



CAN STORIES SHIFT POLITICAL VIEWS?

“When Did You Leave?”:
An immersive theatre
experiment on populist
radical-right narratives
at Oerol 2025.



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INTRODUCTION

A woman arrives at a beautiful spot in the dunes of Terschelling. Yet she is not planning to hike, swim, or walk her dog. She is visiting a theatre performance at the Dutch landscape arts festival Oerol. Before the performance begins, she receives a tablet and a set of headphones. She is asked to sit down on a small tribune, surrounded by trees. A voice through the headphones asks her to answer some questions, followed by an eight-minute monologue.

The voice belongs to a fictional character named Merel. Merel works in healthcare. She is exhausted, frustrated, and feels abandoned by politics. Gradually, Merel's story turns into a political message. Immigration, she argues, is putting unbearable pressure on Dutch society. The borders should be closed.

Other spectators listen to other stories, six in total. Next to her, for instance, someone is listening to a very different story. Here, a man named Arend talks about masculinity, empathy, and caring for others. Another participant hears Tessa, a conservative stay-at-home mother who reflects warmly on traditional family life. Someone else listens to Paul, a musician who is furious at political elites and bureaucracy.

None of the spectators know that other members of the audience are hearing different stories. What they also do not know is that they are taking part in a scientific experiment – an experiment about the persuasiveness of political messages, and populist radical-right (PRR) messages in particular.



CHAPTER 1

THE RISE OF THE POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT

Populist radical-right (PRR) parties are increasingly successful. In Europe, support for such parties has increased fivefold since the 1990s. Today, roughly one in four Europeans supports a PRR party, and one in three Dutch citizens does so. In India (the world's largest democracy) and in the United States (the world's most powerful democracy), PRR politicians and their parties hold power. The PRR is therefore no longer a political niche. Its ideas have become increasingly mainstream and normalized, and attract support from large parts of the public.

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?

PRR actors are not only effective politicians, but also skilled storytellers. By conveying personal and emotional stories, they connect political ideas to everyday frustrations, fears, and identities. Their narratives can draw people into a story world and make them more open to the ideas embedded within it.

But we know surprisingly little about how much immersive storytelling can increase the persuasiveness of PRR ideas.

Two questions emerge: Can PRR messages also persuade people who are generally unlikely to support such ideas? And what happens when people encounter such stories in realistic, emotionally immersive settings?

Most existing studies expose research participants to short written texts or social media posts on a computer screen. But real life is messier. Political persuasion often happens through stories, emotions, personal experiences, music, and conversations. The main goal of this project was to study exactly that.

CHAPTER 2

A THEATRE EXPERIMENT

With a team of researchers, writers, theatre makers, musicians, dancers, and many other creatives, we developed an immersive theatre experiment around seven fictional family members preparing for – which they expect to be – a tense family dinner. Each character represented a different worldview and political message. Spectators first listened individually to one of these character's personal stories through headphones. After these monologues, the audience watched a live theatre performance in which all seven characters took part in a heated, confrontational family dinner.

Before and after the stories and the theatre performance, we measured spectators' political attitudes. We also examined whether people felt transported into the narratives, identified with the characters, sympathized with them, and experienced strong emotions. Finally, after the performance, we organized focus groups to better understand how participants interpreted what they had just experienced. In this way, spectators became more than just audience members: they also became research participants.

The composition of the audience at this theatre festival was particularly interesting. Based on previous research, we expected them to be relatively resistant to PRR ideas. Many studies show that theoretically educated, politically left-leaning women who are open to new experiences are generally less likely to support PRR parties.

Our audience closely matched this profile. In total, 2,735 people participated in our study, between 1,921 and 2,281 of them answered all key questions. Figure 1 shows that about 85 percent of participants identified as left-leaning, almost

70 percent as female, and that more than 40 percent had a university degree. Almost everyone scored high on openness to new experiences. This was therefore an audience that, politically speaking, could be expected to be relatively resistant to several PRR messages, even if it was also highly receptive to immersive storytelling.

So, what happened?

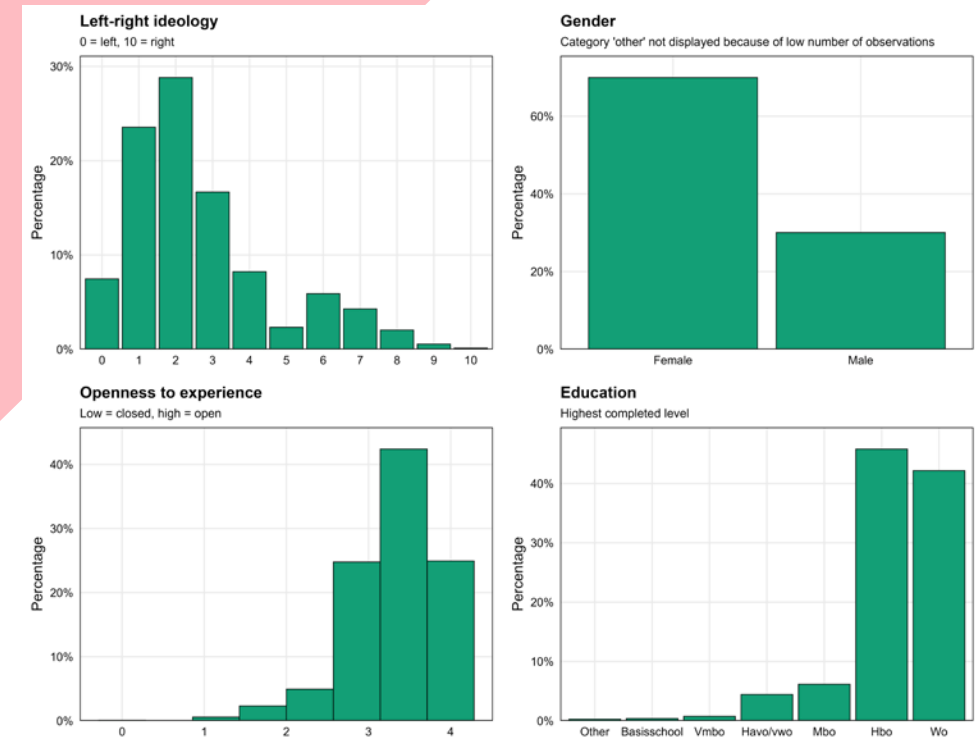


Figure 1: Descriptives

CHAPTER 3

POLITICAL MESSAGES AND NARRATIVES

We examined six political messages. Four of them were closely connected to themes commonly associated with the PRR.

- The first is *nativism*, which is a xenophobic form of nationalism, and often expresses itself in anti-immigration attitudes.
- The second is *populism*: a type of anti-elite resentment that emphasizes that ordinary people are betrayed by powerful elites.

Two other messages focused on gender, an issue that is increasingly important for the PRR.

- The *protective masculinity* message claims that men are strong and women weak, and that men therefore should protect women.
- The *tradwife* message emphasizes that women should embrace traditional gender roles by dedicating their lives to taking care of the family.

The two remaining messages oppose PRR thinking.

- *Tolerance* emphasizes mutual respect. The idea is that people can only peacefully live together if they accept the coexistence of groups with different views.
- *Caring masculinity* rejects dominant forms of masculinity in which gender hierarchies play a key role. It links masculinity to care and mutual support rather than strength and domination.

Each political message was embedded in a compelling narrative, told by a character whom people could relatively easily relate to. The stories were intentionally personal and emotional. The characters did not simply communicate abstract political opinions, but described frustrations, fears, disappointments, family conflicts, and hopes for the future. The political messages gradually emerged from these personal experiences.

We designed seven narratives. One for each political message and one narrative without a political message. This final narrative formed the control condition in our experiment.





CHAPTER 4

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

Vincent (80) – the grandfather | Control Group

Vincent is a retired biology teacher who has been living alone in a large house surrounded by nature since the death of his wife. Within the family, he represents the control group: someone who is not strongly driven by ideology, but instead tries to hold on to nuance, reason, and harmony. During the birthday dinner, he desperately attempts to keep the peace while confronting a family that is slowly falling apart. Beneath his calm demeanor lies deep grief and an intense longing to keep his family together.

Merel (48) – the daughter | Nativism

Merel has worked in healthcare for many years, spending countless nights on hospital shifts. She feels exhausted, undervalued, and abandoned by society. Out of this frustration, she has increasingly embraced nativist ideas: a form of nationalism centered around the belief that one's own culture and community must be protected from outside influences. Her longing for safety and recognition expresses itself through strong opinions about immigration, identity, and the loss of control. Yet beneath her anger is a woman who mainly feels unseen.

Paul (49) – the son-in-law | Populism

Paul worked in a factory for years until physical complaints forced him to stay at home. Isolated and increasingly withdrawn, he spends his days listening to classical music while disappearing deeper into conspiracy theories and populist thinking. He strongly believes that ordinary people are systematically betrayed by political elites, the media, and public institutions. Behind his cynicism and provocative statements hides a man struggling with depression and a growing sense that he no longer has meaning or value within either society or his own family.

Marijn / formerly Sophie (19) – the grandchild | Tolerance
 Marijn is non-binary, studies to become a teacher, and is actively involved in climate activism and social justice movements. Within the family, they represent the perspective of tolerance: the belief that people with different backgrounds, beliefs, and identities can only live together peacefully when they genuinely accept one another. At the same time, Marijn experiences how difficult tolerance becomes when conflict turns deeply personal. Desperately searching for a room of their own and a place to feel safe, they struggle to balance activism, vulnerability, and a deep desire to be recognized.

Arend (51) – the son | Caring Masculinity
 Arend spent years traveling through Portugal in a camper van, moving between different love affairs and temporary lives. Recently returned to the Netherlands, he dreams of opening a small B&B. Arend represents caring masculinity: a form of masculinity rooted in care, vulnerability, and mutual support rather than dominance and control. He believes in softness, emotional openness, and personal freedom, yet struggles with what it truly means to take responsibility for the people around him. Beneath his relaxed appearance lies someone searching for genuine connection and direction.

Wolf (28) – the grandson | Protective Masculinity
 Wolf lives with his girlfriend Tessa in the chalet owned by his father. Since Arend returned from Portugal, Wolf feels increasing pressure to finally build a stable life for himself. He dreams of a house, marriage, and starting a family. Out of this insecurity, he increasingly embraces ideas connected to protective masculinity: the belief that men should be strong and protect women. He feels deeply responsible for Tessa and their future together, but this sense of responsibility often turns into frustration, control, and anger. Beneath his tough exterior lies a fear of failing as a man.

Tessa (33) – Wolf's girlfriend | Tradwife
 Tessa sees herself as a traditional woman who values calmness, caregiving, and domestic life. She represents the tradwife perspective: the belief that women find fulfillment through traditional gender roles centered around family, care, and homemaking. She spends most of her time at home in the chalet she shares with Wolf and his father, a situation that increasingly makes her feel trapped. While she dreams of warmth, stability, and starting a family, she slowly begins to question how much of the life she is living is truly her own choice.





CHAPTER 5

THE DESIGN OF THE MONOLOGUES EXPERIMENT

With the monologue experiment, our goal was to temporarily place audience members inside the emotional world of one particular character. As a result, the experience was intended to be intimate and immersive. Before participants listened to the monologues, we asked them a series of questions about politics and society. Afterwards, we asked several of these questions again. This allowed us to examine whether attitudes changed after exposure to the narratives. The six main political attitudes we measured corresponded directly to the six political messages embedded in the narratives.

We asked participants to what extent they agreed with the following statements. They could answer on a scale from 0 (completely disagree) to 10 (completely agree).

- *Nativism*: Immigrants pose a threat to Dutch society and therefore the borders must be closed.
- *Populism*: The political elite only cares about itself and does not listen to ordinary people.
- *Protective masculinity*: Women are vulnerable and men are strong, and men should therefore protect women from danger.
- *Tradwife*: A woman's place is at home, and her feminine strength lies in taking care of her family.
- *Tolerance*: The fact that people have different values and ways of living, makes society strong and should therefore be celebrated.
- *Caring masculinity*: Real male strength lies in showing compassion and courage to care for others on the basis of respect.

We also measured several background characteristics that we know are related to PRR support, such as education, gender, age, political ideology, and personality traits.

A first question was whether our manipulations worked as intended. Did participants indeed perceive the characters as communicating the political messages we wanted them to communicate? The answer is yes. Participants consistently associated each character most strongly with the intended political message. For instance, participants in the nativism condition overwhelmingly perceived “their” character as communicating nativist ideas, while participants in the tradwife condition most strongly connected their character to traditional gender roles. So, overall our so-called “manipulation checks” strongly suggest that participants interpreted the narratives largely as intended.



CHAPTER 6

THE RESULTS OF THE MONOLOGUES EXPERIMENT

What happened to participants' political attitudes? Figure 2 shows the changes in attitudes before and after exposure to the narratives. Each of the six panels focuses on one specific attitude and shows the distribution of scores and the average (the black dot) before and after exposure to the monologues. It does so for both the control group (light-blue dots) and the treatment group corresponding to each attitude (dark-blue dots).

“Pre Post” shows whether the difference between before and after exposure was statistically significant. One, two or three stars indicate significance, while “ns” means “not significant”. “(T-C)” indicates whether the change in the treatment condition is statistically significantly different from the change in the control condition. We can conclude that a narrative has shifted an attitude in the direction of the political message communicated by the character when both “Pre Post” and “(T-C)” are significant.

This is the case for three narratives.

- Participants exposed to the nativist narrative became more supportive of nativist attitudes.
- Participants in the protective masculinity condition became more supportive of traditional ideas about men protecting women.
- Participants exposed to the tradwife narrative became more supportive of traditional gender roles.

The populist narrative behaved differently. Rather than increasing populist attitudes, participants became significantly less populist after listening to the story. The caring masculinity and tolerance narratives produced little measurable change.



Figure 2: Mean scores per treatment condition compared to the control condition, pre and post exposure to narrative

What makes these findings particularly striking, is that the participants were probably among the least likely groups to support PRR ideas in the first place. Yet several of the narratives nonetheless succeeded in shifting their ideas in this direction.

We also examined whether the effects differed across groups. Were women affected differently than men? Did participants with a university education react differently? Did ideology or personality matter? Overall, the answer was largely no. The effects were surprisingly similar across different demographic and personality groups. This suggests that the persuasive power of immersive storytelling may operate relatively broadly, even among audiences that can generally be expected to be resistant to these political ideas.

CHAPTER 7

HOW ARE NARRATIVES PERSUASIVE?

Why were some narratives more persuasive than others? To answer that question, we examined four psychological processes that researchers often associate with storytelling and persuasion.

- *Transportation* refers to the extent to which participants felt absorbed into the story world (measured on a 1–7 scale).
- *Identification* captures whether participants felt emotionally connected to the character (measured on a 1–7 scale).
- *Sympathy* measures how likable or sympathetic participants found the protagonist (measured on a 0–10 scale).
- And *emotionality* reflects the extent to which the narratives triggered emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, enthusiasm, hope, or pride (measured on a 0–10 scale).

After listening to the monologues, participants answered questions about each of these experiences.

The results reveal clear differences between the narratives. Figure 3 presents for each condition the average score on transportation, identification, sympathy and emotionality. The graph shows that the non-PRR narratives (tolerance and caring masculinity) generated relatively higher levels of these experiences, while several of the PRR narratives scored lower on these dimensions (in particular the nativism, populism, and protective masculinity conditions).

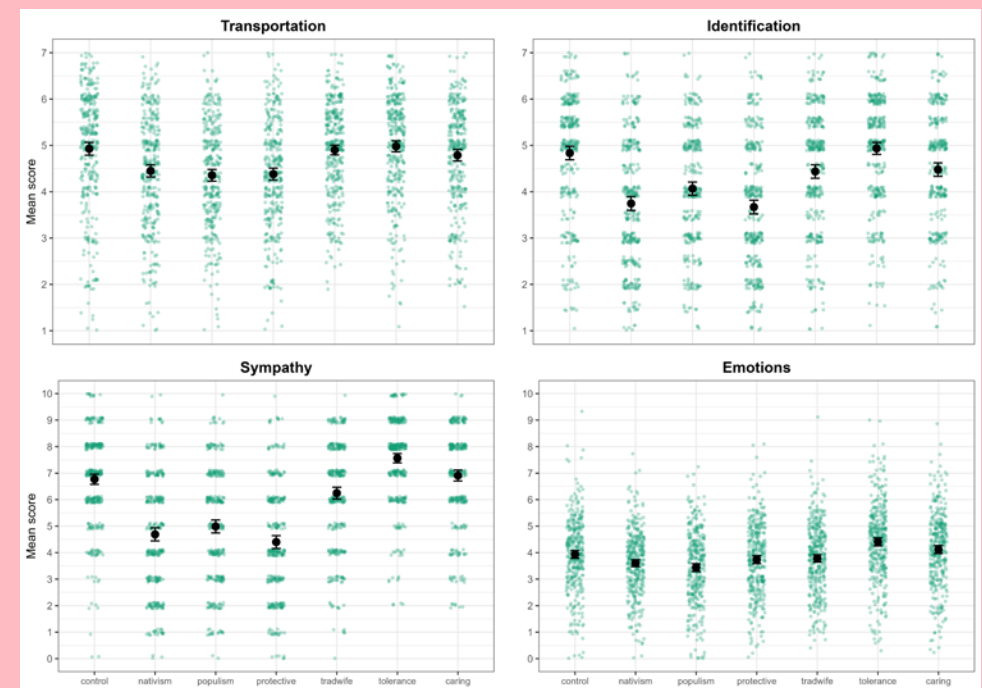


Figure 3: Mean scores on transportation, identification, sympathy and emotionality per condition

This pattern is perhaps not surprising given the composition of the audience. Most participants identified as politically left-leaning and were theoretically educated. Existing research would predict that they generally feel more affinity with the non-PRR characters and their worldviews, and therefore experience more transportation, identification, sympathy, and emotionality.

At the same time, the PRR narratives still generated substantial levels of emotional engagement. Participants were often less transported into these narratives than into the other ones, but they were far from emotionally disconnected. Even in the PRR conditions, average scores on transportation and identification remained clearly above the midpoint of the scale (which is 4).

In other words: many participants still became meaningfully immersed in narratives with which they politically disagreed. Figure 4 shows, for each condition, to what extent

transportation, identification, sympathy and emotionality are related to attitude change. If the dot is above the dashed horizontal line, and the confidence intervals (the vertical lines) do not overlap with this line, the relationship is statistically significant and in the expected direction.

The graph shows that participants who reported stronger transportation, identification, sympathy, or emotionality also tended to change their attitudes more strongly. This pattern emerged across most conditions. The more (emotionally) engaged participants became with a narrative, the more likely they were to shift their political attitudes in the direction communicated by the character. This suggests that political persuasion through storytelling depends strongly on emotional engagement, alongside or instead of abstract arguments and factual information. Instead, transportation, identification, sympathy and emotions appear to play a central role.

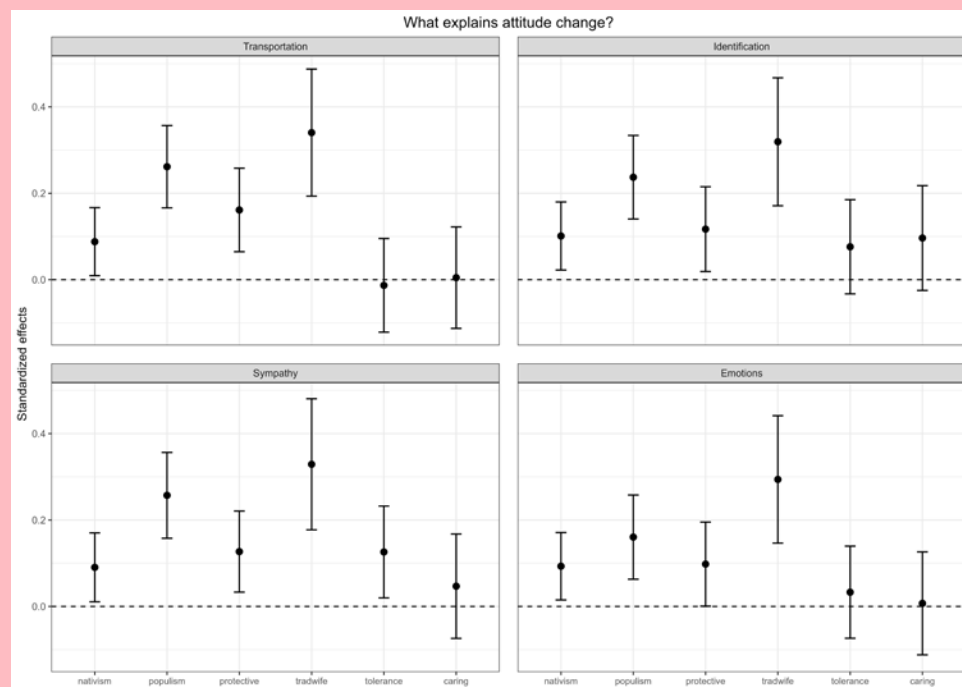


Figure 4: Standardized effects of transportation, identification, sympathy and emotionality on attitude change per condition (including 95% confidence intervals)

At the same time, there were important differences between narratives. In the tolerance and caring masculinity conditions, the relationship between emotional engagement and persuasion was much weaker. One likely explanation is that many participants already strongly agreed with these messages before entering the theatre. Therefore, there was relatively little room to agree even more strongly.

The populism condition shows another interesting pattern. Although this narrative slightly decreased populist attitudes overall (see Figure 2), participants within this condition who reported relatively high levels of transportation, identification, sympathy, or emotionality nonetheless tended to shift in a more populist direction. This nuances the conclusions from the main analysis: also in the populism condition, narrative persuasion mechanisms may still operate when participants become emotionally engaged with the story.



CHAPTER 8

THE MUSICAL THEATRE PERFORMANCE

Thus far, the experiment focused on the individual monologues participants heard through their headphones. This was the cleanest part of the study, because each participant encountered only one narrative in relative isolation.

But real life is rarely that simple.

Political messages are usually encountered in much more chaotic environments, where people are simultaneously exposed to competing viewpoints, social interactions, emotional reactions, and public debate. In other words: we do not encounter political messages in a vacuum, but talk about it with others.

The second part of the performance therefore moved beyond the isolated monologues and introduced participants to a broader and more contested information environment.

After the monologues, all research participants watched the same musical theatre performance. During the play, the seven family members came together for a tense family dinner in which old frustrations resurfaced and political disagreements escalated. Characters radicalized in response to one another and relationships deteriorated.

CHAPTER 9

RESULTS PERFORMANCE

SYNOPSIS

'During a festive dinner celebrating their grandfather's eightieth birthday, a family gathers around the table for the first time since the death of their grandmother. What begins as an attempt at reconnection slowly turns into a suffocating confrontation in which old wounds, unresolved grief, and clashing worldviews rise to the surface. The grandmother's empty chair lingers as a silent presence over the dinner table, while conversations derail and family members retreat further into their own truths.'

Gradually, the family loses the ability to truly listen to one another. Words become weapons, silences unbearable, and the dining table transforms into an emotional battlefield. Beneath the sharp confrontations lies a deep longing for recognition, closeness, and understanding — yet no one seems to know how to truly reach one another anymore.'

Participants were now exposed not only to the character whose narrative they had heard privately, but also to all the other characters and their political perspectives. This raises the question: would the persuasive effects of the original narratives change once they became embedded within a broader and more confrontational social environment?

Figure 5 displays the results. Because many participants dropped out before completing the final survey after the performance (mostly for technical reasons), the number of respondents was substantially lower here (it dropped to 1,455–1,740,

depending on the attitude). To make sure the comparisons across time are valid, we therefore included only participants for whom all three measurement moments were available. We also examined whether participants who dropped out before T3 differed systematically in their attitudes from those who completed all three measurement moments. This does not appear to be the case: we found no meaningful differences in baseline attitudes between the two groups.

The graph is similar to Figure 2, with the main difference being that we now have three time points rather than two, and that we left out the comparison with the control condition.



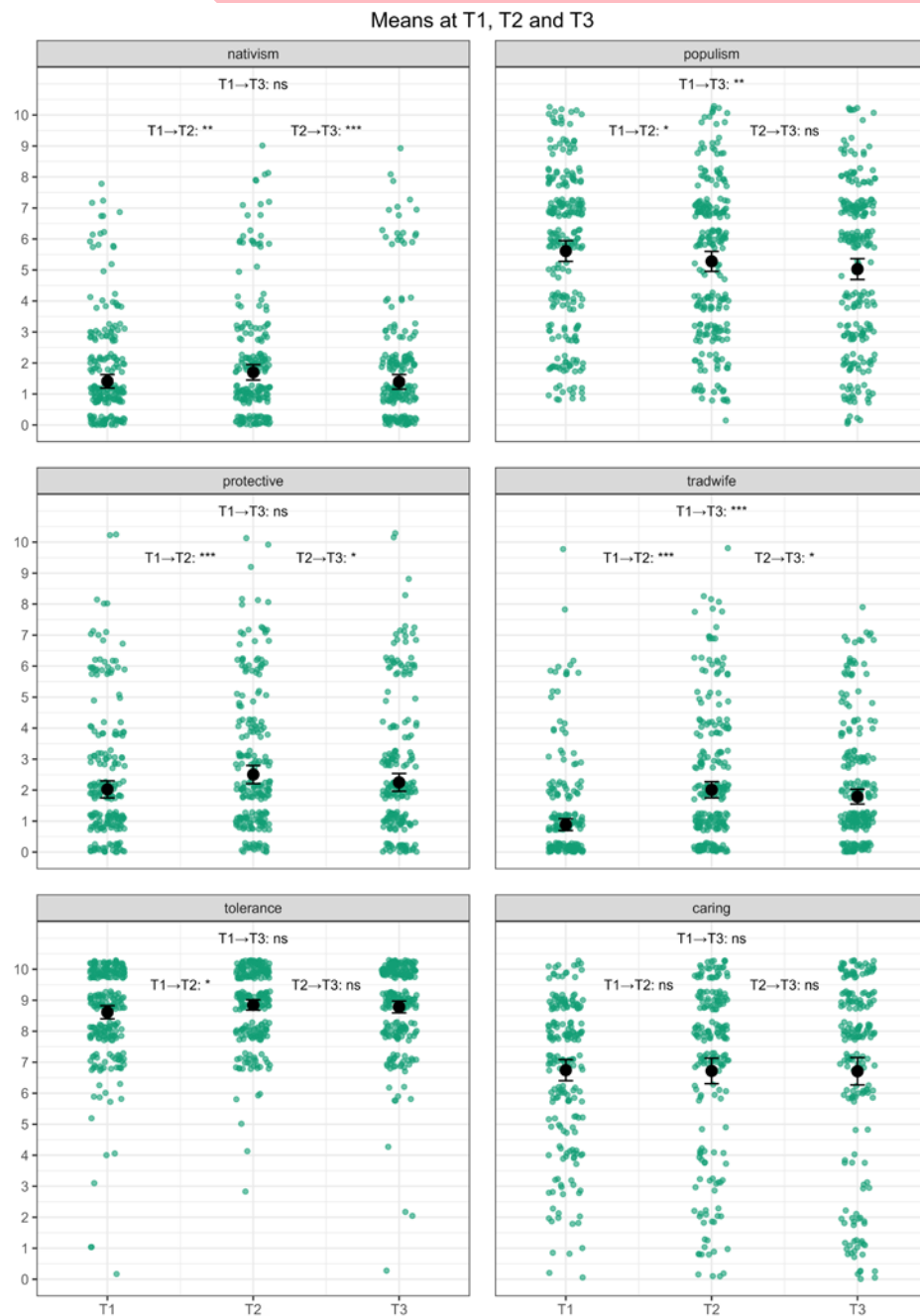


Figure 5: Mean scores per treatment condition, pre exposure to narrative (T1), post exposure (T2) and post exposure to the performance (T3)

The results show that several of the initial effects weakened after the theatre performance. In the nativism and protective masculinity conditions, participants partially moved back to their original attitudes after being exposed to the broader family conflict on stage.

As a result, the overall differences between the first and final measurements largely disappeared and were no longer statistically significant. The tradwife condition behaved similarly, but the outcome is slightly different. Here, participants also moved back after the performance, but the overall effect remained visible and statistically significant. In the populism condition, attitudes changed little after the play. The tolerance and caring masculinity conditions also remained relatively stable, with no statistically significant changes. This may be because participants already agreed more strongly with these attitudes before the experiment began.

These findings suggest that persuasive effects may weaken once narratives become embedded within more complex and contested social environments. Isolated narratives can temporarily increase receptiveness to political messages, but these effects do not necessarily remain equally strong once audiences are confronted with competing perspectives and social conflict. At the same time, some narratives appear more resilient than others. The tradwife narrative, in particular, continued to influence attitudes even after participants encountered the broader and more chaotic social dynamics of the theatre performance.

CHAPTER 10

FOCUS GROUPS

To better understand how participants experienced the narratives and the theatre performance, we organized post-performance focus groups. In total, we conducted 17 focus group interviews with 141 participants. Each group consisted of audience members who had listened to the same narrative during the same performance. The discussions focused on participants' impressions of the characters, the political themes in the performance, and the extent to which they recognized these characters from their own social environments.

One striking pattern was that most participants were highly aware that they belonged to what several themselves described as a "left-wing bubble." They generally recognized that their own political views differed strongly from those of several of the more PRR-oriented characters. Yet despite this disagreement, participants often made considerable effort to understand the characters.

This was especially visible in the discussions about the nativist and protective masculinity characters. Participants initially reacted critically toward these characters and described them as macho or confrontational. But as the focus groups conversations continued, many participants began to reflect more sympathetically on the personal experiences underlying the characters' political views. Participants frequently emphasized that they disagreed with their political ideas. For some, these characters were highly recognizable from their family (e.g. sons, brothers) or professional circles (e.g. pupils). During the conversation, focus group participants came to understand how someone might arrive at such positions.

The tradwife character was received more positively. Participants regularly connected her story to memories of their own childhoods and motherhood. The populist character generated confusion. Many participants struggled to position him politically, and interpreted his anti-elite frustrations in very different ways.

The caring masculinity and tolerance characters felt highly familiar to many audience members. Participants often recognized these characters within their own social circles. Nevertheless, some participants reacted negatively to the way these characters behaved during the theatre performance itself, and described them as judgmental or passive-aggressive.

Overall, the focus groups suggest that the narratives were generally interpreted as intended and that participants actively engaged with the emotional worlds of the characters. Participants repeatedly distinguished between understanding a character and agreeing with them politically. The narratives often appeared capable of increasing emotional understanding even when ideological disagreement was and remained strong.

CHAPTER 11

ZOOMING IN ON SOME CHARACTERS

The focus groups uncovered important information about how participants related to the messages, narratives, and characters they were exposed to. We would like to highlight three characters and their stories in particular.

THE TRADWIFE

One narrative stood out repeatedly throughout the project: the tradwife condition. Compared to several other PRR narratives, the tradwife narrative generated: (1) relatively high transportation, (2) relatively high sympathy, (3) relatively strong persuasion, (4) and more durable effects over time.

The focus groups largely helped explain why. Participants often responded positively to Tessa, the conservative tradwife. Some rejected her traditional worldview initially but then softened quickly. They began reflecting on their own childhoods and described growing up with their stay-at-home mothers. Some participants mentioned that maybe having a mother at home more often would be a good thing, considering what is going on with youth these days. Others quickly added that perhaps a father could also take up this role. Most participants agreed that her choice to be a stay-at-home mother was a valid choice and that she is entitled to make that decision.

Thus, the tradwife narrative did not feel alien to many participants. Nor was it too radical to feel detached. This may explain why the narrative produced relatively strong emotional engagement and persuasive effects.

POPULISM

The populist narrative produced one of the most surprising

findings: overall, participants became slightly *less* populist after listening to Paul's story. Yet participants who felt strongly transported into the narrative, who identified with Paul, or who sympathized with him, still tended to become *more* populist. How can both processes happen at the same time?

Again, the focus groups offered an important clue. Participants often struggled to place Paul politically. Some saw him as right-wing, but others contested this by adding that he could also be in the ideological centre or left-wing. Participants considered Paul conspiratorial or chaotic. At the same time, many agreed with parts of his critique, and several participants explicitly shared his distrust toward politicians.

In other words: unlike the other PRR narratives, Paul's worldview was politically ambiguous, and this ambiguity may be one of the reasons why the narrative behaved differently. Moreover, participants already agreed with parts of his anti-elite message before hearing the story. As a result, the narrative may have produced less additional persuasion.

CARING MASCULINITY

The caring masculinity condition produced another intriguing result. Participants generally liked the values communicated by Arend. They considered him empathetic, tolerant, and emotionally intelligent. Many participants (especially men) recognized aspects of themselves or people around them in his character. Yet the narrative produced little measurable attitude change.

The focus groups again helped explain why. Although participants agreed with Arend's values, many described him as preachy, passive-aggressive, judgmental, or weak. This finding shows that agreement alone is not enough for persuasion. People may already support a political message while still reacting negatively to the person communicating it.

Persuasion depends not only on what is said, but also on who says it and how.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSION

What can we learn from this theatre experiment?

First, the findings show that political storytelling can be persuasive, even among audiences that are generally resistant to the ideas that are communicated. Several narratives succeeded in shifting political attitudes after only an 8-minute exposure. Narrative transportation, identification, sympathy and emotions played an important role in this process.

At the same time, the project revealed important limits to narrative persuasion. Participants did not radically change their worldviews. Many effects were modest, and, importantly, weakened once the stories became embedded within the broader and more chaotic environment of the theatre performance. This suggests that persuasive effects do not exist in a vacuum but are socially embedded. Once audiences encounter competing viewpoints, social discussion, and conflicting interpretations, attitudes can partly shift back toward earlier positions.

One striking finding was that participants often emotionally understood characters with whom they strongly disagreed politically. During the focus groups, audience members repeatedly emphasized that understanding someone's fears, frustrations, or motivations was not the same as agreeing with their political views. The stories made many participants more willing to temporarily see the world through the eyes of people very different from themselves.

This suggests that political narratives operate not primarily through factual persuasion or rational argumentation, but – at least partly – through emotional connection. Stories can temporarily soften political positions by allowing people to experience unfamiliar perspectives from the inside.

The project also demonstrates the value of collaboration between researchers and artists. Scientific experiments are often conducted in highly controlled laboratory settings that struggle to capture the emotional and social complexity of real life. Theatre is explicitly designed to immerse audiences in stories and emotions. By combining artistic creativity with experimental rigour, this project made it possible to study political persuasion in a setting that more closely resembled how people encounter narratives in everyday life.

In a time of growing political polarization, these findings matter far beyond Terschelling. PRR politicians and influencers are skilled storytellers. They know very well how to effectively convey their nativist, populist and sexist messages. Our study helps illuminate one possible mechanism through which such persuasion works.

We would like to conclude by emphasizing that storytelling can also be employed to communicate more inclusive messages. The fact that the tolerance and caring masculinity messages did not lead to substantial attitude change is probably because the audience at Oerol already agreed with these ideas before the performance began. Other studies show that exposing people with different backgrounds to democratic and tolerant ideas embedded in narratives can make them more supportive of liberal democracy.

This is hopeful news in a time when the PRR is on the rise and democracy is increasingly under pressure. Stories can be employed to weaken democracies. But they also have the potential to strengthen them, by fostering empathy, understanding, and openness toward people with different experiences and worldviews.

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