

## APPENDIX A: Interview Protocol

### Open questions

[Note: The interview protocol is structured around the two pillars of Study 1: How do politicians **generate a perception** of the people, their views and opinions (1) and how do they **refer to** the people in their communication (2)]

#### SOURCE

1. How do you form your perception of public opinion? This has already been addressed in the survey: you were asked to rank potential sources of information. Could you reflect a bit on what your thinking process was when you were ranking them?  
**How do you come to know what issues the public is concerned about** at any point of time?

*Offer, if needed: What I mean is, do you ever do this by talking to citizens directly (whether that's F2F or online) or do you use research on public opinion or other sources (IF NEEDED: media, journalists, other politicians, advisors, interest groups...)? [Offer as few options as possible and only in cases where respondent seems 'stuck']*

*PROBE 1: WHY do you prefer (the ones they list as the most important)? [Do you trust some more than others? Are they more reliable?]*

*PROBE 2: How do you select what's important? You must get much more information than you as for/need.*

*PROBE 3: How accurate do you think these sources are? Do you think that everyone is represented equally – or is this even important?*

#### REPRESENTATION

1. We've spoken a bit about public opinion, now, but, in a way, this assumes one uniform **"public"** [that holds those opinions]. When you assess public opinion in all the ways we've just discussed, **who do you think this is most representative of?**

*PROBE 1: Are some segments of the population over- or under-represented, and does this even present a problem? In reality, can/should everyone be heard?*

*PROBE 2: Sometimes, in political catchphrases, we hear a reference to the term "us" or "we" – Let me give an example: Clinton, for example, used the slogan "Putting People first", Obama's catchphrase was "Yes we can", even Thomas Jefferson used the phrase "We are all Republicans" ...*

*Who do you think this "us" is? Or the people are in Clinton's "Putting People first? Is this something you can relate to in the context of The Netherlands, your party and your constituents?*

*PROBE 3: Do you feel like you should represent all the people or some more than others (like those who voted for you)?*

2. Can you describe the People you represent and perhaps name three characteristics they possess?

*PROBE: Do you think the people you represent are different from the people other politicians/parties represent?*

## EXECUTIVE POWER

Last question:

1. How does this knowledge of what the public *wants*, and what the People's *will* is, and *who* those people are, translate **into the way you address the people**?

*PROBE: You were presented with a few statements where you had to guess the public opinion. How would you use the knowledge of the Public's will on any of those statements in your communication about this issue (when you take a stance on this issue) to the public?*

*[Political Communication = addressing the people; campaigning, any other form of communicating political content to the people, not within politics itself]*

2. When you think about communicating to your electorate as a whole, is there a "right" way of communication with your audience... What I mean is, how important is the **style** of communication when you address the people? And does your perception of the public opinion (that you've learned about from the sources we spoke about) influence the way you communicate with them?

*PROBE: How do you make sure that you reach your target audience? What role does **the media** play, here?*

**APPENDIX B: Representative data**

**Table 1:** Dimensions, Themes, Categories and Data

Theoretical Dimensions, Second-order themes and First-Order Categories	Representative Data
<b>PEOPLE vs PUBLIC</b>	A1. “My day always begins with reading an overview of the news. Then you know what the big topics are.”
1. <i>Trends/Agenda</i>	A2. “Independent journalism doesn’t exist anymore. Does the press know public opinion more than me? No, you can’t let yourself be fooled by that.”
A. Traditional media as “country thermometer” (unrepresentative indicators of <i>what</i> the public thinks about)	B1. “Social media are nowadays a source for certain groups to express themselves. But it is not a representative group that is active there.”
B. Social Media: closer to the people (unrepresentative indicators of <i>how</i> the public feels)	B2. “[On social media are] those who are complainers, they find fault with everything. And this group is particularly good at arousing certain themes that the average citizen isn’t engaged with at all. And then you get a strongly distorted picture.”
2. <i>Specialization</i>	B3. “Twitter is the most important medium for me, but Twitter is for the in-crowd. That is to say, mainly for the politicians and journalists themselves. And a few opinion leaders. But that is only a very small world you are a part of.”
C. More extensive information: based on MP/party portfolio (and is pro-active)	C1. “I do [topic x], so for me, speaking to the experts in that field is very important And I receive a media report on [topic x], so I read the newspapers about that topic.”
D. Deciding what is important: based on experience and “gut feeling”	C2. “My subject is [ topic x] and I have worked in it my whole life. Well, 33 years, so half of my life! And in that time, I have developed diverse views and can relate the things that happen now fairly easily to the knowledge that I already have.”
D. Deciding what is important: based on experience and “gut feeling”	D1. “Whether it is talking to people or assessing what information sources are trustworthy: it’s a bit of a feeling, a bit of experience that you have. You know your feelings, it’s not always rational.”
D. Deciding what is important: based on experience and “gut feeling”	D2. “look, I am someone who works at the intersection of politics and society for over 30 years. I’m a political scientist, so I know quite a bit about one thing, quite a bit more about another. I just assess the information on the basis of what I know.”
3. <i>Democratic Representation</i>	E1. “The best source is speaking to people. That does take up a great deal of time and is least effective in getting a quick overview of [...] what the public wants.”
E. Micro-level: one-on-one contact with people is the preferred and most important source	

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E2. “Saturdays, at the sport games of my children, I’ll try to tell or ask something on the sidelines. Or waiting in line at the butcher, I’ll shoot the breeze a bit. I try to do that as much as possible.”

E3. “I really don’t think that there are sources that represent *the* public opinion. Public opinion is made up of a lot of different sources and I use all of them.”

F. Macro-level: MPs must justify People’s opinions in the context of representing a larger public (made up of many opinions)

F1. “Look, public opinion, I believe, is just a cacophony of conflicting voices. Our society is incredibly multiform and a certain part of the population is better at bringing their points out into the open than another.”

F2. “It is, of course, a really important interplay: you have to listen to the opinion of the residents but at the same time you are no jukebox! It’s not like ‘you ask, we play’. You also have to present new visions, new ideas, things people haven’t thought about.”

### CONCEPT vs REALITY

#### 4. *The People: an irrelevant concept*

G. Anti-pluralistic concept (i.e. ignores diversity that makes up the population)

G1. “I have some trouble with the understanding of the People. Especially in the populist corner you see that they present themselves as the exclusive representatives of those people. But ‘the People’ is as diverse as it can get and I think we need to keep acknowledging that diversity.”

H. Invented concept: too abstract to mean anything and incompatible with the ‘real world’

H1. “The People don’t exist. Because if you generalize then you exclude and I think that there are a lot of people in The Netherlands that don’t feel represented.”

H2. “We pretend to speak on behalf of the People, you know, but the People, here, is invented. Who they are, but especially who they are not.”

#### 5. *The People: a relevant concept*

I. Silent engine (credited with being instrumental in keeping the country running but mostly unheard)

I1. “The People means everyone that lives in the Netherlands. Everyone is the People.”

I2. “Instead of the concept of the people, we have the ‘silent engine’. Those are the people who don’t necessarily send out five Tweets a day but who are just teachers, police men, nurses, or... well, keep society going.”

J. Divide between the 90% (the People that need leadership) and the 10% (the elites that can take care of themselves)

J1. “We can certainly relate to the term of ‘The People’ because we try to create a sense of belonging – *you* can belong to [the party] as well. We are here got the 90% who are listened to the least.”

J2. “I think it’s good that there is more attention to groups that often do not feel heard and are then

represented. Thus, if you speak about the People versus the elite, then I think it's really good that there is attention to the people."

J3. "I think that we can relate to [the concept of The People], because what we stand for is good education, good care, those basic principles in which a large part of society has interest. And within our party we often discuss the contrast between 90% of the people who just work, who receive a wage, and often have debt, for example, but still want good education and good care. That is 90% of the people irrespective of their specific problems. And with this big set of interests, these shared interests, so to speak, we can speak of the interest of The People, in my opinion."

6. *The 'ordinary' electorate*

K. Specific Values

(e.g. hard-working, good, just, vulnerable, concerned about his community, tries hard)

K1. "Our voters are the hardworking Dutchmen. The large middle-class. Just people who have to work hard, hard working."

K2. "Our voters are people of good will, they are hard-working and value that things happen justly."

L. Specific Demographics

(e.g. married old couple; student; nurse; rural or sub-urban living location)

L1. "The People are the family who lives in Alphen aan de Rijn, Trilgras 47 (example of a rural Dutch address). That is the situation in which most Dutch people are in."

L2. "There is a difference between the city and the counties. I come from the countryside, myself, and I have resisted against the urban culture that dominates The Hague. A lot of politicians come from the Hague or Amsterdam, they are overrepresented and they heavily impact the tone of the debate. So I try to represent the voices from the counties."

L3. "You don't speak on behalf of all the Dutch citizens. You can say that you *want* to, or that it's your *ambition*, to be a representative of the People, but in practice you normally stand for your supporters. We are, of course a fairly elitist party. Our supporters care about the environment, are higher educated and young."

L4. "We clearly make a choice that we, in our political viewpoints, stand for the 90%, the greatest common denominator of the normal Dutch citizen. Not so much the very wealthy, but the working people, or those looking for work, living on social security, with lower income, poor, older couples, students."

**STRATEGY & STYLE**

7. *Marketing*

M1. "We really use the public opinion consciously, here. We really try to translate our policy debates, so that

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- M. Translating politics into something useful for the people (for transparency and activation of voters)
- people understand, like ‘ok, it means this and that for me’. Even with something as difficult as the finance sector, you can still say ‘ok, this will mean something for the people, it will mean something for you mortgage approval, for your bank fees, etc.’.”
- M2. “For a politician, people have no idea what you do. I’m doing this for over a year, and they still don’t. Nobody knows what I do and it’s important that they do know because of two reasons: 1) you want to be re-elected and 2) you also want people to know where to find you if they have concerns about something.”
- M3. “We have an activating style of communication because people of course want to know what your viewpoints are, but you also have to activate them. Politicians highly overestimate themselves and how society looks at them. If you walk around here [the parliament], you have a feeling that you are the center of the world, but that’s not true. I’m debating something about fiscal policy on Thursday night, but I also know that that the people are sitting on terraces watching the Belgium-England game.”
- N. Social Media: short and direct best for wider population (slogans, tweets, etc)
- N1. “Social media are gaining so, that is becoming more important in reaching the public. You have to anticipate the changing trends and say ‘fine, let’s post a picture on Instagram, instead of issuing a press release’. It has to be attractive or there has to be a twist, so that people share it.”
- N2. “We noticed that short blogs are read more often. Images work even better than text.”
- N3. “I always use slogans, I like to think of slogans, To communicate what something is about briefly and to the point. You look for something that is appealing and something that the people can relate to.”
- N4. “Communication... I mean, yes, via social media. There are so many means for that nowadays. I notice that in my party as well: nice films, really short and powerful – not with long texts, that doesn’t reach. Everything has to be quick, in one little sentence. I’m not very good at it, but I have to do it because it also has to be sold to society.”
8. *Personal Connection*
- O. Style needs to adapt to your target audience (professionals in the field vs. public engagements)
- O1. “We just speak everyday language. Nowadays populist parties are right-wing, but when I came to parliament some time ago, we were the populists because we spoke everyday language. Others would say ‘you play up to them’ but no, not at all. I’m not going to speak extra ‘Jip-en-Janneke’ language, that’s for certain. But I’m just going to explain it the way it is.”

O2. "I think you should use different types of communication for different target groups. Especially when I stand in front of an audience full of doctors un training, well then I speak differently than when I have to say something to the heartland. So you have to be aware of who your audience is and make a connection with your style."

O3. "The people that make up the core of the silent engine are not the ones we hear most about. So you have to know who you are representing when you speak. The leader of [a conservative party] is always polite and straight. But our Prime Minister is much looser. He says things like "oh, piss off" and others say that's wrong. But you have to appeal to a certain part of the population."

P. Remaining authentic is very important (e.g. 'be you')

P1. "Saying what people want to hear, playing up to them, is a nasty business, I think. It's negative populism. But there is also positive populism: just being clear and explicit and that is very important, I think. It's important that you are authentic because we already have so much sameness. How do you make sure you are authentic? You just are who you are!"

P2. "I will not adapt, just like that. I have to be more critical. You cannot make compromises with yourself. You have to simply state what you stand for and then look afterwards at how it compares. It is not that the public opinion influences my style of communication, but the other way around! The people that vote for you will like what you have to say, so it's a good fit."

P2. "I think that as a politician you need to be clear about which political movement you stand for. And this can mean that you sometimes have to take on the less popular standpoints. Or taking standpoints that do not conform with the mainstream in the political opinion. But you should primarily reason from your party's ideology and party program, and that is the basis from which you should communicate. Even if it is not what dominates the public opinion."

9. *Trust*

Q. Responsibility to listen but also to lead (people want to be heard but also want leadership)

Q1. "The public opinion doesn't need to be right. It's just the theme that is important, that is the public opinion, then. And I don't have the ambition to serve the public opinion. And I'm not burdened with 'Oh God, hopefully that percentage of my voters will agree with that.' I'm not concerned with that."

Q2. "You always have to listen. It's not like leadership is just making decisions and not listening. I'm convinced that society wants leadership. I think that people want decisions to be made, at some point. People want

leadership. But you know, that leadership, it also means trusting someone. People find that important.”

Q3. If the entire public opinion would say ‘well, we support [policy opposed to party policy]. We would *not* go along with this. Rather, we would think “Oh, OK, the public opinion indicates this, but we stand way over here. So how will we get the public on our side?’ Politics is not only listening to public opinion, but also to a great extent influencing public opinion.”

Q4. “In politics you have to show leadership. Especially in light of the differences in public opinion and values. You are here for that purpose and people expect that from you. You don’t need to return to the people all the time. You are given a certain mandate and you have to live up to it. The [political] elite has become a bad word, but I think it’s super important – that there is an elite that makes the decisions.”

Q5. “Most of the time it is weighing interests and a struggle between interests. And then you make choices and with those choices you build up your political position and afterwards you create a narrative of why that was the better approach.”

R. Communication as important tool to set yourself apart from the abstract ‘politics’

R1. “You have to be active and show that you are committed to the voter. This requires effort, but as a representative of the people, you are totally not in contact with the people when you are here [in The Hague]. So you have to make sure that you do not estrange from the voter, so you have to bring across what you did when you’re not here.”

R2. “I believe, that unless you’re a very famous politician who gets a lot of attention on social media, you have to go to the organizations directly and tell them what you do. Then the people make a connection and think ‘Hey, that’s [politician’s name] from the [party name]! He’s doing a good job!’.”

R3. “I always emphasize that I, myself, am from the sector of [specialty]. That I know ‘what I am talking about’, that I’ve gotten my hands dirty. I use it to create a certain sense of trust. I try to communicate that I’m a [profession], I’m a father, I’m a grandfather. I mean well by all the people. And every time you come across me, you will meet the same person.”

R4. “Showing your face, going on working visits, speaking to certain professional groups... you have to deal with one subject for a long time and then maybe people recognize you for that. You so easily become part of the abstraction that is politics. So I try to articulate things in the form of personal stories, to avoid becoming part of the abstract.”



## APPENDIX C: Core Statements

**Table 2:** 105 Core statements from the data grouped by RQs and first-order category

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<b>RQ1: Sources of public opinion</b>	<b>Core statements:</b>
A. Traditional media: serves as “country thermometer” (unrepresentative indicators of what the public thinks about)	<p>Reading the newspapers before work or media reports that are prepared for them: but mistrust. Scanning for themes, topics and trends (mediated through co-workers)</p> <p>Journalists are lazy. Some topics are sexy but not relevant (or feasible)→ still covered.</p> <p>There is not one PO. Different sources for different issues.</p> <p>Journalists and media cannot be trusted</p> <p>News as a quick overview of the trends</p>
B. Social media: closer to the people (unrepresentative indicators of <i>how</i> the public feels)	<p>Social media: individual voices and reactions</p> <p>Social media: overrepresentation</p> <p>People are not (in) the traditional media, but rather on social media</p> <p>Loudmouths (social media) and companies and the rich (traditional media) are overrepresented</p>
C. More extensive information: based on MP/party portfolio (and is proactive)	<p>Mention in debates the people you come across or reach out to – and the efforts you make to seek info.</p> <p>Organizations and spokespersons from issues can give you advice</p> <p>Meetings/Work visits: time consuming</p> <p>Proactive: seek out people who have to do with topic; experts</p> <p>Depends on the MP’s portfolio – no other topics.</p> <p>Research: priority when faced with debates and meetings</p>
D. Deciding what is important: based on experience and “gut feeling”.	<p>Practice vs. preference. Cannot get it all from the people but would like to. Too much info. Not practical. No time.</p> <p>Depends of your expertise; your gut feeling</p>

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Depends on party ideology/ own ideology

It's a lot of information. You have to make decisions.

You have to stand up for the issues you believe in and the people you believe in, then they will follow.

E. Micro level: one-on-one contact with people is the preferred and most important source

You trust the people.

Most important: personal stories (SP)  
Emails and one-on-one meetings – some time always dedicated to that; Door-to-door contact (not frequent)

Holding your eyes and ears open when you're in the market; at a game, at someone's home

Going to the homes of ordinary people

People: real life (at the butcher, soccer game, kid's school)

Some days reserved for just meeting with people or work visits

Public opinion is easy to identify on a small scale. The abstractions are tricky.

F. Macro level: MPs must justify People's opinions in the context of representing a larger public (made up of many opinions)

Public opinion tells you what to highlight.

Relate to public opinion but it doesn't change your viewpoint.

Because: you listen to everything and everyone but at the end of the day: must make decision

Public opinion should not change *your* (the MP's) opinion

Try to convince people of your opinion, not the other way around.

Democracy = assessment of all the opinions and interests and the responsibility of a representative to make the best decision, considering the context of it all.

Over and under-representation leads to the fragmentation of the political system (50+ because they were not present online)

Constantly look at the micro (person) and macro (society) level.

"I think from the man and a lot of others think from the collective" -> Listen to the person stories but make them applicable to the population as a whole.

**RQ2: The People**

G. Anti-pluralistic concept (i.e. ignores diversity that makes up the population)	Diversity cannot be ignored (majority)  There is not one “people” – there are many ‘peoples’ in one society and the term ‘the People’ ignores this variety  This is populist rhetoric – not useful for society as it is
H. Invented concept: too abstract to mean anything and incompatible with the ‘real world’	Not a useful concept in terms of governing: it does not relate to the real world  Does not mean anything – invented concept for campaigning and marketing  Pretend to speak in the name of the people = populism. People are invented. Especially who they are not.  You cannot speak on behalf of the people. You try to make everyone feel included but that isn’t possible.
I. Silent engine (credited with being instrumental in keeping the country running but mostly unheard)	Term reminiscent of the ‘silent engine’  People in the ‘silent engine’ keep the country running, the hard workers that are quiet in their demands but essential to society functioning  Majority of the people can be categorized in these terms: just working in ordinary jobs and keep the country running
J. Divide between the 90% (the People that need leadership) and the 10% (the elites that can take care of themselves)	We have a specific voter and person to represent: those that need us and need politics to be on their side  Useful term: society is made up of 90% of people who need politics and 10% who are rich enough to take care of themselves  90% are ‘the People’ and those are the people that need representation  Populist term but useful in our case.  (SP): some years ago <i>we</i> were the populists and then it was a good thing. Still use the same terminology because the meaning of it has not changed (for them)  The “we” narrative enables you to appeal to many people as potential voters. You’ve decided for them where they belong, they just have to give in.

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K. Specific Values (hard-working, good, just, vulnerable; concerned about his community, tries hard)

Older, married, also all extremes

Values: Hardworking; less heard; NOT the loudmouths

Someone that just tried hard, is hard working, and doesn't demand much

Exception: young, educated city residents (GL)

Self-aware: "bakfiets" mamas are our 'people' but we are in the minority (GL)

L. Specific Demographics (e.g. married old couple, nurse, lower-income, rural or sub-urban living location)

My neighbor, the family down the street.

People in my community

Ordinary: most of the people, live their lives; all Dutch people; this is the situation of the regular citizen.

Outside of The Hague → living in the country.

But resulting policies must work for the whole country – also minorities.

### RQ3: Communication

M. Translating politics to the People (for transparency and activation of voters)

Translate the jargon – put politics in terms the people can understand.

Relate it to their situation: "what does this mean for me" (why is public opinion useful) "for the future"

Understandable language. No jargon.

Normal Dutch; understandable Dutch for people; simple language

Something that people can use and can "kaas van maaken" (make cheese out of..)

Your job as a representative: Represent and communicate: be the bridge between party and people

N. Social Media: short and direct best for wider population (slogans, tweets, etc.)

Short reactions.

Short blog, Images even better.

Newsletter, Website, Twitter – quick contributions

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, Reddit → Don't love these but good to reach audience

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Like the use of slogans. Useful. “Quick and dirty”.

Slogans are appealing; brief and to the point.

In practice: everything has to be quick. In one sentence. It has to be sold.

O. Style needs to adapt to your target audience (professionals in the field vs. a public engagement)

Different vocabulary for elite and citizens. But do not adapt the way you speak with citizens themselves.

Different for different stakeholders. Not different people within the population – only professionals vs. public.

Election program determines communication (what you talk about)

What do these people want to hear about? Public opinion gives a hint.

Positive populism: activating population with simple language leads to increased participation

Positively enthusiastic voice always works. And a mode of asking questions – Listening.

P. Remaining authentic is very important (e.g. ‘be you’)

Don’t use different voices.

There is no way to learn to be authentic – you have to just be ‘you’. Best communication strategy.

Observation: Communicating seems important but MPs seem unaware of their own process and only reflect on it when prompted.

Identify who the People are, who you are and how you fit together → use this in communication.

Do not butter them up. Don’t suck up to them. That’s negative populism and underestimates the people.

Don’t speak extra ‘Jip and Janneke’ (casual slang). It’s fake. (GL)

Yes, more Jip & Janneke (CDA) when you talk to people so that they trust you. Lots of the voters are MBO educated (vocational education).

Do be straightforward and clear. Be authentic. “Be you”.

Your own style is not something you adapt to different groups. The direct way is just you.

Do not compromise your own style – that is your authority to portray.

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Q. Responsibility to listen but also to lead (people want to be heard but also want leadership)

The ones that belong to the people (90%) don't realize it sometimes. You have to tell them → they are the people.

No compromise with your own viewpoints.

Public opinion does not matter. Take it and give your own spin on it.

Party ideology and own opinions are communicated

Public opinion indicates trends of what to talk about, not what to think about it, as a politician. Party ideology dictates that.

Trust that your own ideas are good. Hence, they have to be presented as such to the Dutch citizen.

R. Communication as important tool to set yourself apart from the abstract 'politics'

Telling, formulating, presenting. You have to know who your voters are to do so properly.

Ambition: use public opinion to reach a lot of people with a message that is authentically *yours*.

Trust is reciprocal. We need to trust our sources but people need to trust us as their representatives.

Communication style is your connection with the people (and it's a skill!)

Different ways to do that: Rutte is much looser: says stuff like "piss off" whereas Buma is polite...

You so easily become part of 'the' politics. The abstraction of it. Politicians see themselves as too important. You have to remember that. And connect with the people.

When you are labeled an elitist/intellectual party: your communication and style help you reach a broader base → communicate that you are there for all the people.