responses were noted in the same way as earlier interviews: no full transcription, but looser notes taken during the interview (see Appendix I). This data was analysed inductively, and each finding was mapped onto the criteria, so the outcome is a judgement per requirement rather than a collection of opinions.

## 16.5 EVALUATING AGAINST THE CRITERIA

Tables 8 - 11 shows the evaluation plan grouped and tested on the campaign criteria. Every criterion is tied to a question, so the evaluation measures what it set out to measure. The fourteen campaign criteria (S) are joined here by a small number of new ones (D, F, V).

USABILITY

| # | CRITERION | QUESTION OR SET-UP | EVIDENCE SOUGHT | METHOD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S8 | One central message | "What is this about?" | An unprompted paraphrase matching the objective | Interview with target group |
| S1 | Told from the With-holder's perspective | "Whose story is this?" | Names the boy who hesitates | Interview with target group |
| S2 | The behaviour is shown | "What does he do?" | Describes the act unprompted | Interview with target group |
| S10 | Language they already use | Note any word queried or repeated uncertainly | Words that had to be explained | Observation |
| S11 | No prior knowledge needed | "Was anything unclear?" | Whether context had to be supplied | Interview with target group |
| S12 | Lands within seconds | A few seconds of exposure, then what it was about and who made it | Correct interpretation from short exposure | Observation |

table 8 - Usability evaluation table

FEASIBILITY

| # | CRITERION | QUESTION OR SET-UP | EVIDENCE SOUGHT | METHOD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S13 | Works in digital formats | Show a vertical cut, a still and a soundless version | Whether the message survives in a digital format. | Observation |
| S14 | Works in physical spaces | The improvised set-up, passed by participants | Legibility, recognisability, whether it is noticed | Observation |
| F1 | Production and partnership | "Can VON produce and sustain this?" | Production, partner and media realism | Interview with Carlijn |

table 9 - Feasibility evaluation table

DESIRABILITY

| # | CRITERION | QUESTION OR SET-UP | EVIDENCE SOUGHT | METHOD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S3 | A sender from inside their world | "Who do you think made this?", before the sender is revealed | Names something close to their world rather than an institution | Interview with target group |
| S4 | A situation they recognise | "Does this happen where you are?" | Recognition of setting, tone and language | Interview with target group |
| S5 | Nobody is written off | "What do you think of the boy who says it?" | Read as a normal mate rather than the villain | Interview with target group |
| S6 | Humour | "Was it funny?", plus whether anyone laughs | Laughter, and whether the joke is at someone's expense | Interview with target group |
| S7 | Pride rather than shame | "How did that leave you?" | Pride or lightness rather than being caught out | Interview with target group |
| S9 | A small and feasible action | "Could you do that in your group? What would happen?" | Intention, and the barriers named | Interview with target group |
| D1 | Podcast appeal | Concept presented in Instagram Stories with a yes or no poll and potential reasoning behind. | Willingness to listen | Open instagram sample |

table 10 - Desirability evaluation table

VIABILITY

| # | CRITERION | QUESTION OR SET-UP | EVIDENCE SOUGHT | METHOD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| V1 | Plausibility of the mechanism | "Would this move a With-holder?" | Seen as something that will move an individual. | Interview with target group |
| V2 | Coherence of message, media and sequence | "Do the parts belong together, and is the order right?" | Seen as a coherent smooth and understandable storyline. | Interview with target group |
| V3 | Unintended effects | "Who else will see this, and how will they read it?" | Risks of ridicule, stigma or covert persuasion | Interview with target group |
| V4 | Budget realism | Budget assumptions reviewed line by line | Whether the reach targets match the spend | Interview with Carlijn |

table 11 - Viability evaluation table



figure 54 - The improvised set-up.



figure 55 - The set-up at secondary school 1.



figure 56 - The set-up at de Hogeschool van Rotterdam,



figure 57 - The set-up at STC.



figure 58 - The set-up at secondary school 2.



figure 59 - The set-up at secondary school 3.



figure 60 - The set-up evaluation with group 1.



figure 61 - Observation set-up.



figure 62 - The set-up evaluation with group 2.

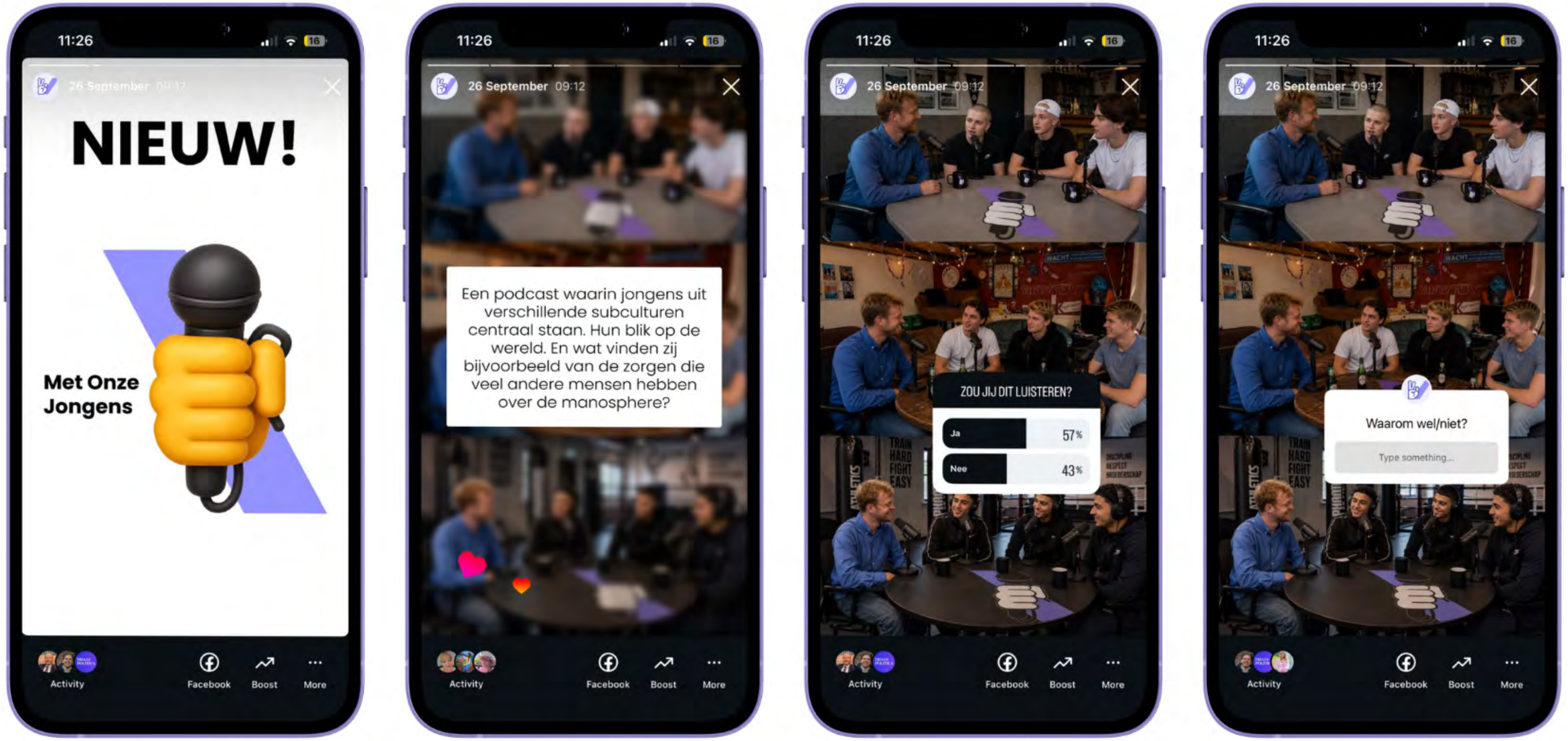



figure 63 - The Instagram poll

# 17. RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the evaluation plan, as illustrated in chapter 16. The results are seperately toegelicht in de target group evaluation and the evaluation with VON.

## 17.1 EVALUATING AGAINST THE CRITERIA

The results are presented in the evaluation tables (see Tables 12–15), which show the outcomes for each evaluation point across the evaluation sessions; the notes from these sessions can be found in Appendix I. Tables 12 – 15 mainly cover the evaluation of the commercial, while the evaluation of the campaign & campaign strategy and of the podcast is presented separately in chapters 17.2 and 17.3.

USABILITY

| # | CRITERION | VERDICT | EVIDENCE | Change recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S8 | One central message | Partly met | Different central messages were reported: some participants took away “stay true to yourself and don’t always follow the group,” others “don’t believe everything you see online.” The video also prompts curiosity about the wording used for asylum policy, which pulls attention toward that topic rather than the intended central message. | Sharpen the central message so it reads consistently across viewers, and reduce competing cues (such as “asylum seeker”) that draw attention away from it. |
| S1 | Told from the With-holder's perspective | Partly met | Participants recognised that the story is told from the central actor’s perspective, but did not pick up on the fact that this perspective was of great importance to the video. | Make the With-holder’s perspective more explicit, so it registers as the frame of the story rather than an incidental detail. |
| S2 | The behaviour is shown | Partly met | The central actor’s behaviour is recognised, but it remains unclear to viewers whether he is the one in control or that they should re-enact his behaviour. | Clarify clearer who holds the role and that his behaviour is to be re-enacted. |
| S10 | Language they already use | Met | The language used is understood, but it remains unclear whether these are the best possible words, or the ones that fit most naturally with this group’s own way of speaking. | Test the specific wording separately against this group’s own language, to confirm it is not just understood but the most natural fit. |
| S11 | No prior knowledge needed | Partly met | Some elements come across as slightly out of the blue, and participants needed to watch closely to fully follow the video. That said, no real prior knowledge is required, because all things are understood. | Build up the context earlier or more clearly, so the video does not depend on close, attentive viewing to be understood. |
| S12 | Lands within seconds | Not met | Across all observations, viewing time was approximately 3–5 seconds, and attention went to the improvised set-up rather than to the message itself. | Rework the opening seconds so the message itself draws attention. |

table 12 – Usability criteria evaluation results

DESIRABILITY

| # | CRITERION | VERDICT | EVIDENCE | Change recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S3 | A sender from inside their world | Not directly tested | The sender in this round was the researcher rather than a brand or institution, such as VoorOnzeJongesn, delivered in a way too informal and unpolished for participants to comment on meaningfully. | This can only be tested on the long run, if the sender has set foot in the world of the young men. |
| S4 | A situation they recognise | Met | Recognition varied between groups, but the snack-bar scene itself was consistently recognised as a plausible, familiar setting. | X |
| S5 | Nobody is written off | Partly met | Because of the AI generation, the actors did not come across as fully believable or relatable. That said, the young man was not seen as a villain of any sort; in only one instance was he seen as somewhat of a loser. Independently, the use of AI was seen as manipulative, which made the video feel less appealing and harder to resonate with. | A real-life video instead of an AI-generated video. |
| S6 | Humour | Met | Laughter was observed, but this may partly be attributable to the setting rather than the content itself. When asked directly, however, participants did confirm that they found it funny. | X |
| S7 | Pride rather than shame | Not met | Participants did not identify strongly with the actor, and reported feeling neither pride nor shame after watching. | Strengthen identification with the central actor, since without it neither pride nor shame can be evoked; a version that draws viewers closer to his perspective may help. |
| S9 | A small and feasible action | Not met | Participants missed concrete “handles” (guidance on what to actually do) and the call to action was not clear. | Add a concrete, feasible action participants can picture themselves taking, and make the call to action explicit rather than implied. |
| D1 | Podcast appeal | See chapter 17.3 | | |

table 13 – Desirability criteria evaluation results

FEASIBILITY

| # | CRITERION | VERDICT | EVIDENCE | Change recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| S13 | Works in digital formats | Not tested this round | The vertical-cut and soundless versions were planned, but not worked out. | X |
| S14 | Works in physical spaces | Partly met | The improvised set-up itself was clearly noticed. It consistently drew attention and worked as an icebreaker for the conversations that followed. But it was not read as a deliberate campaign placement, reactions were along the lines of "wtf, what is this". Being noticed is there; being recognised as a real campaign placement is not yet. | Because this tested an improvised set-up rather than a professionally produced abri, the verdict may understate how a finished unit would land. |
| F1 | Production and partnership | See chapter 17.2 | | |

table 14 – Feasibility criteria evaluation results

VIABILITY

| # | CRITERION | VERDICT | EVIDENCE | Change recommendations |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| V1 | Plausibility of the mechanism | No formal verdict | As noted earlier, the central message was picked up differently by different participants, so its intended effect arrives fragmented rather than uniform. It is possible that some young men will reconsider their behaviour after seeing what the campaign is getting at, but that effect can only be confirmed through longer-term testing. | For now, the message needs to be made clearer. Its actual effects should then be measured over a longer period. |
| V2 | Coherence of message, media and sequence | Partly met | At first glance, the video's coherence comes across as fairly good. On closer viewing, however, the target group struggles to follow some parts. The snack-bar scene, for instance, comes out of the blue. | A shorter, more coherent video that focuses more tightly on the intended central message. |
| V3 | Unintended effects | Risk flagged | For some participants, the video appears to intend for the central actor to be seen as someone ridiculed within a right-wing group, but he is not portrayed with full conviction or authority. The use of the word "AZC" also risks raising eyebrows and pulling attention toward a different topic than the one intended. | Give the central actor a more empowered, less easily dismissed portrayal in the video. |
| V4 | Budget realism | See chapter 17.2 | | |

table 15 – Viability criteria evaluation results

## 17.2 EVALUATION OF THE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

The campaign strategy was evaluated with Carlijn van Donselaar, Head of Strategy & Campaigns at Voor Ons Nederland (see Appendix I1.2 for notes of this interview). She confirmed that the concept fits VON's mission of reaching young men within the "mild majority," VON's target group, though her confidence was stronger in the film and the campaign around than in the podcast. This raised the question of whether the VON-supporters' interest in this specific group of young men is sustained enough to justify more than a one-off effort.

A separate brand, "Voor Onze Jongens," was seen as a gain rather than a dilution, since it would allow for more tailored content than the main VON brand permits. At the same time, she pointed to a real risk of VON's image becoming too masculine-coded (something already visible in the current supporter base) which could be difficult to justify to civil-society partners, and might cost VON confidence and funding if the organization as a whole were seen as too focused on men. In my own view this is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is a point worth raising in the discussion. On the content itself, the strongest element was engaging with attitudes the audience already holds rather than introducing the topic cold to a group that is otherwise hard to convince. If only one component could be kept, she would choose the campaign over the brand or the podcast, as it aligns most closely with VON's mission.

The proposed budget was seen as unrealistic: a fully finished production would need closer to €50,000, bringing the total campaign budget to roughly €110,000. She concluded that the concept works if it is tested intensively with the target audience to measure real behavioural change, and fails if it relies on unverified assumptions about that audience.

### 17.3 EVALUATION OF THE PODCAST

The desirability of the "Met Onze Jongens" podcast was evaluated with an Instagram Story poll on Voor Ons Nederland's account (see Appendix I1.3). The poll reached 813 followers, of whom 83 voted: 47 said yes (57%) and 36 said no (43%). Several respondents also left a comment explaining their answer, and a few things stand out specifically for desirability, whether the podcast and its sender actually appeal to someone, once those comments are read alongside the numbers.

The yes-votes fall into two clear groups. The first is simple curiosity about what young people are dealing with today, echoed in replies like "what's keeping young people busy" or "surprising and informative what young people are dealing with." The second is more personal: several respondents describe themselves as parents of teenage or nearly-adult sons and say they want to understand what that generation is going through, with a few adding that they would forward the podcast to their own sons. A smaller group gives a professional reason instead, such as an outreach youth worker who welcomes "input from a different perspective."

The no-votes point the other way, toward distance from the podcast's subject or the format itself: "the target group feels far removed from me," "I'm not young," alongside more practical objections such as podcast fatigue ("there are already too many podcasts," "no patience for it") and doubts about the framing of this group ("heavily coloured and a biased standpoint").

That makes the 57% a genuinely encouraging result rather than one to qualify away. This poll was aimed exactly at the audience the podcast is meant to reach first, Voor Ons Nederland's existing supporters, and a majority of them said they would listen. The comments explain why: curiosity about young men's world and, for many, a personal stake as parents wanting to understand their own sons' generation.

# 18. CONCLUSION, IMPROVEMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter closes the project. It briefly repeats the answer to the research question, then tells the story of what the evaluation actually showed, organised around the three things that were actually put to the test: the commercial evaluated by the target group, the podcast evaluated with Voor Ons Nederland's own audience, and the campaign & campaign strategy evaluated with Voor Ons Nederland self. Based on this conclusion, some improvements are shown in chapter 18.2 Recommendations for improving and implementing the concept follow in chapter 18.3.

## 18.1 CONCLUSION

### 18.1.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTION, BRIEFLY

This report starts by answering the research question: why do practically educated young men aged 16 to 22 in the Netherlands vote for, or feel drawn to, anti-democratic parties, and how do they differ from those who do not?

This report shows that the answer sits mainly at the group level, not the individual: many of these young men are rarely fully ideologically convinced, but adopt the norms of a right-leaning friend group because no one, no Challenger, makes disagreement look socially acceptable (chapters 7–9). That absence, not personal conviction, is the mechanism the concept was built to interrupt.

### 18.1.2 FROM DESIGN CHALLENGE TO FINAL CONCEPT EVALUATION

The design vision, design goal and design challenge describe what this project was aiming for: a group in which disagreement is visible and ordinary, a With-holder for whom speaking up feels safe and worth doing, and a design that motivates that shift. Those are not statements that can be judged directly; they only become judgeable once they are translated into something concrete. That is where the final concept comes in. The campaign criteria took the vision, goal and challenge apart into fourteen specific requirements, three campaign concepts were designed against them, and one, Stay True to Yourself, was selected and developed into the final concept: the campaign 'Blijf Bij Jezelf', the brand 'Voor Onze Jongens', the podcast 'Met Onze Jongens' and the campaign strategy 'Care, Connect, Change'.

Three elements of the final concept were evaluated, in three different sessions, each with its own audience. In this chapter we conclude on the three elements in before coming to a full conclusion of the whole concept.

### 18.1.3 THE COMMERCIAL

Chapter 17.1 reports the full evaluation table against all four dimensions; the conclusion to draw from it is that usability and desirability are held back by the same underlying problem, while feasibility and viability stay open rather than settled.

On usability, the target group followed the language and the general set-up without real difficulty, and mostly recognised that the story is told from the perspective of the boy who disagrees, even without fully registering why that perspective matters. What did not hold up is the message itself: different viewers took away different central ideas, a few individual beats felt disconnected from what came before them, and across every observation it was the improvised set-up, not the message, that caught attention first, well outside the few seconds the criteria call for the message to land in.

On desirability, the situation in the commercial was recognised as familiar and the humour worked without moralising, which means the concept's entry point holds, and the actor was not written off as a villain. What does not yet hold is trust in the sender: because this round used an AI-generated video rather than a real one delivered by an actual brand, the actor came across as less believable, participants reported neither pride nor shame after watching, and no concrete, feasible action was ever offered them to actually do. Recognisability and tone are not the same as feeling moved to act.

Feasibility was only partly tested this round. The digital formats a cut-down campaign would need were planned but not tried, so no verdict exists there yet. Physical placement is a genuinely encouraging, if incomplete, result: the set-up drew attention consistently wherever it appeared, though what it drew was curiosity about a strange object rather than recognition of a real campaign, a distinction still to be closed.

Viability follows directly from the same fragmentation. Because the message did not land uniformly, the plausibility of the underlying mechanism carries no formal verdict, not a failure, but an open question that needs a clearer, more uniform message before it can even be tested. Two further findings are worth naming as risks rather than failures: the video's coherence weakens around one scene that feels disconnected from the story leading up to it, and the central actor risks being read, in the wrong group, as someone ridiculed rather than as someone taking a considered stand.

### 18.1.4 THE PODCAST

Chapter 17.1.2 reports the Instagram poll results in full. The conclusion to draw from a 57% majority, from exactly the audience the podcast needs to convince first, is a positive one for desirability at this stage of the rollout, not a caveat to qualify away. The reasons behind that majority, curiosity about young men's world and a personal stake as parents, match what the podcast is trying to achieve. On this evidence, the podcast looks like a good idea to carry forward; how to grow that appeal further, and what to do about the group that isn't interested, is picked up in the recommendations.

### 18.1.5 THE CAMPAIGN & CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

Chapter 17.2 reports Carlijn van Donselaar's evaluation in full. The conclusion to draw from it is that feasibility and viability split into two different verdicts depending on what is being asked. On mission fit and brand value, the answer is yes: the concept belongs at Voor Ons

Nederland, and the separate brand is seen as an addition rather than a dilution. On committing real resources to this specific subgroup, the answer is not yet: her confidence there is more measured, and the budget as currently planned understates what a properly finished production would actually cost. That does not make the concept infeasible; it means feasibility and viability both depend on Voor Ons Nederland budgeting for the version of this concept its own evaluation just showed is needed.

### 18.1.6 OVERALL CONCLUSION

Read together, these three evaluations point in one consistent direction, though each speaks to a different part of the four dimensions, and it matters which.

Desirability was tested twice. In the commercial, with the target group, it only half-holds: the situation and humour land, but the AI-generated production undercuts the trust the sender needs, and viewers felt neither pride nor shame. In the podcast, with Voor Ons Nederland's own audience, desirability is confirmed: a majority said they would listen, for reasons that match what it's trying to achieve.

Usability was tested only in the commercial, and is the most clearly unresolved of the four: language and comprehension hold up, but the message itself doesn't land as one clear idea within the first few seconds, and different viewers took away different readings.

Feasibility was tested twice. In the commercial, the physical set-up proved it draws attention in the real world, though digital formats weren't tested this round. In the campaign strategy, with Voor Ons Nederland itself, feasibility comes down to production and budget: mission fit is confirmed, but the current budget understates what a proper production would cost.

Viability was also tested twice. In the commercial, the mechanism carries no formal verdict, because the message never landed uniformly enough to test it, alongside two flagged risks (a disconnected scene, the actor risking being read as ridiculed). In the campaign strategy, viability turns on Voor Ons Nederland's confidence and numbers: the mission fits, but confidence in this specific subgroup effort is more measured, and the budget isn't realistic yet.

Every weakness that surfaced, the split message, the AI-generated production, the missing concrete action, the underestimated budget, sits with the commercial and its production, not with the podcast or the strategy, and all of it points to the same fix: a properly finished, single-message film, produced well enough to be trusted, and budgeted realistically. None of it points back to the underlying idea being wrong. Once that version exists, the same three tests can be run again for real, and the vision this project set out toward becomes something that can finally be tested rather than only aimed at.

## 18.2 IMPROVEMENTS

Following the conclusion, I made a number of improvements myself, specifically to the commercial. I focused there because Carlijn van Donselaar sees the campaign and the commercial as the part of the concept with the most potential, and because this is also the change that could best be made now, and best tested further afterward. See figure 64 for the updated and improved version of the commercial.

The most important change was to shorten the commercial so that the central message, "Stay true to yourself," comes to the forefront: it now appears at both the beginning and the end. Given how short the attention span of passing young people turned out to be, they need to be able to absorb the message quickly. Part of that shortening meant cutting the opening scene, in which a hand reaches out to the young men; in testing, no one noticed this gesture, and it simply did not land. An even shorter clip would arguably work even better here, though I suspect that would leave too little room to convey what's necessary. An interesting direction for a future iteration rather than something to change now.

Within that shorter commercial, I also gave the With-Holder more presence, by portraying his internal struggle more clearly and having the voices in his head speak to him directly. The reference to "asylum seekers," on the other hand, I left unchanged, since it functions as an attention-grabber that is instantly recognisable both in relation to the situation and to "right-wing" groups.

Finally, I changed the protagonist's closing line from "You'll believe everything you see online" to "You'll believe everything you get told," shifting the focus away from the online/internet angle and bringing the message closer to home.

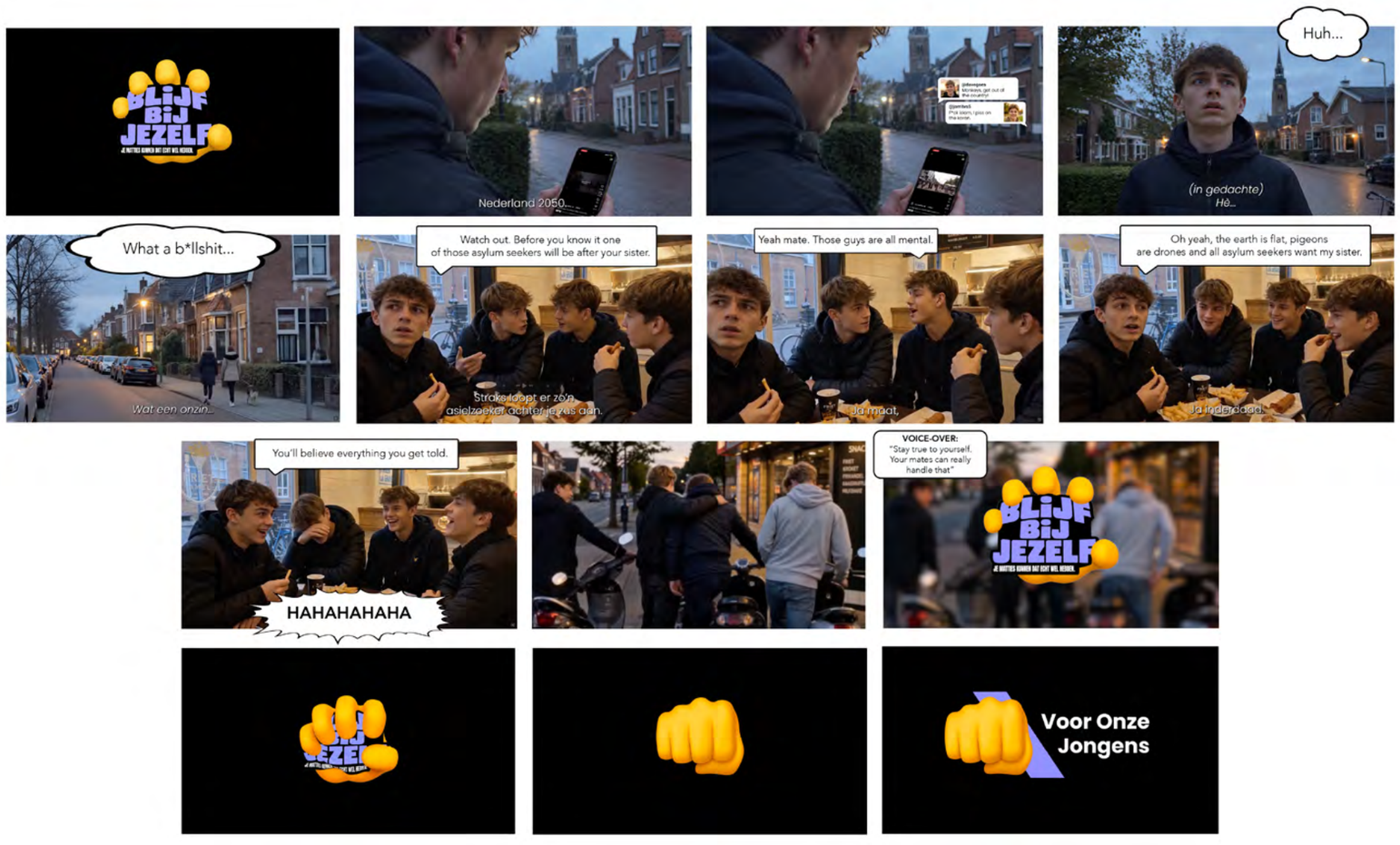



figure 64 - The improved commercial

## 18.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The improvements of chapter 18.2 focus on the one part of the concept that I could revised quite easily. This chapter focuses on recommendations on further implementation or further research.

### 18.3.1 FROM AI-GENERATED TO REAL FOOTAGE

Across nearly every criterion touched by the target-group evaluation, the AI-generated look of the commercial worked against it: a real, filmed video was the single change reviewers asked for most often, and the AI aesthetic undermined credibility even where the message itself landed. The clearest next step is to reshoot the concept with real actors and real footage, and to test whether that alone resolves the persuasion problems the current version's look and feel appeared to cause. This also points to a broader lesson: young people simply do not connect with AI-generated campaigns, and real, filmed video remains best practice. It also opens up a further research direction of its own, worth pursuing beyond this project: a direct comparison of AI-generated and real-life campaigns, to establish more systematically what effect that difference in production has on credibility and persuasion.

### 18.3.2 A CLEARER CALL TO ACTION

The cross-cut findings pointed to a message that felt fragmented, and to the absence of a concrete call to action once the message had landed. The next iteration would benefit from being built around a single core message and a single, concrete next step for the viewer to take, rather than trying to carry the campaign's fuller story within one commercial.

### 18.3.3 SCOPING A REALISTIC PILOT BUDGET

Van Donselaar estimated the real cost of producing and running the concept at roughly €110,000, well above the €70,000 originally planned. Rather than launching the full campaign at once, it would be worth scoping a smaller pilot that fits within a realistic budget, so that VON can decide whether additional fundraising is needed before scaling up, rather than committing to the full scope from the outset.

### 18.3.4 MEASURING EFFECTS BEYOND FIRST REACTIONS

The evaluation in this report captures first reactions: votes on a poll, short conversations on the street, and a single expert's judgement. None of these can show whether the concept actually changes how a person (specifically the With-holder) behaves within his own group over time. A meaningful next step is to design a way of measuring that longer-term effect, so that a future version of this concept can be judged not only on how well it is received, but on whether it does what it set out to do.

### 18.3.5 EXTENDING THE CAMPAIGN TO OTHER GROUPS

A similar campaign aimed at behaviour in more left-leaning groups would be interesting to see. It could show whether the mechanism behind 'Blijf Bij Jezelf', group pressure overriding personal conviction, is specific to this target group or a broader pattern in how peer groups shape political expression. It might also make this campaign feel less like it is specifically targeting young right-wing men, even though it is intentionally framed in a positive way, which could in turn help motivate young men to engage with it. Right now, the young men could feel framed as though they are the only ones with a problem to fix, which risks provoking defiance rather than openness; a broader campaign, focused on more sub-groups, could change that dynamic.

### 18.3.6 A SHIFTING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

I started this project based on the 2023 election results of the Dutch National Parliament; the in-depth results reported by Huijsmans et al. (2026) were not yet available at that point. Those results later showed that relatively many higher-educated young people also voted for anti-democratic parties in 2025. This opens up an interesting follow-up question that this report cannot answer: why is that happening, and does the same social-identity mechanism apply to that group too? My own hypothesis is that the same mechanism is at play here, only mirrored: in these more left-progressive groups, it is the right-wing With-holder who speaks up and, in doing so, leaves the group.

### 18.3.7 WATCHING THE BRAND-MASCULINITY TENSION

Van Donselaar currently sees "Voor Onze Jongens" as a gain for the wider VON brand rather than a dilution of it. That reading is not guaranteed to hold as the sub-brand grows or as its tone evolves, particularly given how closely it sits to questions of masculinity and in-group belonging. It would be worth deliberately monitoring this relationship as the concept scales, so that a brand seen today as complementary does not quietly start to work against Voor Ons Nederland's broader identity.

### 18.3.8 PRODUCING THE PODCAST

The Instagram poll showed that a clear majority of Voor Ons Nederland's own followers would be interested in listening to Met Onze Jongens, a genuinely positive signal for a concept that has so far only existed as an idea. The natural next step is to actually produce it: developing real episodes and testing an actual listening experience rather than the concept alone, so that Voor Ons Nederland can build the track record needed to eventually reach audiences beyond its own supporters.

# 19. LIMITATIONS & DISCUSSION

This chapter looks back critically at the project itself. It first sets out the limitations that shaped what the previous chapters could and could not show, and then discusses a number of choices made along the way.

## 19.1 LIMITATIONS

This section describes the limitations of the project: the constraints and gaps that shaped what could and could not be in this project.

### 19.1.1 REACHING THE ACTUAL TARGET GROUP

The subgroup at the centre of this research (practically educated young men inclined toward anti-democratic voting) was the hardest group to reach throughout the project. Despite contact with around five teachers, outreach through other students, and flyers at vocational schools, I came into contact with roughly fifty young men from this target group, directly and indirectly, but was only able to conduct in-depth interviews with two of them. Much of the deeper understanding in this report therefore rests on those two extensive conversations, complemented by many shorter conversations and observations, for example at Tienskip. I definitely got a good feel for the group, but it remains a limitation on how far the Discover findings on this specific subgroup can be generalised.

The same difficulty returned during the final evaluation. The original aim was to interview at least fifteen practically educated young men aged 16 to 22 with right-wing views; in practice, only ten of the twenty-five participants matched that profile, and the remaining fifteen served as a comparison group instead. This is not a separate limitation so much as the same one appearing twice: the group this project is ultimately about is, by its nature, difficult to access at every stage.

### 19.1.2 A SHALLOW LOOK AT THE MANOSPHERE

I did not do a very deep dive into the manosphere, so my conclusion that it is not a major driver for this target group might be a bit too strong. Attending a meeting on the manosphere later in the project also made me start to shift my stance on this. Recent research from Utrecht University and the Trimbos Institute (De Looze et al., 2026) shows rather worrying declining numbers on acceptance of homosexuality among lower-educated young men specifically. I stand by the direction of the conclusion at the end of chapter 7, but I would now phrase the claim about its overall influence less firmly than this chapter currently does.

### 19.1.3 COMPARING THE FIRST THREE CONCEPTS AT ONCE

I tested the first three campaign concepts at the same time, via Whatsapp. This probably influenced the feedback, because participants could compare them directly rather than judging each one on its own terms. Testing them one by one might have resulted in different insights, and this is worth keeping in mind when reading the Harris profile results in chapter 13.2.

### 19.1.4 DESIGNING FOR A ROLE THAT IS HARD TO IDENTIFY

Although the campaign is meant for the With-holder specifically, I found it difficult to design for that role in isolation. In practice, you only really know someone is a With-holder after speaking with them one-on-one; it is not something that can be read off a group from the outside. As a result, I ended up designing more for young men in general than exclusively for With-holders, which is a looser fit with the design challenge in chapter 13 than originally intended.

### 19.1.5 EVALUATING WITHOUT A PROFESSIONAL SET-UP

The evaluation itself was run using an iPad and a portable speaker rather than proper realistic digital screen. This is a limitation in its own right: the setup likely drew some attention away from the concept itself, and participants may have been reacting partly to the improvised set-up rather than purely to the campaign material. A more polished,

professional set-up could plausibly have produced somewhat different scores while the focus was then maybe more concentrated on the subject of the video.

### 19.1.6 AN AI-GENERATED VIDEO AFFECTING CREDIBILITY
The video used in the evaluation was AI-generated, and this almost certainly pulled down its perceived credibility. Since credibility is one of the explicit evaluation criteria, this is not a minor detail, it directly affects one of the scores the concept is judged on. A professionally produced version of the same video, with real-life actors, might score meaningfully better on this specific dimension than what was tested.

### 19.1.7 NOT BEING ABLE TO TEST THE PODCAST
The podcast itself could not actually be tested during the evaluation. This means I still do not have a solid answer to whether it is something that is genuinely wanted, as opposed to something that sounded good in concept but was never put in front of them directly. This remains an open gap rather than a validated part of the concept.

### 19.1.8 ADVERTISING THE CAMPAIGN
I did not verify whether the campaign could actually be advertised on Instagram or similar platforms, given the restrictions around political content. This is a limitation of the implementation plan: if paid placement turns out to be restricted, the plan would depend far more heavily on organic reach and on VON's own existing audience than currently assumed.

## 19.2 DISCUSSION
This section discusses a number of choices made throughout the project, and reflects on how they shaped the concept.

### 19.2.1 CHOOSING SIMPLICITY OVER DEPTH
I deliberately kept the intervention simple. I see many design projects in this space ending up with complex workshops or programmes, whereas I wanted to make something that could realistically be implemented and that stayed understandable and close to the target group. That simplicity probably comes at the cost of some nuance. It might be worth linking this to Jesse Frederik's view on radical-right voting: not that people are worse off than before, but that they simply resent the government, and that they equally resent asylum migration, a resentment he argues is stoked by politicians (Frederik, 2026). Whether a simpler campaign or a more intensive, facilitated intervention would move this target group further is itself a question worth exploring rather than assuming.

### 19.2.2 KEEPING THE PROBLEM WHOLE RATHER THAN SPLITTING IT INTO CLUSTERS
The Discover phase was built up from a set of separate factors rather than layering the contextual factors on top of one another into tighter clusters. This was a deliberate choice. I wanted to keep the story big and rich, and to preserve the sense of a genuinely complex problem in which the target group plays by far the largest role. Flattening that into the kind of neat clusters more common in design practice would, I believe, not have had the effect I was after, and I am still convinced of that. I also doubt it would have led me to as clearly defined a Define phase and design challenge as the one I ended up with.

### 19.2.3 NOT GOING DEEPER INTO SOCIAL MEDIA USE
I deliberately did not build a whole chapter around the social media use of these young men, even though it would have fit naturally in the Discover phase. That was a conscious choice, not an oversight. After speaking with Quita Muis, I started to see that framing social media as the all-encompassing cause behind these young men's political attitudes is itself part of the public narrative this project set out to question, and that social media can have a positive effect on young people just as easily as a negative one: the negative effects that dominate public debate struck me, from her account, as considerably overstated. When I later looked more closely at their own social media use myself, I recognised the same pattern she had described. I did not want to get pulled into the "social media is the problem" narrative simply because it is the easier or more familiar story to tell. That means this report says less about what these young men actually see online, and how it moves them, than it could have. A fuller account of that might have added a layer this project is missing, but going further into it would also have meant building on an assumption I had already come to doubt.

### 19.2.4 GROUPING YOUNG MEN TOGETHER
Throughout this report I have often treated the target group, and in particular the right-leaning subgroup, as more uniform than it actually is. There is always nuance within a group this size, and not every young man in it fits the patterns described here equally well. I made this simplification deliberately: treating the group as one coherent whole made the design process more manageable and the findings easier to act on. Accounting for every individual nuance was simply not feasible within the scope of this project, but it is worth being explicit that this was a trade-off, not an oversight.

### 19.2.5 NOT EXPLORING MORE INTERVENTION DIRECTIONS
I did not explore many alternative intervention directions in real depth. In my mind, the campaign already felt like the strongest available response to the research findings, and that conviction meant I spent less time deliberately weighing other directions than I probably could have. Spending more time consciously working through alternatives might have sharpened the final choice further, but at that stage of the project it did not feel like the right way to spend the time I had.

### 19.2.6 CHOOSING AN AI-GENERATED VIDEO
Even though, the AI-generated video showed it limitations (chapter 19.1.6). Producing the commercial with AI-generated video and voice was a deliberate choice, and one that sits slightly outside the strict scope of the design challenge. I wanted to test, on purpose, how young men in the evaluation would respond to a video made this way, and whether that method could make a real impact. Not just because it let me test the concept without a production budget or crew, but because AI generation is faster, cheaper and more efficient, and could plausibly become a tactic VON itself uses for future campaigns. The project has since spoken directly to that question: the evaluation showed that participants picked up on the AI-generated nature of the video, and that this worked against the sender's credibility across several criteria. So the finding is that AI-generated video is, at least for now, more of an obstacle than a shortcut for this target group and this kind of message. That is a useful conclusion for VON's future tactics, even though it may have cost this specific commercial some of its strength in the evaluation.

### 19.2.7 VON'S CAUTION AROUND A MASCULINE IDENTITY
One further point of discussion maybe concerns the organisation this project was carried out for, rather than the concept itself. Voor Ons Nederland has indicated that it does not want its work, including this project, to become "only about men": a campaign or brand that leans too explicitly on masculinity risks costing VON the backing of other societal partners whose support its broader mission depends on. I understand that concern. VON operates as a coalition-building movement rather than a single-issue organisation, and a foundation seen as championing "the men's cause" specifically risks being read as taking a side, which could cost it partners its other work still needs.

At the same time, I think the opposite pull is at least as strong, and arguably the most important asset for my concept. If the mechanism behind Blijf bij Jezelf depends on the sender being trusted rather than read as an out-group voice, then a sender needs to present itself visibly and unapologetically as speaking from and to men. Voor Onze Jongens already moves in that direction through its tone, logo and philosophy.

So I recognise why VON, as an organisation that depends on a broad coalition, would want to keep some distance from an explicitly masculine identity. But for the effectiveness of this specific concept, I believe that distance is more likely to cost credibility than to protect it, which leaves VON with a genuine trade-off between what serves this campaign and what serves the organisation as a whole.

# 20. PERSONAL REFLECTION

In this chapter, I, the researcher and designer behind this project, take you through my process and my reflection on my own work.

## 20.1 THE PROCESS: CARRYING RESPONSIBILITY ALONE

One of the most important things I've learned in this project is that I am very hard on myself and strongly dependent on other people's opinions. That combination isn't ideal when you're carrying out a project on your own: a project where you bear full responsibility and where you can't simply discuss feedback with a team. On many occasions (mostly at the end of the project), almost every piece of feedback on the project felt like criticism of me as a person. That was difficult, and it's also something that has really only surfaced now, during my graduation project.

Before this, my studies had always come reasonably easily to me, especially in team settings. In a team you get continuous feedback and the responsibility for the project is shared. Carrying out this project alone, especially as it "grew up," sometimes felt like being a single father to an unhealthy baby, while everyone around me kept telling me I should be raising it differently.

I've also learned that I think in black and white. Things are either very good or very bad: if something is fine, it quickly feels bad; if something is good, it feels like it's not quite good enough; only if something is really good, is it actually good. That makes it hard to feel satisfaction, let alone express it. Still, even though my initial expectations, which in hindsight were probably too high from the very start, weren't met, I am genuinely proud of myself: I finished the project and never really stopped along the way. That's something worth holding on to, together with the lesson that I need to learn to more often settle for "this is fine" instead of only for "this is amazing." I've learned that you can't talk yourself into stress resilience; you have to feel it, and that doesn't happen automatically.

So I'm genuinely glad it's over, but at least as glad that the process has taught me something about myself.

## 20.2 WORKING METHOD: INSTINCT OVER METHOD

At the same time, I've learned that I'm not very structured as a designer. I'm not really one for fixed design methods; I need to feel a design and act on instinct. That makes designing more enjoyable, but also harder: without a worked-out method, it's more difficult to properly substantiate and defend your own design choices. With what I know now, I probably should have embraced these methods a bit more, so that the design would have rested more firmly on substantiated theory rather than mostly on my own gut feeling. Perhaps I would then also have recognised the biased perspective from the previous section in myself sooner and more sharply.

## 20.3 PERSPECTIVE AND ASSUMPTIONS

Looking back, I'm actually quite proud of how I approached the problem in this project. Where the assignment is, at its core, about protecting democracy against parties that want to tear it down, my own focus was mainly on the individual: not so much on the problem itself and the disastrous consequences it could have, but on the person who is among the biggest drivers of this problem: the vocationally educated young man. My idea was therefore always to understand this person specifically: I wanted to know what drives him, and what the biggest trigger really is.

I did this from a perspective I already held before the project even started. That perspective assumes that people don't think for very long, or particularly carefully at all, about their voting choice or about the message they put out into the world, but that it's mainly about their position within the groups closest to them, and how they position themselves relative to that through the things they say. From the start, that bias had both a shadow side and a bright side. The shadow side: it may have kept me from considering multiple other explanations for their radical-right views, voting behaviour, or behaviour in general. The bright side: it actually gave me the energy to broaden my perspective on this issue and to design from it.

So I entered the research phase with a fairly biased perspective, and I think that perspective ended up shaping my final concept as well. That perspective meant that I didn't believe what these boys say is something they truly, deep down, believe themselves; I think it's more likely that it's been talked into them, and that the group pressure they feel plays a large role in their behaviour.

## 20.4 BRAM, THE DESIGNER, ENGINEER AND COLLEAGUE

Alongside, it's just also important to reflect on myself as a designer, as a future engineer and future colleague. Anyone who has read this chapter up to this point might think the process consisted mostly of struggle, but that picture isn't entirely accurate. In this project I also discovered what I truly enjoy, and one thing clearly stands out: making a real connection with the people you're designing for, the people you can mean something to. The talking, the understanding, the laughing. Teaching people something, and learning something from them in return. That's what gives me energy, what makes me feel good, and what I'm therefore good at too.

I got to experience that many times in this project, starting with the interviews with the boys: something I genuinely looked forward to, and which I came alive from every time the moment arrived. I learned to truly listen, to stay open in these kinds of conversations, and not to be afraid to ask certain things. But perhaps the most important lesson is this: if you really want to get something out of someone, you have to enter the conversation without prejudice and stay kind, whatever the other person says, and keep seeking connection. That's what I get a kick out of, and something I definitely want to do more of in the future. I've also noticed that I really enjoy making visuals and the accompanying photography; something I'd like to keep developing



later on. My dream of working as a campaign strategist for social-cause campaigns hasn't faded, and it's still the field I'll be applying to once this is finished.

## 20.5 COLLABORATION WITH VOOR ONS NEDERLAND

I carried out the project alone, but that does not mean I was alone. I spent a lot of time at the Voor Ons Nederland office with the great people there, and I experienced that collaboration as very enjoyable. The Voor Ons Nederland team is one I can definitely see myself working in again later. Worth mentioning: alongside my graduation project, I also spent one day a week doing other work for VON, things like designing stickers, putting together videos for their social media, joining street interviews, and helping think through concepts. I also enjoyed this thoroughly, because again, it was something I would do in a team and thus we could burst off eachother's energy.

It also showed me that a designer can be of real value in a working field like this. A foundation such as Voor Ons Nederland is inherently fluid: it constantly has to reinvent itself, nothing is set in stone, and everything keeps moving, which means the people in it have to stay creative and keep coming up with new ideas to make an impact. Here too, I felt that my design background could be, and perhaps already was, of real value.

## 20.6 WHAT I TAKE WITH ME

What I take away from this above all is that satisfaction doesn't announce itself to me on its own; sometimes I have to consciously let it in. I'm proud that I finished this project and never really gave up along the way, even though my own (in hindsight too high) expectations weren't met. That combination, being proud while also learning to more often settle for "this is good" instead of only for "this is amazing," is something I'm taking with me as an ongoing piece of work.

Professionally, I'm taking away something more positive: I now know that I get energy from genuine connection with the people I design for, as I experienced during the interviews: the listening, entering conversations without prejudice, and continuing to seek connection. I want to keep making that same kind of connection through imagery too: making visuals and photographs is something I've proven to be good at, and something I'd like to keep developing, because above all it brings me joy.

# 21. EPILOGUE

Thank you for reading the report of my graduation report.

As you may have read in my reflection, this project asked a great deal of me. Not only because the subject is complex, but mainly because I constantly had to keep the group of young men in the back of my mind. I wanted to make something that would genuinely make them think, and perhaps even change. That's difficult, precisely because these boys aren't easily motivated.

This is a group I myself once belonged to and at sometimes still belong to. Boys who are insecure but act certain. Boys who sometimes kick against things, not always because they fundamentally disagree with them, but because kicking earns recognition. The group laughs, you get attention, you belong. Often it isn't about the question: what do I actually think of this? But about: what does everyone else think of me? Who shouts the loudest? Who makes the funniest joke? Who seems the most certain? Who gets the most attention?

That's what makes this target group complicated. A lot of what they say doesn't come purely from themselves, but is strongly shaped by the group around them. At the same time, many boys within that group feel exactly the same way, which keeps reinforcing the behaviour. The moment they feel that something is being demanded of them, that someone is imposing something on them or correcting them, they shut down. Sometimes they respond even more extremely, partly because of that group pressure. You say no, so I do yes.

That's why you can't simply tell these boys what to think. You have to reach them. And that only works if there's trust.

What I learned in my conversations is that with these boys, listening is often more powerful than correcting. Not because everything they say is okay. Some statements are harsh, unnuanced or hurtful. But if you jump on them immediately, they no longer have to listen to themselves. Then it becomes a fight between you and them. If you let them finish talking, something else happens. Then they hear themselves. Then they sometimes notice for themselves that their story doesn't hold up, that it was mainly a stance, a voice that wanted to belong.

What struck me is that many of these boys aren't used to positive recognition. They're startled by a compliment from another man. That says something. Joris Luyendijk said something on De Claudia Show that stuck with me: in progressive Netherlands, almost nothing positive is ever said about men. And I find myself asking: why not, really? These boys mostly hear what they're doing wrong. They're lazy, far-right or misogynistic. But if you only approach young men as a risk, you push them further away, even if that's not your intention.

That's the tension at the heart of this subject. On one hand, there are people who are justifiably hurt by what these boys say. On the other hand, there's the question: what actually works if you want to reach them? My answer isn't that anything goes. My answer is that we need to better understand where it comes from. A lot of what these boys say doesn't come from deep conviction, but from insecurity, group pressure and the need to belong somewhere. And let's be honest, don't we all feel this need? And maybe it suits us just fine, because our opinion happens to be the one held by governing Netherlands.

I saw this happen very clearly at Tienskip. I was chatting with a group of boys about an upcoming gay pride event in Stadskanaal. They thought this whole thing was nonsense and said things that struck me, things I would never say myself. Still, I let them talk. Not because I agreed with them, but because I wanted to understand where it came from. At one point, a teacher came and stood nearby. He started correcting them, gave his opinion and said he found their statements strange. You could see immediately what happened: the boys felt unheard and shut down. The conversation stopped. For me, that moment showed exactly why this approach doesn't work.

That's why we need to make room for real conversations. Conversations in which people let each other finish speaking, take each other's concerns seriously, and don't immediately pin someone down on the worst thing they've said. I saw a good example of that in the conversation between Rob Jetten and Jayden on Eva. Not because they agreed, but because there was room for discomfort, difference and humanity.

That's the last thing I wanted to say.



# 22. THE USE OF AI

In this chapter I aim to illustrate how I made use of AI throughout this graduation project. For this project I generally used three different AI chat tools: ChatGPT, Claude and GenSpark. Within ChatGPT I mainly used the GPT-5.6 model, and within Claude the Sonnet model. For GenSpark, I made use of several different AI models depending on the purpose, which are specified per example below.

I used these AI chats for multiple purposes, including:

- Writing text
- Generating images
- Generating video
- Sparring on ideas
- Analysing and processing data
- Analysing reports

Each of these purposes is briefly explained below, illustrated with examples actually used in this project.

### WRITING TEXT

I mainly used AI to rewrite text and spar about text I had already written myself, primarily using ChatGPT and Claude. In instances I also used AI to rewrite complete chapters as inspiration. Examples of this process are shown in figure 65.

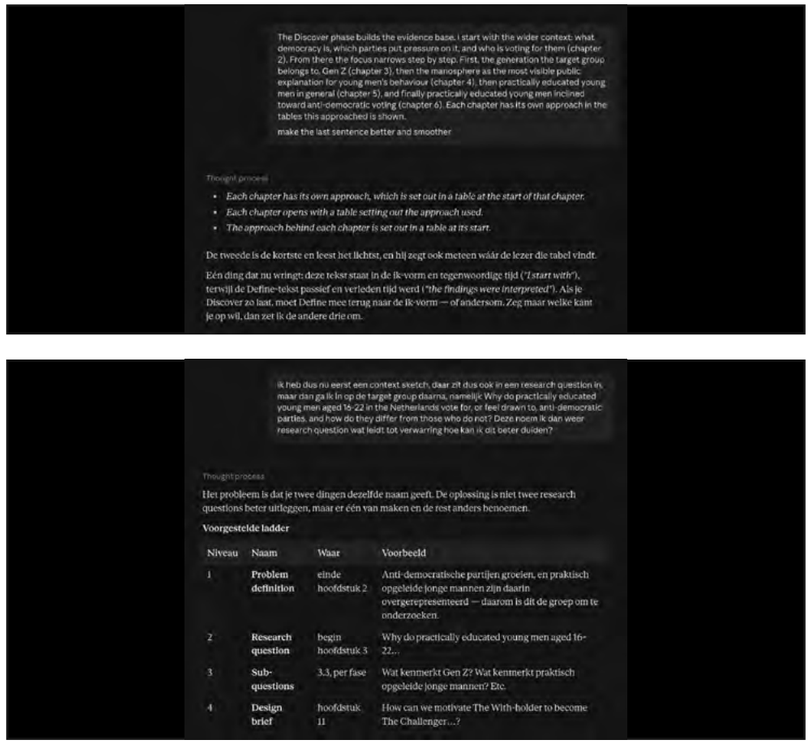



figure 65 - Example of a prompt for writing text

### CREATING IMAGES

I used the AI model Nano Banana 2 in GenSpark and ChatGPT to generate several of the images used in this report. This included the Playmobil figures and the real-life people featured in the campaign, as well as logos such as the Voor Onze Jongens logo. Examples of this process are  shown in figures 66.

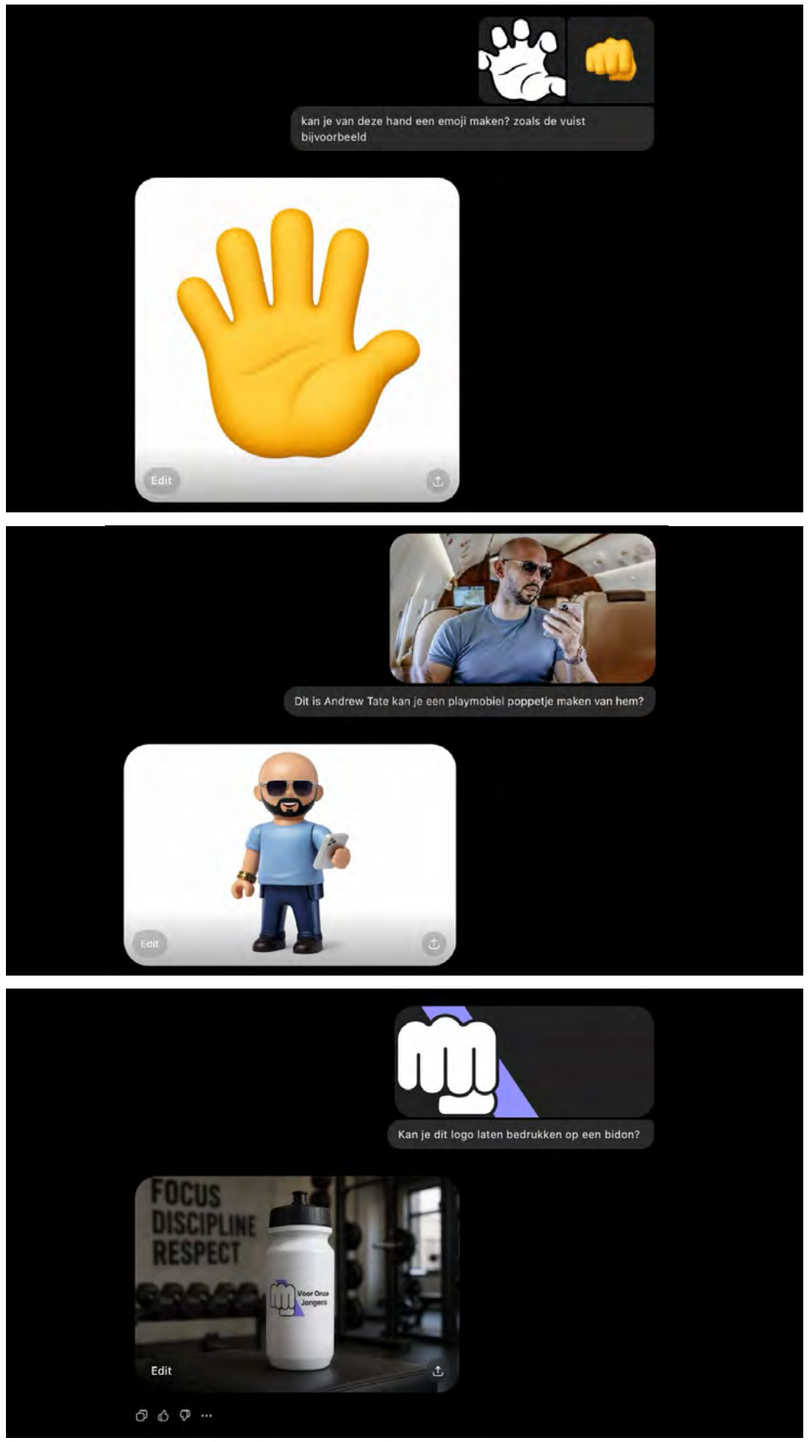



figure 66 - Example of a prompt for creating images

### CREATING VIDEO AND SOUND

I used GenSpark to generate the video commercial for the campaign. For the video itself I used AI-models Seedance 2.5 and Gemini Veo 3.1, and for the sound I used ElevenLabs, both within GenSpark. An example of prompting video generation is seen in figure 67.

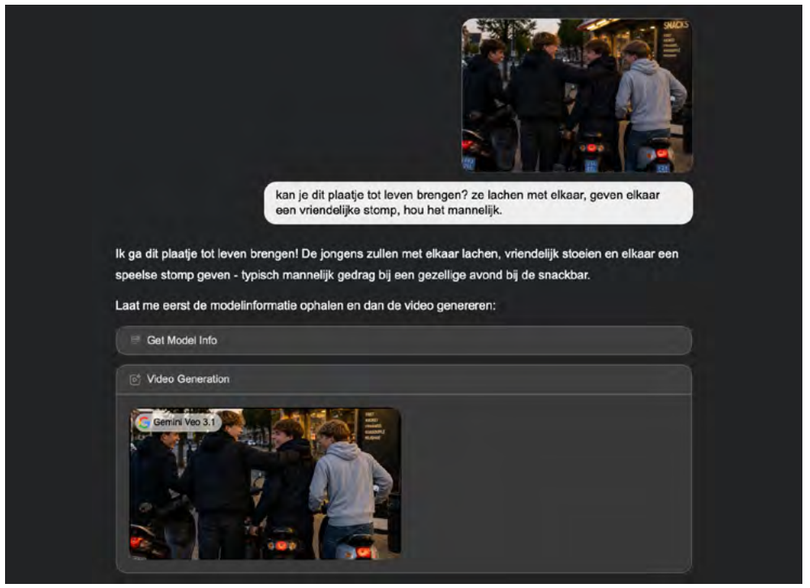



figure 67 - Example of a prompt for generating video

### SPARRING ON IDEAS

I used Claude and ChatGPT to spar on ideas throughout the project. An example of this sparring process is shown in figure 68.

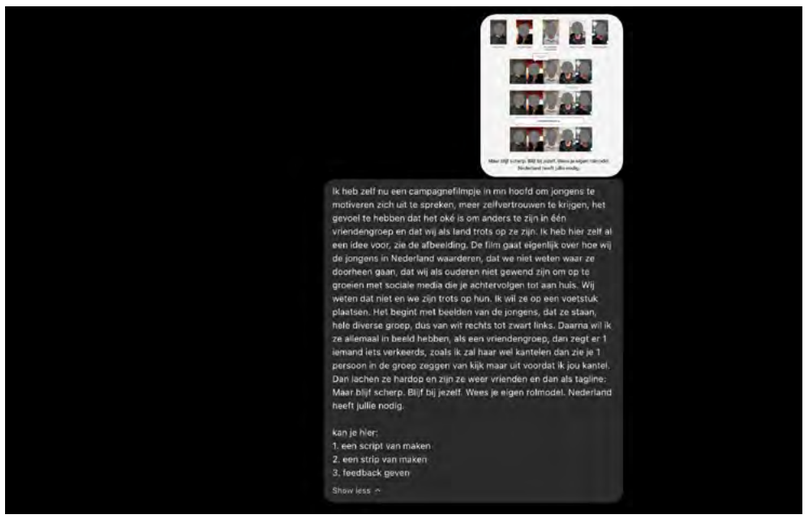



figure 68 - Example of a prompt for sparring on ideas

## ANALYSING AND PROCESSING DATA

I used ChatGPT and Claude to analyse data such as the interview notes and clean-up handwritten notes. Examples of this are shown in figure 69.

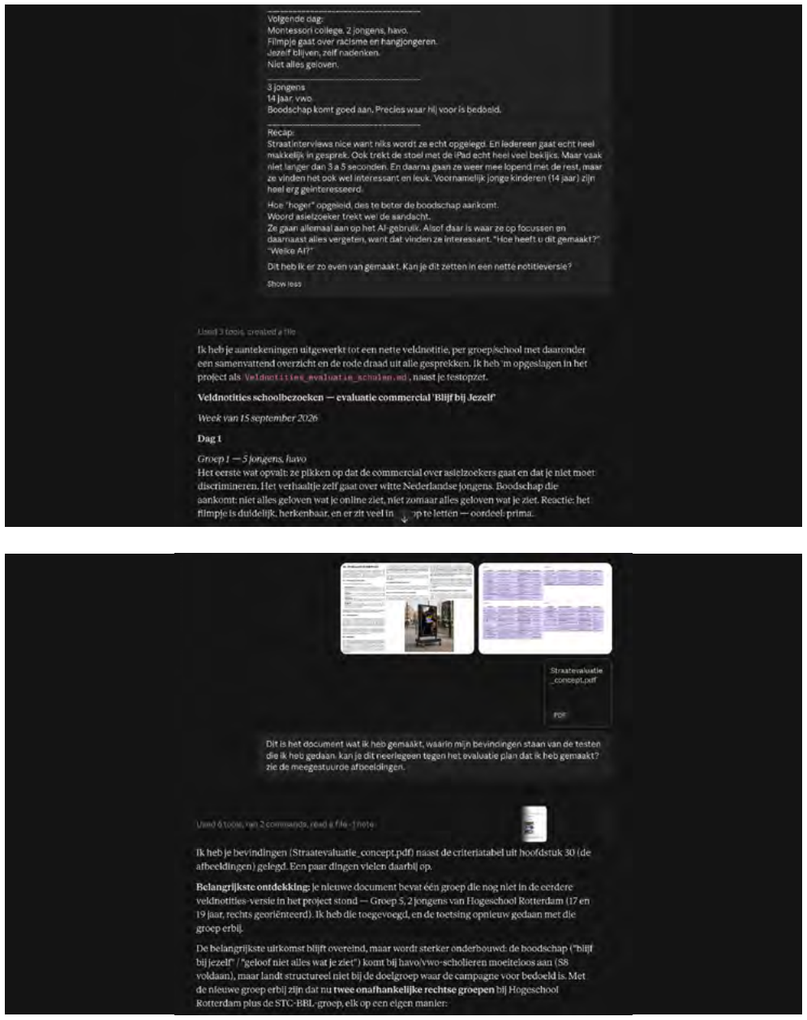



figure 69 - Example of a prompt for analysing and processing data

## ANALYSING REPORTS

Mainly during the research phase, I used AI to analyse and process scientific articles, news articles and other reports, as well as to find information specifically relevant to my project. Examples of this are shown in figure 70.

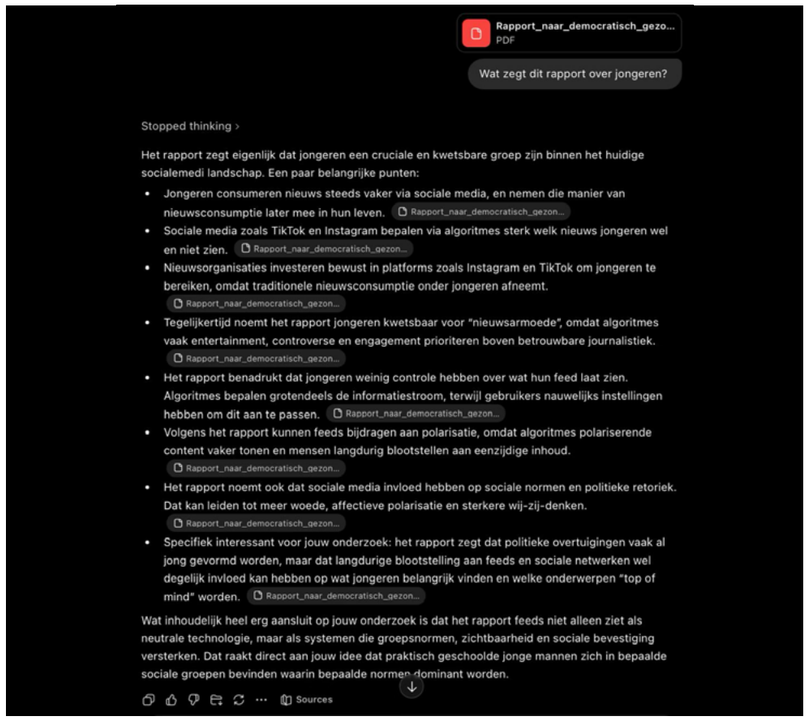



figure 70 - Example of a prompt for analysing reports

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figure 15.
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