The impact of Wilders' discourse and policies on refugee well-being in the Netherlands

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Bachelor thesis Geography, Planning and Environment (GPE)

Nijmegen School of Management

Radboud University Nijmegen

August 2025

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Date of submission: August 2025

University: Radboud University Nijmegen
Faculty: School of Management
Degree: Bachelor of Science Geography, Planning and environment
Specialization: Globalisation

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Word count: 20.211

Cover image: Refugees Protesting in the Netherlands (Alisdare Hickson, Wikimedia Commons, 2023)

Radboud Universiteit

I. Abstract

This thesis investigates the impact of Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policies on the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands. With the rise in support for far-right populism and an increase in anti-immigration discourse, this research examines how language and law intersect and eventually influence well-being. This study combines the critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the social exclusion theory to explore the relationship between Wilders discourse and policies on refugee well-being. Well-being in this research is examined using eight themes as suggested by the CBS (2021): subjective well-being, material well-being, housing, health, work, safety, society and environment.

This research ultimately suggests that the effects of anti-immigration discourse extend far beyond political speech. Through emotionally charged language, repetition of misleading metaphors, and an appeal to fear, Wilders' discourse not only shapes public opinion but also legitimises exclusionary policy decisions that directly harm refugee well-being. By integrating insights from cognitive science, discourse theory, and refugee studies, this thesis highlights the urgent need for political communication that is not only effective but also ethical. In an era where misinformation and emotionally manipulative narratives spread rapidly, critically examining the link between words and their consequences is more important than ever. I hope this work contributes to that effort and to a more humane, evidence-based conversation on immigration in the Netherlands and elsewhere.

II. Preface

In front of you, you see my research about the impact of Wilder's anti-immigration discourse and policies on the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands. With this research I want to bring attention to the well-being of refugees here in the Netherlands, and how important the influence of politics is on this subject. I hope to inspire people to make the Netherlands a more welcoming place for all people in need and I hope for people to recognize everybody's well-being matters. Finally I hope my research will contribute to refugee well-being in a positive way. This bachelor thesis was carried out at the Radboud University in Nijmegen for the bachelor Geography, Planning and Environment from February 2025 until August 2025.

I want to thank my supervisor Paschalina Garidou, who helped me figure out where my interests lie and set up this research. I am thankful that I got to work with someone who shares the same interests and values as me. During my research time, Paschalina was always available to answer any of my questions and help me out if I had a problem, which I appreciate.

Also, I want to thank the interviewees and survey respondents for helping me by taking part in this research, without their willingness to cooperate this research couldn't have succeeded. At last, I want to thank my friends and family for supporting me during the research, participating in discussions and for always sharing their honest thoughts.

I hope you will enjoy reading my thesis!

Amber Frederiks

Nijmegen, August 8, 2025

III. Summary

In recent years migration has become one of the most important political topics in the Netherlands. In the 2023 elections, Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) secured almost a quarter of the votes, causing the far-right populist Wilders to win the elections (Allecijfers.nl, 2024). Their election campaign portrayed immigration as an "asylum tsunami" degrading the country's culture and security (PVV verkiezingsprogramma, 2023). This thesis wants to find out what the actual impact of such discourse is; How are Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policies affecting the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands?

The motivation for this research lies in the recognition that political language is not just rhetorical, it shapes public perception, legitimises anti-immigration policies, and ultimately influences the well-being of refugees. Well-being, as defined by the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS, 2021), includes eight themes: subjective well-being, material well-being, health, work-life balance, housing, society, safety, and environment. This research therefore examines both formal policies and the broader discourse, surrounding migration, in order to examine how these dimensions of well-being are affected.

Two theories underpin the analysis. First, the critical discourse analysis (CDA), developed by Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2001), treats discourse as a form of social practice that can (re)produce power relations and inequalities. The CDA examines language at three levels: the textual (word choice, metaphors, framing), the discursive (how texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted), and the socio-political (the broader societal structures they reinforce). When applied to Wilders' speeches, election programme, and social media output, the CDA reveals how terms like "mass immigration" and "asylum tsunami" portray refugees as an overwhelming threat, and create an "us vs. them" narrative.

Second, the social exclusion theory (Levitas, 2005; Silver, 1994) conceptualises how groups are prevented from fully participating in society through economic, social, and political barriers. This theory helps to trace how discourse-driven policies, such as restricting family reunification or shortening residence permits, translate into forms of exclusion that limit refugees' access to housing, work, and social relations. These frameworks complement each other; the CDA exposes the rhetorical strategies that legitimise exclusionary measures, while the social exclusion theory shows the resulting structural barriers and their consequences for well-being.

This research used a qualitative research design, combining document analysis with semi-structured interviews. The PVV's 2023 election programme, speeches and a selection of Wilders' tweets from 2024–2025 were examined. These were coded in Atlas.ti using the open phase, axial phase, and the theory development phase while coding as suggested by Van Thiel (2014), with the CDA guiding the analysis. Interviews were conducted primarily with experts in migration policy, geopolitics, and culture studies, selected through purposive sampling. Questions explored perceptions of Wilders' discourse, its societal effects, and its interaction with policy changes. The analysis connected the discourse and policy evidence with secondary data on refugee well-being, including CBS well-being indicators and discrimination reports.

Sub-question 1: Which are the specific anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders' government and how can they affect the well-being of refugees? Policies associated with Wilders' political agenda, such as the asylum emergency measures act, seek to abolish permanent residence permits, shorten asylum permits from five to three years, and limit family reunification to parents and minor children. Proposals also include reintroducing border controls and creating a dual-status system distinguishing between refugees fleeing persecution and those fleeing war. Interviewees stressed that such measures create more uncertainty, delay in integration, and psychological distress, especially family separation, which research links to higher rates of anxiety and depression (Schweitzer et al., 2018). These policies directly undermine several CBS well-being dimensions, particularly housing, material well-being, society, and subjective well-being.

Sub-question 2: How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being? CDA revealed that Wilders' discourse consistently frames refugees as a threat to national identity, security, and economic resources. His discourse uses metaphors like "tsunami" and "invasion", creates binary oppositions by using "our people" vs. "luck seekers", and blends anti-immigration discourse with an anti-Islam sentiment. At the discursive level, such framing circulates widely in media and is reinforced by repetition. At the socio-political level, it legitimises restrictive policies and normalises social hostility. An interviewee suggested that public attitudes towards refugees have grown more negative because of this normalised anti-immigration discourse, confirming survey data showing declining empathy for refugees between 2023 and 2024 (Reijmer & de Ruiter, 2024). The interaction between discourse and policy creates a reinforcing cycle: discourse shapes public opinion, which in turn supports restrictive policies; these policies create more exclusion, validating the original discourse. This "feedback loop of exclusion" impacts almost all well-being dimensions: economic participation is limited by delayed work access, housing insecurity is prolonged by administrative restrains, subjective well-being declines in a climate of hostility, and social participation is constrained by discrimination and stereotyping.

Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policies affect refugee well-being in the Netherlands. The CDA shows that language frames refugees as existential threats, while the social exclusion theory illustrates how such framing justifies policies that economically, socially, and politically disadvantage refugees. The combined effect is a multidimensional decline in well-being, affecting nearly every dimension identified by the CBS model (2021).

Interviewees emphasised that improving refugee well-being requires action on both the structural and discursive fronts. Discursively, political and media actors must shift towards accurate, humanising narratives, avoiding fear-based frames. Media training in public institutions could ensure that inclusive policies are implemented without bias. Structurally, reforms could include making participating in society more easy and creating a more inclusive migration policy for family reunification.

However there where some limitations to this research. First, relying on expert interviews provided valuable insights but filtered the analysis through professional perspectives. Second, my own political opinions, while acknowledged and managed through triangulation, inevitably

shaped the research lens. Finally, the fast-moving political environment meant that findings capture a snapshot rather than a fixed reality.

Several suggestions have been made for further research. Participatory research involving more direct refugee voices would deepen the analysis of how discourse and policy are experienced. Long-term studies could show how changes in discourse translate into well-being outcomes over time. Finally, comparative research across European contexts could clarify which dynamics are specific to the Dutch setting.

Ultimately, this thesis underscores that refugee well-being is not a only a concern but also a measure of a society's moral standards. The challenge and the opportunity lies in recognising that the same mechanisms that can reinforce exclusion can also create inclusion.

IV. List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
AZC	Asielzoekercentra
CBS	Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
ENAR	European Network Against Racism
EU	European Union
IDP	Internally displaced person
IND	Immigration and Naturalisation Service
NCBR	Nijmegen Centre for Border Research
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NOS	Nederlandse Omroep Stichting
OCW	Ministerie Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschap
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
PVV	Partij Voor de Vrijheid
PVI	Politie Voor Iedereen
PWI	Personal Well-being index
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VWEU	Verdrag betreffende de werking van de Europese Unie
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research motivation

Migration was one of the most important “issues” in the latest Dutch elections. A party to address this migration “issue” is the ‘Party for Freedom’ (PVV), stating in their election programme written by Geert Wilders, that ‘Our beautiful Netherlands, due to the ongoing asylum tsunami and mass immigration, is severely “degraded” and that “Order must now be restored quickly” which “can only be done with the PVV!” (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023). Research showed that 65 percent of the Dutch citizens wanted to reduce the number of refugees (Kanne et al., 2023), and with Wilders advocating for stricter border controls and wanting to call a stop to the refugee intake, his party won almost a quarter (23,3%) of the votes, causing the PVV to win the elections in 2023 (Allecijfers.nl, 2024). Geert Wilders and the PVV have played a significant role in shaping the public discourse and ultimately policy, by advocating for these stricter border controls and reductions in refugee intake. The Netherlands used to be known for its humanitarian approach to asylum seekers, but lately, political changes have created more restrictive immigration policies, maybe even the most strictest we’ve ever witnessed (Generis Global, 2024).

Understanding how policies and discourse affect the well-being of refugees is essential, as it directly influences their ability to integrate, find stability, and contribute to society. Issues such as mental health, economic participation, social inclusion, and housing are all impacted by political decisions and public attitudes (CBS, 2021). Through researching on this topic, I want to show the real-life consequences of Wilders anti-immigration discourse and contribute to the broader discussion on refugee well-being in the Netherlands.

1.2 Problem definition

In the last few years, almost a quarter of the Dutch voters showed they want more restrictive immigration policies, by voting for Geert Wilders and his party (Allecijfers.nl, 2024). Wilders is known for his outspoken views on immigration. He advocates for strict limits on immigration from non-western countries and is very much against introducing the Islam in the Netherlands; “We must stand together to counter Islamization…” (Wilders, 2012). He argues that this migration flow is a threat to the Dutch culture and our safety; “…We must speak the truth and defend our civilization. If we fail to do so, we will end up either enslaved or dead.” (Wilders, 2012). He says: “The Netherlands is not an Islamic country and it should never be!” (Wilders, 2025). He then calls for harsh measures to reduce the number of refugees entering the Netherlands and to make the country less attractive to asylum seeks. These measures are meant to stop the Islamization of the Netherlands and include, tightening family reunification rules, shortening temporary visa durations, and designating certain areas as safe to reject asylum applications (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023). The fact that Wilders’ party is the biggest in the Netherlands raises my concerns about the impact it has on the well-being of people who are fleeing their home country and are seeking safety and stability in the Netherlands.

Well-being is defined by the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (CBS, 2021) as “our current quality of life and the extent to which it is achieved and maintained at the expense of the generations that will follow us or of people in other parts of the world.” And the concept ‘quality of life’ includes eight main themes: personal well-being, material well-being, health, work-life balance, housing, society, safety and the environment (CBS, 2021). Anti-immigration policies might affect some of these themes, such as psychological health, social inclusion, economic stability, and access to housing and healthcare. Policies that limit refugee rights, restrict access to employment and housing, or create a negative public sentiment could contribute to increased stress, social isolation, and economic difficulties for refugees. On top of that, the rise of this anti-immigration sentiment leads to higher discrimination and xenophobia, further degrading refugees’ sense of security and belonging (European Network Against Racism, 2023).

1.3 Research aim and research questions

The aim of this research is to figure out how Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse influences public perception and policy-making in the Netherlands, and what the consequences are for the well-being of refugees. My assumption is that his anti-immigration discourse along with his policies is indeed affecting the well-being of refugees and not in a positive way. While Wilders' anti-immigration discourse is often presented as a response to societal concerns, this research investigates how these narratives around refugees are actively constructed, framing refugees as a threat and creating restrictive policies towards refugees.

Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse, such as his rhetoric, narratives, and media use, frames migration as challenging or threatening. This can influence the public perception and attitude towards refugees. A report from 2024 showed a rise in discrimination reports, the number of reports received by the national hotline Discriminatie.nl even more than doubled. This is the fifth year in a row that the number of reports has increased in the Netherlands (Discriminatiecijfers, 2024; 2025). Frank Smilda, who represents the North Netherlands Unit in the Politie Voor Iedereen (PVI) Tackling Discrimination section, says “What we are seeing is an increase in the number of reports, and given the current roughening in society, but also in politicians dealings with each other, I can well imagine that. If you see how things sometimes go in the House of Representatives, you shouldn't be surprised if that is reflected in society” (Politie.nl, 2025). On top of the growing discrimination reports, Wilders’ anti-immigration policies aiming to prevent or control refugees moving across borders are making life even more difficult for refugees.

Rather than solely focusing on formal refugee policy, this research places the focus on the discursive environment as well, that is: the public language, framing strategies, and emotional appeals used to influence voters and justify exclusionary policies. Wilders’ discourse is analysed not just as political speech, but as a form of social practice that both reflects and reinforces exclusionary policies. At the same time, this research evaluates the effects of such discourse and policies on the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands.

By looking at the social, as well as the policy-related dimensions, this research will discover whether such political developments influence refugees' well-being. The central question of this thesis therefore is: **‘How are Geert Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse and policies**

affecting the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands?' To help me answer this main question, I formulated several sub-questions regarding Wilders' discourse and policies and its effects on refugee well-being:

Sub-question 1: Which are the specific anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders' government and how can they affect the well-being of refugees?

Sub-question 2: How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being?

Together, these two sub-questions aim to explore the relationship between far-right political discourse, anti-immigration policy, and refugee well-being. With these sub-questions, I hope to form a complete understanding of how Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policies are affecting the well-being of refugees.

1.4 Relevance

1.4.1 Societal relevance

If we were to implement all of Wilders promoted anti-immigration policies, this could have major social impacts, especially when it comes to the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands. His policies advocate for stricter border controls, a significant reduction in asylum approvals and a stop to family reunifications (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023). In October 2024, the Dutch government approved some policies presented by Asylum and Migration Minister Marjolein Faber who are meant to tighten asylum laws, such as the reintroduction of border controls and the suspension of asylum applications under certain conditions, because "We want to make the Netherlands as unattractive as possible," said Faber (CORDER, 2024).

One of the most critical social consequences of these policies is breaking up refugee families. Restrictions on family reunification, particularly for adult children and unmarried partners, are leaving many refugees in distress, because they are unable to reunite with their loved ones. Research has shown that family separation contributes to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among refugees, particularly among children and young adults who struggle with displacement and social isolation (Schweitzer et al., 2018).

Additionally, the broader political discourse surrounding immigration has influenced public perception. Wilders' strong anti-immigration attitude, often framed around national security concerns and "saving" the Dutch culture, aligns with a rise in discrimination. According to reports from human rights organizations, there has been an increase in discrimination against asylum seekers, with refugees facing higher barriers to housing, employment, and social integration (European Network Against Racism, 2023). Research in migration studies, psychology, and public health have also demonstrated that hostile political environments and restrictive asylum policies contribute to declining mental health among refugees, thus affecting their well-being. Studies indicate that long-term uncertainty, fear of deportation, and experiences of discrimination increase the presence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety among refugee communities (Laban et al., 2005; Silove et al., 2017).

On top of that, the housing crisis in the Netherlands has worsened the challenges faced by refugees. Overcrowded asylum centres, long waiting periods for residency applications, and an overall shortage of affordable housing, have made it very difficult for refugees to find safety and stability (VluchtelingenWerk, 2024). These structural barriers create a cycle of exclusion, preventing refugees from accessing essential services and keeping them from fully participating in the Dutch society.

At last, there is are also economic downsides of these anti-immigration discourse to consider. While anti-immigration policies often aim to reduce the number of incoming refugees, they can also lead to long-term economic consequences. Research suggests that well-integrated refugees contribute positively to labour markets, especially in ageing societies where workforce shortages are growing, just like in the Netherlands (OECD, 2022). Restrictive policies can limit the potential contributions of refugees to the Dutch economy, because they are limiting their access to education and employment opportunities. So Wilders' anti-immigration policies do not only effect refugees but they also affect the overall Dutch society.

1.4.2 Scientific relevance

The impact of Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse on refugee well-being in the Netherlands remains an underexplored area in scientific literature. Even though studies have researched the populist discourse and its effects on the public attitude (Mudde, 2019; Wodak, 2015), there is still a knowledge gap regarding its direct effects on the well-being of refugees in those host countries, especially in the case of the Netherlands. Existing literature is often focused on policy frameworks and integration outcomes (Scholten, 2020), but not a lot of studies focus on the well-being of refugees under these anti-immigration discourses.

With this research I hope to contribute to the broader academic debate on the effect that far-right politicians, like Wilders, have on refugees. Scientists have discussed whether right-populist discourse mostly influences public perception or that it also has socio-economic and psychological effects (Betz, 2019; Inglehart & Norris, 2017). By laying the focus specifically on the Netherlands, this research contributes to the discussion by providing insights on how anti-immigration discourses create social environments and policies that turn into everyday challenges for refugees, such as social exclusion, discrimination and access to vital services such as housing and healthcare.

Finally, Wilders' policies provide a case study in the broader field of migration governance. The Netherlands has historically been known for its relatively progressive approach to refugee integration, but recent policy changes align with the growing trend of restrictive asylum measures across Europe (Generis Global, 2024). Some researches argue that far-right populist discourse is mainly symbolic (Moffitt, 2016), but this research hypothesizes that it indeed has impact on people's life's, because populism is not only influencing public attitudes but also governmental policies that affect refugee well-being. Focussing specifically on the case of Wilders can bring insights on the impacts of certain anti-immigration policies, and this can then help to advise future policymakers in other countries who are facing similar challenges.

1.4.3 Relevance for the Sustainable Development Goals

The definition of well-being as presented by the CBS, originates from the Brundtland Report (United Nations, 1988), prepared by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED): “Sustainable development is a development which meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. The Brundtland Report also argues that sustainable development is essentially about distributional justice, in both time and space. This means that the distribution of well-being between the present and future generations is included, as well as the difference in well-being between countries.

The topic of this research aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set up by the UN, particularly SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). By researching how anti-immigration policies and discourse can affect for example refugees' mental and physical health, social integration, and access to essential services, this research gives a clear image of how politics contribute to social inequalities. Furthermore, this research aims to provide insights on how political discourse and policy-making influence refugee well-being, once again highlighting the need for more inclusive and righteous politics.

Sustainability is not just about environmental concerns, it is also about social and economic concerns. By looking at the long-term impacts of anti-immigration policies on vulnerable populations, such as refugees, this research highlights the correlation between social sustainability and human well-being. While using the well-being indicators (‘’Monitor of Well-being & the SDG’s’’) set up by the CBS (2021) for a sustainable future, I hope to find out what the impact is of Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse and policies on the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands. Ultimately, this research can support the vision of sustainability as a framework for the well-being of all individuals, regardless of their background.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Definition of concepts

Some of the concepts cannot be directly translated into questions and require some concreteness. In this part of the research process, maximum consideration is given to maintaining content and concept validity. This is done by analysing meaning as precisely as possible while keeping the parent concept in mind (Korzilius, 2008).

2.1.1 What is well-being?

Well-being is a concept that is perceived differently by many people. One way to look at well-being is that it is all about feeling well, feeling good; hedonism states that if your pleasant experiences outweigh your unpleasant experiences, you are doing well (Jeremy Bentham, 1789). Another view states that well-being is about desire fulfilment, rather than feelings: we do well when we get what we desire and do what we want to do (Chris Heathwood, 2016). However another theory says that well-being relies not so much on our individual feelings or desires, but on the fulfilment of our human nature.; we flourish by fully exercising our human capacities (Aristotle, appr. 330 BCE).

All these different ideas on what well-being is, are at work in the world around us. They influence our attempts to reach well-being, to measure well-being, and to promote well-being through institutions and policies. They inform our perspective on the relation between personal well- being and society. All of them come with certain strengths but also with weaknesses. But what does this research specifically mean with 'well-being'?

As mentioned before well-being is a concept that is hard to define, I therefore think looking at well-being from just one point of view falls short to this research. However I have to limit the concept or else it would be too broad for this research. In this research I will therefore stick to the ideas of the Dutch government regarding well-being. The CBS (2021) compiled a list of eight main themes related to well-being, this lists includes:

1. Subjective well-being: is central to reflections on well-being in a broad sense, it is defined here as the way a person values their life. It is measured by means of the degree to which people are satisfied with their lives, the extent to which they feel they have control over their lives and the Personal Well-being Index.

2. Material well-being: is made up of the disposable income that people have, together with the goods and services that they can buy with that income and with which they can add fulfilment and colour to their lives.

3. Health: both actual and perceived, is a key determinant of quality of life. A chronic illness, for example, can restrict a person's ability to participate fully/actively in society.

4. Work-life balance: well-being, for most people, depends on having appropriate paid employment. On the other hand, free time also has a major influence on people's perceived quality of life. A balance therefore needs to be struck between work and free time. Many factors are important in this regard. For example, a good education is important for a person to have good prospects in the job market.

5. Housing: decent and affordable accommodation is one of our basic needs.
6. Society: in which everyone can participate and in which people can trust one another and trust institutions such as the government and the legal system. The number and quality of social contacts and hence the degree to which people participate in social life.
7. Safety: crime and perceived safety, have a direct impact on quality of life. Both the actual risk of being a victim and the feeling of safety or a lack of safety have an effect.
8. The environment: clean air, clean drinking water and surface water, sufficient healthy natural spaces and biodiversity, and uncontaminated soil are key basic needs. In a densely populated country such as the Netherlands, it is also important for certain areas to be primarily left natural, so that flora and fauna can survive and thrive.

2.1.2 When are you considered a refugee?

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR): "A refugee is someone who has been forced to flee their country because of persecution, war or violence." Because of this they are in need for protection from another country since their home country can't or won't protect them.

There is however a difference between refugees and asylum seekers. An asylum seeker seeks safety in another country and is still waiting of their grand for international protection. An asylum seeker can only apply for protection in the country of arrival, which means they have to cross a border to apply for asylum. After this, they must be able to prove that they meet the criteria to be protected as a refugee. In the Netherlands, the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) decides whether an asylum seeker is recognised as a refugee. Asylum seekers who are recognised as refugees are given 'refugee status'; they are also called status holders or permit holders in the Netherlands (Stichting Vluchteling, 2023).

Refugees are also different from internally displaced persons (IDPs) and from migrants. IDPs flee their homes but never cross an international border unlike refugees. Migrants on the other hand choose to move instead of being forced by for example war. Migrants want to improve their lives in another country by work opportunities, education, family reunification or other reasons (UNHCR, 2025).

Then at last, someone could be a refugee in the past but is not considered a refugee anymore. In the Netherlands, a refugee can go through different legal stages. The first is when someone applies for asylum when arriving in the Netherlands, they are now asylum seekers. Then when granted asylum, they receive a temporary residence permit and are recognized as a refugee. After five years they can either apply for permanent residency or naturalization and become a Dutch citizen. If so they are no longer legally considered a refugee, because they now have full residency rights or citizenship (Naturalisatiedienst, 2025). However, someone can still feel and/or personally identify themselves as a refugee because of their past.

Only counting people in the Netherlands with a refugee status as refugees would fall short to this research, since Wilders discourse can also affect the well-being of people who are no longer legally considered as refugees in the Netherlands. People can still feel or been seen as

refugees, even though they gained a Dutch permit. Also asylum seekers coming to the Netherlands are included in the term refugees for this research. The reason why is because Wilders anti-immigration policies can affect their well-being ass well, plus a large number of the asylum seekers are given the refugee status in the end, in 2024 more than 75% gained a residence permit (VluchtelingenWerk Nederland, 2025).

2.1.3 What are anti-immigration policies and discourse?

Anti-immigration policies are as the name says, policies against (anti) immigration. These policies are legislative and administrative measures implemented by governments to prevent and control people moving across borders. These policies can take on different forms, think of stricter border controls, limitations on asylum and/or refugee admissions, reduced access to social services, and deportation measures. The main reasons for Wilders to promote such policies are for example, to protecting national security, preserving cultural identity, and addressing public concerns about migration (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023).

Anti-immigration discourse is also as the name says, a discourse against (anti) immigration. Discourse refers to written or spoken communication, it is thus a broad term and could need some clarification. Discourse involves the interaction between the speaker and listener or writer and reader. It is not just about what is being said, but how it's being said, the intention behind it, and how it is understood. According to discourse theorists Cheregi (2015) and Hart (2021), anti-immigration discourse involves the selective use of framing, metaphors, and identity constructions to shape public opinion. These narratives around immigrants do not operate neutrally but actively construct immigrants as problematic subjects, they often rely on militaristic ("mass immigration") or biological ("asylum tsunami") metaphors (Hart, 2021), which creates panic and portrays immigrants as uncontrollable threats. Politicians often frame immigration while using symbolic threats, such as loss of culture or values, rather than realistic threats, such as job loss and crime, this is because symbolic threats are more emotionally evocative (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017; van Klingeren, 2020). Anti-immigration discourse can range from policy-driven discussions to more populist and nationalist expressions that fuel public aversion against immigration (Wodak, 2015).

Together, anti-immigration policies and discourse shape public opinion, influence political agendas, and impact the treatment of immigrants and refugees within societies.

2.1.4 What is far-right and how does this term fit Wilders discourse?

It is important to clarify the meaning of far right, since it often gets mistaken for extreme right, radical right or populist right. Even though all four share core traits such as nationalism and exclusionary views on immigration, they differ significantly in their views on democracy, their methods and their ideological roots (Haley, 2017).

Among these terms, extreme right is perhaps the easiest to define. It refers to parties/ movements that are openly anti-democratic, explicitly racist, ultra-nationalist, and often supportive of political violence. These groups consider democracy as inherently weak and view pluralism as a threat to national unity (Haley, 2017). In contrast to extreme right the radical right respects democracy but challenges democratic values such as minority rights. Mudde (2007) defines the radical right as a combination of nationalism, xenophobia (or nativism), and authoritarianism. The term populist right introduces yet another layer. Right

populism is more a political style rather than an ideology, it emphasizes a "us vs. the elite" narrative (Mudde, 2004).

Far right is defined by Mudde (2007) as a umbrella term that includes both the extreme right and the radical right. Mudde mentions that what unites them is their nativism, authoritarianism and populism, however they differ in their views on democracy. Yet, there is no single unifying ideological foundation that defines the far fight universally. As Mudde (2007) points out, the far right is more of a descriptive category, where a central definition is lacking. History, national context, and political culture all influence how far-right movements/parties define themselves and how they are defined by others. Many far-right parties actively reject the labels applied to them by academics or the media, making it even harder to label these parties as far right.

In summary, although often conflated, the terms extreme right, far right, radical right, and populist right refer to different political movements. While these subcategories sometimes blur, they help distinguish between violent anti-democrats and parties that work within the democratic system but promote exclusionary policies. Given these distinctions, Geert Wilders is thus best described as a far-right politician with both radical right and populist traits. He respects democratic elections and operates within the Dutch parliamentary system (unlike the extreme right). However, he promotes nativist, anti-immigration, and anti-Islam policies that clearly don't fit within the liberal democratic values. Simultaneously, he positions himself as the defender of the "ordinary Dutch citizen" against the elites, while using populist rhetoric.

2.2 Literature review

The literature review will look intro literature regarding this subject and analyse what has already been written about the problem. I will dive into gaps and link the sub questions to the main question, while using various sources, such as scientific articles, books, papers and statistics.

2.2.1 Anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders

On Friday the 20th of December 2024, cabinet Schoof has officially approved three new laws presented by Asylum and Migration Minister; Marjolein Faber (NOS Nieuws, 2024). These new plans should form "the strictest asylum regime ever" (Wilders, 2024). Faber announced that she is happy that she can now move forward and stated; "The voters have given a clear mandate. We have to change course and reduce the influx immediately. We are taking measures to make the Netherlands as unattractive as possible to asylum seekers. And those who abuse our hospitality have no place here. I am going for a safer Netherlands" (Faber, 2024). The laws approved by the cabinet contain:

1. The Asylum Emergency Measures Act including:
   - Abolition of permanent residence permits
   - Asylum permit valid for 3 years, instead of 5
   - Extension of the declaration of undesirability
   - Limitation on family reunification to only parents and children
2. Dual status system: distinction between people fleeing danger because of ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion, and people fleeing war and (natural) violence. Right now such distinction doesn't exist.

3. Return and Immigration Detention Act: make it punishable if people do not cooperate with deportation.

Faber expects her plans to have an effect: “This is what Dutch people want: a fundamental change of direction in policy to reduce inflow and promote return” (NOS Nieuws, 2024). Such heavy measures align with the concept of ‘crimmigration’, which is the increasing overlap between criminal law and immigration control (Stumpf, 2006). However, on 13 February of 2025, the Council of State, warned the cabinet about the implementation of two proposals because they lack in evidence for their effectiveness and: “These measures could have a disruptive effect on the functioning of the judiciary and thus legal protection” (Directeur Wetgeving en Juridische Zaken, 2025). Despite the negative advice to proceed with these proposals, Faber still wants to continue her plans. On February 27 of 2025, the Counsil of State again addressed their concerns for the implementation of these laws, calling them: “highly inadvisable” (De Rechtspraak, 2025).

Also some policy proposals in Wilders election programme are difficult to preform because they are in conflict with conventions from the United Nations and the European Union. Wilders suggest we must put a halt to asylum, stop family reunification, sending back Syrian refugees, ban double nationality and even banning Korans and mosques (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023).

One of the most critical social consequences of these policies is breaking up refugee families. Research has shown that family separation contributes to increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among refugees (Schweitzer et al., 2018). Also research has demonstrated that hostile political environments and restrictive asylum policies contribute to declining mental health among refugees, thus affecting their well-being. Studies indicate that long-term uncertainty, fear of deportation, and experiences of discrimination increase the presence of PTSD, depression, and anxiety in refugee communities (Laban et al., 2005; Silove et al., 2017). Furthermore, such a hostile political environment which is created by these anti-immigration policies can worsen the social exclusion of refugees, limiting their access to resources and integration opportunities (Bloch, 2013).

2.2.2 Far-right political discourse and refugees

Geert Wilders is known for his strong opinion on immigration. In 2004 he founded the PVV and in 2006 he participated in the parliamentary elections for the first time and won nine seats. Geert Wilders has been fighting for years against the ‘Islamisation of the Netherlands’ and the ‘mass-immigration’ (Partij voor de vrijheid, 2025; Tweede Kamer der staten-generaal, n.d.). His discourse and policies reflect his belief that immigration, especially from Islamic countries, poses a threat to the Dutch identity and security; "Warn your neighbours, your colleagues, your friends for the danger of Islamization, a danger to your country, your liberty, your partner, your children" (Wilders, 2015). Such discourse is consistent with broader far-right populism, which often frames immigration as an existential threat to the nation. Far-right politicians, including Wilders, use populist strategies that positions a native group against a non-native group (immigrants, in Wilders case particularly Muslims and refugees) and then portrays the political “elite” as failing to protect the national interests of a country (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In order to protect these national interests, populist leaders can take heavy measures,

in the past Wilders said he wanted to stop immigration from Islamic nations and make Muslims living in the Netherlands voluntary leave; “We want to stop all immigration from Islamic countries. We want to stimulate voluntary re-emigration to Islamic countries. We want to expel all criminals with dual citizenship and deprive them of their Dutch nationality. We want to de-Islamise our nation. Dear Friends, there is a lot of work to do. We, the defenders of freedom and security, have an historic duty.” (Wilders, 2014).

Wilders' discourse instrumentalises refugees by portraying them not as individuals fleeing danger, but as faceless threats. His repeated calls to "stop all immigration from Islamic countries" and “stimulate voluntary re-emigration” reduce refugees to a political problem, rather than a humanitarian concern. His use of emotionally appealing language, like “Islamic invasion” and “asylum tsunami”, creates biases and contributes to the moral panic around immigration. In doing so, Wilders shifts the public discourse from humanitarian responsibility to a national survival, creating fear-based politics that legitimise exclusionary policies. This framing is not unique to Wilders but is characteristic of far-right politicians across Europe, who often portray themselves as the only protectors of national culture and security (Wodak, 2015).

Wilders' public speeches often reflect his perception of Islam as a threat to Western values and Dutch national identity, as like in an interview with Fox News; "I'm certainly not anti-Muslim, but indeed I believe Islam is a threat to our civilization" (Wilders, 2012a). This approach exemplifies what Wodak (2015) calls the “politics of fear” a strategy in which migrants are depicted as criminal, culturally incompatible, and economically burdensome. Wilders explains on his standpoint by showing the contrast between Dutch values, such as freedom, and the Islamic teachings: "The Netherlands is based on values that are based on Christianity and Judaism, and that Islam poses really a threat to our freedom" (Wilders, 2012a). Also in his election programme he mentions: “Our culture, and Western way of life is threatened by letting in large numbers of people, often from non-Western, Islamic countries” (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023). By portraying refugees and asylum seekers as incompatible outsiders, Wilders constructs a “us” (the Dutch/ Western) versus “them” (refugee/ Muslim) narrative.

Moreover, Wilders strategically victimises himself to reinforce his populist appeal, This self-victimisation, a common populist tactic (Wodak, 2015), reinforces the narrative that he speaks forbidden truths on behalf of “the people”. He has referred to himself as a “political prisoner,” claiming that his right to free speech has been undermined by legal actions against him (DPG Media Privacy Gate, 2004; Sophie, 2024). He has lived under constant protection over 20 years and faced multiple criminal trials, including a conviction in 2020 for group insult after infamously asking supporters whether they wanted “more or fewer Moroccans” (Strafzaak Wilders, 2021; Wilders, 2014). These words led to over 6,000 official complaints and highlights the polarizing nature of his discourse (Darroch, 2016). Wilders defended his words by saying: "It is my right and my duty as a politician to speak about the problems in our country. Because the Netherlands has a huge Moroccan problem" (Wilders, 2016). This clearly shows the tension between freedom of speech and hate speech within liberal democracies, a debate explored by Brown (2019). These words show how right-wing populists often frame their discourse as a defence of free speech while they engage in this anti-immigration discourse and keep on excluding people from a society (Moffitt, 2016).

Wilders' provocative anti-immigration discourse has had its effects on public opinion. Research commissioned by the Volkskrant in June of 2024 revealed a significant decline in empathy towards refugees among Dutch voters. In autumn 2024, 50% of voters considered it a moral duty to take in refugees; this figure dropped to 39% by June 2024 (Reijmer & de Ruiter, 2024). This research also showed misconceptions about immigration, particularly among right-wing voters, many PVV voters falsely believe the Netherlands takes in more asylum seekers than most EU countries, despite statistics showing it is close to the average. According to I&O Research (2023), 98% of PVV voters report strong concerns about immigration. These numbers reflect a broader trend: not only does far-right discourse spread misinformation, it also makes the narratives emotionally appealing, thereby reinforcing its social impact.

This process is explained by confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998), which suggests individuals are more likely to accept information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. Studies by Pennycook and Rand (2023) and Martel et al. (2020) show that emotionally charged, negative political messages are more likely to be believed and widely shared, particularly on social media. Robertson et al. (2023) further show that emotionally charged, negative content spreads faster than neutral or positive content, particularly on social media. Neuroscientific findings also show that fear-based messages activate the amygdala, the brain's emotional alarm system, which heightens attention and reduces critical evaluation of information (Šimić et al., 2021). These studies help explain why Wilders' emotionally loaded narratives about Islam and refugees are appealing to the public, even though this lack supporting data.

The portrayal of refugees, especially those from Islamic countries, as threats to the national security and the Dutch culture contributes to an hostile environment. Research by Esses et al. (2013) finds that such hostile environments increase biases and reduce support for integration policies. Refugees who are exposed to stigmatizing public discourse often experience discrimination, social exclusion, and chronic stress, all of which negatively affect their mental health and sense of belonging. According to the ENAR (2023), these forms of exclusion can hinder long-term integration, education, and employment outcomes, undermining both individual and societal well-being.

2.2 Theory

The theoretical framework is crucial for the research, because it doesn't only explain how the anti-immigration discourse can form barriers for refugees but it also addresses the consequences of these barriers on their well-being. This research is going to use the critical discourse analysis and the social exclusion theory to analyse how Wilders' discourse and policies affect the well-being of refugees. Combining these theories helps to connect the political discourse with the social discourse, which helps to illustrate how discourse, policies, and social structures influence refugee well-being.

2.2.1 Critical discourse analysis and Wilders far-right discourse

The role of Wilders discourse in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy decisions is very important for this research. The critical discourse analysis (CDA), developed by, Norman Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (1994), can help me understand the influence far-right politicians' discourses have on refugees.

The CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to studying language that views discourse as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1992). It investigates how language use contributes to the (re)production of power, dominance, and inequality in society (van Dijk, 2001). In this sense, CDA is not just a linguistic analysis but a form of social critique with as goal uncovering the effects of discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). As van Dijk (2000) explains, it specifically addresses the role of elite discourse in shaping public opinion, arguing that political figures like Wilders use speeches and media statements to form narratives that portray marginalised groups, such as refugees, as threats to national safety, cultural identity and economy. Fairclough (1992; 1995) proposed analysing discourse at three interrelated levels:

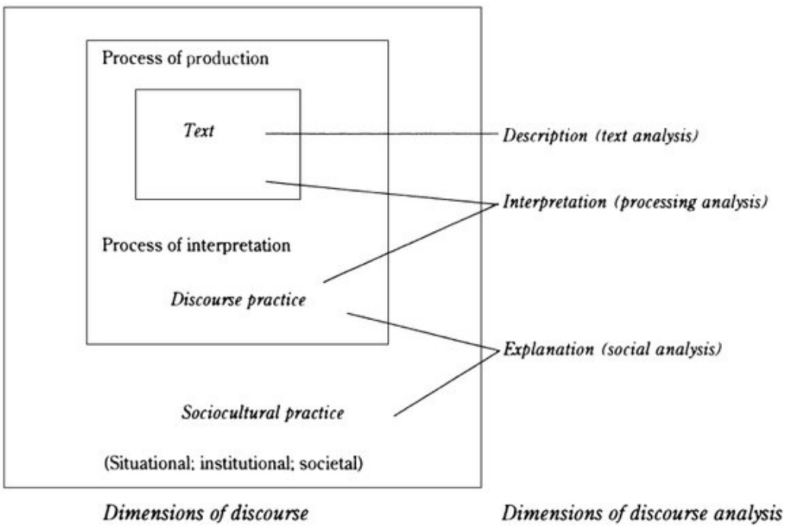

Figure 2: Fairclough's model of dimensions of discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995)

Textual level (description): focuses on the linguistic features of a text/ speech, think of word choice, grammar and the use of metaphors. For example, Wilders' use of terms like “asylum tsunami” or “luck seekers” reflects deliberate word choices that construct refugees as an overwhelming threat rather than individuals seeking safety (Wodak, 2015).

Discursive practice (interpretation): examines how texts are produced, distributed, and interpreted within specific contexts. This includes analysing how Wilders’ speeches are distributed through social media, how they align with or challenge existing discourses in the Netherlands, and how his messages is interpreted by the public (Fairclough, 1995).

Socio-political practice (explanation): this level analyses the broader societal implications, such as how Wilders’ discourse helps legitimise exclusionary policies by framing refugees as culturally incompatible and as a burden. In doing so, his discourse reinforces institutional discrimination and structural inequality (van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). For example, restrictive policies on asylum, family reunification, and access to welfare can be justified by constructing refugees as threatening or even undeserving.

In this way, the CDA allows researchers to connect textual analysis to social processes, exposing how language use maintains or challenges power (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak, 2015). Research on political discourse has shown that negative discourses, like Wilders, have tangible effects. For instance, Verkuyten et al. (2020) argues that anti-immigration discourse

influences media narratives, public opinion, and ultimately policies. Similarly, Esses et al. (2013) show that portraying refugees as threats leads to increased public hostility, reduced empathy, and greater support for restrictive policies. When refugees are portrayed as threats or undeserving of support, such framing justifies anti-immigration policies, which can negatively impact their access to housing, employment, healthcare, and ultimately their mental health and integration (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; European Network Against Racism, 2023). The CDA is thus crucial in answering the second sub-question: "How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being?" It reveals how language shapes public perception and creates a shift towards anti-immigration views, which in turn form the basis for anti-immigration policies that structurally disadvantage refugees.

2.2.2 Social exclusion theory and Wilders anti-immigration policies

After discovering how Wilders anti-immigration discourse influences public opinion and voting behaviour, it becomes possible to better understand the structural consequences of this discourse on refugee well-being. To investigate these consequences, this research uses the social exclusion theory (Levitas, 2005; Silver, 1994), which provides a conceptual framework for analysing how discourse and policy interact to disadvantage particular social groups, in this case refugees.

The social exclusion theory refers to the processes that prevents certain groups or individuals from fully participating in society, whether it is because of economic, cultural, social or political barriers. Levitas identifies three key dimensions of social exclusion:

Economic exclusion: limited access to employment, income, housing, and other resources critical for financial independence.

Social exclusion: barriers to forming social ties, participating in community life, and developing a sense of belonging.

Political exclusion: restrictions on social engagement, political representation, and access to rights.

Wilders' policies and discourse contribute to all these three forms of exclusion. Wilder's has consistently advocated for stricter immigration policies, that can limit refugees' access to housing and employment, these are essential aspects of economic inclusion. For example, restrictions on social housing allocations for refugees, stricter work permits, directly limit their ability to establish economic stability and social integration (Van Houdt et al., 2011).

Research has shown that these forms of exclusion significantly affect refugees' well-being. Researchers found that refugees in the Netherlands who face long periods of unemployment and housing insecurity show higher levels of distress and experience lower life satisfaction. Social exclusion is further reinforced by the stigmatization resulting from this political discourse, which creates a hostile environment where refugees struggle to form social connections and feel a sense of belonging (De Vroome & Van Tubergen, 2010).

Wilders' discourse legitimises exclusionary policies, which in turn produce tangible forms of social, economic, and political exclusion. This cycle of exclusion reduces refugees' access to key resources and opportunities, impeding their integration and negatively impacting their

well-being. The social exclusion theory therefore directly contributes to answering the main research question: “How are Geert Wilders’ anti-immigration policies and discourse affecting the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands?” In addition it helps me answer the first and second sub-question as well. The first sub-question: “Which are the specific anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders’ government and how can they affect the well-being of refugees?”, the social exclusion theory helps uncover how policies such as limited access to housing, employment restrictions, or reduced welfare benefits contribute to economic and political exclusion, affecting refugees’ well-being. The second sub-question: “How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being?”, the theory also shows how discourse contributes to social exclusion, by portraying refugees as bad and shaping hostile public environments.

2.2.3 Connecting the theories: a holistic approach

The two theories mentioned above, complement each other by linking political discourse to policy outcomes along with their impacts on refugee well-being. The CDA explains how Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse shapes public perceptions and policy decisions, which then leads to exclusionary policies that limit refugees’ access to resources and social participation. The social exclusion theory further clarifies how these policies and discourse create structural barriers that marginalize refugees in multiple domains of life. Finally, when connecting the two theories above to the eight themes regarding well-being it becomes clear what the impact of Wilders is in refugee well-being.

By using this holistic approach, I hope to fully tackle the main question: “How are Geert Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse and policies affecting the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands?” In this research the mentioned theories work together in order to reveal the full chain of effects, from discourse to policy, form policy to social exclusion and from social exclusion to well-being. This holistic approach makes sure that the political discourse, policies as well as refugee well-being are considered, this offers a nuanced understanding of the consequences that this anti-immigration discourse and policies have.

2.3 Operationalisation

In this chapter the concepts from the conceptual model will be operationalized. For the operationalization of the concepts I will be using the three steps method of Van Thiel, which means I will first identify the key concepts, then I will divide these into subdimensions and finally I will have measurable indicators (2014). According to Van Thiel, operationalization involves translating abstract theoretical concepts into measurable indicators that can be observed in practice (2014).

There are three central concepts in this research, which are anti-immigration discourse, anti-immigration policies, and well-being of refugees. Anti-immigration discourse refers to for example speeches, public statements, election programs, rhetorics, and communicative strategies used by far-right politicians, in this case, Wilders. Following Van Thiel (2014), anti-immigration discourse will be operationalized through content analysis of speeches, social media posts and his election programme, as well as interviews with experts. Indicators could

be the frequency of negative framing of refugees, recurring themes in rhetorical narratives or changes in public perception about migration correlating with Wilders' campaigns.

Anti-immigration policies are defined as governmental measures that restrict access to public services or opportunities for immigrants. This will be operationalized by analysing policy documents and policy proposals concerning the eight well-being themes listed by the CBS (2021). Indicators could be changes in legal entitlements or access to services (e.g., asylum procedures, eligibility for housing or work), the implementation of exclusionary practices in municipalities or for example budget allocations or cuts specifically affecting refugee services.

The CBS defines well-being "here and now" through eight core dimensions (CBS, 2024). These themes are designed to capture the quality of life of individuals currently living in the Netherlands. This research uses them to analyse how anti-immigration discourse and policy influence refugee well-being.

This research uses a mixed-methods approach, as recommended by Van Thiel (2014), to triangulate data and enhance validity. Document Analysis: Policy documents, parliamentary records, and political party programs will be reviewed to identify and categorize specific anti-immigration policies. Content Analysis: Speeches, social media outputs and the election programme of Geert Wilders will be coded thematically to identify dominant patterns.

Each sub-question corresponds to a different set of indicators and methods:

Sub-question	Indicators	Methods
Which are the specific anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders' government and how can they affect the well-being of refugees?	Policy restrictions: ○ Border controls ○ Family reunification ○ Limiting asylum approvals ○ Stricter housing allocation	Interviews, policy documents and secondary data
How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being?	○ Negative framing ○ Us/ Them rhetoric ○ Exaggerating ○ Societal impact	CDA, interviews and secondary data

Table 1: Operationalisation table

2.4 Conceptual model

Based on the theoretical framework and especially on the theories discussed above, I designed a conceptual model, shown below (figure 2). The arrows suggest a causal relationship that can either be positive or negative. The exact relationships will be explored in this research.

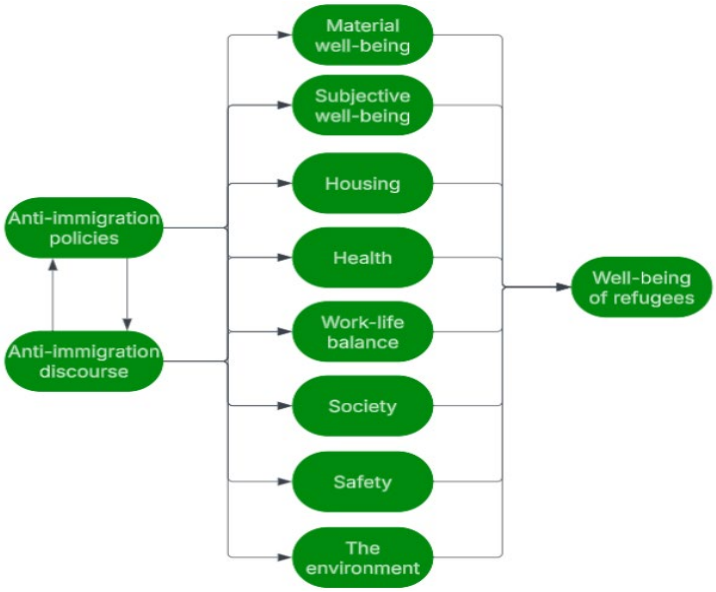

Figure 2: conceptual model

The conceptual model I designed for this research is to help understand the relationship between Geert Wilders' anti-immigration policies and discourse and the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands. The anti-immigration policies variable and the anti-immigration discourse variable in this model have their influence on each other, the exact relation is going to be shown using the CDA. The variables consist of key elements such as policy restrictions on refugees, negative political discourse, and shifts in societal perception driven by Wilders' view on immigration. These factors shape the experiences and opportunities for refugees in Netherlands.

The dependent variable is the well-being of refugees, which is examined using the eight themes of wellbeing that were discussed in the concept definition. The first theme, material well-being, material well-being is the disposable income people have and this is examined by using datasets from the CBS. Subjective well-being, reflects mental health, stress levels, and the sense of belonging among refugees, this is examined using the personal well-being index. Housing represents a vital aspect of well-being, think of access to stable living conditions and risks of overcrowding. Health plays a crucial role, as access to healthcare and physical well-being can be directly influenced by restrictive policies. Another essential factor is work-life balance, which includes employment opportunities and financial stability. The factor society examines how social integration, public perception, and discrimination impact refugees' ability to feel accepted and participate in the community, to examine this I use the social exclusion theory. Safety concerns the perceived safety as well as the actual safety, this will be examined by using datasets on crime from the CBS as well as reports on for example discrimination numbers. Lastly, the environment, is the space where people live in and if it is healthy, it is hard to examine this since refugees live spread out throughout the Netherlands.

Each of the well-being themes could be influenced differently, depending on both government policies and societal responses to the anti-immigration discourse. By analysing these relationships, this research hopes to provide an understanding on how political discourse and policy decisions influence the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands.

3. Methodology

In this chapter the research methodology is explained, this is going to be the backbone of this research. First the research strategy and design will be explained. Then the data collection and analysis will provide a clear inside on how the interviews will be conducted and processed. At last I will discuss the methodological reflections, where I will explain obstacles that I could face during the research and potential limitations.

3.1 Research strategy and design

To answer the research question, it is important to understand the experiences refugees have and the get in touch with experts and how they view changes regarding policies. This will allow me to gain insights about the effect that anti-immigration policies and discourse have on the well-being of refugees. For this reason I chose to use and collect qualitative data. This qualitative approach will fit the research better than a quantitative approach. This is because qualitative research methods make it easier to obtain in-depth information on specific topics in comparison to quantitative methods (Van Thiel, 2014). Mainly face-to-face interviews will be used as a qualitative research method. This offers a more effective way of collecting detailed data than, for example, a survey research.

Face-to-face interviews give respondents the opportunity to elaborate their answers better and it gives the researchers the opportunity to ask further questions when more depth is required. Also, long face-to-face interviews often collect the most data (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004), because of the following factors: first there is improved communication which helps build trust in the relation between the respondent and the researcher, and secondly this trust then promotes cooperation, socialisation, interaction, directness and ensures more active participation of the interviewee compared to other methods of qualitative data collection (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Further, during face-to-face interviews, information can also be gained from non-verbal cues. Research has shown that interaction without words have high communicative power (Lippa, 1998). The amount of non-verbal information exchanged during a two-person interaction varies from 66 percent to 93 percent (Birdwhistell 1970).

Besides conducting interviews this research will also make use of document analysis, this is a form of desk research in which documents are reviewed in a systematic way (Bowen, 2009). A Document analysis is a qualitative research method that examines documents to understand and interpret information, cultural norms, and social practices. This method is widely used in fields like history, sociology, education, and political science, as it allows researchers to analyse existing documents to gain insights into human behaviour, societal changes, and historical events. Documents in this case are secondary data, such as policy documents, legal papers, statistics or virtual outputs such as social media (Van Thiel, 2014). This form of analysis has quite some benefits: it is efficient, documents are widely available and they have a broad coverage, on the other hand, document analysis can lack in detail and there is a risk of biased selectivity (Bowen, 2009). For the document analysis I will make use of the Critical Discourse analysis, I will analyse Wilders discourse using his speeches, his social media and his election programme. With this document analysis patterns in Wilders discourse can be discovered and therefore it can help discover the effects of such anti-immigration discourse on the well-being of refugees.

By exploring how this political discourse affects lives, this research will highlight the broader societal impact of Geert Wilders' policies and discourse. This methodological approach ensures a ethical and reliable research of refugee well-being in the Netherlands.

3.2 Data collection

As mentioned above this research is going to use a qualitative research approach. There are three conventional types of interviews: structured, semi-structured, or open/unstructured interviews (Bryman, 2012; Van Thiel, 2014). I will be using semi-structured face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method. Semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth exploration while also keeping flexibility in responses (Bryman, 2012).

There are several sampling strategies, such as purposive sampling, snowball sampling and theoretical sampling (Bryman, 2012; Van Thiel, 2014). For this research, purposive sampling will be used, because it can be difficult to reach some respondents. Purposive sampling means that the selection is done on the basis of theoretical criteria (Van Thiel, 2014). Because refugees might be hard to reach, the goal is to focus on experts. Experts can allow me to broaden my scope, since in that case I am not zooming in on one specific person.

Since this research deals with a sensitive subject, the interviews will take place in safe locations to make sure that the interviewee feels comfortable and trusts me. The interviews will consist of open-ended questions focusing on different themes regarding Wilders discourse and policies, additionally, questions will address the impact on refugee well-being, such as integration challenges, discrimination and essential services such as housing. Of course, different interview guides will be made for each experts, to make sure that the questions fit well with their expertise-area. I will either do the interviews in Dutch or English, depending on the interviewee's preferable language. I will not conduct interviews with persons that don't fully control one of these languages, because it could lead to misinterpretations.

Ethical considerations play a crucial role in this research. Before participating, I will explain the purpose of this research to the interviewees, their right to withdraw at any time, and information on how their responses will be used in the research. With their permission, interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. To protect participants' privacy, all identifying information will be anonymized if they want to.

3.3 Data analysis

After the data is collected, the analysis can take place. In this phase of the research the interviews will be transcribed and the data will be reviewed to gain familiarity with the responses. When transcribing interviews, it is important to write the recordings down with an eye for detail, because some features of talk, such as a pause or an emphasis, can be crucial for the interpretation of the data (Bailey, 2008). After the interviews are put down on paper, the coding phase can start, where words, phrases, and ideas are identified. Coding is a process of labelling rough data and assigning units of meaning to specific parts of this rough data. In this way, the rough data can be dissected meaningfully, while keeping the relations between the parts intact. Codes are attached to parts of the text, varying in size, so it could be some words, sentences or even whole paragraphs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). These codes can

subsequently be clustered to create networks of codes, from which conclusions can be drawn to help answer the research question (Bryman, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Overall, coding consists of three phases: open coding, axial coding and theory development (Van Thiel, 2014). In the open coding phase, the rough data is labelled with short, descriptive codes to help identify relevant information from the data. This process is done multiple times per interview transcript, document and other contents, until there is a coding scheme left. With this coding scheme, the process of axial coding can start. Axial coding means that the existing codes are categorized in more general themes and patterns (Van Thiel, 2014), such as for example: "Nationalism," "Framing of refugees," and "Policy restrictions." These thematic groupings will help uncover deeper insights into how anti-immigration discourse and policies affect the lives of refugees. These code groups thus form the basis for the development of general theories about the research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In the theory development phase, the different code groups are compared with each other to look for patterns, cause and effect relations and other forms of interconnection (Van Thiel, 2014). By connecting this code network with the theoretical basis of the research, general conclusions about the research can be drawn. With the help of the computer program Atlas.ti the iterative process of coding the transcripts and documents is done, while keeping the conceptual framework of this research in mind.

3.4 Methodological reflections

Researching the effects of Geert Wilders' anti-immigration policies and discourse on refugee well-being in the Netherlands requires careful methodological consideration, especially regarding ethics, data sensitivity, researcher limitations, and potential obstacles.

Given the sensitive nature of this research, ethical concerns are a priority. To ensure ethical integrity I have to make sure that the participants are fully informed about the purpose of my research, their rights to withdraw, and how their data will be used (Tracy, 2010). I will also remove personal identifiers, and properly store their answers to protect the anonymity of the participants. Besides it is important to recognize that some participants might not speak openly due to fear of consequences. Therefore, creating a safe and non-judgmental space is crucial.

There are also several limitations that might affect my research process. Refugees may be difficult to reach due to legal constraints, fear, or distrust of researchers, refugees might also be hard to communicate with since they might not control the Dutch or English language. Involving translators into my is a possibility, but this can lead to translation biases. Meaning I have to be careful while phrasing questions and make sure to double check translations. Policies about refugee data protection can limit my access to official statistics, so using alternative data sources, such as NGO reports, might be needed.

Also because this political discourse is polarized, both the bias of the researcher as well as the units of study can be an obstacle for this research (Van Thiel, 2014). Therefore it is important to maintain objective and avoid imposing my personal views. Collecting my data from multiple sources, such as, interviews, policy analysis and media discourse, can improve my reliability. This research is conducted in a dynamic political environment where policies and discourse can shift quickly, I will have to constantly keep an eye on the media and political developments.

4. Analysis

In this chapter the analysis of Wilders discourse, interviews and secondary data will be carried out. First the document analysis will be done, secondly the analysis of the interviews and at last the two analysis will be revisited and linked to refugee well-being using secondary data.

4.1 Analysing Wilders discourse through the lens of the CDA

For this research I analysed different speeches and statements of Wilders as well as the election programme he has written for his party in 2023. This content analysis will be carried out using Atlas.ti, I will use the three step coding method as mentioned in the methodology. Overall, coding consists of three phases: open coding, axial coding and theory development (Van Thiel, 2014).

The first content of Wilders to analyse will be his election programme for 2023 (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023). His election programme consists of multiple subjects;

- Asylum and immigration
- Livelihood security: purchasing power and pension
- Safety
- Healthcare
- Housing market
- Climate and energy
- Farmers, fishers and animals
- Democracy, culture and public broadcasters
- Education
- Defence
- Mobility and waterworks
- External affairs, European Union and development aid
- Finance

After reading Wilders election programme, the following subjects were chosen as relevant to this research: asylum and immigration, housing market, democracy, culture and public broadcasters, defence, external affairs, European Union and development aid. These subjects were chosen because they mentioned immigration in some way.

Second three speeches of Wilders are analysed, the first one is his speech on 26th of May 2025, where he announced his 10-point plan regarding asylum and migration. The second speech is a speech he has given after winning the elections in 2023. The third speech will be the speech with his most known statement in 2014, “Do we want more or less Moroccans?”.

As third, his social media appearances are analysed, for this some tweets he has posted on Twitter will be analysed. I choose not to analyse his Instagram as well as his Facebook account, this is because he has far out the most followers on Twitter. To compare: Geert Wilders has 1 600 000 followers on Twitter and just 282 000 followers on Instagram and 524 000 on Facebook.

After coding all that is mentioned above, a list of codes emerged along with their code groups. This helps for further analysis because it gives structure and guides me through the documents that were coded. The codes in Atlas.Ti are written in Dutch, this is because it is easier and

because it gives an better overview since the documents that are used are mostly in Dutch, however for the research I translated them from Dutch to English. These are the code groups to structure the codes: code group 1; Framing of refugees/ other immigrants, code group 2; measurements regarding immigration, code group 3; nationalistic, code group 4; rhetorics remaining, code group 5; we vs them thinking.

Code/ Code group →	1	2	3	4	5
"Numbers"	X				
"For everybody"				X	
Destruction of the netherlands	X				
Reduce overall migration		X			
Asylum problems	X				
Asylum stop		X			
Asylum flow	X				
AZC's willen sluiten		X			
Therefore pvv with picture someone from non-western background	X			X	
The "real" refugee	X				
The elite					X
The people			X		
The Dutchman			X		X
The Turk	X				X
Discrimination of the Dutch people					X
Threat to the Netherlands	X				
No translated government information		X		X	
Luckseekers	X			X	
Contain family reunification		X			
Border control		X			
Closing borders		X	X		
The Europe					X
The Netherlands			X		
How to implement		X			
Hope				X	
Loving the Netherlands			X		
They/ them	X				X
Islam	X				
Jew hatred import	X				
Left					X
Massa migration	X			X	
Large-scale	X			X	
Dutch people first again			X		X
Dutch flag			X		
Nexit		X	X		

Code/ Code group →	1	2	3	4	5
Not welcome					X
Non-Western	X				X
Priceless	X			X	
Our			X		X
Our money			X		X
Getting our country back			X	X	X
Our Netherlands			X		X
Our culture			X		X
Our people			X		X
Our values and norms			X		X
Our homes			X		X
Our care and education			X		X
Open borders	X			X	
Call to action/ take action		X			
Everywhere are AZC's	X			X	
Overcrowding	X			X	
Propaganda			X	X	
Stopping temporary shelter		X			
Strictest asylum policy ever		X			
Growing sympathy			X	X	
Syrians	X				X
As a guest	X				X
Terrorists	X			X	
Tsunami	X			X	
Evicting		X			
False information				X	
Ban on dual nationality		X	X		
Headscarf ban		X			
UN convention		X			
Priority for migrants	X				
Aliens	X			X	
Who says so?				X	
We					X
We are falling behind			x	X	
Housing					
Housing shortage					

Table 2: Code scheme

Now we will look through the lens of the CDA while analysing the content mentioned above. The CDA is applied to discover how Geert Wilders uses language to construct a certain political reality, influence public opinion, and justify exclusionary policies. This analysis is categorised by three levels outlined by Fairclough (1995): the textual level, the discursive level, and the socio-political level. Before reading: since the research is written in English, the quotes used in the analysis where translated from Dutch to English, this may cause some quotes to not be fully grammatically correct or to lose some of their strength.

4.1.1 PVV Election Programme (2023)

In the election programme of the PVV, Wilders presents a radical anti-immigration agenda. The title of the election programme is "Dutch people number one again" (page 1), assuming that right now the Dutch people are disadvantaged he even mentions that "there must also come an end to the discrimination of Dutch people" (page 3). In the preface he states that the PVV will make sure the Netherlands will be "a country where the Dutch are cherished again" (page 3). The preface sets the tone for the rest of the election programme. Statements with no further explanation or support such as "Asylum seekers feast on luxurious cruise ships of free delicious buffets, while Dutch families have to cut back on groceries" (page 6) and "Our beautiful Netherlands has been severely degraded by the ongoing asylum tsunami and mass immigration" (page 3) are common throughout the document.

Textual level:

On a textual level, Wilders language mostly consists of metaphors and exaggerations, such as words like "asylum tsunami" (page 6) and "mass immigration" (page 3; 6; 10; 29), which presents refugees and other immigrants as overwhelming and even as a threat to the Netherlands. The frequent use of "our" people, home, money, etc. (81 times throughout the document), versus "luck-seekers" (page 3; 6; 42) and "illegal immigrants" (page 6; 7; 8) creates a strong 'us' versus 'them' narrative.

The document refers multiple times to an "asylum stop" (3 times on page 7; 2 times on page 8) and stresses that "The Netherlands is not an Islamic country" (page 4; 8). In order to stop the "Islamisation" of the Netherlands he comes with specific anti-Islam policy proposals such as a "ban op double nationality" (page 8), the closure of mosques (page 8), closing Islamic schools (page 8; 33; 34), and even banning the Koran (page 8). These proposals are framed as non-negotiable for the PVV and are presented without any context or nuance. For example: "The Netherlands is not an Islamic country. Our own culture and secular laws always have priority and if you don't like that, just leave" (page 4).

The election programme of the PVV creates a moral contrast between the ordinary "hardworking Dutchman" (page 10; 11) and the immigrants, who are using up all the public money; "Our welfare state is being sucked dry by non-Western profiteers, for whom everything is regulated to perfection" (page 10). He also suggest "our traditions" are being taken away from us: "Hands off our traditions: Black Pete, Christmas and Eastern stay" (page 30). This along with his famous phrase "Dutchman back on one" creates a sort of nostalgia, before everything was better and it positions the PVV as a protector of that.

Discursive level:

At this level, the focus is on how the PVV's election programme around migration and asylum was made, spread out, and received by the public and media. Wilders himself stated that the tone was softened compared to previous election programmes, although the content remained aggressive on immigration (NOS Nieuws, 2023). The election programme was promoted via the PVV's website, Wilders own social media channels, such as his Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and also the mainstream media, such as NOS and RTL Nieuws. The plans from the election programme where also discussed by Wilders during talk shows and debates. The media mainly highlighted themes about immigration with plans such as an asylum stop.

In his election programme Wilders focusses on existing problems such as housing shortages, rising living costs, and raising crime rates, which he then mostly blames on immigration. The media reinforced these narratives by highlighting the PVV's anti-immigration stance as a central issue in debates and coverages. Closer to the election date, Wilders saw an increase in electoral support (Allecijfers.nl, 2024), indicating successful public uptake of his discourse. In this context, Wilders' message resonated with voters who felt economically or culturally marginalised, reinforcing a common-sense narrative that refugees "take" from the welfare system and threaten "Dutch values." Wilders plans becoming part of the mainstream political debate reinforces and normalizes the negative framing of immigrants.

Wilders' election programme marked a strategic shift in tone, yet remained consistent in framing refugees and asylum seekers as a threat to Dutch society. While Wilders discourse appeared more moderate than in previous years, the underlying message remained the same. The programme repeatedly portrays refugees as "profiteers," whose presence displaces native Dutch citizens in housing, welfare access, and public safety.

Social-political level:

At this level, the analysis connects the discourse to institutional structures, policy measures, and power dynamics that produce and maintain social exclusion. Wilders programme reflects a populist and nationalist worldview in which the Dutch identity must be protected from external threats, in this case refugees. Wilders states that "closing our borders to even more fortune seekers from other cultures is necessary in this regard" (page 3) and that "We must also take back our national sovereignty" (page 3). Fairclough (1995) points out that such programmes do not just outline plans but also serve as instruments for legitimizing political ideologies. In Wilders case, the election programme reinforces the belief that Islam and immigration undermine Dutch society, and that harsh measures are needed to protect "our values." The PVV election programme outlines or even redefines who does and who does not belong in the Netherlands, which beliefs are viewed as legitimate, and which ones viewed as a public threat. His consistent use of "us" versus "them" thinking, the Dutch people versus the immigrant, versus tradition, versus progressiveness, versus practical welfare, versus the "left-liberal elite" (page 29), puts the PVV in the position of the protector, the protector of "the Dutchman" and "the Dutch identity".

In this election programme welfare chauvinism comes forward, it is the idea that welfare benefits belong to a certain group, often the native group of a country (Bjørklund & Goul Andersen , 1990). Wilders wants policy priorities like giving "priority for Dutch people" (page

20) in social housing, this is because Wilders claims that right now immigrants are given priority: “Because those who do look warm in their social rental homes are status holders. They still receive massive priority.” (page 20).

According to CDA frameworks (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2000), narratives like Wilders are not just descriptive but they construct political realities, because they authorize exclusionary practices such as anti-immigration policies. For example, by framing migrants and Islamic institutions as existential threats, PVV can legitimize harsh policy measures such as closing the borders, banning double nationalities, and stepping out the UN refugee convention. And in order for Wilders to push his anti-immigrations policy through he demands a binding referendum of the “Nexit” (page 43). Making it easy for him to then step out of conventions or arrangements with the European Union and the United Nations; “Opt-out EU rules asylum and migration, denounce UN Refugees convention” (page 8). These policies, made possible by and legitimised through public discourse, contribute directly to social exclusion, as defined by Levitas (2005). On an economic level, refugees have limited access to the labour market due to work permit restrictions and stigmatization (VluchtelingenWerk, 2024). On a political level, rights on family reunification have become stricter.

4.1.2 Speeches from Wilders

Speech 2014, “More or less Moroccans”

On the 19th of March in 2014 Wilders held an speech in a café full of PVV supporters for the local elections. During the speech he asked his supporters rhetorically: “Do you in this city and in the Netherlands want more or less Moroccans?” His supporters replied with screaming “less”, Wilders then replied, “Well, we'll take care of that then!”

At the textual level, this analysis focuses on the linguistic features and rhetorical strategies in Wilders’ speech. The language is deliberately simple, repetitive, and emotionally charged. The phrase “less Moroccans” frames this entire group as a problem with no nuance or context. Wilders also uses a call-and-response technique, creating the illusion of democratic support and collective agreement: by asking the question after two easy crowd-pleasers (“Do you want more or less EU?”), he creates a rhetorical trap. This implies public consent while avoiding direct responsibility, a tactic in elite discourse strategies (van Dijk, 2000).

At the discursive level, the speech is analysed in relation to how it was created, spread out, and interpreted within the Netherlands. This event was not spontaneous, it took place in a controlled setting (a private venue with PVV supporters) during an emotionally charged moment: election night. This moment was carefully chosen, with a sympathetic audience to ensure the desired reaction. The speech was filmed and broadcast, quickly spreading through national media (NOS, RTL, newspapers), and going viral on social media platforms, receiving widespread coverage. Even though there was a lot of commotion around the speech, the wide range of the speech contributed to the normalization of discriminatory language in Dutch politics.

On a socio-political level, this speech supports a broader ideology of ethnic nationalism, where groups are either included or excluded based on cultural or religious background (Elgenius & Rydgren, 2024). As Van Dijk (2000) argues, politicians often use strategic language

to create symbolic boundaries, such as “us” versus “them”. Here Wilders’ use of “less” positions Moroccan-Dutch citizens as unwanted and as a collective problem, which reinforces polarisation and justifies discriminatory policies. According to Levitas (2005) and Silver (1994), this is a textbook case of social exclusion, which occurs when discourse and policy intersect to marginalise groups from full participation in society.

Speech 2023, election night speech

On the 22nd of November in 2023 Wilders won the elections and held an speech to his audience (NOS, 2023). He opened his speech with his famous slogan: “35 seats, the largest party in the Netherlands. And I tell you Netherlands, the voters have spoken tonight, the voters have said: we are fed up, we are fed up and we want and we are going to make sure that the Dutch people are back on number one.” Stating that the Dutch people have to put back on number one again, is a standard phrase Wilders uses.

On a textual level, the structure of the speech is built around repeating, emphasising, and using symbolic language. He opens with: “The voters have spoken tonight. We are fed up. We are going to make sure that the Dutch people are back on number one.” He repeatedly uses “That Dutchman” to from a central figure in his speech who is in this case both the victim as the winner. Repeating this over and over is emotionally persuasive, because he is giving people hope and a voice. Phrases like “asylum tsunami” and “nonsense spending” are framing migration as disaster that is overcoming the Netherlands and that public spending on it is a waste. Wilders suggests that money should go to “healthcare” and “safety” for “the Dutch people” instead of the “tens of billions in nonsense spending” that he insinuates goes to immigration and climate. In Wilders speech there is no room for neutrality, you either support “the Dutchman” or you have turned your back on them. The speech ends with a personal and emotional tone, he thanks his supporters and his wife, which humanizes Wilders as a leader, a common technique used by populists to create intimacy with the public.

On a discursive level, the speech is analysed in relation to how it was made, spread out, and interpreted within the Netherlands. Wilders’ speech was broadcast live on national television (NOS) and social media during the election night. The loud applause, repetition of words and the emotional loading looks more like a populist rally then a real institutional victory. Wilders uses his platform not just to celebrate victory but to reframe national identity: the Dutch people (as he defines them) have reclaimed their country from the “elites” and “outsiders”. His phrase: “The Dutch people are back on number one” has become an ideological refrain, normalising ethnic nationalism in Dutch politics. Even though Wilders acknowledges the need to cooperate with other parties (“every party will have to jump over its shadow”), he uses that as a contrast to double down on his ideological priority: the centrality of “the Dutchman.”

On a social-political level, his speech puts the PVV in the position as the voice of the people “the voter has spoken tonight”. According to van Dijk (2002), political discourse actively defines group boundaries: who belongs, who doesn’t, and who gets to decide. Wilders positions himself as the mouthpiece of the “real” Dutch people, and by doing so, implicitly excludes entire populations. Wilders’ repeated emphasis on “The Netherlands for the Dutch people” assumes that immigrants do not belong to the Netherlands. Statements like: “We are going to make sure that that Dutchman is back on number one” create an exclusionary

nationalism. This ideology, when translated into policy, justifies cuts to migration, asylum procedures, and integration programmes. When looking through the lens of the social exclusion theory (Levitas, 2005; Silver; 1994), most domains of exclusion are being affected. Wilders frames migrants as an economic burden, justifying budget cuts. Wilders repeated use of "Dutch first" devalues migrants in the Netherlands and normalises ethnic nationalism.

2025, Press conference with ten-step plan

On the 26th of May 2025 Wilders held a press conference about his ten-step plan concerning asylum and migration. The press conference was set up as a direct response to the coalition's failure to deliver on anti-immigration policy.

On a textual level, his language is confrontational and emotionally loaded. The phrase "the limit is reached" is repeated several times during the conference, stressing the fact that he takes it no more. The speech frequently uses numbers and statistics to prove why Wilders has a point, like "every 11 days a new asylum centre", "60.000 Syrians", "12.000 family reunifications". The statistics in itself have little context, for example he does not mention how many houses are built right now in comparison to the asylum centres, he does not mention other immigrants enter the Netherlands beside Syrians, he also does not mention how many other immigrants besides refugees entered the Netherlands for family, work relations or love relationships. Wilders uses these statics without any comparative context, distorting public understanding of the actual impact of immigration and portrays refugee arrivals as threatening. Wilders repeatedly says that "The Netherlands should become Netherlands again" as if it is not rights know, because of "to many strangers" and "to much Islam". Statements like "the street image is unrecognisably changed" rely on cultural essentialism, the belief that a country's identity is always visually and ethnically the same, however that is of course not the case. The asylum seeker is consistently framed as a "luck-seeker," instead of a refugee, claiming that these people who are fleeing from danger are not in 'real' danger. Words such as "misbehave" "and "making unsafe" suggest that immigrants inherently make the Netherlands unsafe.

At the discursive level, the speech is analysed in relation to how it was created, spread out, and interpreted within Dutch society. The press conference was broadcast live on national television and further spread out through social media platforms. The timing was also strategic: it followed coalition failure to implement effective anti-immigration policy, allowing Wilders to portray himself as the only one delivering on voters' wishes. Wilders repeatedly cites Article 72 of the VWEU, which relates to public order and security exceptions within EU law. Wilders does this in order to frame his policy proposals as legally grounded. While he oversimplifies its application, the reference gives pseudo-legitimacy to otherwise extreme measures. Wilders express reinforces this by expressing the need for this anti-immigration policy by using words as "must" and "shall", this creates a sense of urgency and authority, he explicitly states "our patience is up", in his way legitimizing a turn to more anti-immigration policy. This press conference, like earlier speeches, uses discursive repetition to create public consensus through emotional saturation. His closing reminder: "Nobody but us has won the elections" implies that electoral victory justifies any policy, even exclusionary ones.

On a social-political level, the policy proposals, including closing the border, sending back all Syrians and denaturalising people with double nationalities, represent a political agenda grounded in ethnonationalist exclusion. Wilders' proposals reshape the notion of citizenship from a legal right to a behavioural reward, only those who behave "Dutch" are allowed to stay. Wilders then reminds his audience that "nobody but us has won the elections" emphasising that because he has won the elections he has authority. When applying the social exclusion theory (Levitas, 3005; Silver, 1994) it becomes clear that the social as well as the economic side of exclusion is affected by this speech, or could be affected. Framing refugees as a financial burden in combination to the housing crisis can justify restrictive policies on housing allocation for refugees. Also saying that "the street image is unrecognisable" implies refugees don't belong here, creating more distance between refugees and native Dutch citizens. By defining who counts as truly Dutch, Wilders' plan excludes migrants and refugees from full participation in society. It treats asylum seekers not as humans fleeing danger, but as threats to the Dutch cultural.

4.1.3 Wilders' Tweets (2024–2025)

Wilders uses the platform twitter on a daily basis and his with 1.6 milion followers he has quite a large range. The Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to a selection of Geert Wilders' tweets, mostly concerning refugees, immigration, and the Dutch national identity. The tweets were posted in 2024 and 2025, a period with ongoing tensions around the new asylum policy, coalition negotiations, and growing electoral support for the PVV. This analysis shows how Wilders' social media use reinforces ideological positions, activates group identities, and influences policy.

Textual Level:

The tweets wilders had posted in the last 1,5 years vary from positive tweets around the Netherlands to negative tweets around immigration causing the Netherlands to degrade. What is striking is that most of the tweets concerning the Netherlands have elements of the "us" versus "them" narrative. In the following tweet Wilders stresses that the Netherlands is from us, pride on our culture, our habits, our traditions and it is our country. He uses the word our/us five times in just one sentence, making it clear the Netherlands has one identity and belongs to one group.

The Netherlands belongs to us, pride on our culture, our habits, our traditions, it is our country.

(Figure 2: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 25/12/2024)

A few months earlier he also posted a tweet about “our freedom, our culture, our land” along with a video praising the dutch culture. What is noticable is also his frequent use of the Dutch flag, a common tool to use for nationalist (Wodak, 2015).

Figure 3: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 27/09/2024

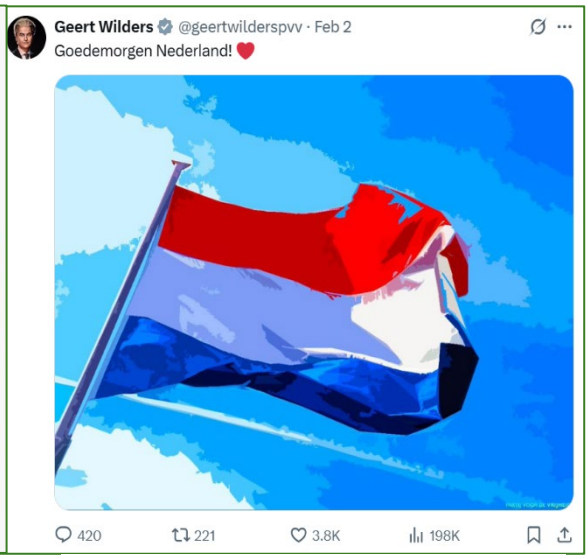

Figure 4: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 02/02/2025

Besides prasing the Netherlands and highlighting that the Dutch poeople belong to a certain group as well as the Netherlands beloning to that certain group, Wilders also uses his platform to express his thoughts on refugees and other immigrants. Wilders especialy mentions Asylum Centers as a problem to the Dutch society, he frequently says that the Netherlands is about to become one big “ayslum center” and that “the Netherlands is screaming for harsh become “unrecognisable” and that “the Netherlands is screaming for harsh asylum measures”.

(Figure 5: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 01/10/2024)

The Netherlands is screaming for harsh asylum measures. Our country is about to become one big asylum centre. We have made negociations with the coalition about emergency measures. the whole of the netherlands sees that the netherlands is in an asylum crisis. If NSC ducks again they will demolish this cabinet.

Wilders tweets frequently uses terms that create a sense of threat or invasion, such as "occupied territory” and “gigantic housing shortage”, as seen a tweet from 2024:

I can not see the growing asylum flow anymore. Our country is overcrowded, it is costing billions, we have a gigantic housing shortage and more and more villages and citys look like occieped territory. The Netherlands is unrecognisable. Everywhere asylum centres. This must stop fast. Zero concessions. I am done with it. (Figure 6: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 05/04/2024)

This language creates an image of asylum seekers as outsiders that overwhelm the Dutch society, reinforcing an "us" versus "them" narrative. Similarly, an other tweet from 2024 contrasts Dutch identity with the Islam, framing the Islam as incompatible with the Netherlands. He suggests that you can either love the Netherlands or the Islam but not both, reinforcing polarization within the Netherlands.

The VVD loves the Islam. The PVV loves the Netherlands.

David van Weel: After a month Ramadam starts the Sugar festival today – Eid al-Fitr. Everybody that is preparing for these days: wishing you a beautiful and meaningful celebration!

(Figure 7: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 30/03/2025)

Using metaphors and hyperboles are central in Wilders' tweets as well as in his overal rhetoric. In 2024 he posted a tweet where he describes immigration as something that is destroying the Dutch norms and values "Our norms and values are being destroyed". He even says "we allowed hundereds of thousands of people with the wrong flags and the same loyalties to pout their poison on us in European capitals" assuming that there is a right or wrong flag. He also creates a picture of the Islam as an ideology rather than a religion: "we have not stopped radical Islamism but cultivated it". And according to Wilders the worst part is: "the biggest threat is that for decades we have welcomed people from otger parts of the world where violence, inequality and lack of freedom dominate". This hyperbolic language creates an image where other cultures are not welcome because of fears that they will change "ours".

Figure 8: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 14/02/2025

Another example from a 2024 tweet: "Airplanes full of Syrians... back to their own country!" Wilders wants all Syrians to go back to their home country now that Assad's regime has fallen, even though it is still troubeled and maybe even unsafe to go there. The image of mass deportation of Syrians dehumanizes refugees, it reduces them to be just a problem which Wilders wants to get rid off as soon as possible.

Nice, then hopefully planes full of syrians can fly from schiphol back to their own countries as soon as possible!

#backtoyourowncountry

Unrest in Middle East: Saturday, Januari 4

LIVE/ AIRPORT DAMASCUS RESUMES INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS AFTER FALL ASSAD

(Figure 9: @geertwilderspvv 04/01/2025)

Discursive Level:

At this level, the focus is on how Wilders tweets around migration and asylum were made, spread out, and received by the public and media. Wilders' tweets engage in broader discursive practices, particularly in framing others negatively. The tweets on an averrage reach over half a million people. His anti-immigration discourse aligns with global far-right narratives, such as Trumps, he even poses with the famous Trump hat, which says: "Make America great again", this statement echoes a populist discourse (Mondon & Winter 2020). The tweets below where posted the 6th of November 2024, after Trump won the elections in the United States.

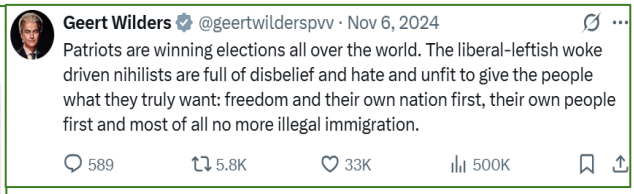

Figure 10 & 11: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 06/11/2024

Additionally, Wilders often blames other political parties or politicians for societal issues, such as blaming them for creating more hatred against Jews. This scapegoating tactic shifts responsibility away from structural factors that need adressing and onto specific groups. With this Wilders simpily turns complex issues into a "us" versus "them" narrative.

All those parties that ruled for years and left our borders wide open should be ashamed of themselves. They are crying crocodile tears now but are entirely responsible for the import and growth of all this disgusting Jew-hatred.

(Figure 12: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 10/11/2024)

One of Wilders most popular tweets is the one in figure 13. Wilders posted this tweet on the 21st of December 2024, and it was seen by over 8 million people and shared by 20 thousand. This shows the wide range Wilders social media posts have.

Figure 13: Tweet @geertwilderspvv 21/12/2024

Social-political level:

The social and political impacts of Wilders' discourse are real, as his language reinforces nationalist and exclusionary ideologies like anti-immigration policies. His December 25, 2024, tweet: *" The Netherlands belongs to us, pride on our culture, our habits, our traditions, it is our country."* Suggest that the identity of a country can be claimed and owned, excluding those who do not fit his vision of what the Dutch identity is. Policies like "Sending Syrians back", mentioned in his October 26, 2024, tweet, normalize deportation as a legitimate response to immigration.

Further, Wilders' tweets often conflate Islam with violence, as in his December 21, 2024, post: "They hate us. They kill us." This rhetoric reinforces Islamophobia by painting a picture where Muslims as inherently violent. The media influence of Wilders' tweets cannot be overlooked. High-engagement posts, such as his December 21, 2024, tweet with 8.3 million views, show that his ideology has a big audience. Wilders having such a big audience makes sure that his negative framing of refugees and the Islam is being widely spread out. Creating a sense of threat from those two, this then shapes the public preception of refugees and the Islam. Wilders' social media presence is part of a broader populist strategy that weakens trust in institutions and positions him as the voice of the people. Van Dijk (2006) describes how political leaders increasingly gain discursive power outside formal institutions, especially through social media.

4.1.4 Conclusion of the Critical Discourse Analysis

The CDA of Wilders' political language reveals a consistent use of fear-based, exclusionary discourse to frame refugees as dangerous, culturally incompatible, and as an economic burden. Throughout his public communications, ranging from election programmes to his tweets, Wilders uses alarmist metaphors and language to construct a negative image of refugees, particularly those from Islamic countries.

An example is Wilders' reference to an "asylum tsunami" (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023, page 6), portraying refugee arrivals as a natural disaster overwhelming the Dutch nation. Similarly, in parliamentary speeches, he has described the Netherlands as being "degraded" by mass immigration (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023, page 3) and claimed "Islam does not belong here." In a widely circulated tweet from 2024 (Figure 13), Wilders stated: "They hate us. They despise our values. They kill us. (...)This is our land, our freedom, our lives."

Such language goes beyond political critique. It dehumanizes refugees, reduces them to faceless threats, and positions them outside the moral community of the Dutch nation. By consistently using terms like "luck seekers" (PVV Verkiezingsprogramma, 2023, page 3; 6; 42), Wilders discourse strips refugees of individual stories, needs, and rights.

This discourse has clear links to social exclusion theory, which identifies how symbolic boundaries become institutional ones (Levitas, 2005; Silver, 1994). Wilders' framing legitimizes policy proposals that restrict refugees' access to housing, employment, and long-term residency, such as abolishing permanent residence permits or suspending family reunification rights. These policies institutionalize the exclusion already initiated through discourse. As Levitas (2005) argues, social exclusion operates on multiple levels: economic, social, and political, and Wilders' discourse directly supports exclusion across all three.

The consequences of such exclusion are visible when evaluated through the lens of the CBS framework on well-being. According to CBS, well-being encompasses dimensions such as subjective well-being, housing, safety, material well-being, and social participation (society). Wilders' discourse undermines each of these. Subjective well-being is harmed when refugees are portrayed as threats and made to feel unwelcome. Housing insecurity is exacerbated by policies proposed to deprioritize refugees in social housing allocations, often justified by claims that "Dutch people come first." Safety, both actual and perceived, is compromised. Discourses that associates refugees with crime contributes to increased discrimination and hate incidents, as evidenced by the rise in discrimination reports (Discriminatiecijfers, 2024; 2025). Social relationships and participation are severely limited when refugees are labelled incompatible with "Dutch values," reinforcing isolation rather than integration.

This CDA shows that Wilders' discourse is not merely symbolic. It actively constructs social hierarchies, justifies exclusionary policy, and contributes to real harm. The use of militaristic and alarmist metaphors, such as "invasion," "tsunami," and "danger to our civilization", creates a moral panic that closes space for empathy, inclusion, or dialogue (Esses et al., 2013).

In conclusion, Wilders' anti-immigration discourse plays a foundational role in both shaping public attitudes and legitimizing systemic exclusion. It functions as a gateway to policies that deny refugees access to the very conditions required for well-being, as defined by the CBS

(2021). The CDA confirms that language in politics is not neutral: it has power, and in this case, it reinforces cycles of exclusion, inequality, and psychological harm for one of the Netherlands' most vulnerable populations.

4.2 Interviews concerning Wilders and refugee well-being

For this research I conducted 3 interviews. The first interviewee is Jeroen Boom, he is an Assistant Professor in Visual Culture Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen. His research focuses on the politics and ethics of seeing and not seeing in the context of contemporary cinema, global politics, and ecological violence. The second interviewee is Saskia Bonjour, she is an associate professor in political science. Her research focuses on the politics of migration and citizenship in the Netherlands and in Europe. Right now she is also leading the Stranger Families Project, which explores how migration law and policy deal with different kinds of families seeking to live together in Europe. And the final interviewee is Henk van Houtum, he is a professor of Political Geography and Geopolitics and co-founder and coordinator of the Nijmegen Centre for Border Research (NCBR), Radboud University Nijmegen. He is an expert in European border policy, cross-border cooperation, migration, conflict, national identity politics, the politics of sport and the cartography of borders and migration.

The interviews gave me insights on Wilders discourse as well as the implications his policy proposals can have on the well-being of refugees. The interviews were coded to give an overview of what has been said and make it easy to find back. The codes in Atlas.Ti are written in Dutch, this is done because the interviewees were Dutch as well so this was easier while coding, however for the research I translated the codes from Dutch to English. This is the list of codes along with their code groups that emerged from the coding:

Code group	Code
How are refugees viewed?	Threat Refugees are a problem Reduced Reduced to victim Family reunification on family reunification Big families The border spectacle Dangerous men Ukrainians Watching from a distance Passive making Potential risk Flow of refugees We/ them Without context
Discourse	Refugees are a problem Discriminate Own people first Extreme nationalistic Lied past Reduced Reduced to victim Family reunification on family reunification Big families Influence politics

	Dutch culture Nostalgic nationalism Gut feeling Stigma Flow of refugees Language use We/ them
Policy	Proving gay relationship is hard Family reunification Migration undesirable in NL Migration desirable in US IND overcharged IND less and less resources Complicated relations Young adult policy People left behind Migration right Migration right VS family right Dutch precursor gay relationships Positive link between integration and family connections Guilt feelings Social construct Time is precious Passing on traditions Exception space Settlement risk VISA policy Liquid weapon
Improvement points	Actively consuming images Everything is connected Better integration Forensic Architecture Constructed image Reduced The border spectacle In US migration is desirable IND overcharged Young adult policy Critical citizenship Media literacy Migration policy more generous Normalise refugees Improve reception Paradox Purple Sea film Veil of ignorance Responsibility Refugee perspective Why don't we do anything?

Table 3: Code scheme interviews

Before reading: the quotes I used in the analysis where translated from Dutch to English, since the research is written in English, this may cause some quotes to not be fully grammatically correct or they can lose some of their strength.

4.2.1 How are refugees viewed?

To understand why immigration-policies and discourse even exists it might be smart to look at how refugees are viewed in the first place. During the interview with J. Boom, it became clear how the media reinforces the negative framing around refugees just as Wilders' discourse does. According to the CDA, such media representations are not neutral, they construct specific power relations through language and imagery (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2015). Media often displays refugees as either a threat or as a victim:

> *"We see men with guns and masks "rescuing" refugees. That feeds the idea that they are a threat. And because they are a threat, those men carry weapons. A circular reasoning." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

> *"What we often see is that media portray and represent refugees in such a way that reduces them to victims, and nothing more than that." ~ J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

When we see and hear about refugees in the media, most of the images we see as well as the things we hear create a distance between refugees and non-refugees, because we look at them with a distance, they are displayed on the screen and we are invited to watch. This is called symbolic exclusion, a core concept of social exclusion theory, where refugees are treated as fundamentally different and excluded from the social and moral community (Levitas et al., 2007; Silver, 1994). This creates distance, both physical and emotional between "us" (viewers, citizens) and "them" (refugees).

> *"There are again lots of images of boats in the middle of the Mediterranean. Often also taken by drones. And what that actually does to us, literally, is we look down on these people. They are images in which we look at them with a kind of distance." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

> *"So they actually become sort of passive objects who can only suffer. And we are then actually invited to look at them and consume that suffering." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

On the news we see flows of people with no faces hidden behind numbers and statistics with no given context. Wilders discourse aligns with the image of this flow of refugees.

> *"The flood of refugees. Wilders called it a tsunami of refugees. Also in how we name refugees in the phrases we use. I think it's very important that we stand still on the fact that that has an effect." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

However framing the arrival of refugees as a "tsunami" or saying the Netherlands are "flooded" because of it, has a certain load to it, it dehumanises people and construct them as natural disasters rather than human beings in need (Charteris-Black, 2006). These terms assume these people who are fleeing from danger are the danger itself. It also distorts reality, by raising an image as if it is easy to cross the European border.

> *"The idea of a refugee flow there is actually a kind of effortlessness to it. So the idea of flowing in like that, without effort, without friction." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

This creates a false image, because as a refugee with no valid passport, crossing the European border is extremely dangerous. Because of the visa policy (European Commission, 2024), a lot of safe ways to travel to Europe are closed off, meaning that when you don't have the right passport or documents you have to take an alternative route. These alternative routes are illegal routes, often taking months and involve human trafficking and crossing the Mediterranean sea without decent nor safe boats. These illegal routes often result in causalities (Fargues, 2017).

> *"The EU is the deadliest border op earth." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

4.2.2 Wilders Discourse

Wilders uses his language as a weapon, he purposefully creates a division between "the Dutch" and "the other", often referring to the refugees or Muslims. His discourse taps into national nostalgia and fear-based populism.

> *"You see a very specific kind of version of Holland. In a love form, a kind of false love perhaps, but at least the hatred is wrapped up in affection, and a kind of nostalgia. In the past everything used to be nice." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

What Wilders does is that with his use of language he creates some sort of nostalgia, like everything was better before, then he creates a sense of fear for losing that nostalgia because of refugees entering the Netherlands. This nostalgia creates a form of false love for the past where he says everything used to be better before, which aligns with his famous slogan "Dutch people come first again", suggesting that Dutch people are now being disadvantaged in comparison to the past. This mirrors Trump's "Make America Great Again", using vague but powerful temporal references that idealise the past and demonise the present. But who belongs to this imagined community? That question is rarely addressed.

> *"What is us and again anyway? That is never asked. Then everyone starts thinking, oh yes, of course, then it becomes ours again. And that, apparently, is enough, populism is apparently enough." ~ H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

Van Houtum argues that there is not just one Dutch identity and that the definition of it cannot be pinned down. A country changes over time, people change, culture changes making the identity of a country a social construct (van Houtum, 2011).

> *"By claiming 'our people, our democracy, our true identity,' he frames these as singular and exclusive, thereby hijacking the broader, inclusive idea of freedom" ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

Wilders thus creates a "us" versus "them" narrative by claiming that there is one group that fits the Dutch identity.

> *"It creates an image of the other with capital O. So, someone who doesn't belong here, with us." ~ H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

This discourse contributes to symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991) by legitimising exclusion and normalising racism. S. Bonjour suggests that this image created by Wilders of who does and

does not belong has created a pathway for people to openly be racist and express views that would have been unacceptable just a few years ago.

> *"Politicians try to articulate something that is alive in society, but people in society also very much look at politicians and are guided by politicians partly in what they think, but certainly in what they say and do. So it gives legitimacy to racism and the way he expresses himself." ~ S. Bonjour (personal communication, May 15, 2025)*

4.2.3 Anti-immigration policy

Wilders advocates for strict anti-immigration policies, however S. Bonjour argues that some policies on immigration are already very strict. For instance the migration policy on family reunification, right now the Dutch policy only allows children or parents to travel after, only in some cases where a family member is highly depending on you they can come as well (UNHCR, 2019). Wilders posing family reunification as a problem during his elections is misleading.

> *"It was really outrageous, he framed it as if just anyone was allowed to come. He said it is family reunion, upon family reunion and so on, and that is really demonstrably nonsense, because we have such a very strict policy." ~S. Bonjour (personal communication, May 15, 2025)*

If family reunification is already very strict how can Wilders then make it even more strict? Right now there are plans for erasing the young adults policy. This policy makes sure that children over 18 can still come along with their parents if they are dependent on them, say they still live at home or depend on the money of their parents. S. Bonjours argues that removing the young adults policy is unreasonable.

> *"It's kind of the last leftover of reasonableness or something, right?... Well, that is being scrapped out and for what purpose, who will get better of this?" ~S. Bonjour (personal communication, May 15, 2025)*

Besides the policy on family reunification already being very strict, it is also harmful for those who cannot be united with their family. Even if people can be united with their family in the Netherlands, the approvals for their family to come he are very long, some people have to wait months or even years before they can see their family again (UNHCR, 2019).

> *"The delay in family reunification is dramatic for all parties involved. Dramatic and ultimately also for Dutch society, dramatic." ~S. Bonjour (personal communication, May 15, 2025)*

Small children have to wait sometimes years before they can come here, creating a huge backlog for them, especially in school. For the Dutch society it is better as well, because when children get Dutch education as soon as possible they have a better change at participating fully in the Dutch society. S. Bonjour also mentions that people can really start living when they find a place here in the Netherlands and when they have been united with their family.

> *"Everything stands still until then." ~S. Bonjour (personal communication, May 15, 2025)*

Then the reason people cannot just fly over like most Dutch people can is because of the Visa policy. Visa policy allows only people with the "right" passport to enter a country and if you don't have the right passport you will have to apply for a visa (European Commission, 2024). In many countries where refugees come from getting such a visa is hard, especially when you already have family living in the Netherlands, this is because you have a high settlement risk. H. Van Houtum argues that this is a form of discrimination, based on the country you were born in you have more or less rights to enter a country.

> *""If you have an Afghan passport, you can only travel to 25 countries and with a Dutch passport, to 188 (...) I find that completely unjust. I find it morally indefensible." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

H. Van Houtum argues that this constitutes discrimination based on origin, which is incompatible with fundamental human rights values, including the principle that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. It also violates the non-discrimination principle enshrined in the national constitution (Article 1) and in the legal framework of the European Union. So even if we think it is wrong to discriminate on basis of origin, the European Union still holds this Visa policy because of safety reasons. However when traveling to a country like the Netherlands, is very hard if not impossible in a legal way. So people have to do it illegal and when you travel with no legal document, you are bound to take illegal routes with fear of your own live. You could argue that the European Union is only considering the safety of the Europeans. H. Van Houtum and J. Boom stress that we have to recognize those people dying at sea whilst trying to reach Europe are dying because of this Visa policy.

> *"Those people are not dying because the border is open. Those people are dying because the border is closed. The border is completely open, says Wilders. No, those people are dying because the border is closed, that's why they are dying." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

> *"They never touch those bodies of those refugees who are drowning, but by policy they do force them, which actually makes the Mediterranean a sort of weapon." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

4.2.4 Improving refugee well-being

So people die at sea, families are ripped apart, discrimination is increasing and refugees are blamed, what can we do? The first thing mentioned by J. Boom is media education. Every day we consume information by watching the news, listening to politicians and scrolling through social media. J. Boom stresses that it is important to realize that this information is never neutral and that it can create a certain image, for instance of refugees.

> *"What we really need now is critical citizenship, because only that way you stay resilient as a citizen and that you don't get caught up in populism for example. So I think it's very important that you show that an image is not neutral, an image is always constructed/ created." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

Once we can critically look at images we can start to take some responsibility and realize policy is made by us, by the people. When you look at the news and you see refugees drowning in the

Mediterranean sea realise they are drowning because of "our" policy. However finding a way to help or change the system can be hard, J. Boom stresses that.

> *"There is so much injustice in the world where to start as an individual. I mean, that's a really big question." ~J. Boom (personal communication, April 30, 2025)*

A start happens small, it can start with you, how you view refugees. We must not forget refugees are people, they are no "tsunamis" they are no "numbers" entering the Netherlands, they are people, we have to normalize refugees. Wilders' discourse may be extreme, but if it is not countered, it becomes normalised.

> *"Wilders' entire thinking is extreme, because it is extremely nationalistic. But by not opposing it, you normalise it, by not ignoring it, you normalise it." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

Stop dehumanizing them and make them normal, they are your fellow citizen, they are your neighbours, they are your colleagues, they are your friends, begin recognising them as people first.

> *"Seeing others as normal. Not as outside the norm, not as exceptions to what is "normal," but simply as part of what we understand to be human." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

Once we realize refugees are normal we can start making policy where they are treated as a normal part of the society. H. Van Houtum suggest that making them normal and creating humane shelters is a must to improve their well-being. He says we constantly make a moral distinction, by putting refugees in overcrowded camps and tourists in nice hotels. Besides improving the shelters we must also let them participate more.

> *"By enabling participation. Immediate participation. Just as we do for Ukrainians." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

He mentions that nobody talks about Ukrainian refugees, he says this is because they could immediately participate in the Dutch society. The treatment of Ukrainian refugees offers a powerful case study: without visa restrictions, they were able to participate immediately.

> *"Nobody talks about that. There are far more Ukrainians than Syrians, yet nobody talks about it. Because they could participate immediately. And they did, seamlessly. It shows a completely different way of approaching the issue. It proves that it is possible. It is all about willingness." ~H. van Houtum (personal communication, May 16, 2025)*

S. Bonjour also mentions she would like to see a more generous migration policy in order to improve the well-being of refugees. Including keeping the young adult policy and expanding family reunification so it creates more space for grandparents to also travel after.

> *"I would like to see a much more generous migration policy at all with a much more generous visa policy and so on." ~S. Bonjour (personal communication, May 15, 2025)*

4.2.5 Conclusion of the interviews

The interviews conducted for this research underscore how Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policy proposals negatively affect the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands.

In response to sub-question 1**;** Which are the specific anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders' government and how can they affect the well-being of refugees? Expert interviews, particularly with S. Bonjour, revealed that Wilders' proposed policies, such as restricting family reunification and abolishing the young adult policy, are not only exclusionary but carry serious consequences for the well-being of refugees (Bonjour, personal communication, May 15, 2025). These measures delay emotional reunification with loved ones, create prolonged legal uncertainty, and hinder access to education, employment, and stable housing. This aligns with the social exclusion theory**,** particularly Levitas' three dimensions: economic exclusion (e.g., barriers to employment), political exclusion (e.g., limited access to rights), and social exclusion (e.g., family separation and isolation) (Levitas, 2005). H. Van Houtum mentions that we must let all refugees participate in society immediately, just like we did with Ukrainian refugees (Van Houtum, personal communication, May 16, 2025). The result is an environment however in which refugees are denied full participation in Dutch society, conditions that significantly erode well-being across the CBS well-being domains are; housing, work-life balance, social relationships, subjective well-being and material well-being**.**

Addressing sub-question 2**;** How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being? the interviews make clear that Wilders' discourse functions not just as political rhetoric, but as a mechanism of instrumentalization, where refugees are portrayed as threats**.** As H. Van Houtum emphasized, Wilders creates a distinction between refugees an "the Dutchman", he creates a version of "the other" (Van Houtum, personal communication, May 16, 2025). Wilders then proceeds to frame refugees as threats under terms like "asylum tsunami". J. Boom mentions "it's important to stand still on the fact this has an effect" (Boom, personal communication, April 30, 2025). This effect mirrors Wodak's (2015) concept of the "politics of fear," wherein migrants are constructed as threats to be controlled rather than people in need of protection. This discursive strategy fuels public opposition towards asylum centres, normalizes racist attitudes, and in its turn reinforces symbolic and material forms of exclusion. As S. Bonjour mentions, it contributes to a public climate where discrimination becomes more acceptable (Bonjour, personal communication, May 15, 2025) and where refugees experience social rejection, further diminishing their subjective well-being, perceived safety**,** and sense of belonging (society), all core dimensions of the CBS well-being framework.

Taken together, the interviews with J. Boom, S. Bonjour, and H. Van Houtum provide rich qualitative evidence that connects discourse and policy to well-being. Their perspectives reinforce the conclusion that Wilders' anti-immigration discourse is not a neutral political stance but an exclusionary stance with its effects on refugees well-being. When far-right discourse becomes normalized, it embeds itself into both societal attitudes and institutional frameworks, creating a hostile environment that undermines core elements of well-being.

5 Conclusion

In the final chapter of this research the results will be summarized and discussed upon. Recommendations for improving refugee well-being as well as for future research will be given. I will also critically reflect upon this research and explain the limitations of this research. Finally I will end this research with a few personal words in the final remarks section.

5.1 Discussion

In order to answer the main question of this research; How are Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policies affecting the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands? I will look into the two sub-questions first and shortly answer them.

Revisiting the first sub-question; Which are the specific anti-immigration policies promoted by Wilders' government and how can they affect the well-being of refugees? The analysis of the policy documents, election programmes, and interview material paints a consistent picture. Wilders' policy proposals, the asylum emergency measures act, the dual status system and the return and immigration detention act include shortening asylum permits, abolishing permanent residence permits and further limiting family reunification. These measures directly influence several of the CBS (2021) well-being dimensions: housing, material well-being, and subjective well-being are all negatively affected when refugees face prolonged uncertainty about their legal status or are separated from their family members. The social exclusion theory (Levitas, 2005; Silver, 1994) helps to conceptualise this: such measures create economic exclusion by limiting access to stable housing and employment; social exclusion by breaking up family and community ties; and political exclusion by constraining access to rights and participation. Even when not yet implemented, the very proposal of such policies send a signal that refugees are not welcome and validates exclusionary attitudes.

The second sub-question; How does far-right political discourse, particularly in the case of Wilders, portray and instrumentalise refugees, and how does this affect their well-being? The CDA revealed that Wilders portrayal of refugees frames them as threats to Dutch culture and security. Metaphors such as "asylum tsunami" and framing the arrival of immigrants as overwhelming form the textual layer of this strategy. At the discursive level, these ideas circulate widely through speeches, social media, and national news, constructing a negative public perception of refugees. At the socio-political level, this framing legitimises the restrictive policies mentioned above and creates an environment in which discrimination becomes more socially acceptable. As van Dijk (2001) notes, elite discourse does not just reflect public opinion, it shapes it, often in ways that create structural inequalities. The interviews underscored this causal chain: interviewees pointed out an rise in hostility towards refugees that aligns with Wilders anti-immigration discourse. In terms of well-being, such discourse negatively affects subjective well-being and the sense of safety, even in the absence of direct policy impacts, by creating a social environment in which refugees are "othered" on a daily basis.

When these findings are put together, the main research question; ''How are Geert Wilders' anti-immigration discourse and policies affecting the well-being of refugees in the

Netherlands?'' can be answered with clarity. The relationship is like a feedback loop: discourse shapes policy, policy shapes discourse, and together they create multiple layers of exclusion that effect nearly all dimensions of the CBS well-being model (2021). The CDA demonstrates how language frames refugees in ways that justify restrictive measures, the social exclusion theory shows how those measures, economically, socially, and politically marginalise refugees. The combination between policy and discourse creates what could be described as a "feedback loop of exclusion", where each new speech or policy proposal not only has an immediate effect but also create more exclusion. This aligns with the broader literature on far-right populism (Mudde, 2019; Wodak, 2015) but also extends it by showing how policy and discourse operate in a specific national context with measurable consequences for refugee well-being.

The theoretical lens also clarifies why the impacts reach further than just legal consequences. The CDA shows that discourse is a form of social practice, meaning that Wilders' words are not just words but they effect the social world, by reshaping norms, perceptions and behaviours. Meanwhile, the social exclusion theory reminds us that well-being is not just an individual aspect of life but it is shaped by one's inclusion (or exclusion) in the social, economic, and political world. This holistic approach shows that a speech portraying refugees as "criminals" is not just offensive; it is part of a larger system of exclusion that can make housing officials less willing to rent to refugees, employers more hesitant to hire them, and neighbours less inclined to offer help.

Finally, the findings suggest that the feedback loop between discourse and policy is not inevitable. Just as words can legitimise exclusion, they can also normalise inclusion, empathy, and solidarity. Breaking the loop requires interventions at both the discursive and structural levels, challenging harmful metaphors while also tackling the material conditions of exclusion. In this sense, the research is not only descriptive but prescriptive: it points toward the need for political communication that is as ethically grounded as it is rhetorically effective, and for policies that include refugees rather than excluding them.

5.2 Improving refugee well-being

The research is focused on the influence Wilders has on refugee well-being, however I think it is important to also mention what we can do to improve refugee well-being. The interviews provided not only a critical lens on Wilders discourse and policies, but they also pointed towards practical and structural improvements. With the findings of this research as well as the results of the interviews, I will make some suggestions to improve the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands.

To battle anti-immigration discourse and policy, it is important to realise our own biases. For this critical citizenship is required, this can be done by for example media training (Boom, personal communication, April 30, 2025). It is important to understand that the news we consume, whether it is from national television, social media or politicians, is never neutral; it is always constructed. Once we can recognize our own biases and consume information with a critical lens, we can begin to see that refugees are a normal part of society. As H. Van Houtum

argues, we must normalise refugees and speak up against discourses like Wilders, because by ignoring it you are normalising it (personal communication, May 16, 2025). As Einstein once said: “The world will not be destroyed by those who do evil, but by those who watch them." (GlobalGiving, 2019).

Once we start normalising refugees we can create policies for including them, we can start letting them participate in society (Van Houtum, personal communication, May 16, 2025). When refugees are allowed to contribute, they can start to feel part of the Dutch society rather than feeling on the outside. This aligns with the social exclusion theory, which identifies economic participation as a critical aspect of inclusion.

Besides letting refugees participate, S. Bonjour also mentions she would like to see a more generous migration and visa policy in general (personal communication, May 15, 2025). In this more generous policy there would be room for a more inclusive family reunification rules, leading to less stress and anxiety since family (Schweitzer et al., 2018). But also for refugees who haven’t entered the Netherlands yet, well-being could be improved, by creating a more inclusive visa policy. As also mentioned by H. Van Houtum, the current visa policy is discrimination on base of origin, and thus contributing to political exclusion (personal communication, May 16, 2025).

In sum, the path to improving refugee well-being lies both in changing discourse as changing policy; undoing structural barriers that limit access to housing, work, and education, and reshaping the discourse around immigration so that refugees are not persistently portrayed as threats. Without progress on both fronts, interventions risk treating the symptoms of exclusion without addressing the root cause.

5.3 Limitations and considerations

Every piece of research is defined as much by its boundaries as by its findings, and this study is no exception. While I aimed for a detailed examination of Wilders’ discourse and policies and its impact on refugee well-being, certain limitations inevitably shaped the process as well as the outcomes.

One of the most significant limitations was the accessibility of participants. Speaking directly with refugees would have offered valuable first-hand perspectives, yet the practical and ethical barriers were considerable. I made the decision to focus largely on experts and secondary sources to ensure the safety and comfort of participants, a choice that protected individuals but inevitably filtered the findings through the lens of professionals rather than those directly affected.

Language also proved a subtle but persistent barrier. Even when interviews were conducted in Dutch, I remained aware that certain nuances, especially emotional ones, might be lost in translation, either in the moment or in the process of coding. This was a reminder that research is not just about what is said, but about the unspoken meanings that live in tone, pauses, or cultural context.

Another limitation was my own position as a researcher. My political and ethical convictions about refugee rights are no secret, and while I worked consciously to maintain analytical distance, I know they shaped the way I approached the topic, selected sources, and interpreted data. Rather than pretending these convictions do not exist, I have tried to make them transparent, recognising that all research is conducted by people, by often referring to myself (the researcher) during the thesis. This awareness pushed me to view data carefully, to challenge my own assumptions, and to be open to findings that might complicate my expectations.

Finally, the political and media environment itself was in flux throughout the research period. Policy proposals evolved quickly, public discourse shifted in response to events, and what felt urgent in February sometimes seemed overtaken by new events in July. This is the nature of studying politics in real time: the ground moves under your feet.

I believe these limitations do not undermine the value of my research. If anything, they serve as a reminder of the messy, imperfect realities in which both refugees and researchers operate.

5.4 Future research suggestions

The findings and limitations of this research suggest several opportunities for future research. First, while this study captured the perspectives of experts and examined the public discourse through CDA, it did not directly interview refugees themselves. Future research could adopt a participatory methodology, giving refugees greater agency in defining what well-being means to them and identifying the policies and discourses that most affect their lives. Such approach would deepen the human dimension that the CDA and the social exclusion theory can sometimes risk abstracting.

A second suggestion would be; long-term studies, they would help clarify the temporal dynamics of the feedback loop between discourse, policy, and well-being. For instance, how quickly do changes in political discourse translate into measurable changes in subjective well-being, employment rates, or housing security? Are the effects of hostile discourse cumulative, and if so, over what timescale? This would require combining discourse analysis with long-term well-being metrics, potentially drawing on CBS datasets.

As Third, comparative research could examine whether the patterns observed in the Netherlands under Wilders' influence align with those in other European contexts where far-right populist parties have significant political effects. Such a comparison would help distinguish which effects are tied to general populist strategies and which are specific to the Dutch context.

5.5 Final remarks

This research set out to answer a clear question: “How are Geert Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse and policies affecting the well-being of refugees in the Netherlands?”. The answer, drawn from the analysis, is that they do so in deeply interconnected ways. His discourse constructs refugees as threats, using metaphors and frames that normalise hostility and fear. This discourse, in turn, legitimises restrictive policies that directly undermine multiple dimensions of refugee well-being, from housing stability and family unity to economic participation and a sense of safety.

The case of Wilders’ anti-immigration discourse and policies is not only a political issue to analyse; it is a reminder that the lines between speech and action, between perception and reality, are far thinner than we like to think. The CDA taught me that language is never neutral, that each metaphor is a choice and each choice carries weight. The social exclusion theory reminded me that exclusion is not just an absence of inclusion, but an active process, one that can be designed, reinforced, and, crucially; dismantled.

If there is one thing I hope this work leaves behind, it is the idea that responsibility is something we share. The words of a politician may set the tone, but it is the way those words are carried by the public that determines how deep they will cut. Every conversation, every headline, every policy decision either participates in the work of exclusion or in the work of inclusion.

Studying well-being is not just about statistics or trends, it is about understanding how policies and public attitudes affect people’s daily lives. Refugee well-being is not a separate issue: it reflects the values of the Netherlands as a whole. The findings in this thesis show that Wilders’ current discourse and policies narrow the spaces in which refugees can feel safe, welcome, and valued. Changing that is not only a task for politicians, I believe we all hold responsibility, as citizens and as politicians, to make the Netherlands a place where people feel safe, welcome, and valued for who they are rather than feared for where they come from.

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