

This is a man's world, this is a man's world 🎵

How gendered recruitment criteria, gendered institutions, the white-male norm, stereotyping and political-related sexism and misogyny influence women's decisions to actively participate in politics.

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Abstract

Although women in the Netherlands are allowed to actively participate in politics since 1919, the descriptive representation of women – in both the national as in the local level – is still too low compared with the representation of men. In the literature, possible barriers are put forward that might explain this lower representation as the factors are possibly causing women to not aim or aspire to a career in politics. Therefore, this thesis examines whether these barriers result in a lower descriptive representation of women in politics in the Netherlands by using the municipality of Nijmegen as a case. As the municipality of Nijmegen can be considered a least-likely case, this study allows for more generalization for the Netherlands as a whole. The research is based on eleven semi-structured interviews with two elected and nine not-elected women that were on the candidate list for the municipality council in March 2022. Evidence has been found that right-oriented women have internalized that they do not conform to recruitment criteria. Further, although women in general argue that they can affectively operate within the political arena, there is improvement for transparency and less lobbying. In addition, since women do struggle with the white-male norm, this indicates gender dynamics. Also, although women argue that they suffer from more prejudice in comparison to men, sexism doesn't serve as a barrier. Finally, whether participants experienced misogyny depended on how active and outspoken they were and how affected a woman was by this hate, depending on her age and self-esteem.

Keywords: female politicians, municipal council, descriptive representation of women, local politics, gender stereotyping, white-male norm, sexism, misogyny, new- and feminist institutionalism.



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1. Introduction

On the 12th of April 2022, the news came out that Lilianne Ploumen would be stepping down as the leader of the Labour Party (PvdA) and would quit as a member of the House of Representatives in the Netherlands. In a public personal statement, Ploumen explained why she decided to stop as party leader. In her statement, she argues that “*the leadership of the party does not suit her and that she is therefore not the ideal leader of the PvdA*” (NOS, 2022). In addition, Ploumen states that a party leader should be “*opinion-forming*”, “*distinctive in style and positions*” and “*adept at debating in plenary*”. She claims to be lacking in these areas “*I don't think I can do that well enough, and that's why I'm stepping down*” (Ibidem).

After she made her statement, a big discussion started in the Netherlands in which many people wondered whether men - who are in a similar position as Ploumen - would have done the same. To illustrate, people have argued that politicians such as Mark Rutte (VVD) and Wopke Hoekstra (CDA) should resign because of their role in the benefits affair.¹ Especially Ploumen’s statement about “*not being the ideal leader*” got a lot of attention. The commotion and discussion that arose as a results of Ploumen’s choice revealed an underlying phenomenon that people have been noticing for quite some time, namely the standards that are visible in the political arena that make it difficult for women to enter politics in general and that women have to fight against impossible standards, being that the ideal leader is associated with masculinity.

As a master student in Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Politics, I am both aware and interested in the standards that keep women from entering politics and therefore cause for a lower descriptive representation of women in political bodies. This, therefore, prompted me to further examine different factors and whether those serve as barriers that cause women to not aim for a career in politics. Examining why women decide to not aim for a career in politics is not only very interesting, but it is also fundamentally important as equal representation in politics matters for several reasons. To illustrate, a significant argument for equal descriptive representation is that it influences substantive and symbolic representation. In other words, female politicians are better at acting on behalf of women in general and women will feel better represented when there are more women in politics in general. To complement, Roberge and Van Dick (2010) state that having more women in politics results in more diversity and this improves creativity, innovation, causes a variety of different perspectives, results in faster problem-solving and reduces intra-group cohesiveness through the team members' greater variety of perspectives. Therefore bringing women on board results in better decision making and – additionally, it makes the system more legitimate. To end with, having more women in politics puts an end to the idea – that is

¹ The benefits affair [Dutch: toeslagenaffaire] is a Dutch political affair that resulted from unjustified suspicions of fraud in childcare benefits. After the false suspicious of fraud, a strict recovery policy by the national government was being held.



internalized by women themselves and the society as a whole – that women are unfit to govern. Taken together, it is crucial that we take steps that increase the representation of women in politics.

1.1 Research Question

According to literature and previous research, two types of explanations for the lower descriptive representation of women in politics can be found: institutional and cultural factors. The institutional explanations are found in the recruitment procedures of political parties and in political institutions themselves. At first, since there is a gendered-norm in the political arena, this influences the ‘best’ candidate selection according to Krook (2006). Due to these normative institutional barriers, women are seen as unfit to govern as they do not match the recruitment criteria and this results in less women getting into office. The other institutional barrier can be found in political institutions itself. According to Mackay, Kenny & Chappell (2010), gender relations are ‘institutionalized’, embedded in particular political institutions and therefore, shaping the social interaction that is happening there. Therefore, women should act more masculine in order to adhere to the male norm that is institutionalized in the political arena and therefore, women are not able to act on behalf of women. In other words, the political arena being gendered influences the substantive and symbolic representation of women and therefore indirectly influences the descriptive representation of women.

Cultural explanations can be found in the white-male norm, gender stereotyping, political-related sexism and misogyny. At first, since the political arena is being dominated by men, there is a white-male norm in place (Kronsell, 2005). This norm is causing that women might have internalized that they are unfit to govern. Another possible barrier can be found in gender stereotyping. To illustrate, research shows that women do not conform to the image of the ideal leader (Bierema, 2016). Since women do not conform to this image, Kahn argues that women’s access “*to political offices may be limited by people’s stereotypical views of women’s capabilities and liabilities*” (1996, p. 131). Therefore, gender stereotyping could explain the lower descriptive representation of women as well. Two other cultural barriers can be found in sexism and misogyny. To illustrate, as the amount of sexism and misogyny that female politicians have to deal with has increased in the last decade (Barker & Jurasz, 2019), this could be a possible explanation of women not aiming for a career in politics as they are scared to become a victim of sexism and misogyny.

Having elaborated on the way in which gendered recruitment criteria, gendered institutions, the white-male norm, stereotyping and political-related sexism and misogyny affect Dutch women in general, this thesis will try to answer the following overarching research question:

- ***What institutional and cultural barriers affect women’s decisions to become active in politics?***

Specifically:



- Institutional factors: *In what way do gendered recruitment criteria and gendered institutions affect women's decisions to become active in politics?*
- Cultural factors: *In what way does the white-male norm, gender stereotyping and political-related sexism and misogyny affect women's decisions to become active in politics?*

1.2 Societal and scientific relevance of the research

The problem of a lower descriptive representation of women is not only a problem of the Netherlands, on the contrary, it is a global issue. Although we have seen an increase of female politicians across the globe, there is still no equal representation and this is problematic. As in many other countries, the political arena used to be men-only for many centuries in the Netherlands. Although the first female politician already took a seat in the Dutch House of Representatives in 1918 (PDC, 2021), men were still well in the majority until the second decade of the twenty-first century. To be specific, it took until January 2021 before ten out of the twenty ministers were females. Although equal representation has been accomplished when it comes to the minister posts, the seat-distribution in the House of Representatives is still problematic as only 59 out of the 150 seats are currently taken by female politicians (Ibidem). This shows that equal representation hasn't been accomplished yet when it comes to the House of Representatives, the political body that is directly chosen by citizens. What is even more problematic are the numbers of female representation on the local level. To illustrate, after the elections of 2018, the percentage of women in local councils increased to 31,67%, which is the first time that amount of women have been above 30% (Ministerie van BZK, 2020; Kranendonk, 2019). These facts make it crucial to further examine why so many women still do not aim for a career in politics and whether this is a choice or whether they are held back by institutional and cultural structures. After all, it is beneficial for the whole society if we have equal representation.

This research is scientifically relevant for several reasons. At first, despite the fact that research has already been done on the descriptive and substantive representation of women in the Netherlands on the national level, there hasn't been much research done on the local level. Therefore, this thesis contributes to existing literature by examining the factors that cause a lower descriptive representation of women. As a follow up, in today's academic literature, there have been various interesting studies conducted that concern gendered recruitment criteria and gendered institutions. However, whether women have internalized those barriers – and are thus aware of them – has not been examined yet. Especially not in the Netherlands on a local level. In addition, there has been – to my knowledge – no research conducted about the white-male norm and stereotyping and how these existing norms and stereotypes affect women in their decisions to become politically active or not. Also, nor has there ever been research on whether political related sexism and misogyny make females doubt to aim for a career in politics as they are afraid to become victims of this hatred themselves. Altogether, it is scientifically relevant to examine the effects of the white-male norm, gender stereotyping, political related sexism and misogyny on women their aspirations to become politically



active or not since it can explain the lower descriptive representation and, when we can explain this, we can do something about it.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis conducts a qualitative study in the municipality of Nijmegen in order to answer the research question and to test the six hypotheses that were drawn from the literature. Eleven semi-structured in-depth interviews have been conducted in total with both elected and non-elected women from four political parties across the ideological spectrum. The women that were elected serve as a control group as we expect that these women have possibly not internalized the different factors that much and therefore, these potential cultural barriers have not stopped them from aiming for a career in politics. The not-elected women are the group we're interested in as we expect that these women (might) have internalized the six factors and therefore, do not consider a career in politics. In this way, a clear insight can be obtained in whether the factors serve as barriers or not, that explain the lower descriptive representation of women in politics. After the interviews were conducted, the data was processed due to transcribing. In order to analyze the data-transcripts, the researcher coded the data with the help of a coding scheme that is based on the hypotheses. Coding helped to further test the hypotheses and answer the research question.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

The thesis is structured as follows: In the next chapter, the theoretical framework on which the research is based is presented. First, I define descriptive-, substantive- and symbolic representation, after that it is explained why the descriptive representation of women matters and at last, the six possible barriers that result in women withdrawing from politics are presented. At the end of the theoretical chapter, the six hypotheses that follow from the literature are summarized. In chapter three the methodology on which this thesis is based and its implications is presented. In addition, chapter three explains why the municipality of Nijmegen was chosen as a case. Then, it is explained how the interview guide was created, how and which participants were selected, the way data was collected and how the data was analyzed with the help of coding. In the final part, the positionality of the researcher is talked upon. In the fourth chapter, the findings from the in-depth interviews are presented with the use of the six hypotheses and in the final chapter, chapter five, the findings are interpreted and discussed, the results are summarized, possible caveats are being reflected upon and suggestions for further research is elaborated upon.



2. Theoretical framework

The aim of this thesis is to examine which barriers there are that cause women in the municipality of Nijmegen to not practice a career in politics. The findings should make an important contribution to existing literature regarding the factors that cause a lower descriptive representation of women in politics. Therefore, the following chapter will give an overview of the theoretical framework I draw in order to explain the lower descriptive representation of women that results from the barriers that women face while aiming for a career in politics. The theoretical framework includes descriptions of the different forms of representation, reasons why it is important to have an equal descriptive representation of women in general, different possible explanations that declare the lower descriptive representation of women in parliament and, finally, the chapter ends with the six hypotheses that derived from the theoretical framework.

2.1. Defining descriptive-, substantive- and symbolic representation

According to Soroka and Wlezien (2010) representation is about the aggregation and deliberation of public interest. As such, beside political parties, representation can be done by non-state actors (both national and transnational) and non-governmental organizations such as interest groups, lobbyists and social movements. So, representation involves different actors. In Hanna Pitkin's seminal book *The Concept of Representation* – her most important contribution to political philosophy – she distinguishes between four different forms of representation: descriptive-, substantive-, formalistic- and symbolic representation.

Although there are four different forms of representation, this research will focus on descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation and leave formalistic representation out. According to Herrick (2016), formalistic representation involves formal structures that give representatives the authority to act and it makes them accountable to the eligible voters. As a result that formalistic representation focuses on the transaction at the start, so before the actual representation begins, it does not contribute to my research.

2.1.1 Descriptive representation

Issues of political representation are a core focus of research on gender and politics. Although widely regarded as having a number of dimensions – formal, descriptive, substantive and symbolic (Pitkin 1967; cf. Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler 2005) – most feminist focus on descriptive- and substantive representation and the ways in which these forms of representations may be linked (Phillips 1995; Young 2000; Carroll 2001). In her book, Pitkin (1967) argues that descriptive representation denotes the correspondence between the characteristics of the representatives and the represented. Mansbridge elaborates on this definition by defining descriptive representation as “*individuals who in their own background mirror some of the more frequent experiences and outward manifestations of belonging to the group*” (1999, p. 628). In



addition, Arnesen and Peters (2018) describe descriptive representation as the degree to which a representative resembles those who voted for them, those represented. In descriptive representation, representatives live in some sense typical of the larger class of persons whom they represent (Ibidem). Mansbridge (1999) continues that “descriptive,” modifying representation can denote not only visible characteristics, such as color or skin or gender, but also shared experiences, so that a representative with a background in for example farming, is to that degree a descriptive representative of his or her farmer constituents. Childs and Lovenduski argue the same as Mansbridge by stating that the representative, by descriptive representation, “*stands for a group by virtue of sharing similar characteristics such as race, sex ethnicity or residence*” (2013, p. 490). If we go by this definition, this would mean that only women legislators could represent women constituents, a legislator from the LGBTQ+ community could only represent constituents that belong to this community as well and so on. This corresponds to Wängnerud (2009) who describes descriptive representation in her article simply as the number of women that are elected to national parliaments. In addition, Mansbridge (1999) emphasizes that shared experiences are what lies at the core of descriptive representation. Put together, descriptive representation is about all the ways in which the representative represents its constituency. In this case, women representing women.

2.1.2 Substantive representation

To begin with, the research on substantive representation is less advanced. According to Wängnerud (2009), this is because the dependent variable for doing research on substantive representation is more multifaceted compared to descriptive representation. To illustrate, what effect an increase in the number of women in parliament causes can be very broad. Lovenduski (2005), Mackay (2008) and Pitkin (1973) argue that “*an increase in the descriptive representation of women may result in an equivalent, or related, increase in the substantive representation of women*” (Allen & Cuts, 2016, p. 912). In other words, an increase in the number of female politicians (women’s descriptive representation) may result in an increase in attention to women’s policy concerns (women’s substantive representation). In their article *The Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women: New Directions*, Celis and Childs define substantive presentation as “*acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them*” (2008, p. 419). So it is about doing something on behalf of your constituency. In her article, Wängnerud (2009) defines substantive presentation similarly by stating that it is about the effects of women’s presence in parliament. Pitkin (1967) argues that substantive representation captures the relationship between the represented and the representative in which the represented are ‘logically prior’, whereby they are responsive to the represented and not the other way around. In addition, according to Arnesen and Peters (2018), substantive representation is about the actions that the representatives take to represent their constituents’ interests. So the politician makes policy that is in line with what the citizens want (public responsiveness). Altogether, substantive representation is about the action what the representative does for its constituency.



The effect that the representation has for its voters, the public responsiveness. In this case, it is about women acting on behalf of women.

2.1.3 Symbolic representation

According to Jeffrey Kurebwa (2015), who reviews Hanna Pitkin's *Conception of Women's Political Representation*, symbolic representation refers to the extent that a representative 'stands for' the people he or she represents with an emphasis on symbols or symbolisation. So, symbolic representation captures the way in which a representative stands for the represented. Childs and Lovenduski (2013) argue the same by stating that symbolic representation is about a leader standing for national ideas. What is important with symbolic representation is that the represented 'feel' represented instead of being actually represented. To illustrate, you can feel represented by Greta Thunberg due to her speeches that make people – and especially world leaders – aware of the danger and urgency of climate change, however, Thunberg has no real political power. Therefore, you only have the feeling of being represented. According to Suzanne Dovi (2015), symbolic representation concentrates on the emotional reaction of those being represented. She illustrates this by the example "*political scientists who study symbolic representation investigate whether democratic citizens feel represented by their individual representatives, interest groups, their political parties, or formal political institutions*" (Ibidem, p. 8). Therefore, symbolic representation is about what a representative symbolizes and whether people 'feel' represented or not. In other words, women feeling represented in politics.

2.2 Why descriptive representation matters

In the following section, it is explained why the number of women – that is active in the political body – matters for several reasons. First off all, it is talked about in what way descriptive representation has an influence on women's political internal efficacy since women have started to believe that they are unfit to govern, which is false. Secondly, descriptive representation has an important influence on the substantive and symbolic representation of women. Third, descriptive representation matters because it makes the political system in general a lot more legitimate for several reasons. At last, some additional arguments of why descriptive representation matters are being put forward by the *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (2013).

2.2.1 Women's political internal efficacy

According to Alexander "*Descriptive representation potentially reverses the harmful internalization of women's inferiority in political leadership by reversing the observation that women do not govern and challenging the notion that women are absent because they are unfit to govern.*" (2012, p. 439). Shortly said, because there are only a few women in politics, this results in a situation where people have started to believe that this is due to the fact that women are unfit to govern. This assumption however is false. An



additional argument comes from suffragists like Anne Martin who argues that the dominance of males in politics and other areas of life led women to internalize a belief in their own inferiority to men and is causing them to underestimate their capacities in areas historically dominated by men (Williams, 1998). Due to this internalized belief, it is plausible that women are less likely to enter politics because they believe that they are not fit for office. This makes it even more important to have an equal representation of men and women in parliament because now, the situation is causing women to underestimate their own capacities and therefore, lots of talent, skills and knowledge are lost.

When there is a higher descriptive representation of women in politics, this brings important advantages on different levels that show that an equal representation matters. To illustrate, “*evidence of the positive influence of increases in women’s presence in parliament on women’s beliefs in women’s ability to govern indicates that women’s descriptive representation are potentially effective tools for eroding cultural barriers to women’s political empowerment, particularly concerning women’s beliefs*” (Alexander, 2012, p. 460). As a follow up, when there are more women in politics, this means there are more role models and role models play an important role. To illustrate, the article *The Temporary Importance of Role Models for Women’s Political Representation* of Fabrizio Gilardi (2015) investigates the supply side of women’s political representation by focusing on how the election of female politicians is affecting the motivation of women to run for office in other units. The research of Gilardi shows how important it is to have role models and how they play a crucial part in attracting and enthusing other women. Therefore, we are dealing with a descending spiral: having a low descriptive representation of women in politics results in lesser women in politics.

Although aiming for a leadership role doesn’t come without multiple challenges, once reached the top, female leaders bring improved performance and profitability to organizations, infuse leadership teams with innovation and fresh perspective, and inspire vision among their employees (Bierema, 2016). So, more women in politics would result in a higher descriptive representation and provides a lot of benefits to the table.

2.2.2 How descriptive representation influences other forms of representation

Those who see a link between the descriptive presentation of women and the substantive representation of women note that “*the core assumption is that ‘numbers matter’: an increase in women’s descriptive representation in parliaments would therefore, generally – even automatically – translate into an increase in the substantive representation of women*” (Allen & Cuts, 2016). Ladam, Harden and Windett are arguing the same by stating that “*A woman occupying a high-profile office directly impacts women’s substantive representation through her policy actions.*” (2018, p. 369). In addition, descriptive representation is also considered important for promoting symbolic presentation and (policy) responsiveness, while policy responsiveness is believed to be a principal contributor to symbolic representation (Mishler & Rose, 1997). This again is confirmed by the research of Ladam and colleagues (2018) who examined whether promi-



ment women in politics can serve as a role model for other women that are interested in political careers and whether this causes an increase in female candidates. Their research confirms their hypothesis by showing that high-profile women have indeed substantively large positive effects on female candidates. Therefore they conclude that “*women in major offices are crucial for women’s representation and that they, beyond their direct polity impact, amplify women’s political voice by motivating more women to enter politics*” (Ibidem, p. 369). As a result, the study by Ladam et. al shows that a higher descriptive representation of women causes a higher degree of substantive and symbolic representation. So, having more women in parliament would cause the parliament to act more on behalf of women and will also cause women in general to feel more represented. This is in accordance with the influential book *The Politics of Presence* of Phillips (1995) that states that female politicians are better at representing the interests of women. This indicates another theory that acknowledges a link between descriptive- and substantive representation. Therefore, a representative descriptive representation of women in politics is a must since it ensures acting on behalf of women’s interest and concerns and it results that women better feel represented.

In a later section – that explains the lower descriptive representation of women – it is argued that the political arena is gendered [see: **2.3.1 Institutional explanations**]. The political arena being gendered has also important consequences for the descriptive-, substantive- and symbolic representation. To illustrate, as a result of women having to adapt to the norm that exists in the political arena, women behave more masculine and therefore, female voters are less likely to identify themselves with the female politicians (descriptive representation). In addition, as a result that female politicians cannot be themselves completely, this has consequences for their political actions, views and functioning. Thus, female politicians cannot act on behalf of their constituency (substantive representation). In the end, how can you represent your supporters properly if you cannot be yourself? Third, when only ‘masculine’ women are able to survive in politics (because they adapt best to the norm), this results that other women, who do not adhere to this masculine behaviour, see themselves as unfit for office so then you come back to the argument about women's political internal efficiency. This would result in a situation where less women will go into politics because they see only a few ‘masculine’ women taking a seat who do not serve as role models.

2.2.3 Legitimacy of the political system

As a follow up argument, if descriptive representation indeed has an influence on other forms of representation, then we could argue that we have a problem of representation in the Netherlands. To illustrate, since the distribution of women and men in the Dutch parliament is still not equal, we can state that women in general aren’t well represented by the parliament. Therefore, if the amount of women in parliament would be higher, this would make the political system in general a lot more legitimate. Mansbridge (1999) supports this argument in her book where she claims that having an increase in the descriptive rep-



resentation of women is perceived as a sign that women as a group do have a role to play in decision-making political institutions. In addition, she argues that women see the decisions emanating from those institutions as more legitimate as a result of women's increased presence in them.

According to Smith (1970), the legitimacy of a political system is about the voluntary acceptance of political decisions by society. When there is unequal representation – which is the case in the Netherlands when it comes to the male-female division – this has important consequences for the legitimacy of the political system. First off, it can cause citizens to have lower political trust and this can result in lower political arrangement. Therefore, as citizens do not trust the government or (certain) politicians, they are not involved in politics and this will cause them to not vote anymore (there is political elimination). This results in lower legitimacy of the system since only a small part of the population voted and therefore, the election output is not based on a high voter turnout. Together, these arguments shows how important it is to have equal representation.

To end with, in the chapter *Political Representation* of the *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (2013), Childs and Lovenduski give important arguments on what the benefits are of having more women in our elected political institutions. First, they illustrate the *powerful justice argument* that states that it is simply unfair for men to dominate political institutions since women make up half of the world's population. In addition, the professors illustrate an *pragmatic argument* that stresses the electoral advantage of having more women in parliament. According to this argument, having more women in political body's attracts more women's votes and it causes political parties to be seen as more women friendly.

Secondly, Childs and Lovenduski introduce the *difference argument* which generally states that women will bring different things to the table than men as a result that women have a different style and approach. So again, having more women in politics results in having more diversity in politics and this results in better decisions making. Together, the pragmatic and difference argument imply that women's presence improves the substantive representation of women.

A third argument of why having a higher descriptive representation of women is beneficial can be found in the *overlooked interest argument*. This argument states that male representatives do not know and are not aware of how certain policies affect female citizens. Therefore, it is better to have an equal representation of both men and women so that people from the same sex, characteristics, race and ethnicity can make policies that are in line with their constituency. Which boils down to the argument that women should be represented by women.

With this knowledge in mind, we ask ourselves: how come that there isn't an equal distribution of women and men in Dutch politics? Are women just not interested in politics or is something holding them back? What are the barriers women face?



2.3 Explanations for a lower descriptive representation of women

In the literature, possible explanations of why we have fewer female politicians compared to male politicians in the Netherlands can be found. The first two explanations can be found on the institutional level. To illustrate, women have a hard time in the selection procedure due to deep normative barriers in the candidate selection and, once they're in, the gendered institutions are influencing the behaviour of female-actors. Four other possible explanations can be found on the cultural level where the white-male norm, gender stereotyping, sexism and misogyny might influence the descriptive representation of women in politics.

2.3.1 Institutional explanations

Institutional explanations for the descriptive representation of women are twofold: recruitment and the role of institutions. First off, we have to examine which barriers women experience during recruitment. Thus, before women enter the political office. Secondly, we examine how political institutions themselves influence the different forms of representation of women once they are in office. With the help of new institutionalism and feminist institutionalism, a link is made how political institutions influence and shape the behaviour of female actors and what consequences this has for their representation.

The first institutional explanation for the lower descriptive representation of women in politics can be found in the recruitment of women. As a result that there is a gendered-norm in place, this influences the 'best' candidate selection. Krook for instance states that "*in politics, there are deep normative institutional barriers to "gendering" existing criteria of candidate selection*" (2006, p. 117). Due to these norms, women are seen as unfit as they do not match the criteria of the typical male political leader and therefore, they are not getting into office.

Interesting to look at is the research of Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2019) who were the first to perform a large-scale comparative analysis of potential unintended gendered consequences of formal selection criteria for parliamentary representation. The researchers find that there is indeed a relationship between formal selection criteria and men's and women's representation and they state that these criteria are harmful to women (Ibidem). In other words, gendered recruitment criteria are causing women to not get into political office since women do not conform to these criteria. In general, we see that informal institutions and their gendered effects on party recruitment have received a lot of attention in the last couple of years. According to Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, "*These studies have demonstrated that gendered norms and practices within political parties shape the opportunities for male and female aspirants [...] and this resulted in more men than women in politics.*" (2019, p. 325). Important to mention is that the recruitment might seem neutral but are still harmful to women. To illustrate, studies that have been conducted elsewhere reveal how "*ostensibly gender-neutral recruitment processes are in actual practice gendered, as male characteristics are emphasized and often become the criteria in selecting*



candidates” (Randall, 1987; Lovenduski & Norris, 1989; Shepherd-Robinson & Lovenduski, 2002; Krook, 2009; as cited by Matthews, 2012, p. 623). Examples of male characteristics are being ambitious, in control, self-confident, forceful, individualistic etcetera whereas typical female characteristics are being helpful, expressing emotions, being aware of feelings of others, etcetera (Kniveton, 2008).

Thus, barriers for women to enter politics can already be found in the recruitment selection as the selection criteria favor men over women which results in a lower number of women in politics in general. Since women are aware of these selection criteria, they are less likely to apply for a job in politics since they know they do not conform to the male-favoring criteria.

This results in the first hypothesis: **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is because women have internalized that they will not be recruited because they do not conform to the selection criteria.**

Even if women were to be recruited, it is not enough to only bring them on board. Therefore, the next question focuses on how political institutions influence the substantive representation of women. In order to understand how political institutions play a role in a lower descriptive representation of women in parliament, new institutionalism is introduced. New institutionalism has allowed for greater understanding of the co-constitutive nature of politics: the diverse ways in which actors bring about or withstand change in institutions; and the way in which institutions shape the nature of actors’ behaviour through the construction of rules, norms and policies (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell, 2010). “*The basic premise of NI is that institutions ‘matter’, an ‘argument that the organization of political life makes a difference.’*” (March & Olsen, 1984, p. 747). In all forms of new institutionalism, attention is given to both informal- and formal institutions. Therefore, new institutionalism is an approach that helps us understand how institutions shape individuals and vice versa.

However, although new institutionalism already confirms that institutions change actors (and vice versa), a critique on the theory is that it fails to acknowledge the gendered patterning of institutional rules and norms. By doing so, “*new institutionalism scholars miss the opportunity fully to discern the nature and interplay of formal and informal institutions and the differential effect they have on the men and women operating within these environments as well as the outcomes – the norms, rules, policies and laws – these institutions produce*” (Ibidem, p. 581). Therefore, I would like to introduce feminist institutionalism in addition. Feminist institutionalism is a newer variant of institutionalism that seeks to engage with both the strengths and limitations of existing paradigms. To illustrate, feminist institutionalism does acknowledge the gendered patterning of institutions. “*Feminist institutionalism critiques and seeks to overcome the gender blindness of existing scholarship in the field, to include women as actors in political processes, to ‘gender’ institutionalism, and to move the research agenda towards questions about the interplay between gender and the operation and effect of political*



institutions.” (Ibidem, p. 573-574). To state that an institution is gendered means that “*constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily life or logic of political institutions rather than existing out in society or fixed within individuals which they then bring whole to the institution*” (Kenney, 1996, p. 456). According to Mackay, Kenny & Chappell (2010), gender relations are not only seen to be ‘institutional’, but these relations are ‘institutionalized’, embedded in particular political institutions and constraining and shaping the social interaction that is happening there. Therefore, the same authors give us strong arguments that the political arena is in fact gendered and this leads women to have to act more masculine in order to adhere to the masculine norm that is institutionalized in the political arena. This is confirmed by Bierema who states that, when women advance into a leadership role, “*they have to personify the ideal male worker by exhibiting masculine behaviours*” (2016, p. 124). The book *Lean In* from Sheryl Sandberg confirms this by stating that women really just need to act more like men if they want to get ahead in business (2013). Hirdman provides further evidence to strengthen the argument – that states that women have to adhere more masculine behaviour in order to match the ideal image – by saying that institutions affect individuals who, by performing their daily routines according to institutional norms, verify and reproduce the institution (1990, as cited in Kronsell, 2005, p. 284). As long as a distinct segregation of the spheres persists, the gender system remains both invisible and intact. This would again mean that women have to behave in a masculine way and possess masculine qualities in order to adhere to the male-norm that the political institutions embody.

Together, this results in a negative effect of the representation of women. Like Chappell (2002, 2006) explains, the rules of the game – be they relating to legislatures, courts, bureaucracies or federal structures – can be seen as gendered as they prescribe (as well as proscribe) ‘acceptable’ masculine and feminine forms of behaviour, rules and values for men and women within institutions. The key feminist insight is that both structure and agency are gendered. Therefore, “*gendered relations and gendered institutions structure the context in which actors construct and deploy their gendered identities and interests*” (Mackay, Kenny & Chappell, 2010, p. 582-583). This would mean that, in order to survive within the political arena, women are forced to behave more masculine since the political arena and its institutions are gendered and this has important consequences for women’s representation. Since women know that the political arena is dominated by men and this influences their behaviour, they’re convinced they cannot effectively operate within the political institutions and this causes them to withdraw from politics.

This results in the second hypothesis: **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women thinking that they will not be able to effectively operate in the municipality council.**



2.3.2 Cultural explanations

In the literature, four possible cultural barriers that result in a lower descriptive representation of women in politics are being talked upon. To start with, since there exists a gendered norm in the political arena that favours men over women, this results in a situation where women are seen as unfit for office as they do not adhere to this norm. Secondly, women are dealing with gender stereotyping since men are seen as the ideal leader and this results in a situation wherein the leadership-competences of women are called into question. A third and fourth explanation of why women do not aspire to a career in politics can be found in sexism and misogyny. To illustrate, the enormous hate, gendertrolling and sexism that women in office experience causes other women, who were considering a career in politics, to reconsider their choice.

Gender norm: the white-male norm in politics

A possible cultural explanation of why there is a lower descriptive representation of women in the Netherlands can be found in the white-male norm that influences women's confidence in their leader competencies. In her article *Gendered Practices in Institutions of Hegemonic Masculinity*, Annika Kronsell begins with the sentence "*Institutions of hegemonic masculinity tend to represent and reify specific notions of masculinity in ways that makes it the norm*" (2005, p. 280). As a result that the political arena always have been – and still is – dominated by men, the Dutch political arena can be viewed as an institution of hegemonic masculinity that makes female politicians obey a white-male. Because women do not adhere to this male-norm, women themselves have the internal belief of being unfit to govern. In addition, not only women think of themselves as unfit, this is a view widely believed by society. Unfortunately, this view is constantly being confirmed by the fact that we see a vast majority of male leaders compared to a small minority of female leaders .

However, having women in politics is actually profitable. For example, Kronsell (2005) argues that the presence of women calls attention to the norms of the dominant culture since women represent 'difference', i.e. the dominant majority become aware of themselves and what binds them together in terms of explicitly gendered norms. Therefore, when women enter politics or entail in political activities, Kaufman and Williams (2013) state that this challenges existing gender norms. Kronsell confirms the same by stating that, "*when a woman – whether feminist or not – becomes a part of an all-male organization, her mere presence challenges those norms, making them 'appear', often in subtle and tacit ways.*" (2005, p. 291). To give an example, Kronsell argues that – once women entered an institution of hegemonic masculinity – the sexualized and abusive language is 'shaped up' and this is considered to be an important and positive contribution to women's engagement. These arguments confirm that there is indeed a norm in the political arena.



To complement, the norm is not only causing women to perceive themselves as unsuitable candidates, the norm also results in tolerance of unfriendly behaviour towards women. In her research, Bierema (2016) confirms this by arguing that organizations today are (still) not woman-friendly. In order to support her argument, she gives several examples of women who face discrimination, are being sexualized and face pay discrepancies and occupational segregation when they become leaders (Ibidem). This makes the political office very unattractive and female-unfriendly. Therefore, since there exists a male-norm in politics, women have internalized that they are not fit to govern.

This results in the third hypothesis: **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women having internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women.**

Gender stereotyping: the “Ideal” (Male) Leader

Another possible barrier that results in women not aiming for a career in politics is the fact that they do not match the stereotype of the ideal leader – which is associated with masculinity. So, women do not match the image of the ideal political leader. In her article *Women’s Leadership: Troubling Notions of the “Ideal” (Male) Leader* Professor Laura Bierema of the University of Georgia states that the problem isn’t that women aren’t well prepared to take on leadership roles, in fact, the problem is that they do not conform to gendered organizational images of ideal workers (2016). Thus women have to battle with stereotypes to which they do not conform to. According to Reid, the ideal leader is a man who is wholly devoted to his work, prioritizing work over family, personal needs, and health (2015, as cited in Bierema, 2016). To be more specific, leaders are “white, western and male” (Stead & Elliot, 2009, p. 164). In accordance, when people were asked to identify characteristics of successful middle managers, the characteristics tend to fit masculine stereotypes better than feminine (Powell, 2011, as cited in Bierema, 2016). In her research, Powell noted that the incongruity between what we expect of leader roles and women’s roles may dissuade women from seeking management positions and perpetuate enduring stereotypes (Ibidem). This makes gender stereotyping an important explanation for the lower descriptive representation of women.

In general, stereotypes are cognitive structures that contain knowledge, beliefs and expectations about different groups (Hamilton & Trolie, 1986). According to Sanbonmatsu, specific political gender stereotypes can primarily be explained by beliefs about the traits of men and women in general (2003). To give an example, female candidates are perceived by society as more warm and expressive than an identical male candidate (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). In addition, voters also make use of stereotypes in order to judge the ability of male and female politicians to handle particular issues. This causes people to think that female candidates are better at handling compassion issues such as helping the poor, whereas male candidates are seen as better handling crime, defence and foreign policy issues (Ibidem). Although we



could argue that women benefit from some of the believed gender stereotypes, Kahn (1996) concludes that “*women’s access to political offices may be limited by people’s stereotypical vies of women’s capabilities and liabilities*” (p. 131). In addition, asked to state a preference, people across the globe tend to prefer men over women managers, even though women’s representation among the management ranks has increased (Bierema, 2016). In fact, the same research argues that females even prefer men to women as bosses. So, since people across the globe are used to male leaders, they want to maintain this.

Another argument that contributes to the argument that gender stereotyping is resulting in a lower descriptive representation of women comes from the Catalyst study (2017). This study identified double-bind dilemmas that female leaders face. Catalyst calls gender stereotyping “*one of the key barriers to women’s advancement in corporate leadership [that] leaves women with limited, conflicting, and often unfavourable options no matter how they choose to lead.*” (2017, as cited in Bierema, 2016, p.127). Catalyst named this the “double bind of leadership” noting it leaves women “*Damned if you do, doomed if you don’t*” (Ibidem). Therefore, gender stereotyping could be a possible barrier for women to enter politics since their capabilities are getting underestimated by society and women themselves as well.

This results in the fourth hypothesis: **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women questioning their leadership-competences because those do not adhere to image of the ideal leader.**

Taken together, we can state that the political arena collides with patriarchal nations, cultures, politics and history and that this has “*created persisting stereotypes that affect women’s ability to navigate work life and career advancement*” (Bierema, 2016, p. 120). Therefore, as a result of political institutions being gendered, this leads to women failing to conform to the “ideal worker” image since they deviate from the norm. As a consequence, women’s confidence in their ability to attain C-suite positions diminishes over time, and both women and men prefer male leaders.

Sexism and misogyny

The last two cultural explanations of why women do not aspire to a career in politics can be found in sexism and misogyny. Although sexism and misogyny can also be placed under culture, they receive extra attention since both aspects seem to be of increasing importance as research shows that female politicians are dealing with sexism and misogyny more often in the last decade (Barker & Jurasz, 2019). In addition, violence against women has indisputably increased in general during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dehingia et. al, 2021).

Therefore, as a result of women not matching the image of the ‘ideal’ masculine leader and the internal belief of society that perceives women as unfit to govern, women face a lot of sexism and misogyny.



Therefore, sexism and misogyny are relevant explanations for the lower descriptive representation of women in parliament. A distinction is made between hostile and benevolent forms of sexism.

Sexism

To start with, sexism and misogyny are often used as synonyms since the two terms are correlated with each other. However, there is an important and clear distinction between the two concepts. Wrisley defines misogyny (with its roots in ‘hatred’ and ‘women’) as a negative- or emotional orientation towards women as a group and sexism (with its roots in sex and ‘-ism’, or the ‘process or action of’ systematic prejudice) as the institutionalized expression of individual misogyny (e.g. lower wages for women, lack of access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, etc) (2021, p. 5). In this way, misogyny is about the hate towards women and sexism is the expression of the hate.

According to Anderson, sexism itself emerges “*as a mode of punishment ‘meted out to women who break gender rules’*” (2014, p. 106). With sexism, a distinction can be made between traditional and new forms of sexism. The more traditional conception describes sexism as “*an attitude of prejudice or discriminatory behaviour based on the supposed inferiority or difference of women as a group*” (Cameron, 1977, p. 340). Within this traditional category, gender ideology designates attitudes that emphasizes the difference in roles between both sexes and behaviours that demonstrate the superiority of men over women in different areas (Gissi, 1978; as cited in Ramiro-Sánchez et, al. 2019, p. 123). Therefore, allowing sexism in the political arena reinforces the dominance of men.

Within Anderson’s scheme, sexism takes two forms: hostile and benevolent. In their research Ramiro-Sánchez and colleagues place hostile sexism under the traditional form of sexism (2019). Plakoyiannaki et al. states that hostile sexism characterizes women as “*unfit to make important decisions and presents females as easily manipulated, vulnerable, and weak*” (2008, p. 103). Anderson herself describes hostile sexism as “*a way to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men’s exploitation of women as sexual objects through characterizations of women*”. (2014, p. 108). In addition, Ramiro-Sánchez and colleagues divide the definition of hostile sexism into three dimensions: “*women’s inferiority and weakness compared to men, women’s relegation to roles of wife and homemaker, and sexual power that women possess that makes them dangerous for men*” (2019, 123). The third dimension is important as it shows that women are often the victim of sexism and misogyny as a result of men being frightened of losing their own position. To summarize, hostile sexism regards women as inferior and consist of negative and hostile feelings towards (non-traditional) women.

The newer form of sexism can be classified under benevolent sexism. Ramiro-Sánchez and colleagues describe new forms of sexism as a set of attitudes towards women that are based on a more stereotypical and limited view of women, but with a positive tone for the perceiver (2019). Anderson (2014) describes benevolent sexism similarly by stating that it involves attitudes toward women that seem positive on the surface but, in fact, are patronizing and disempowering. Therefore, benevolent sexists characterize wom-



en as creatures who need protection from men with a friendly tone. The system of sexism-punishment that Anderson describes does a lot of heavy lifting to explain how gender roles are enforced (as cited in Wrisley, 2021, p. 6). As a follow up, this view – of women being seen as inferior and dependent on men – is still dominant in our Dutch culture and it creates the idea that women, because they are inferior to men, are not able to govern.

From this perspective, the reason why women decide to not enter politics is because they are afraid men have internalised these ideas, and will treat them accordingly.

This results in the fifth hypothesis: **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career can be found in sexism because women are afraid they will be the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour.**

Misogyny and gendertrolling

As New York Times columnist Nora Renata Aron (2019) writes “*Misogyny is everywhere*’, [...] ‘*The word, which conventionally means hatred of women, was once a radical accusation, but recently, it seems to have eclipsed the gentler “sexism” and “chauvinism” in popular use.*” (as cited in Wrisley, 2021, p. 4). Wrisley agrees with Aron by arguing that misogyny’s meanings and usages have proliferated far beyond the capaciousness offered by the original definition, i.e. ‘the hatred of women’ (2021, p. 3). Therefore, the given definition feels too simplistic to capture the complexity of misogyny today. Manne states that misogyny today can be understood as “*an ‘inherently political phenomenon’, metaphysically dependent on ‘norms and expectations of a patriarchal structure’ and a historical connection to a fully-functioning patriarchy, if not a currently existing one*” (2017, p. 67, as cited in Wrisley, 2021, p. 7-9). Manne continues by explaining that the aggressive behaviour towards women is “*at least partly, although not necessarily purely, because of their gender*” (Ibidem). This shows that the hatred mainly stems from the fact that we are dealing with ‘female politicians’ and not just ‘politicians’. Another important reason for women not to aspire to a political career. After all, women will always face a lot of hate just for ‘being a woman’ rather than for their views.

While as feminist theory is providing material and conceptual tools to combat women’s oppression within the male-dominated power structure that constitutes our reality (Wrisley, 2021, p. 2), misogyny on the other hand, is an affective condition undergirding the domination of women under patriarchy. Wrisley argues that with the help of a feminist lens “*we might glimpse a resolution to the transhistorical and deeply affective imbalance that defines misogyny and, to a certain extent, gender itself*” (Ibidem). If this is true, this would mean that analyzing misogyny would result in a solution for the oppression that women face in the male-dominated power structure that makes it crucial to understand and ultimately tackle misogyny.



A specific form of misogyny that a lot of female politicians have to deal with is gendertrolling. To illustrate, when the hatred takes place on the internet, we speak of the phenomenon of 'trolling'. According to Phillips, a troll is a person “*whose real intention(s) is/are to cause disruption and/or trigger conflict for the purposes of their own amusement*” (2015, p. 17). Therefore, trolling refers to aggressive online behaviour. According to Dehingia and colleagues, the main goal of online misogyny is “*to maintain the patriarchal order and perpetuate sexist norms, which enforce and normalize male control and push women out of online spaces*” (2021, p. 1). A specific misogynist variant of trolling is called “gendertrolling” (Mantilla, 2013). According to Mantilla, gendertrolling has several components that make it distinctive from other more generic forms of online trolling: first off, gendertrolling is crucially not done to simply upset the targets, but it also often expresses sincere beliefs held by the trolls. Another feature that makes gender trolling distinct is the gender-based insults. For example, gendertrolling involves specifically gender-based insults, including the widespread use of pejorative terms that are levelled particularly at women—“cunt,” “whore,” “slut” — and comments designed to insult and humiliate women, especially in regard to their weight and physical appearance. A third feature are the credible threats since gendertrolling involves a significant and credible component of threat: rape threats, death threats, threats of torture, “doxxing” (revealing the offline identity of a person's online presence), or posting targets' home or work addresses and encouraging others to menace or threaten them with loss of their job or their physical safety. A recent example that confirms this last feature is the incident that took place on 5 January 2022 at the home of D66 leader Sigrid Kaag. On this evening, Kaag was threatened at her home by a man with a large burning torch who rang her doorbell. While the man was at Kaag's door, he was filming himself via a live stream on various social media channels (Brandsema & Vink, 2022). A few months earlier, Kaag was threatened by a different man who said “*I hereby give you notice that before midnight tonight I am going to attack Sigrid Kaag and injure her in such a way that she is either dead or never able to perform her duties again.*” (Belleman, 2021). A good example of the credible threats that are associated with gendertrolling. The last and also the most important feature that makes gendertrolling distinct is that the trolling happens as a reaction to women speaking out. A unique feature of gendertrolling is that it nearly always occurs in response to women speaking out about some form of sexism (Mantilla, 2013, p. 564-65). The just-mentioned features of gendertrolling are good examples of why there is a lower descriptive representation of women in parliament. After all, who would voluntarily go into politics when you know you can receive various threats? Or if you are scolded on a daily basis? Therefore, you must be a fool if you voluntarily go into politics as a woman.

This results in the final hypothesis: **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women being afraid of becoming the victim of (online) aggressive behaviour [read: hate], gender-based insults and receiving different forms of threats.**



To conclude, misogyny and sexism go hand in hand to maintain and reproduce a system of domination in which women are subjugated (Wrisley, 2021). Therefore, misogyny and sexism are important to analyze since it helps us to tackle the power order that is male-dominated.

2.4 Hypotheses

To summarize, the following hypotheses are formulated based on the possible barriers that women face and the reasons they have to become politically active or not, according to the previous literature. Those hypotheses are being tested through interviews with female party-members of different political parties that were on the candidate list for the city council of the municipality of Nijmegen. The hypotheses thus provide the link between theory and empirical data.

Hypotheses 1ab – institutional barriers as perceived by women

- Hypothesis 1a recruitment: A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is because women have internalized that they will not be recruited because they do not conform to the selection criteria.
- Hypothesis 1b political institutions: A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women thinking that they will not be able to effectively operate in the municipality council.

Hypotheses 2ab – cultural barriers as perceived by women

- Hypothesis 2a gender norms: A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women having internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women.
- Hypothesis 2b gender stereotyping: A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women questioning their leadership-competences because those do not adhere to image of the ideal leader.

Hypotheses 2cd– cultural barriers – sexism and misogyny that function as a barrier

- Hypothesis 2c sexism: A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career can be found in sexism because women are afraid they will be the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour.
- Hypothesis 2d misogyny: A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women being afraid of becoming the victim of (online) aggressive behaviour [read: hate], gender-based insults and receiving different forms of threats.



3. Research design

The following chapter explains what methodology approach for qualitative research is used in order to answer the research question. After the methodology, why the municipality of Nijmegen was selected as a case is discussed. Then, it is explained how interview participants were selected, how the interview guide was set up and how interviews were conducted. Further, it is explained how the data was processed and how the data has been analyzed with the help of a coding scheme. Last, it is explained how the researcher has dealt with her positionality.

3.1 Methodology

Buckley and Chiang define research methodology as “*a strategy or architectural design by which the researcher maps out an approach to problem-finding or problem-solving.*” (1976). Therefore, the methodology illustrates the comprehensive strategy that silhouettes the researcher’s choice and use of a specific method in order to answer the research question. In accordance, this thesis tries to explore an under-researched topic by focussing on the reasons why women do or do not decide to become politically active, using qualitative interview research. Qualitative interview research tries to understand phenomena from the subject’s point of view. According to Brinkmann and Kvale, this means that researchers are trying to unfold the meaning of a subject’s experiences’ and are trying to uncover the subject’s lived world prior to science (2015). Therefore, it makes sense to apply a qualitative approach since we are interested in women’s experiences, opinions, views and motives on why they didn’t aim to become politically active in the municipality council. In other words, we want to understand the subjective meaning that – in this case women – attach to the world around them and how they understand the world itself (Hesse, Biber & Leavy, 2011).

As a result of this research focussing on women’s subjective experiences, semi-structured interviews are conducted in order to test the theorized hypotheses and eventually, answer the research question.



According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), semi-structured interviews are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee. The research therefore makes use of an deductive approach since our theories are getting tested against newly collected data. In order to perform semi-structured interviews, an interview guide was created on the basis of the six overarching themes: recruitment, political institutions, gender norms, gender stereotyping, sexism and misogyny. The interview guide can be found in the appendix [see: **Appendix: Interview Guide (translated)**]. After all interviews were held, data was collected through the process of transcribing the interviews. After transcribing, the process of coding will help to define what the data is that the researcher is analysing (Gibbs, 2007). Therefore, thematic coding helps to identify a passage out of the transcription script by searching and identifying concepts and finding relationships between them. The coding is done with the use of a coding scheme that helps to categorise themes. The coding scheme allows us to code what is observed in terms of how often a theme appears. During the coding, I looked at which themes emerged and which themes did not. These results have been linked to the different hypotheses to examine to what extent these hypotheses can be confirmed or can be rejected.

A drawback of qualitative interviewing is that interviews are limited to a relatively small sample of women, making it harder to generalize to women in other municipalities, or other parts of the Netherlands. Nevertheless, within these limits I did seek to maximise diversity among respondents, and therefore the sample of interviewees is selected based on diversity in position on the list of candidates, diversity on the political spectrum (so different political parties) and the inclusiveness of the parties in general. This is explained more broadly in the next section about case selection.

3.2 Case selection

Municipality of Nijmegen

The main research question this study seeks to answer is what the reasons are that Dutch women – who have an interest in politics – do not aim for a career in it. In order to do so, the researcher carried out semi-structured qualitative interviews with female candidates for the municipal council in the municipality of Nijmegen. In this section, I will first explain the choice for Nijmegen and subsequently the selection of women candidates to interview.

Gerring identifies a case study as “*an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units*” (2004, p. 1). In addition, when performing a case study, the researcher examines a single phenomenon – in this case women not aiming for a career in politics – to uncover causal mechanisms and in order to make assumptions about the wider population (Gerring, 2004). In other words, by performing an in-depth study on the municipality of Nijmegen, we try to understand the barriers for all women in the Netherlands. So from studying one case intensively, to saying something about a broader set of cases. Therefore, examining a case in-depth would allow me to better understand



what the effects are of gendered recruitment criteria and institutions, the white-male norm, gender stereotyping, sexism and misogyny on women not aiming for a career in politics since an in-depth analysis can provide answers to why and how X is related to Y.

The municipality of Nijmegen was chosen as a case for two reasons. First off, Nijmegen can be seen as a least-likely case due to her leftist character. To illustrate, the nickname of the municipality of Nijmegen – which is ‘*Havana on the Waal*’ – refers to Nijmegen being the third most leftist municipality of the Netherlands (Reith, 2021). In addition, as a result that Nijmegen is a municipality with a more left, inclusive and pro-gender equality character, it is less likely that the factors found in the literature will serve as (major) barriers. However, if we can conclude that the factors serve as barriers here, it is very plausible that these factors serve as barriers in other municipalities as well. Secondly, the municipality of Nijmegen was chosen for practical reasons since the researcher did her internship at the local politics in Nijmegen and therefore had many contacts and a greater access to participants to interview.

Selecting interview-participants

The unit of analysis are the women who are interested in politics but do not aim for a career in it. However, due to the scale of the study, it is difficult to approach this research group. For this reason, it is decided to interview women who were low on the candidate-list and therefore politically interested, but who do not hold a political office. These women were to be studied in order to make implications about the lower descriptive representation of women in Dutch politics in general. This research thus tries to study whether there is a causal mechanism between three things 1) women having internalized they do not conform to the gendered recruitment criteria, the white-male norm nor the image of the ideal leader (gender stereotyping); 2) women not conforming to the gendered norm in the political arena and, 3) women being scared off for a career in politics due to sexism and misogyny.

Therefore, my three expectations are that women who have more characteristics that conform to the gendered norm have less negative experience with the gendered patterning of the political arena what causes these women to experience less barriers, secondly, I expect that women, who are in politics, have not internalized the different factors as much as women who do not aim for a career in politics, and at last, I expect that women, who are in politics, can more easily shrug off sexism and misogyny compared to women who do not aim a career in politics. Thus, I expect a difference in the characteristics of women and in their internalization of the factors between women that were elected (control group) and those who were not (research group).

In total, twenty-nine individuals were approached from five different political parties. From those twenty-nine individuals, five obtained a seat in the municipality council and the other twenty-four individuals were not elected. The individuals were approached through the general mail of the political party, through private email addresses, through LinkedIn and through connections who approached them



on behalf of the researcher. From the twenty-nine approached individuals, a total of eleven interviews were conducted with two elected and nine not-elected women from four different political parties.

As mentioned earlier, the researcher has adopted a diverse case selection approach when selecting interview-participants. The diverse case selection method is chosen since the research aims to make more general implications as to why Dutch females in general do not consider a political-career. The diverse method “*requires the selection of a set of cases—at minimum, two—which are intended to represent the full range of values characterizing X, Y, or some particular X/Y relationship*” (Seawright & Gerring, 2008a, p. 300). Therefore, diverse cases are more likely to represent the full variation of the population and thus allow for more generalization. In accordance, the research has chosen a group of women that differ from each other on different levels.

At first, when performing a diverse case selection, the researcher chooses one case from each category (Seawright & Gerring, 2008a). Therefore, the variety on the political spectrum was taken into account as several women from GreenLeft [Dutch: GroenLinks], several women of D66, several women from VVD and a woman from the City Party Nijmegen [Dutch: Stadspartij Nijmegen] were interviewed. However, for reasons of privacy, in the remainder of this thesis the candidates are being referred to as being from a left-wing party or a centre-right party. Whereby the candidates from GroenLinks and D66 are classified under left-wing and the participants from VVD and Stadspartij Nijmegen are classified under centre-right.² As parties differ from each other in terms of the left-right spectrum, this also creates variation in their inclusive nature. According to Kittilson in the *Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics*, left-oriented parties are more likely “*to nominate women to winnable positions and thus send more women to parliament than rightist parties*” (2013, p. 544). This means that, having more leftist parties in the municipality council most likely results in a higher descriptive representation of women in local politics. This is something that we find in the left-wing oriented parties of the municipality of Nijmegen as the more left and progressive have around 40% of women on their list while the VVD has circa 22% of women and the City Party Nijmegen has only 15% of women on their list.

Secondly, all interview-participants were in different positions on the candidate list. While electing participants, the researcher made an estimation from which position on the list it was unlikely that a candidate would be elected or not. To illustrate, since a specific left-wing party used to have six seats, it was likely that women in position twenty or higher were not to be elected for the municipality council. Also, the probability that women would be elected by preferential vote was also included. Therefore, women who were approached as possible interview-participants always had two or more women in front of them on the candidate-list and that made the chance of being elected by preferential votes smaller. In the end, the participants that did obtain a seat – the control group – were on position two or three and the

² Although the City Party is hard to position on the left-right spectrum since it differs per subject, the party will be placed under centre-right since it mainly overlaps with right-spectrum aspects and the party is male dominated. In addition, this will ensure the anonymity of the participants since we now have two left-oriented parties and two right-oriented parties.



position of not-elected women – the research group – varied from position number ten until number thirty-seven.

At last, the participants varied in their age and therefore also in their life-phase as the youngest participant was 25 years old and the eldest participant was 68 years old. This is of importance as the different life phases might influence whether women do or do not aim for a career in politics. To illustrate, it may be that they're still studying or just starting to have children.

However, interview-participants didn't differ much on their ethnical background as all participants had a white skin color.³

To conclude, as a result of the research relies on a diverse set of cases, this strengthens our ability to generalise research findings to women in the municipality of Nijmegen as a whole, and Dutch female candidates in local elections.

3.3. Data

As mentioned before, this thesis uses a qualitative research approach with the help of in-depth interviews (qualitative interview approach) in order to answer the research question. In-depth interviews will provide information about which factors serve as a barrier and which do not for women's decisions to become politically active, helping to demonstrate support for, or refute hypothesis. The interviews can thereby shed light on some of the causal mechanisms behind the phenomenon of women not being descriptively represented in politics in the Netherlands.

The way of conducting interviews and the kind of questions the interviewer can ask are multiple. In order to unfold women's experiences, semi-structured interviews were used with the help of an interview guide. The interview guide contains a list of questions and prompts that were designed to guide the interview in a focused, but still flexible and conversational manner (Fossey et. al., 2002). It can be seen as a script that structures the course of the interview more or less tightly. According to Brinkmann and Kvale, the guide should include an outline of topics to be covered, with suggested questions, for the semi-structured type of interview (2015). In accordance with Brinkmann and Kvale, the used interview guide includes an outline of six topics that match the hypotheses and has 36 suggestions of questions in total. Since the interviews are used as a tool to test the hypotheses, all the interview questions were based on the six hypotheses. Although the questions are based on theory, Brinkmann and Kvale suggest that questions "should be easy to understand, short and devoid of academic language" (2015, p. 157). For this reason, the interview questions are brief and simple. In **Figure 1** is shown how the researcher created questions that helped to test the hypotheses. In addition, the interview guide started with four open questions that are not connected to a specific hypothesis but were used to make the participant feel a bit more relaxed. Those questions were about the participants' political interest and their motive to become a

³ This is important to mention since women of colour are more vulnerable to sexism and misogyny since intersectionality plays a role (they are not only women, but women of colour).



member of a political party. The original and translated interview guide can be found in the appendix [see: **Appendix: Interview Guide**].

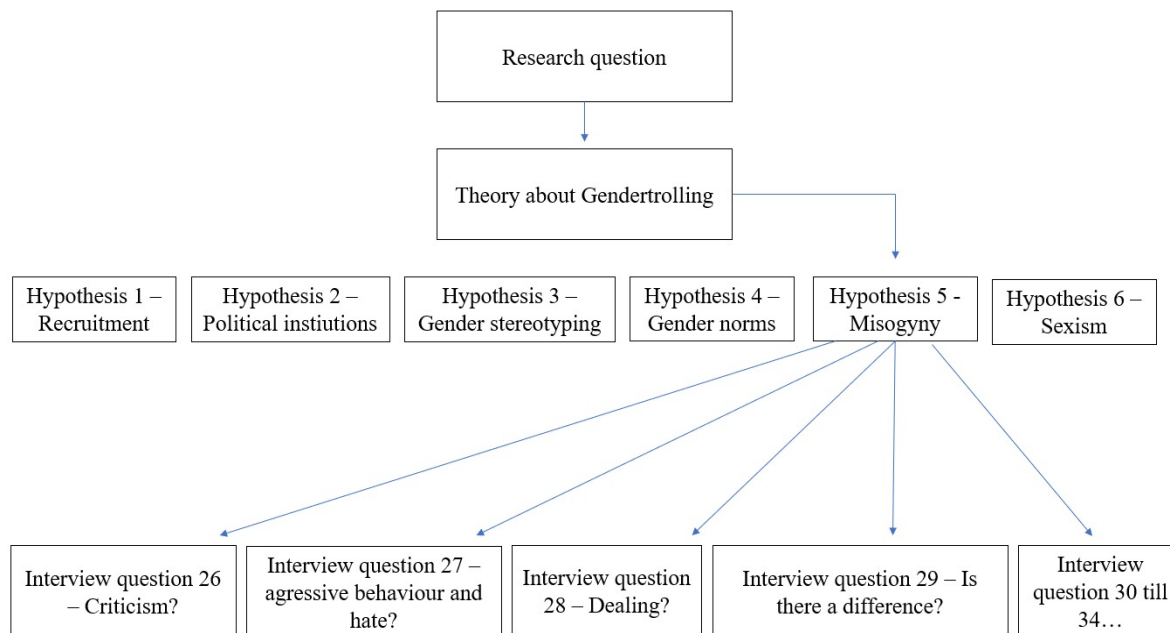


Figure 1. From hypothesis to interview questions.

Conducting the interviews

When approaching the various participants, it was indicated that the interviews could take place either online or physically, in accordance with personal preference. However, as a result of most participants having a quite busy schedule, eventually all interviews were held online as those meetings are less time consuming. This didn't affect the validity as people have become accustomed to the online environment and online meetings due to the Covid-19 pandemic. After participants indicated their preference for a date and time, they were invited for an interview appointment via Webex or Microsoft Teams. Both enterprises allow for free and unlimited video conferencing and online meetings. This makes Webex and Teams the perfect tools to use since you can easily invite participants via a link for an online appointment without the other person having to download the app. While making an appointment for the interview to take place, the participant was asked whether they would be at a place where she could freely speak out while conducting the interview, i.e. a conference room or at the participants' house. In this way, the researcher made sure that the participant felt more at ease and this had a positive effect on the validity and outcome.

When conducting an interview, the interviewer asked the interviewee whether it was okay to record the interview. In this way, the interviewer only had to focus on how the interview was going and whether each topic was discussed properly. In addition, recording the interview also allowed for transcribing the interview later on. All participants were informed that interview materials would only be used for the



thesis, always anonymously, and that, as soon as the thesis had been accepted, the interview recordings and transcripts will be deleted.

To end with, all the eleven interviews were conducted in the first three weeks of May with each interview lasting between 45-70 minutes. Both the researcher and the interview-participants were at home while conducting the interview. All the interviews have been recorded via phone and manually transcribed by the researcher herself. Because all the interviews were held in Dutch, the transcribing was also conducted in Dutch. For this reason, quotations from the interviews that are being used in the upcoming chapter are translated from Dutch to English.

Data analysis

After conducting the interviews, all recordings were transcribed. According to Bryman, when transcribing an interview “*it is important that the written text reproduces exactly what the interviewee said*” (2016, p. 485). This means that every word should be written out so that you really do justice to what the participant has said. Important benefits of transcribing is that it corrects the “*natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say during interviews and it allows more thorough examination of what people say*” (Ibidem, p. 482).

Once the eleven interviews were transcribed and the data was processed, the data analysis took place so that the researcher could test the causal mechanism for every hypothesis. In order to analyze the data, the researcher made use of the content analysis approach. With the help of content analysis, the researcher is able to quantify and analyze meanings and relationships of certain words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data (Columbia University, 2022). In order to analyze the transcripts using content analysis, the transcript should be coded into categories so that the data can be summarized further. The word ‘code’ refers to “*a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based data*” (Saldaña, 2020, p. 884). The coding of the data was done with the help of a coding scheme that was set up while analyzing the data. Bryman explains the coding scheme as “*a form onto which all the data relating to an item being coded will be entered*” (Ibidem, p. 298). The used coding scheme is based on the six different hypotheses and exists of a first cycle and a second cycle. The first cycle was created mostly before the data was processed – and partly while analyzing the data for the first time – and is therefore based on the researchers’ expectations. The second cycle was created when the data was analyzed for a second time and the research found additional codes. Within the coding scheme, the goal of the questions, the first- and second cycle and the description of every code are included. The coding scheme can be found in the appendix [see: **Appendix: Coding scheme**]. To end with, as a result of the analysis being based on language, we made use of a thematic analysis since we examined the data to identify broad themes and patterns.



Positionality

According to Brinkmann and Kvale, it is important to keep in mind that interview knowledge is socially constructed in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee (2015). In this case, the positionality of the researcher – and thus the interviewer – is not neutral as the researcher is a member- and politically active within one of the political parties that have been examined. Therefore, this results in a situation where the researcher is socially constructed within a specific party. In addition, the master specialization of the researcher shows that the researcher cares about gender norms and that she is engaged in the subject. However, although the researcher has tried to be as objective and neutral as possible, this is an important aspect to keep in mind. A technique that the researcher used in order to tackle this problem is the fact that she coded her data twice. To illustrate, the first cycle of the code scheme is based on the expectations that the researcher had based on the literature. After coding the data for a first time, the researcher went over the data for a second time to make sure that she didn't miss any important findings. A second technique that the researcher adapted in order to be as neutral as possible is the fact that she used semi-structured interviews. As a result that the interviews started off with open questions, this guarantees that the answers of the participants aren't pushed in a certain directions and that the answers aren't guided. Therefore, the participants have been given space for their own story. In addition, this approach also guarantees that the researcher gets information that she did not expect since participants are not sent in a direction with (closed) questions. The final technique that helped to resolve the researcher's positionality is the fact that all the participants are allowed to read the thesis after it is graded. As a result that the thesis will be made available to the participants, this ensures that the researcher has been as neutral as possible since she knows that she is being verified by the interviewees.



4. Findings

The aim of this thesis is to answer the following research question: **What institutional and cultural barriers affect women's decisions to become active in politics?**

Based on previous literature, possible barriers were specified through six hypotheses which were tested by doing in-depth interviews with women that were on the candidate list for the municipality council elections of 2022. The findings are based on interviews with two elected women and nine not-elected women from different political parties.

Why politics in general?

To start with, all interviews started with the question of why the interviewees had chosen to become a member of a political party. When asked about why the women had chosen to become politically active, eight women argued that they were very politically interested, two of the women were encouraged by people in their environment to become politically active and three women gave answers that implied that they were aiming for a career in politics. What is striking is the fact that almost every answer implies that the interviewees want to mean something for their community by contributing to it. Another thing that all women share is the fact that they are surrounded by people who are also politically active. Therefore, all women find themselves in an environment where it is normalized and encouraged to get involved in politics.

Second, when women were asked whether they aim or have been aiming to become a member of the municipality council, six women argued that they do or did aim to become a member. However, from those six, five women argued that they weren't able to combine their work with a career in politics and this explains their non-electable positions. Three other women started aiming to become a member of the municipality council after they were asked by other party-members. To illustrate, one woman argues that *“Even when I became a member of the party in order to help with writing the election-program, I didn't consider a career in politics. [...] it was only when a few people asked me to stand as a candidate for the elections of 2018 that I did so”* (5). One of the women who did aim for a career in politics argues that she perceives herself as too young and her partner stopped her. She argues *“I am still thinking about aiming for a career as a councilor. I did sign up last summer and applied for the training programme which*



consisted of a number of course days [...] I noticed that I became very enthusiastic about it and that it also seemed a lot of fun [...]. However, my age and my relationship at the time meant that I thought the term was really too long. If I were elected, I didn't want to have to give up halfway through” (1). One answer that stood out is from a younger woman who argued that she doesn't aim for a career in politics since she had experienced politics at close quarters and this has made her renounce a career in politics, she states “I really enjoy thinking about policy and making it, so public administration, but with all the political games and the municipal council perils,⁴ then I think no, that's not for me at all. I'm not really into political games and that's what's keeping me from joining the city council” (9).

Last, when women were asked whether they could explain that the municipality council of Nijmegen has more female councilors than male counsellors for the first time in history, six women argued that this can be understood as a change in society in general that has been going on for some years. All women argue that they are seeing more women in sectors that were previously dominated by men. They argue “I think it is a tendency of the last few years” (2) or they state that “I think there is a turnaround in this anyway so it can be seen as a result of many years of preparation” (11). In addition, one of those six women and another participant think that there is an increase in female ambition in general. In total, four women referred to the #VoteForAWoman campaign that has been very successful and three other women are mentioning that this is a result of women getting a lot of preferential votes that is causing them to have a seat in the municipality council. Two out of the four women that mentioned the successful #VoteForAWoman campaign are also arguing that Nijmegen as a municipality has more women in general in their municipality and this could be an explanatory factor. One answer that stood out comes from a woman that is a member of the municipality council and she argues that she thinks that people would like to see a different political culture. She states “What I think is behind this is a social need to have a representative council and a representative council has an equal number of men and women. Therefore, I think society wants to see a different type of politics which they might associate more with women than men” (5). At last, as a follow up argument, two women give an additional explanatory factor which states that the higher descriptive representation of females in the municipality council can be explained by the left-wing character of the municipality as a whole. They state that left parties are more inclusive and have more females in general.

Together, it can be concluded that all women have affinity with politics and sometimes, this affinity was triggered more by people in their environment. Only half of the women are actually aiming for a career in politics but most participants explain that they are not able to combine their political aspirations with their regular job. One woman indicates that she doesn't aim for a career in politics as a result of having a bad experience while doing an internship and another woman was held back by her partner. In general, nine women argue that the higher descriptive representation of females in the municipality council can be

⁴ Dutch: politieke perikelen.



explained due to a social process that is going on for some years and this process goes hand in hand with successful campaigns that stimulate this process even more. Four women argue that this can be explained by the municipality as a whole, and one argues that society wants to see a different political culture that can be achieved by having more women in politics.

4.1 Recruitment

In order to answer hypothesis one **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is because women have internalized that they will not be recruited because they do not conform to the selection criteria**, questions were asked about women's position on the list, what formal procedure there is to get on the candidate-list, how much influence they had on their position and whether there are (in)formal rules that influence the gender distribution on the candidate list.

At first, a striking fact to mention is that two out of the four parties surveyed do not mention the gender behind the name of a candidate on their list. One of the participants argues *“That is something we voted on with the board. In the end, we decided not to mention the gender of candidates because we think it's not important to mention”* (4). This applies to the left-wing parties.

Secondly, when interviewees were asked whether there was a formal procedure to become part of the candidate list, all participants argued that their party works with a candidate committee that takes the possible candidates under the loop. Some candidate committees asked for a motivation letter and the curriculum vitae of possible candidates before the interview and other committees only talked about motivation and experience during the interview. For each party, a candidate only had to do a committee-interview when the candidate is seeking a place on the list where it is likely that the person will be elected. In addition, in all committees, specific attention is paid to the amount of women and men that take a seat in the committee itself and all parties are trying to make this committee as neutral as possible with people that are independent. Although all parties work with a candidate committee which proposes a list of candidates, what is done with this proposal varies between parties.

Both left-wing parties allow their members to vote on the proposal list digitally, after which some differences in positions may arise. The candidate committee of one of the centre-right parties creates a draft list, this draft is presented during a meeting of party-members for inspection, then new candidates can still be introduced and in the end, the list is submitted to a meeting for party-members for final approval. For the other centre-right party – after the committee creates a draft list – there is a physical members' meeting⁵ where members can vote on the candidate-list. This makes the procedure of how the candidate-list of this party comes about more informal since members are able to physically cast their vote in front of other candidates. The list is only final when the voting took place. A participant explains

⁵ Dutch: Algemene Leden Vergadering.



“If you want to be on the list, first there is a committee that maps out where people want to be on the list, what their ambition is and then - after this committee has made a draft list - the draft is presented during an ALV where members are able to vote” (6). The two other candidates of the same party explained that this procedure made them feel uncomfortable since it is a public vote – instead of secretly – which makes it personal and it is causing them to be less critical since you don't vote low for someone if you need them later. After all, you are in a position of dependence. In addition, this procedure also caused distrust – an argument that will be more talked upon in hypothesis 2 about institutions [see **4.2 institutional barriers**].

What is striking is the fact that the elected women are mentioning that the candidate committee is making use of a profile. One of them states *“There is a profile that members of the committee make use of while electing candidates”* (5) and the other elected women states *“A profile will be drawn up to indicate whether you are suitable as a counselor”* (8). The nine women who weren't elected didn't mention that the committee used a profile. However, whether the non-elected women did not know about his profile or simply did not mention it, has not been checked.

Third, when participants were asked whether they had an influence on their position on the list of candidates three candidates argued that they didn't have an influence, three argued that they were asked to be on the list, three served as 'list pushers' due to their status and connections and two more experienced women had an influence on their position due to their former term of office.

Fourth, when participants were asked whether the procedure to be on the list of candidates was the same for men and women, all participants agreed that this procedure was the same, however whether everyone was asked the same questions is something that most participants do not know. Therefore, some participants argue that they 'think' it is the same for everyone.

Fifth, when participants were asked whether there are (in)formal rules that favor men over women, or the other way around, there were mixed answers. The two elected participants argued that men are being favored over women. To illustrate, one elected candidate from the centre-right party argued that *“The committee consisted of five men and one woman and I think that that caused a lot of females didn't feel comfortable doing an interview.[...] it is hard to get the female ratio up since our members are mostly men.”* (8). This argument implies that, because the party has more men, it is more difficult to recruit women, also since the committee consists mainly of men. The women continued with *“On the one hand, I notice that women seem to judge themselves more harshly than men. So they make a more careful judgement, perhaps a little too much, so that they don't consider themselves good or suitable enough. [...]. I know that five women were asked to be on the list but they said they didn't have the time, even if you are only a list pusher. With men, it seems as if they find it complimentary to be on a list while women feel less comfortable with it, I sometimes have that feeling”* (8). This part of the answer implies that women are stricter for themselves when evaluating whether they meet the selection criteria.



What stands out is that three participants argue that women were favored over men during the election procedure. The three participants claim that this stems from the movement where parties would like to have more women in high positions to go along with the current trend that we see in society. In addition, one of those three participants that belongs to a centre-right party argues that that she herself doesn't think that their constituency really cares whether there are enough females on their list of candidates. She argues *"I also have the idea that this does not really matter among [name party] voters. I don't have the idea that [name party] voters would be very bothered if the first woman in Nijmegen was in fourth place"* (2). Six other women argue that there are no formal or informal rules that favor any gender over the other.

Last, when women were asked whether there were formal rules, such as targets or quotas for the amount of women that should be on the list of candidates, four of them argued that their party doesn't work with quotas, one participant wasn't asked this question, another participant from the left-wing argues that the party has a policy plan to improve the diversity and inclusivity of the party, one participant from the centre-right argues that the party has a rule stating that *"In the top 3 there should at least be one woman"* (7) – whether this rule is formal or informal is unknown – and, to end with, five participants state that the party doesn't have explicit quotas or targets but is striving to have more women and therefore, the party pays attention to this during the recruitment process.

To summarize, it can be concluded that the answer to this hypothesis really depends on which political party you look at. To illustrate, the left-wing parties are very aware of the shift in society that demands more representation of minority groups such as women. Therefore they strive for more inclusivity and diversity and this is because women have not internalized that they do not conform to the selection criteria. On the other hand, it seems like women have a better chance at getting on a higher position on the candidate list compared to men. For women from the centre-right, it does seem as if they have internalized that they do not meet the right requirements to be on the list. According to participants, this is a result of those parties having more males from origin and this makes it harder – according to the interviewees – to have more women on board. However, the interviewees also argue that their constituency cares less about who represents them and therefore, this is less of a problem for those parties.

4.2 Institutional barriers

In order to answer hypothesis two **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women thinking that they will not be able to effectively operate in the municipality council**, questions were asked about where meetings take place, whether participants feel that their opinion is taken seriously, whether participants feel that they can operate effectively within their party and whether there is a safe atmosphere in general.



To start with, the two elected women explained that almost every meeting takes place in the townhall. One member argued that, when there was a general meeting for members, those took place in community centers and auditoriums. Informal meetings between party members take place at bars to maintain and improve relationships.

Secondly, when participants were being asked whether they thought that their opinion was taken seriously, seven of them argued that this was the case from the beginning and two of them said that this was due to their (life) experience. Three other women argued that they did think that their opinion was taken seriously, but that this only came after they proved themselves. An argument that is more talked upon when discussing hypothesis 6 about prejudice [see: **4.6 Sexism**]. One participant argued that she wasn't able to be very critical during gatherings due her dependent position on other party members. She argued *"If you have political ambitions yourself, then you are dependent on certain persons who are going to put you on the list. So sometimes, it is difficult to be critical internally because you know that this could be used against me. I think this is something that applies to every political party"* (2). Therefore, being dependent on someone results in a situation where you cannot always speak your mind and be critical and this is something that all party members suffer from since you are always dependent to a certain extent on people that are higher in rank.

Third, nine participants were asked whether they had the feeling that they can operate effectively. The two elected women and two non-elected women argued that they can operate effectively. However, both elected women emphasize that politics is *"a matter of long breath and patience, it takes time"* (8). Two other women – who both have a seat in the board of their political party – argue that you cannot always follow your own course or pursue your vision because you have to operate within the framework set by the national team. One of them states *"What you can do depends on the national course, therefore you set out your own vision within this framework"* (1). Three other women argue that you can only operate effectively when there are others that share the same opinion as you. After all, we are dealing with a democracy.

The last couple of questions were asked in order to analyze whether there was a safe atmosphere in general. When analyzing the interview answers, it became clear that the answers really differed per political party. To illustrate, none of the participants from a left-wing party had experienced unpleasant comments within their party. In addition, all party members of the same left-wing party argued that they feel like their party can be seen as a safe environment. Overall, none of the participants felt that there was an unsafe environment constantly, but four participants argued that they had the feeling that they couldn't always speak their mind openly. One of the four participants argued that this non-safe environment has improved a lot compared to 20 years ago, she states *"The norms and values have changed"* (3). An answer that really stood out came from an older woman who was not elected. When talking about women's position in the political arena, she stated *"It is different, you are really in a man's world. Men do*



not take into account what you think of the comments that they're making. You really have to prove yourself, but you also have to fit into the context. You have to be fun, be nice, you are not only judged on the content" (11). Her answer implied that there is a certain context and that this context is created by men. However, she also said that this context has changed a bit over the years which is in line with the arguments of participant number 3. In addition, a participant from a centre-right party argued that she has experience with unpleasant comments within her party.

When questions were asked whether participants experienced any taboos, two participants – both from center-right parties – argued that they did feel like there were some taboos in their party. To illustrate, one participant argued that *"there have been some sensitive themes, eight or six years ago, the discussion about black pete⁶ started. Those kinds of discussions always go wrong. [...] the arrival of an asylum seekers' centre is also a sensitive topic"* (8).

At last, two participants complained about transparency and that this made them feel a bit uneasy. One of the participants argued that the level of transparency was very low and that board members *"were allowed to do things due their status"* (1). One participant from the centre-right argued that she sometimes had the experience that there was a lot of lobbying and back-room politics going on when the list of candidates was being made and this made her feel uncomfortable. When the question about openness was being asked, the participant argued *"I don't think there is always enough transparency. It had to do with the order of the list [...] that was preceded by an enormous lobby"* (7). Therefore, lobbying and not being transparent is causing distrust and that makes people feel uneasy.

Altogether, it can be concluded that all participants have the feeling that they are able to effectively operate within the municipality council and within their parties. However, participants argue that there must be enough support for your ideas from other party members. In general, all women describe the municipality of Nijmegen as a safe environment where people can be *"tough on content, but drink a beer with each-other after the debate"* (5). However, the answers also imply that there is room for improvement such as transparency, less lobbying and people will always have to maintain a dialogue - especially when it comes to sensitive issues.

4.3 Gender stereotyping

In order to answer hypothesis three **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women questioning their leadership-competences because those do not adhere to image of the ideal leader**, questions were asked about women their thoughts about how the profile of a typical municipal councilor looks like, what important character traits a good political leader should have and what character traits the participants themselves have.

⁶ Dutch: zwarte piet.



A first thing to mention is the fact that there was no participant who thought about a man (or a woman) when being asked to describe a profile of a typical municipal councilor. In addition, nor did any participant mention certain traits that can be linked to being masculine or feminine. To be specific, four women in total explicitly mentioned that they don't think that there is a typical profile. Two other women were talking about two different profiles that you should have in your municipality council. A participant stated "*The first one is being able to read fast, being analytical and being able to distinguish between main and minor issues*" and the other profile is about "*being strongly representative, you should have people that function as a mouthpiece⁷ for a group that does not feel represented, networkers, people that like going into the neighborhoods*" (8). The other woman – participant number 6 – also talked about two profiles and said that there were older people, who have a lot of experience, and young people who act from ideology, enthusiasm and vision. Five other participants mentioned that it is very important that a person is involved with the municipality, three other women said a typical municipal councilor is passionate and five women mentioned that a person should be representational for the community. Other things that were mentioned once or twice are: having sufficient knowledge, having leadership competences, being ambitious, being a hard worker and a municipal councilor shouldn't be exalted. One thing that stands out is the fact that two women argue that the current municipality council is a bit problematic as a result of most councilors being highly-educated people. One of them argues "*I think it is good to have many different kinds of people. Society is also different, of course. What might be difficult in Nijmegen are all those highly educated people in the council. There are other places in Nijmegen like Hatert⁸ where people are less highly educated and I find it difficult that they are not heard as much [...]. I think it is important to be involved, and that should be part of the profile*" (9). Therefore, having too many high-educated people is not good for the representation of the society.

Second, when participants were asked what important character traits a good political leader should have, seven women argued that involvement is very important, four argued that a good political leader should have sufficient knowledge, three mentioned passion and three mentioned that a leader should be a good listener and should be verbally strong. Other character traits that were mentioned once or twice are: being a hard worker, being persuasive, being open to dialogue, having respect, having empathy, being able to form your opinion, having charisma, being a team player, having guts and being able to let go. This last character trait was mentioned very explicitly by two women. One of them argues "*I think you shouldn't take everything personally. You have to be able to be outspoken [...] with the previous council of Nijmegen, everyone was able to have a tough debate with each other, but afterwards they could always have a beer together. So I think that something you have to be able to separate. It's really a character trait you need because if you take everything that's said personally, you're not suited to politics*" (2). So

⁷ Dutch: spreekbuis.

⁸ A neighborhood in Nijmegen.



according to these two participants, it is really important that you can let go of things and do not take things too personally.

Last, when participants were asked which character traits they have, nine women mentioned the same character traits as were mentioned earlier, two women argue that they bring specific experience and knowledge with them – that they obtained due to their work – and one participant argues that she would be of added value since she represents two different minority groups.

Altogether, it can be concluded that the lower descriptive representation of women is not a result of women questioning their leadership competences because those do not adhere to the white male norm. Nevertheless, based on the interviews it can be concluded that women in the municipality of Nijmegen do not connect being a good leader to masculinity. In addition, nor do women mention character traits that are perceived as masculine characteristics as elaborated upon in the theoretical framework.

4.4 Gender norms

In order to answer hypothesis four **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women having internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women**, questions were asked about the self-confidence and self-perception of participants. To illustrate, one of the questions was about whether participants felt like they had enough good character traits and talents to be a successful leader. A follow up question that some of the participants got asked was whether their self-perception had something to do with their gender and whether participants thought that men were better politicians or not. At last, a question was asked whether participants thought that the expectations of male- and female councilors are the same according to themselves and society.

Overall, it can be said that seven participants are self-confident, two women indicate that they lack self-confidence and two other women seem self-confident but not when it comes to themselves as politicians. When the question was asked whether women have enough qualities and talents to be a successful politician, only one woman said *“Yes and I have been accepted in that respect. I am not going to be falsely modest about that”* (3). This answer stood out since it was the only participant who very confidently answered yes to the question. In addition, this answer comes from the oldest participant. Seven other women – including the two elected participants – said that they *“think they are”*. When the interviewer asked why the women used the word *“think so”*, one of the not-elected women argued *“It's a thin line, since you don't have to get arrogant either, because it's new for you too”* (2). The two elected women argued *“Because there will be something arrogant about saying that”* (5) and the other doubtfully said *“I'm always a bit modest. I think so”*. The interviewer then asked why she was so modest about it, she answered *“I think that's because. It is always a piece of uncertainty whether you do well enough in a*



debate. Whether you can make yourself clear. I think there is still room for improvement in that area” (8). Three other women argued that they do not make good politicians and all three of them argued that this is because they do not like the political culture nor the political games that are being played. Therefore, they do not aim for a political-career. They argue “I don't know if I am a good political leader, I don't know if I always enjoy the political game and that I can achieve enough as I do now in my work field” (11) and “I think I have leadership qualities, but whether that applies to politics, I doubt about. I've noticed that I find the culture, the integrity issues and transparency very annoying and very unfortunate that it goes on like that” (1). Therefore, the political culture is causing these three women to withdraw from politics.

Only three women got the question whether their judgement had anything to do with them being female. One of the women argued no and the other two argued yes. These two women argued that women have different characteristic traits than men have. To illustrate, one of them argued that *“females are better at keeping track,⁹ having a helicopter view” (7)*. Therefore, those two women did acknowledge that women are different than men.

In total, seven of the participants were asked whether they think that men make better politicians or not. Again, the woman who just argued that women have different character traits than men now claimed that *“Men are better at cutting corners, they make sure the process continues, women tend to get stuck” (7)*. The other six women answer this question with a resounding no.

At last, a total of eight women were asked whether the expectations that we have of male- and female politicians are the same. Four women argued that these expectations are the same according to themselves, however they think that these expectations are different according to society. Three other women agreed with this statement and argued that indeed, the expectations that we have for male- and female politicians are different. These three women also argued that – not only are the expectations different – but that women are treated more harshly by society and that this makes women generally work harder. To illustrate, they argued *“women have to work harder for the same results” (9)* and *“I do think that women are judged more critically and that they therefore work harder and then people find women too eager. Very quickly, certain characteristics are attributed to a man and a woman, even though they do exactly the same thing but for a woman, these characteristics are way more negative” (7)*. Only one participant thought that the expectations are the same according to society.

To summarize, it can be concluded that women do not have internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women. However, what can be said is that all women have qualified themselves when saying they are good at something, since they don't want to seem arrogant and they see room for improvement. Therefore, although woman haven't internalized that they are unfit to govern, the answers do indicate gendered dynamics since participants are very doubtful when they judge

⁹ Dutch: overzicht houden.



themselves as politicians. On the opposite side, there isn't a woman who thinks that men generally make better politicians. However, many women recognize that the expectations of male and female politicians are different according to society and that society judges women more harshly.

4.5 Sexism

In order to answer hypothesis five **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career can be found in sexism because women are afraid they will be the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour**, questions were asked about women their experiences with prejudice and discrimination.

First, when asked about whether women have experienced any prejudice in politics, all participants do recognize that women in general have to deal with prejudice. To illustrate, one participant is mentioning that women are being underestimated on their *“intelligence, insight and analytical ability”* (8). Three participants explicitly mention that they do not only have to contend with this prejudice in the political arena, but also at their regular job. Especially if the field of work in which they find themselves was (previously) dominated by men. Two women argue that this prejudice fades away as you get older and have already proved yourself. In addition, most participants argue that women in general have to prove their worth and three recognize that women in general have to prove themselves more than men *“I see quite a few men in the same position as I am and I think: what are you doing in that position? I think that men bluff more. Women do not get away with that so easily, we have to prove ourselves more”* (8), another participant argues *“I do recognize the phenomenon that women have to earn the attention of men [...], having to prove yourself applies more strongly to women than to men”* (3). One of the elected women is arguing that she has never experienced prejudice in the political arena since she had a good start. To illustrate, she argued *“I think I had the luxury that my first debate, my fellow speech which was a tencious topic, went really well. That first debate was such a great foundation for me and it caused that I was taken seriously from the beginning [...] I think it is more complicated when that start is less smooth”* (5). This comes back to the argument that women have to prove themselves. Once they do, the prejudice will fade away. An older woman is arguing that she did have to deal with a lot of prejudice in the political arena but she thinks that politics in general has become more inclusive for women nowadays. She argues *“When I suggested something, there was often no reaction or it was dismissed as a stupid idea, but when a man said it a few moments later it was OK. [...] Those older guys didn't know who I was and told me 'To get some coffee for them' [...] I think that women have to deal with many prejudices in politics and that they have to win their spot”* (11).

Second and last, only four women got the question whether they had experienced any discrimination. One of them is arguing that she experienced discrimination in politics when she was a bit younger. She argues *“With older gentlemen, I used to do policy support and then, when I gave my opinion, they were like 'Oh little girl, what do you know'. And later, you were proved right but they just forgot about it. That*



really felt like discrimination. You are getting underestimated because you are a woman. The fact that you are young probably also plays a role” (8). Two other women from a left-wing party argue that they do not have any experience with discrimination. One of them argues “I don’t think there is space in our political party to discriminate, it is very inclusive and if someone is mentioning that there is discrimination, others would immediately say something about it” (4). At last, another women who is almost 60 years old, is arguing that women in politics face discrimination based on their gender but she doesn’t have personal experience. When talking about discrimination, she illustrates a research that she has read from the NWO – a Dutch Organization for Scientific Research – that states that women are being discriminated in the recruitment procedure based on their gender. She says “When women applied anonymously, they had as much or even more chance of getting the job as men but when the gender was mentioned, men had much more chance of getting the job. [...] So yeah, I do think that there is discrimination based on gender and that is because people think that men will do a better job” (11).

Taken together, all participants recognize that women have to deal with prejudice in politics but that this prejudice fades away when a woman has proved herself. In addition, participants seem eager to prove (older) men wrong. On the other hand, discrimination based on gender doesn’t seem a big issue as only one participant talked about her personal experiences with discrimination.

4.6 Misogyny

In order to answer hypothesis six **A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women being afraid of becoming the victim of (online) aggressive behaviour [read: hate], gender based insults and receiving different forms of threats**, questions were asked about whether the participants experienced any politics-related criticism and hate (both online as in real life), whether participants have experience with misogyny, how the participants deal with hate and gender trolling in general and whether the participants think that there is a difference in the amount of hate that women and men receive. In addition, questions were asked whether (online) hate are common topics of conversation within the political party and within the environment of the participants. At last, a question was asked whether (online) hate has played a role in the considerations of participants to become politically active or not.

A first thing to mention is that the subject of misogyny was not discussed with the oldest participant due to lack of time. Interviews with all other participants revealed that whether participants had experience with criticism and hate depended on how active they had been within their party. There were only two participants arguing that they didn’t have ‘real’ experience with hate apart from some silly comments by people close to them. However, she said that she wasn’t very open about her political



affiliation and that she does not use social media either. All the other participants argued that they did experience hate in both a direct and indirect manner. In total, six participants had direct experiences with hate (aggressive behaviour) and two other women argued that they witnessed hate addressed to other female politicians. From the six participants who had direct experience with hate, four of them described their experiences with aggressive behaviour in real life and the two other females described their experience with gender trolling. The two women who have experienced gender trolling are the two elected women.

What is striking is the fact that – the more a person is involved and active within politics – the more hate a person receives. To illustrate, the two elected women and a woman who helped with campaigning did experience misogyny and were being called out. To illustrate, after a debate in which a certain political party took a fundamentally different position compared to others, the person in question received a great deal of hate, threats and criticism online (gendertrolling). To ensure the anonymity of the person, threats and explicit hatred will not be named. She states *“I actually have many moments like that, I just don’t safe them in my head. They are often anonymous Twitter accounts”* (5). Another women argues *“You are being called out as a child murderer. [...] They call you out but I don’t have a lot of experience with threats. However, when I get comments like that I most of the time block them”* (8). So both of the elected women get a lot of misogyny. The other woman was being called out while campaigning.

Third, in total, seven participants were asked what this hatred did to them, only two women – one elected and the other in her 60s – said it did not affect them. The older participant also indicated that this was due to her age and that it made it easier for her to put it aside. The other five women argued that it did affect their state of mind and that it caused a lot of lack of understanding, frustrations and sometimes irritations. One of the younger participants – under the age of thirty – argued that the criticism and hate did affect her self-confidence and her political ambitions.

Fourth, seven participants were asked whether they think that there is a difference between the hate that women and men receive. All seven participants argued that there is a difference in the nature of the hate and that the hate is more based on sex. To illustrate:

“I really think it is a different kind of hatred. It is written differently. I think with women, hate is much more personal, more offensive and sexual of nature. That women are called a bitch and a cunt or people say things like ‘You need to get some dick’. [...] With men it is much more about the content, what they should have done. But with women, it’s more on the person and not so much the subject” (1).

“I think that women are treated differently. If you look at the comments that a Femke Halsema¹⁰ gets, for example, they are very different from the comments that an Aboutaleb¹¹ gets, even though they are

¹⁰ Mayor of Amsterdam, the capital city of the Netherlands.

¹¹ Mayor of Rotterdam, a city in the Netherlands.



fairly similar positions and municipalities. I don't think men are necessarily better politicians, but that the image of them could do with some maturing, that there should be less framing for that” (6).

“When I look at what [Sigrid] Kaag gets thrown to her head, I think it is a form of aggression and portraying a person in a certain way. Women are approached in a different way, look at the Telegraaf.¹² It may be different, I think the tone is different. So yes I think so, at least that is my experience. And that is especially the case with women who are outspoken, who really stand their ground and don't budge. It has to do with the fact that they are women” (11).

So, although not all participants have experienced misogyny personally, they are aware of hate that applies to other female politicians at the national level and that this hate is more on the national level than at the local level. To illustrate, participants talk about the nature of the hate that is different and they argue that the hate is more personal and therefore less focused on the content (so what female politicians are actually saying). In addition, two of the seven participants argue that the amount of hate that women receive is more compared with men.

Fifth, four women were asked whether their political party gave attention to gender trolling and aggressive behaviour and all of them argued that the party did offer trainings to deal with this type of behaviour.

Six, in total, six women were asked whether misogyny and gendertrolling were common topics of conversation. One of the participants argued that she never discussed this with others, four argued that it is sometimes discussed – most of the time after something happened – and the youngest participant argued that it is a common topic of conversation.

The final question about misogyny that participants received analyzed whether the hate played a role in the considerations of women to become politically active or not. This question was discussed with eight participants in total and only one participant argued that the hatred did play a role in her considerations to become active or not. The other seven women argued that it didn't play a role but they said *“I think that women in general may find it more difficult to admit. ‘I don't feel like it, it keeps me awake, or it bothers me and I'd rather not do it’. I can imagine that. I have the impression that women generally find this more difficult” (2).* However, the women who argued that gendertrolling and misogyny didn't play a role are already a bit older, have life- and work experience and this taught them to let things slip off more easily.

Taken together, it can be said that the two younger women – both under the age of thirty – were mostly affected by the criticism. One of them stopped using Twitter and the other one never made an account since she knew she would get a lot of hate. One of them also argued that she nowadays hardly ever openly states which party she stands for in order to prevent negative reactions. In general, the

¹² Name of a Dutch newspaper.



participants who received most hate were the ones who were most active within politics. Although the non-elected women didn't receive much criticism or hate – except from the time that they were actively campaigning – they are all well aware of the criticism and hate that female politicians receive at the national level. To illustrate, they all mention examples from female politicians such as Sigrid Kaag (D66) Femke Halsema (GroenLinks), Lisa Westerveld (GroenLinks), Kauthar Bouchallikht (GroenLinks) and Lilianne Ploumen (PvdA). What's also striking is the fact that most participants argue that they have the feeling that female politicians are approached differently by society and the media and that the received hate is different in nature. For example, women are judged much less on their content and much more on the way they look.

To conclude, the online aggressive behaviour, gender based insults and receiving different forms of threats are not the reasons why women decide to not pursue a career in politics as for most women, the hate didn't affect their decision to become politically active. However, we can conclude that the effect of misogyny and trolling is much bigger for younger women than older women. The older women have learned to deal with this and therefore the hate doesn't affect their confidence or political ambitions. Altogether, it can be concluded that misogyny is a subject that many women are aware of.



5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this research was to examine whether there are certain barriers that cause women to not pursue a career in politics. In order to examine whether the factors really posed as barriers, six hypotheses were established based on different theories that would test the causal mechanisms. In addition, this research aims to build on research on the lower descriptive representation of women in the Netherlands in general and contribute to it.

In total, eleven in-depth and semi-structured interviews were established with two elected and nine not-elected women in order to test the hypotheses. The participants are: between the age of 25 and 68 years old, of Dutch origin, living in the municipality of Nijmegen, member of a political party (that differ on the left-right spectrum) and have been on the candidate-list for the elections of the municipality council in March 2022.

Institutional barriers as perceived by women

To start with, literature shows that women have a hard time getting into politics as a result of selection criteria that favor men over women. In addition, several researchers explain that this is the result of gendered norms and practices within the political arena that shape the opportunities for men and women. Therefore, the first hypothesis tested whether women have internalized or not that they will not be recruited since they do not conform to the selection criteria that are in favor of men. In total, six women argued that there were no formal or informal rules that favor any gender over the other, which is remarkable. Furthermore, from the results, we can conclude that it matters whether a participant belongs to a left-wing party or to the centre-right party for the hypothesis to be rejected or confirmed. To illustrate, for women from left-wing parties, this hypothesis is rejected since these parties are very much engaged in inclusiveness and actually put women higher on the list as they think this is important – they go along with the social trend. Therefore, it seems like the opposite is true and that left-wing women have internalized that they have a better chance at getting elected. For women from the centre-right parties, this hypothesis is confirmed as interview participants indicate that their fellow women judge themselves more critically compared to their male colleagues. So centre-right women are stricter for themselves when evaluating whether they meet the selection criteria. This makes sense since these parties consist mainly of men and therefore, females measure themselves against their male-colleagues. Also, from one centre-right party, a participant argued that the committee – who was responsible for recruiting list-candidates – consisted mainly of men, which made women feel uncomfortable doing an interview. The participant argued that several women were asked to be on the list but that they didn't want to, also not as a list pusher, while men saw this question as a compliment.



New institutionalism and feminist institutionalism explain the way in which institutions shape the nature of an actors behaviour through the construction of gendered rules, -norms and policies. Since the political arena is gendered, this results in women having “*to personify the ideal male worker by exhibiting masculine behaviours*” (Bierema, 2016, p. 124). Drawn from the literature, the second hypothesis tested whether women thought that they would be able to effectively operate in the municipality council or not. From the results, we can conclude that women in general do not think that they are not able to effectively operate in the municipality council. Therefore, the second hypothesis is to be rejected. However, from the results it can be concluded that you need to have enough support for your ideas. In general, women describe the municipality of Nijmegen as a safe environment where they can openly speak their mind. Nevertheless, participants from centre-right parties argue that there is improvement for transparency and lobbying within the party.

Cultural barriers as perceived by women

Since the political arena is and always has been dominated by men, the political arena can be judged as an institution of hegemonic masculinity. According to Kronsell, these hegemonic-institutions “*represent and reify specific notions of masculinity in ways that makes it the norm*” (2005, p. 280). Since women who aim for a political career only see male politicians and female politicians who have adapted to the existing norm, women doubt their leadership competences as those do not conform to the white-male norm. Therefore, the third hypothesis tested whether women have internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm. From the results, it can be concluded that women in general do not question their leadership competences but they find it very hard to call themselves ‘good politicians’. To illustrate, there was only one participant who thought she would make a good politician and she didn’t want to do false modesty about that. All the other women were doubtful and answered very modestly about whether they were (or could make) good politicians. This implies that women have qualified themselves when saying they are good at something, since they did not want to seem arrogant and they see room for improvement. Therefore, although women haven’t internalized that they are unfit to govern, the answers do indicate gendered dynamics since participants are very doubtful when they judge themselves as politicians. In addition, some women argued that the political culture played a role in this. However, none of the women thought that men would make better politicians but women do acknowledge that men and women are different in how they approach and handle things and this idea has also been confirmed by society. Since almost every participant gave doubtful arguments, the hypothesis is confirmed since this indicates gendered dynamics.

According to multiple research, women have a hard time in politics since they do not match the image of the ideal leader that is associated with being male, white, western and male characteristics. So, women are battling with gender stereotypes to which they do not conform to. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis tested whether women decide not to pursue a career in politics as they question their leadership-



competences as those do not adhere to the image of the ideal leader. Although answers imply that women criticize themselves harshly, it can be concluded that women do not associate masculinity to the profile of a municipality councilor. Nor do the results imply that women associate male characteristics – as described in the theoretical framework – with being a good political leader. As a follow-up, women argue that they do possess important character traits that city councilors or politicians in general should also have. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is to be rejected.

Cultural barriers – sexism and misogyny

In the last decade, we see a trend wherein female politicians have to deal with sexism and misogyny more often. Hostile sexism characterizes women as “*unfit to make important decisions and presents females as easily manipulated, vulnerable and weak*” (Plakoyiannaki, et, al. 2008, p. 103). Therefore, sexism causes that women are the victim of prejudice and discrimination based on their sex, what is confirmed by Cameron (1977) . Drawn from the literature, the fifth hypothesis tested whether women do not pursue a career in politics since they are afraid to become the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour. The results imply that women recognize that females have to deal with lots of prejudice in politics but that this fades away when women have proven themselves. Age also plays an important role since younger women have to prove themselves even more. In addition, it can also be concluded that women have the feeling that females in general have to deal with prejudice more and therefore have to prove themselves more compared to men, in order to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, discrimination based on gender does not appear to be an issue. Even though all women do argue that there is a lot of prejudice, the hypothesis can be rejected as it seems like the prejudice is not holding women back to aim for a career in politics. On the contrary, the participants seem eager to prove (older) men wrong.

Misogyny is defined as the hate towards women that enforces the patriarchal order. The hate stems from the fact that women go against existing norms and expectations of the patriarchal structure and it’s at least partly because of their gender. Therefore, the final hypothesis tested whether women do not pursue a career in politics because they are afraid to become the victim of (online) hate, gender-based insults and receiving different forms of threats. The results imply that whether participants experienced any hatred depending on how active and outspoken they were and how affected a woman was by this hate, depended on her age and self-esteem. To illustrate, there was only one participant who didn’t have experience with hate but she also mentioned that she wasn’t very open about her political affiliation and that she does not use social media either. All other women had in some sort experience with hate whereby the elected women and one woman who helped campaigning experienced misogyny mostly. In addition, although participants didn’t experience hate very often or very explicitly, all participants were very aware of the hate that other female politicians – mostly on the national level – receive on a daily basis. Since women were able to come up with very explicit examples, this shows that women are aware of the hate that



female politicians receive. However, whether the hate affected them depended on women's life-experience. Women under the age of thirty were most affected and consciously stopped using Twitter. Older women – including the elected women – could easily let hatred slip away and argued that this was because of their age. As a follow up, all women argued that female politicians are approached differently by both society and the media and that the hate that they receive is different in nature. To end with, we can conclude that the hypothesis is to be confirmed for women under the age of 30 and to be rejected for women above 30 years. More older women do not let this hate affect their confidence or political ambitions.

Summary

Altogether, it can be concluded that age and women's orientation on the political left-right spectrum do play a role in whether certain factors can be perceived as barriers or not. Age for example has an effect on women's self-confidence and their self-perception. Therefore, age influences whether women see themselves as fit to govern and whether they think they have enough good qualities to be a good politician. Also, younger women are more affected by sexism and misogyny since they have to prove themselves more and they are less able to cope with hatred. Older women are in general more self-confident which can be explained by life- and work experience.

In addition, we see that whether a hypothesis is to be confirmed or rejected sometimes also differs on the left-right spectrum. To illustrate, women who have an affinity with the left-wing spectrum have internalized that they have a good chance of being recruited while women from the right-wing spectrum are stricter for themselves when evaluating whether they meet the selection criteria which can be explained by the fact that centre-right parties have more men. Therefore, women measure themselves against these males.

However, from the data, it can be concluded that the main reason why women do not aim for a career in politics is not because they have internalized that they will face institutional barriers. In fact, women do not aspire to a career in politics since it is almost impossible to combine their work as a municipality councilor with their full time jobs, other career-aspirations, early family life and wanting to have a social life as well. Therefore, the most important reason for not aiming for a career in politics is having a full-time job and women wanting to make a career in their work field. For this reason, a person must like politics in general – with its political culture, games and everything else that comes with it – so much, that you accept your very limited personal time.

To end with, it is important to argue that the tested hypotheses should not be seen as separate from each other. Although not all examined factors serve as barriers to all women, together these factors do carry weight on women's decision to become politically active or not. To illustrate, all women are aware of the hate that female politicians receive and most women argue that females are treated more negatively in the media than men. Add to this the knowledge that you will mostly be surrounded by men and having to bat-



the prejudice in order to be taken seriously. Therefore, it can be concluded that all the factors combined do result in a situation where women choose to not aim for a career in politics. So, it can be described as a bucket of water that becomes fuller and eventually overflows. For younger women that are more insecure and for centre-right oriented women, this bucket is from the start already more full and this makes it plausible that younger and right-oriented women do not aspire to a career in politics.

Possible caveats and further research

Although the research gives important insights, there are also limitations that should be kept in mind. First, the results are based on a qualitative study with a small sample size and this brings important constraints. To illustrate, from the eleven participants, only two of them were elected and this makes it difficult to define the distinction between the research group (not elected-women) and the control group (elected-women). In addition, a total of seven women were interviewed from the left-wing parties and only four women from centre-right parties were interviewed. Therefore, when more women from centre-right parties were interviewed, this would increase the likelihood that the examined factors do serve as barriers. Also, although the research is anonymous, it is likely that women – especially those who were high on the list – do not want to devalue their party. After all, we have seen that many women are aware of their dependent position.

Another limitation from the sample (size) is that the vast majority of the interview-participants are in work environments (previously) dominated by men. For example, I have interviewed women who are doctors, policy advisers, are in the legal profession and almost all of them hold or have held managerial positions in different work fields. This means that these women are used to an environment with powerful men and therefore, they are used to working within an institution of masculinity. In addition, the participants that were 30 years or older come across as very self-confident, women that stand their ground and this will not be the case for every woman in the municipality of Nijmegen above the age of 30. Altogether, this may give a distorted picture since the data is limited. For this reason, it is suggested to continue with interviewing more women from the municipality of Nijmegen that were on the candidate list from other additional parties with the same interview guide. When this is accomplished, the results are based on more women who are also more spread out over different parties that vary on the left-right spectrum and this makes the results more reliable.

Another suggestion is to establish a questionnaire based on the interview guide to distribute among a larger group of women in the municipality of Nijmegen.

Furthermore, one of the reasons to pick the municipality of Nijmegen as a case is because the municipality can be classified as a least likely-case. This means that, since Nijmegen has already a higher descriptive representation of women as a result of the municipality's leftist and inclusive character, it is less likely that the examined factors will serve as barriers. Since we conclude that most of the barriers



do not serve as barriers, it is important to further examine other municipalities who are less inclusive and left-oriented in order to know whether the factors do serve as barriers here. So examining municipalities that are more typical and therefore better represent the Netherlands as a whole.

Another thing to mention is that the data analysis, that was done by coding, is only done by one researcher which could make the research less trustworthy, especially since the researcher has a positionality. However, the coding was done with the help of two cycles which increased the reliability. Also, the researcher has agreed that the participants are able to read the study afterwards and therefore, the researcher knows that she can be controlled which also increases the credibility.

What also influences the results is the fact that the interviews were held in Dutch since Dutch is the mother tongue of all participants. However, this could cause that important information was lost during translation or information has been incorrectly transmitted

Lastly, since the scope of the research is relatively small, the research has taken a binary approach to gender instead of an intersectional approach and all the participants were of Dutch origin. For further research, it is interesting to take on an intersectional approach and to interview participants from different ethnicities to see whether this makes a difference. For example, it may be that women of color have internalized that they do not conform to the white-male norm or that they are afraid of becoming victims of sexism and misogyny. Since I didn't take this into account, this can be seen as a limitation of the study.

Uniqueness and value of the research

What makes this research of added value is the fact that it is an unique in-depth study that focuses on the experiences of women who are politically interested. Since the interviews have been semi-structured, this resulted in their experiences leading in the conversation and thus for the research-output. Furthermore, what makes this research interesting is the fact that it compares women who have an interest in politics – since they are a member of a political party – with women who hold a political office in the municipality council. Moreover, this thesis brings to light that women have the feeling that females in general judge themselves more harshly, suffer more from prejudice and therefore have to prove themselves more, and are aware of the much hatred (misogyny) that women receive. In addition, although institutions seem neutral, gendered dynamics do play a role. For this reason, the examined barriers do play a role for some women but it is more nuanced. To illustrate, the age (and thus life experience) of a woman and her orientation, so whether she is left- or right-oriented, is of influence on how much the examined factors serve as barriers or not. Also, the results imply that a lower descriptive representation of women is not only a consequence of women being a victim of gendered institutions and a culture that favours men over women, but that women have agency. To illustrate, the results imply that most women choose not to go into politics since they want to realise their ambitions as lawyers, for example. So women do have agency. Therefore, more emphasis should be placed in the literature on women's agency rather than victimisation. Hav-



ing brought this to light, Dutch local councils should make the work of a municipality councillor more easy to combine this with other work priorities so that being a councillor becomes more attractive to women.

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Appendix

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Nijmegen, June 2022

Maud Wigink

Appendix: List of interview participants (anonymised)

Number	Place of residence	Gender	Party	Status
1	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Left GroenLinks #1	Not elected
2	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Right VVD #7	Not elected
3	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Progressive D66 #3	Not elected
4	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Left GroenLinks #1	Not elected
5	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Progressive D66 #3	Elected
6	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Right VVD #7	Not elected
7	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Right VVD #7	Not elected
8	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Stadspartij Nijmegen #2	Elected
9	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Progressive D66 #3	Not elected
10	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Left GroenLinks #1	Not elected
11	Municipality of Nijmegen	Women	Progressive D66 #3	Not elected



Appendix: Interview Guide (original)

Open questions	
<p>1. Waarom heeft u ervoor gekozen lid te worden van een politieke partij?</p> <p>2. Waarom heeft u ervoor gekozen om ook politiek actief te worden?</p> <p>3. Heeft u de ambitie (gehad) om in de gemeenteraad te komen? Waarom wel/niet?</p> <p>4. Kunt u uitleggen hoe u denkt dat het komt dat er voor het eerst meer vrouwelijke gemeenteraadsleden zijn dan mannelijke gemeenteraadsleden? Waar komt dit vandaan? Wat heeft hier mogelijk aan bij gedragen?</p>	
Hypothesis 1a – Recruitment <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is because women have internalized that they will not be recruited because they do not conform to the selection criteria.</i>	
<p>5. Wat was uw positie op de lijst?</p> <p>6. Heeft u zelf invloed gehad op uw plek of werd dit door anderen bepaald?</p> <p>7. Wat moet een partijlid doen om op de kandidatenlijst te komen?</p> <p>8. Is deze procedure voor mannen en vrouwen hetzelfde?</p> <p>9. Zijn er regels die mannen meer bevoordelen? Of andersom?</p> <p>10. Heeft uw partij vaststaande afspraken over het aandeel vrouwen dat minimaal op de lijst moet staan?</p> <p>11. Werkt de partij met quota's voor vrouwen?</p>	
Hypothesis 1b – Political institutions <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women thinking that they will not be able to effectively operate in the municipality council.</i>	
<p>Only for elected women:</p> <p>12. Waar vinden vergaderingen plaats? Zowel fractie als gemeenteraad?</p> <p>13. Heeft u het idee dat uw mening serieus wordt genomen?</p> <p>14. Heeft u het idee dat u effectief kunt opereren binnen de gemeenteraad / binnen de partij? Kunt u de dingen bereiken die u wilt bereiken?</p> <p>15. Kan in vergaderingen alles open besproken worden?</p> <p>16. Worden er wel eens opmerkingen gemaakt binnen de vergadering die u onprettig vond? Waar gaan deze opmerkingen dan over?</p> <p>17. Hebben deze opmerkingen er aan bij gedragen dat u in de tijd daarna minder geneigd was uw mening, inzichten en perspectieven te delen?</p>	



<p>For not-elected women: 12. Heeft u het idee dat uw mening serieus wordt genomen? 13. Heeft u het idee dat u effectief kunt opereren binnen de gemeenteraad / binnen de partij? Kunt u de dingen bereiken die u wilt bereiken? 14. Kan binnen de partij alles open besproken worden? 16. Worden er wel eens opmerkingen gemaakt binnen de partij die u onprettig vond? Waar gaan deze opmerkingen dan over? 17. Hebben deze opmerkingen er aan bij gedragen dat u in de tijd daarna minder geneigd was uw mening, inzichten en perspectieven te delen?</p>	
<p>Hypothesis 2b – Gender stereotyping <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women questioning their leadership-competences because those do not adhere to image of the ideal leader.</i></p>	
<p>18. Kunt u het profiel schetsen van een typisch gemeenteraadslid? 19. Wat zijn karaktereigenschappen van een goede politieke leider? 20. Welke eigenschappen brengt u met zich mee?</p>	
<p>Hypothesis 2a – Gender norms <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women having internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women.</i></p>	
<p>21. For elected women: Denkt u dat u een goede politica bent? 21. For not-elected women: Denk u dat u genoeg eigenschappen en talenten beheerst om een succesvolle leider te kunnen zijn? 22. Heeft dat nog iets te maken met dat u vrouw bent? 23. Denkt u dat mannen over het algemeen betere politici zouden zijn? 24. Zijn de verwachtingen die we hebben van mannelijke gemeenteraadsleden en vrouwelijke gemeenteraadsleden hetzelfde?</p>	
<p>Hypothesis 2d – Misogyny <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women being afraid of becoming the victim of (online) aggressive behaviour [read: hate], gender based insults and receiving different forms of threats.</i></p>	
<p>25. Heeft u ervaring met kritiek tijdens verkiezingsmaanden? 26. Heeft u ervaring met agressief gedrag/agressie tijdens verkiezingsmaanden? Haat reacties? 27. Hoe gaat u hiermee om? 28. Wat is voor u het verschil tussen haatdragende reacties en kritiek? 29. Denkt u dat dat er een verschil zit in de hoeveelheid agressief gedrag dat vrouwen en mannen ontvangen? 30. Biedt de partij trainingen aan om hier mee om te gaan? Of trainingen die u hier op voorbereiden? 31 Bent u zich bewust van de vele online haatberichten die vrouwelijke politici ontvangen?</p>	



<p>32. Op welke manier bent u zich hier bewust van?</p> <p>33. Heeft de kritiek en (online) haat een rol gespeeld in uw overwegingen om wel of niet de politiek in te gaan?</p> <p>34. Heeft u wel van vrouwelijke leden of politica gehoord dat zij veel haat en kritiek ontvangen?</p> <p>34b. Wat doet dit met u?</p>	
<p>Hypothesis 2c – Sexism</p> <p><i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career can be found in sexism because women are afraid they will be the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour.</i></p>	
<p>35. Heeft u binnen de politiek wel eens te maken gehad met vooroordelen? Waar gingen deze vooroordelen over?</p> <p>36. Heeft u binnen de politiek wel eens te maken gehad met discriminatie die berust was op het feit dat u een vrouw bent? Hoe uitte zich dit?</p>	



Appendix: Interview Guide (translated)

Hypothesis	Interview questions
Open questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why did you choose to become a member of a political party? 2. Why did you choose to become politically active? 3. Do you have (or did you had) the ambition to become a member of the municipal council? Why or why not? 4. For the first time, there are more female councillors than male councillors. Can you explain what caused this to happen? What has possibly contributed to this?
<p>Hypothesis 1a – Recruitment</p> <p><i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is because women have internalized that they will not be recruited because they do not conform to the selection criteria.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. What was your position on the list of candidates for the municipality-council elections? 6. Did you have any influence on your position or was it determined by others? 7. What does a party member have to do to get on the list of candidates? 8. Is this procedure the same for men and women? 9. Are there rules that favour men more? Or vice versa? 10. Does your party have any agreements on the minimum proportion of women on the list? 11. Does the party have quotas for women?
<p>Hypothesis 1b – Political institutions</p> <p><i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women thinking that they will not be able to effectively operate in the municipality council.</i></p>	<p>Only for elected women:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Where do meetings take place? For both the party fraction and the municipality council. 13. Do you feel your opinion is taken seriously? 14. Do you feel you can operate effectively in the city council / within the party? Can you achieve the things you want to achieve? 15. Can everything be discussed openly in meetings? 16. Are there any remarks made during the meeting that you found unpleasant? What are these remarks about? 17. Did these remarks result in a situation wherein you are less willingly to share your opinions, insights and perspectives in the time after? 18. In general, do you feel you can be yourself as a politician within the municipality? Is there a safe atmosphere within the meetings and the party? <p>For not-elected women:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Do you think your opinion is taken seriously? 13. In a situation where you were elected, do you think you can operate effectively in the municipal council / within the party? Can you achieve the things you want to achieve? 14. Can everything be discussed openly within the party? 16. Have you ever heard remarks within the party that you found unpleasant? What are these remarks about? 17. Did these remarks make you less inclined to share your opinions, insights and perspectives in the time after?
<p>Hypothesis 2b – Gender stereotyping</p> <p><i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women questioning their</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Can you sketch the profile of a typical municipal councillor? 20. What are character traits of a good political leader? 21. What qualities do you have? What qualities do you bring with you?



<p><i>leadership-competences because those do not adhere to image of the ideal leader.</i></p>	
<p>Hypothesis 2a – Gender norms <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women having internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women.</i></p>	<p>22. For elected women: Do you think you are a good politician? 22. For not-elected women: Do you think you have enough qualities and talents to be a successful leader? 23. Does your answer has anything to do with being a woman? 24. Do you think men would generally make better politicians? 25. Are the expectations we have of male councillors and female councillors the same?</p>
<p>Hypothesis 2d – Misogyny <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women being afraid of becoming the victim of (online) aggressive behaviour [read: hate], gender based insults and receiving different forms of threats.</i></p>	<p>26. Have you experienced any criticism during the election months? 27. Do you have experience with aggressive behaviour during election months? Or any hate reactions? 28. How do you deal with this? 29. What is for you the difference between hate and criticism? 30. Do you think there is a difference in the amount of aggressive behaviour that women receive compared to men? 31. Does the party offer training to deal with this? Or trainings that prepare you for this? 32. Are you aware of the many online hate messages female politicians receive? 32b. In what way are you aware of this? 33. Did the criticism and (online) hatred play a role in your decision to enter politics or not? 34. Have you heard from female members or politicians that they receive a lot of hate and criticism? 34b. How does this affect you?</p>
<p>Hypothesis 2c – Sexism <i>A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career can be found in sexism because women are afraid they will be the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour.</i></p>	<p>35. Have you ever had to deal with prejudice in politics? What were these prejudices about? Can you give any examples? 36. In politics, have you ever had to deal with discrimination based on the fact that you are a woman? How did this manifest itself?</p>



Appendix: Code book

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
	Gender		The way how the participants identify themselves.
	Women		Gender of the participant.
	Municipality council		A group of elected representatives within a municipality.
	Elected		The participant was elected to have a seat in the municipality-council of Nijmegen.
	Not-elected		The participant was not elected to have a seat in the municipality-council of Nijmegen.
	Household		The composition of how the participant lives (together with others or alone) as well as the organisation of the associated activities to provide food, clothing, cleaning, laundry and shelter to that household.
	Partner		The participant has a love relationship with another person.
	Parent		Family status of the participant that indicates that the interviewee has children.
	Nijmegen		Municipality in the Netherlands.
	VVD		Right-oriented political party in the municipality of Nijmegen.
	GroenLinks		Left-oriented political party in the municipality of Nijmegen.
	Stadspartij Nijmegen		Local party in the municipality of Nijmegen. The party fluctuates within the political spectrum depending on the topic.
	D66		Progressive party in the municipality of Nijmegen.
	<i>Vote for a Women campaign</i>		A foundation with the aim of improving political representation and emancipation of women by getting more women politically active and elected.

Category 1 – Open questions

The open questions focus on women their political interest, whether they aimed (or have been aiming) to become a member of the municipality council and whether they can explain the higher descriptive representation of women compared to men, in the municipality council of Nijmegen.



Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Analysing why women have chosen to become politically active.	Surroundings encouraged this		The participant explains that her environment encouraged her to become politically active.
	Interested		The participant claims that she was interested in politics and wanted to participate in political-related activities.
	Good for career in general.		The participant claims that getting politically active was a strategic move for her career in general.
	Aiming for a career in politics		The participant describes that she is aiming to have a career in politics.
		Strong opinion	The participant argues that she has a strong opinion what she wants to share.
Analysing whether women aim or have been aiming to become a member of the municipality council.	Aiming		The participant describes that she has been aiming to become a member of the municipality council.
	Not aiming due to other work priorities.		The participant describes that she have been thinking about working in the municipality council, but she argues that she is being caught up in other work priorities.
	Not aiming due to lack of personal experience.		The participant describes that she has been thinking about working in the municipality council, but she argue that she lacks personal experience and therefore she feels like she is not ready yet.
		Doesn't like politics that much	The participant argues that she doesn't really like the political culture.
	Others have asked		The participant describes that she has been asked by others who were politically active to consider a career in politics or a career in the municipality council.
Analysing whether women can explain the higher descriptive representation of women compared to men, in the municipality council of Nijmegen after the elections of March 2022.	Social process		The participant describes that she see a change in society that increases the representation of women in general.
	<i>Vote for a Women</i> campaign		The participant describes that the <i>Vote for a Women</i> campaign has been successful.
	Preferential votes		The participant argues that the increase in the descriptive representa-



			tion of women is a result of preferential votes.
	Left-character of the municipality		The participant argues that the increase in the descriptive representation of women is a result of the left-oriented character of the municipality of Nijmegen.
	More women in the municipality		The participant argues that there are more women in general in the municipality of Nijmegen
		Different political culture	The participant argues that people would want to see a different sort of politics and women will help to change that.
		Increase in female ambition	The participant argues that females now see politics as a way to upgrade their social status.

Category 1 – Recruitment

A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is because women have internalized that they will not be recruited because they do not conform to the selection criteria.

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Analysing whether women have internalized that they will face barriers/difficulties as a result of not conforming to the selection criteria.			The participant describes different (in)formal rules and procedures that affect her position on the list of candidates.
Analysing whether participants have had an influence on their position on the list of candidates.	Influence due status		The participant argues that she has had an influence on her position on the list of candidates due to her status within the party.
		Asked to be on the list	The participant argues that she was asked to be on the list of candidates.
	Influence due former term of office.		The participant argues that she has had an influence on her position on the list of candidates due to her former term of office in the municipality council of 2018-2022.
	No influence		The participant argues that she hasn't had any influence on her position on the list of candidates and that her position was determined by an list-commission.
Analysing what participants must do to be on the list of candidates.	Formal procedure		The participant argue that there was a formal procedure for people who wanted to have a position where it was plausible to be elected. This procedure entailed a motivation letter, sending your CV and having a conversation with a list-commission.
	Asked by		The participants argue that they were



	other members		asked to be a 'list pusher' by other members of the party.
Analysing whether the procedure to become on the list of candidates was the same for men and women.	Yes		The participant argues that the procedure was the same for men and women.
	No		The participant argues that the procedure was not the same for men and women.
Analysing whether there are ((in)formal) rules that favour men over women, or the other way around.	Informal rules in favour of men.		The participant argues that there are informal rules that favour men over women.
	Informal rules in favour of women.		The participant argues that there are informal rules that favour women over men.
	No rules		The participant argues that there are no rules that favour men over women, or the other way around.
Analysing whether the political party has quota's for the amount of women that should be on the list of candidates.	No quota.		The participant argues that the political party does not work with quota's or targets in order to have a higher amount of women on the list of candidates.
	Informal rules		The participant argues that there are no formal rules, but that having more women on the list of candidates is a priority of the party itself and therefore, the party is trying to get a higher amount of women on their list of candidates.
		Policy plan	A participant argues that her political party has a policy plan to improve the diversity and inclusivity of the party.
		Formal rules	The participant argues that there is a formal rule to have at least one women in the top 3 of elective candidates.

Category 2 – Political institutions

A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women thinking that they will not be able to effectively operate in the municipality council.

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Only for elected women: Analysing where meetings take place.	Townhall		The elected-participant argues that meetings of the municipality council as a whole takes place in the townhall.
	Room of the political		The elected-participant argues that formal meetings with members of the



	group		political party take place in the room of the political group. ¹³
	Community centre		The elected-participant argues that formal meetings with members of the political party take place in community centre.
	Bar		The elected-participant argues that informal meeting take place in bars.
Analysing whether participants feel that their opinions are taken seriously.	Yes from the beginning		The participant argues that she has the feeling that her opinion was taken seriously from the beginning.
		Yes due (life) experience	The participant argues that she has the feeling that her opinion was taken seriously due to her (life)experience
	Yes after a while.		The participant argues that she has the feeling that her opinion was taken after some time. The participant first had to prove herself to others.
	No due position.		The participant argues that she has the feeling that her opinion has not been taken serious due to her position.
Analysing whether participants feel that they can operate effectively.	Yes		The participant argues that she has the feeling that she can effectively operate within the party.
	Not completely		The participant argues that she can only effectively operate within the party when other people have similar opinions as to her.
	No		The participant argues that she cannot effectively operate within the party.
Analysing whether there is a safe atmosphere in general.	Not always safe and open		The participant argues that she doesn't feel she could always say and think anything openly.
	Taboos		The participant has the feeling that not everything can be discussed openly and freely.
	No taboos		The participant has the feeling that everything can be discussed openly and that there are no taboos.
	Unpleasant comments		The participant argues that she has experience with unpleasant comments within the party.
	No unpleasant comments		The participant argues that she has no experience with unpleasant comments within the party.
	Safe environment		The participant states that there is an safe environment within the party.
	Unsafe environment		The participant gives several examples and hints that there can be an unsafe environment within the party

¹³ Dutch: fractiekamer.



			at certain times.
		Lobbying	The participant argues that she sometimes has the experience that there is a lot of lobbying and back-room politics.

Category 3 – Gender stereotyping

A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women questioning their leadership-competences because those do not adhere to image of the ideal leader.

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Analyse what, according to the interviewees, is the profile of a typical municipal councillor.	No profile		The participant describes that there is no typical profile of an ideal political leader.
		Two profiles	The participant describes that there are two different profiles that you should have in your municipality council.
	Involvement		The participant describes that being involved belongs to the profile of a typical municipal councillor.
		Not exalted	The participant describes that a municipal councillor should not be exalted.
		Leadership competences	The participant describes several competences that a good leader should have: being handy, being tactical, be able to motivate.
	Hard worker		The participant describes that you have to really work hard.
	High-educated		The participant describes that being high-educated belongs to the profile of a typical municipal councillor.
	Passionate		The participant describes that being passionate belongs to the profile of a typical municipal councillor.
	Ambitious		The participant describes that a person should be ambitious.
	Representational		The participant describes that being representational belongs to the profile of a typical municipal councillor.
	Sufficient knowledge		The participant argues that a good councillor should have sufficient knowledge.
		Fast reader	The participant argues that you should be a fast reader and that you easily sift through dossiers.



		Good connector	The participant argues that you should be good in making connections.
	Analytical		The participant describes that being analytical belongs to the profile of a typical municipal councillor.
Analyse what, according to the interviewees, are important character traits of a good political leader.	Involvement with the municipality		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be involved with the society and the municipality in general.
	Sufficient knowledge		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should have sufficient knowledge in order to make good decisions.
	Passion		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should have passion for its profession.
	Hard worker		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be a hard worker.
	Persuasion		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be able to persuade others from their opinion or position.
	Good listener		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be a good listener.
	Openness to dialogue		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be open to dialogue.
	Respect		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should have respect for other people and their opinion.
	Empathy		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should have empathy.
	Form opinions		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be able to form their opinion.
	Team player		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should be a team player.
		Charism	The participant argues that an ideal political leader should have charism.
	Having guts		The participant describes that an ideal political leader should have guts.
		To let go of	The participant describes that it is very important to be able to let go of.
	Be verbally		The participant describes that an



	strong		ideal political leader should be verbally strong in order to form its opinion and being able to debate.
		Having vision	The participant describes that a good political leader should have a strong vision
		Life experience	The participant describes that an ideal political leader should have life experience.
Analysing how the participant thinks of herself	Same characteristics as a good politician.		The participant argues that she has the same characteristics as a good politicians should have.
	Other characteristics as a good politician.		The participant explains that she has other characteristics then a good politician.
		Representation of minorities	The participant argues that she would be of added value because she represents two different minority groups within society.
		Experience due work	The participant argues that she would be of added value because of her work experience.

Category 4 – Gender norms

A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women having internalized that they are not fit to govern due to the existing norm that favours men over women.

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Analysing the self-perception of interviewees.	Self-confident		The participant is pretty self-confident about herself.
	Doubtful		The participant is doubtful whether she has enough talents and characteristics that a good political leader should have.
	Lack of self-confidence.		The participant is arguing that she is missing some self-confidence.
	Lack of life experience		The participant is arguing that she is missing life experience due to her age.
Analysing whether women think of themselves as good politicians.	Good politician		The participant is arguing that she has qualities that a good politician should have.
		Think so	The participant thinks she will make a good politician but she is doubtful.
	Not a good politician		The participant is arguing that she is missing qualities that a good politician should have.
Analysing whether women their judgement has anything to do with them being women.	No		The participant is arguing that her judgement has nothing to do with her gender.
	Yes		The participant argues that women



			have different talents and qualities than men.
Analysing whether the interviewees think that men make better politicians.	No		The participant arguing very straight forward that men do not make better politicians.
		Other qualities	The participant argues that men have different talents and qualities than women.
Analysing what the expectations are of the interviewees of male- and female councillors.	Same according to interviewee		The participant argues that in her own views, these expectations are the same.
	Different according to interviewee		The participant argues that in her own views, these expectations are not the same.
	Same according to society		The participant argues that, according to the perception of society, these expectations are the same.
	Different according to society		The participant argues that, according to the perception of society, these expectations differ.

Category 5 – Misogyny

A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career is a result of women being afraid of becoming the victim of (online) aggressive behaviour [read: hate], gender based insults and receiving different forms of threats.

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Analysing the experiences that women have with hate/aggressive behaviour.	No experience with aggressive behaviour.		The participant describe that they have no experience with aggressive behaviour in general.
	Indirect experience.		The participant describes her experiences with indirect hate, addressed to other female politicians, of what the participant witnessed.
	Direct experience.		The participant describes her own experiences with direct aggressive behaviour (hate).
	Experience with aggressive behaviour in real life.		The participant describes her experiences with aggressive behaviour in real life.
	Experience with gender trolling.		The participant describes her experiences with gender trolling on social media.
Analysing the experiences that interviewees have with misogyny.	Called out		The participant gives specific examples of misogyny that she has experienced.
Analysing how the women deal with aggressive behaviour and gendertrolling in general.	No effect		The participant argues that the aggressive behaviour does not affect her state of mind.



	Influential on state of mind		The participant argues that the aggressive behaviour that she has faced affected her state of mind.
	Influential on self-confidence.		The participant argues that the aggressive behaviour that she has faced affected her self-confidence.
	Influential on political ambitions.		The participant argues that the aggressive behaviour that she has faced affected her political ambitions.
Analysing whether women think there is a difference between the aggressive behaviour that women and men face.	Difference in the amount of hate.		The participant argues that there is a difference between the aggressive behaviour that women and men face as women receive more hate in general.
	Difference in the nature of hate.		The participant argue that the amount of hate men and women receive is different. The hate that women receive is more based on their sex.
	No difference		The participant argues that there is no difference between the aggressive behaviour that women and men face.
Analysing how much attention is paid to aggressive behaviour and gender trolling within the party.	No attention		Women argue that aggressive behaviour and (gender)trolling is an undiscussed topic within the political party and that the party is not offering any trainings or help do deal with this.
	Trainings		Women argue that their political party is offering trainings to deal with aggressive behaviour and (gender)trolling.
Analysing whether aggressive behaviour and hate are common topics of conversation.	Never discussed		Participant argue that they never talk about aggressive behaviour and hate with others.
	Sometimes discussed		Participant argue that they sometimes talk about aggressive behaviour and hate with others.
	Often discussed		Participant argue that they often talk about aggressive behaviour and hate with others.
Analysing whether aggressive behaviour and (online) hate have played a role in the considerations of participants to become politically active or not.	Did not play a role		The participant argues that aggressive behaviour and (online) hate have not played a role in her considerations to become politically active or not.
	Play a role		The participant argues that aggressive behaviour and (online) hate have played a role in her considerations to become politically active or not.

Category 6 – Sexism



A reason why women decide not to pursue a political career can be found in sexism because women are afraid they will be the victim of prejudice and discriminatory behaviour.

Goal	First cycle codes	Second cycle codes	Description
Analysing whether women have experience with prejudice.	No experience with prejudice.		Women argue that they have no experience with prejudice in politics.
	Experience with prejudice		Women argue that they have experience with prejudice in politics and give examples.
		Experience without examples	The participant thinks that there are a prejudice but they cannot mention an example.
		Experience with prejudice in work field.	The participant argues that she has experienced prejudice in her work field.
		Party struggles with prejudice	The participant argues that the party she is a member of struggles with prejudice.
Analysing whether women have experience with discrimination based on their gender.	No experience with discrimination.		Women argue that they have no experience with discrimination in politics.
		No personal experience with discrimination.	The participant argues that she has no personal experience but she knows explicit examples.
	Experience with discrimination.		Women argue that they have experience with discrimination in politics and give examples.