



Trust in the municipalities and willingness to participate and covid-19

Abstract. The execution of the energy transition to sustainable resources in the Netherlands should result in a decrease in carbon dioxide emission of 49% in the year 2030 compared to 1990. The Dutch government has decided that municipality governments should play a key role in the execution of the transition. According to existing literature trust in the government plays a key role in the willingness to participate in the proposed plan from this government (O'Connor, 1999). The research of O'Connor (1999) and other research provide grounds to assume a positive relation between trust in the government and willingness to participate in the energy transition. This current research will explore this relationship on a municipality level government, where research is lacking. Another subject of this research is the mediating effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the level of trust in the municipality. Surveys were done by students of the Utrecht University in 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 resulted in 607 respondents of which 446 have been used in the analysis. These show that there is a significant effect of the level of trust in the municipalities on the willingness to participate in the energy transition, following regression analysis. Furthermore the 2019/2020 respondents had a significantly higher mean level of trust in the municipality compared to the 2020/2021 respondents. However, the generalisability of the results and the comparability of the different municipalities in this research are limited because of the use of secondary data.

Keywords: Energy transition; Municipality; Trust; Willingness to participate; Covid-19

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M.C. van Moolenbroek | 6286879

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Thesis supervisor: M.Sc.Philipp Schneider

Second reviewer: Dr. Amy Nivette

University Utrecht | Faculty of Social Sciences Universiteit Utrecht |
Sociology

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1. Introduction

When in 2016 the climate agreement from the UN summit in Paris was signed by State Secretary Dijksma, The Netherlands set themselves the goal to emit 49% less CO₂ in the year 2030 compared to the emission levels of 1990 (Ministerie van Infrastructuur en Waterstaat, 2020). The practical implications of the Paris agreement for the Netherlands are regulated with the Climate Law (2019). One of the plans that has resulted as a result of this law is that from 2021 onwards at least 50.000 households every year should improve their sustainability by lowering their carbon dioxide emissions. This should increase to 200.000 households every year in 2030. According to the ministry of Economics and Climate (2019), Dutch municipalities will play a central role in the execution of the plans to a more sustainable society. The municipalities get the responsibility to come to an agreement with homeowners, residents and other involved parties about the correct strategies that are needed in every neighbourhood. The ministry of Economics and Climate have asked every municipality in the Netherlands to create a timeline by the start of 2021 that explains the strategy about when every neighbourhood is made more sustainable.

Over the past two years Utrecht University, in collaboration with the Academie van de Stad, has been interviewing citizens of several municipalities in the province of Utrecht about their views on the energy transition. The data collection has been commissioned by the municipalities in the province of Utrecht, to gain insight into the views and attitudes of the citizens regarding the energy transition. Because the data was collected for the municipalities, and with questions about the attitudes of respondents specifically towards the municipalities, this research will give a great insight into how the transition is executed on a regional level as opposed to the national level. Following the climate law, all of the municipalities that are within the scope of this research have a timeline of their strategy concerning the transition to sustainable households available. The ambitions of the different municipalities range from CO₂-neutrality in the year 2030 in the municipality of Amersfoort and the neighbourhood of Overvecht-Noord in the municipality of Utrecht to achieving this goal by 2050 in the municipality of Zeist (De Bruijn, 2020; Gemeente Utrecht, 2019; Gemeente Zeist, 2019). In between these goals lies the goal of Houten, who wants to achieve CO₂-neutrality in the year 2040 (Gemeente Houten, w.d.). The difference in the goals can already be seen in the different stages the municipalities are in their aim to achieving CO₂-neutrality. The municipality of Utrecht has stated that they want to start presenting offers to their citizens in 2022 to help them warm their houses and water using sustainable energy instead of gas (Gemeente Utrecht, 2019).

Previous research has shown that trust in the governing body plays a significant role in the decision of citizens in whether they participate in plans or not (Cho & Mcleod, 2007; Falcone et al. 2020; Bosch, 2007). This significant relationship between trust and participation follows the deliberative democracy perspective (Neblo et al., 2010) Furthermore, there is a literary base to assume that this positive relationship between trust in the governing body and the willingness to participate in specifically the energy transition is significant (Hooper et al., 2018). The current study will be of explorative nature and will contribute to the existing literature by providing an analysis on the level of municipalities, with data specifically collected for these municipalities, something which in current research is missing. In the challenge to solve the climate crisis in the near future, it is unlikely to find the solution in the efforts of individuals, but rather in the collective action of groups of people (Lorenzoni & Pidgeon, 2006). Because of the complexity of the solution to this issue, it is out of reach for consumers to have enough knowledge and expertise about climate change itself and the viable options for sustainable energy. It is therefore in the interest of individuals to rely on the expertise of others like the government to lead them through the transition (Whitfield et al., 2009; Huijts et al., 2012). This research could contribute to the interaction between municipalities and individuals by providing further understanding about this interaction. The data that will be used in this research will also provide a unique chance to evaluate the effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the levels of trust in the governing bodies. The 2019/2020 cohort of the data was collected shortly before the first covid-19 regulations were in place and the 2020/2021 cohort after almost one full year of regulations. So the data of 2019/2020 is not yet influenced by the pandemic, and the data of 2020/2021 is after a significant period of time with the threat of Covid-19. However, because the data was not specifically collected to make comparisons between years this research will not aim to give definitive answers and indication with regards to trust in the municipalities and its influence on willingness to participate in the energy transition, rather it aims at exploring and showing the need for further analysis in the future. According to Van der Meer et al. (2020) when a threat to the safety of the citizens is expected, the increase in trust that follows this threat according to the Rally round the flag hypothesis from Mueller (1970) does not happen. Instead, it is argued that the presence of the Covid-19 threat for over a year should result in a decline in institutional trust because the citizens will blame the government for not being able to remove the threat after almost a year (Van der Meer et al, 2020). The lack of research on the effects of trust in municipality level governing bodies and the novelty of the influence of the covid-19 pandemic on this trust has led to the formulation of the following research question;

Is there a decline in trust in the municipalities in the province of Utrecht during the covid-19 crisis, and how does this affect the citizens' willingness to participate in the energy transition?

2. Theory

2.1 Trust in Municipalities

Following the main argument of the deliberative democracy perspective, when the political system is perceived as reliable citizens are more likely to participate in plans (Neblo et al., 2010). Research from O'Connor et al. (1999) shows that greater levels of trust in the governmental capabilities result in more support for policies concerning the topic of climate change. According to their research, the higher levels of trust in governmental capabilities in Bulgaria compared to the USA can explain that their citizens are more inclined to support and participate in policies concerning climate change (O'Connor et al., 1999). The positive relation between the trust in the government and the willingness to participate by citizens stems from the thought that their actions will have positive results because the citizens feel that they work together with government officials rather than against them (Nabatchi, 2010). The relation between trust in the involved institutional parties and the performance of their plans have also been found positive and significant by Montijn-Dorgelo and Midden (2008). They specifically found that the more trust people had in the parties that were involved in the application of sustainable hydrogen systems in buses in the Netherlands, the more benefits and the fewer risks they perceived from hydrogen usage in busses (Montijn-dorgelo and Midden, 2008). Less trust in the plans of governing bodies concerning climate change leads to less feeling of responsibility in behaviour concerning climate change (Lorenzoni & Pidgeon, 2006). In turn, less feeling of responsibility ultimately will lead to less change from individuals in their behaviour to live according to environmental regulation (Wynveen & Sutton, 2015).

The importance of trust from citizens in governing bodies for them to realize their plans is further explained by Schmeets (2017) who analysed longitudinal data from both the Netherlands and 27 other European countries. Nearly 40.000 respondents over five years answered questions about trust in the government in the Netherlands, and comparison with data from 2002 until 2014 from the 27 European countries resulted in the conclusion that trust in governing bodies plays a significant role in citizen participation. Trust is a significant predictor for citizens to see the ideas and policies as legitimate (Schmeets, 2017). Following the increase in perceived legitimacy, the support base for the policy will increase. This will in turn encourage

people to follow the proposed policy, increase their willingness to participate and increase their openness to new plans in the future as well (Schmeets, 2017). At the same time where trust in the governing bodies leads to an increase in participation, there is also reason to assume that a lack of trust will lead to a crisis in legitimacy for policymakers.

Therefore it is predicted that;

H1: When trust in the municipalities is higher, the citizens are more willing to cooperate with the municipality in the energy transition

2.2 The influence of Covid-19

The following part of this research will focus on an important factor that could influence this level of trust, covid-19. Generally, in times of crisis, the *Rally round the flag* theory from 1970's political researcher Mueller (1970) is used to explain the effects of the crisis on institutional trust. He observed that in times of outside threat on the safety of one's country the level of trust in the governing body would spike significantly for a short period of time, but it was observed that the trust would decline relatively shortly after this initial spike (Mueller 1970). One of the key conditions for a rally round the flag is that the threat to safety comes unexpected, when people think that the threat should have been expected by the government the rally round the flag won't happen (Van der Meer et al. 2020). An example of the rally round the flag after an unexpected threat to the safety of the citizens in the United States has been observed by Chanley (2002) after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001. After these attacks, the institutional trust spiked for a short period of time. The increase in the percentage of people that trusted the government doubled to 64% in the month after the attack was followed by a decline in trust in all of the following three months (Chanley, 2002). The same effect was found by Putman (2002) who not only saw an increase in trust but also found a significant increase in political involvement for American citizens after the terrorist attacks. The effect has later been observed in different contexts as well. Firstly the effect has been observed outside of the American context by Wollebaek et al.(2012). They observed similar effects in Norway after the terrorist attack on the island of Utøya in 2011 which killed 69 people. Trust in political institutions significantly increased for almost half of the respondents in all different age groups, as well as an increase in political involvement (Wollebaek et al., 2012). The increase in political involvement has had a significant positive effect on the levels of support for proposed legislations by governing bodies(Albertson &

Gadarian, 2015). Meaning that when the rally round the flag has ended and trust in the government will fall again, the support for proposed legislations will lower with it.

The concept of rally round the flag does not just occur when the perceived threat to the safety by citizens is a result of military or terrorist threat either. The rally round the flag principle was also observed by Prati & Zani (2011) following the 2009 outbreak of influenza and by Blair et al. (2017) following the Ebola epidemic in Liberia, extending the context of the rally round the flag to epidemics. Studies have found support for the rally round the flag principle in the context of the covid-19 pandemic, Van der Meer et al. (2020) found that in the first six weeks after measures were taken by the Dutch government trust in the government significantly increased. In Sweden, the rally round the flag effect was observed as well, one month into the acute phase of the pandemic analysis of over 7000 Swedish citizens showed that there was a significant increase in institutional trust (Esaiasson et al., 2020). Both the study from Van der Meer et al. and Esaiasson et al. were conducted in the first phase of the pandemic. When using the rally round the flag theory, the spike in trust shortly after the threat was first observed was to be expected. However, following the theory, and the results from previous authors there should be a decline in trust after the initial spike in trust. The level of trust should decline as the unexpectedness of the threat lowers over time, this effect was found by several authors who tested the rally round the flag theory, within months after the threat occurred (Mueller, 1970; Chanley, 2002) For respondents in this research who did the survey in early 2020, before the first official covid-19 cases were in the Netherlands, there should be no rally round the flag effect because the impact of covid-19 is negligible. For the respondents in 2020/2021, the decrease in trust after the initial rally round the flag is significant because the data was collected approximately eight months after the initial government restrictions (Ministry of general affairs, 2021). Meaning that the data collection for 2020/2021 occurred when there was a high level of uncertainty about the strategy of the government, resulting in people blaming the government for the second wave of the pandemic, ultimately visible in the riots against the government during this period (Geels, 2020). The absence of the unexpectedness of the covid-19 threat should result in a decline trust instead of a new rally round the flag.

It is not just the rally round the flag effect that has been theorised to affect the level of trust in the government during times of crisis. Ervasti et al. (2019) find that during times of crisis the level of trust in the government declines. They specifically find that during the ongoing economic crisis in Greece from 2002 until 2011 trust in the government and their officials steadily declined. Braun & Tausenpfund (2014) find that following the 2008 global

financial crisis the trust in the governing body in the European Union declined. This effect of declining trust is also observed by Roth (2012), who first found a decrease in trust in countries hit by the economic recession providing further analysis showing that the decline in trust was more pronounced in countries who were hit harder by the economic crisis (Roth et al., 2012). Because of the global scale of covid-19 and far-reaching government measures to contain the virus, the impact of covid-19 has not just been on public health but also the economy (Susskind & Vines, 2020). In the Netherlands, the largest economic contraction ever was seen in the second economic quarter of 2020 (Statistics Netherlands, 2021). Because the data was collected during the second wave (RIVM, 2020) the economic contraction had happened for the 2020/2021 respondents. The level of trust in the government from the respondents from 2020/2021 should therefore be lower than that of the respondents in 2019/2020. Combined with the decline in trust following the rally round the flag theory the following hypothesis is made;

H2: The level of trust in the municipalities in the province of Utrecht will be lower for respondents during the covid-19 crisis compared to respondents from before the covid-19 crisis

3. Methods

In this research, the effect of trust in the Municipalities capabilities on the willingness to participate in the energy transition by citizens was tested. Furthermore, the mediation effect of covid-19 on the levels of trust was tested. The expectation is that when trust is higher, the willingness to participate will in the energy transition be higher too. Because the influence of covid-19 is expected to be negative on the level of trust in municipalities this acts as a mediating variable. Figure 1 shows the effects stated in hypothesis 1 and 2.

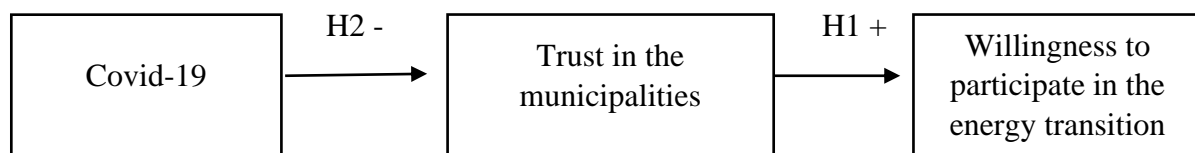


Figure 1: Hypothesised effects

The independent variable in the analysis is the level of trust in the municipality. The dependent variable in the analysis is the willingness to participate in the energy transition. The effect of Covid-19 on the level of trust in the municipalities was analysed too.

3.1 Participants

The data used in this research was collected in the province of Utrecht. This research contains data from the municipalities of Amersfoort, Houten, Utrecht, Veenendaal and Zeist. All of the respondents were residents in one of these municipalities at the time of the data collection. The dataset contains the data of 607 respondents distributed across the different municipalities. Because the respondents of Veenendaal were not asked about trust in the government, 489 respondents were left in the dataset. After filtering out respondents that did not answer on one or more of the variables that are used in the analysis, 448 respondents remain in the dataset. The questions they didn't answer measured either the level of trust in the municipality, the willingness to participate in the energy transition, or were used as a control variable. The distribution of the respondents per municipality can be found in table 1. The data was collected by students of the Utrecht University in collaboration with Academie van de Stad and has been collected in December 2019 and January 2020 and December 2020 and January 2021. Trust in the municipalities and willingness to participate in the energy transition are the primary outcome measures in this study. Because the data collection was done by different groups in different years these variables have not been measured exactly the same way. However, since the goal of these studies was the same, it will be assumed that both of these variables are measured in a way that is comparable enough. The data from 2019/2020 was collected in quantitative face-to-face interviews in the homes of the respondents by pairs of students. The data from 2020/2021 was collected online using Qualtrics because of government restrictions for the covid-19 pandemic, which meant it was impossible to do face-to-face interviews with the respondents.

Table 1 *Distribution of respondents per municipality*

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Zeist	115	25.7	25.7
Utrecht	109	24.3	50.0
Houten 2019/2020	88	19.2	69.2
Houten 2020/2021	59	12.7	81.9
Amersfoort	81	18.1	100.0
Total	448	100.0	

3.2 Trust in municipalities

Trust in municipalities was measured using different Likert-scale questions in different municipalities. The comparability of the different municipalities, in different years, is illustrated

by the following questions from Utrecht in 2019/2020 and Houten in 2020/2021 respectively. Both of these questions measure trust in the municipality and for both questions the respondents had to answer whether they agreed with the statement on a 5-point Likert scale.

For Utrecht the question asked to the respondents was: *I trust that the municipality, in general, follows the law*. Respondents had the option to answer the question with: *completely disagree – disagree – neutral – agree – Completely agree*.

For Houten the question asked to the respondents was: *The municipality is honest and sincere*. Respondents had the option to answer the question with: *completely disagree – disagree – neutral – agree – Completely agree*.

Some of the datasets used multiple questions to measure the level of trust in the municipality. For these municipalities, these questions were tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha test. For the municipality of Zeist, three different questions were used to make a new variable measuring trust in the municipality with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=.819$. For the municipality of Utrecht, two questions were combined to make a new variable measuring trust in the municipality with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=.738$. For the data collected in 2020/2021 in the municipality of Houten, three different questions were combined to make a new variable measuring trust in the municipality with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha=.819$. For the other municipalities singular questions were used to measure trust in the municipality, these questions are available in the appendix.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics for the variable trust in the municipality per municipality

Descriptives Trust in the municipality					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Zeist	115	1.00	4.00	2.633	0.689
Utrecht	109	1.00	5.00	2.601	1.049
Houten 2019/2020	86	1.00	5.00	3.477	0.991
Houten 2020/2021	57	1.00	4.50	2.778	0.761
Amersfoort	81	1.00	5.00	2.490	1.026

3.3 Willingness to participate in the energy transition

The willingness to participate in the energy transition was measured in similar ways in the different datasets using either Likert-scale questions or other ordinal questions. Though the questions to measure willingness to participate were not standardized between different municipalities and years they are still comparable, as illustrated by the following questions from

Amersfoort and Houten in the 2020/2021 data collection. Even though the data from Amersfoort was asked in a percentage and Houten in a 5-point Likert scale, these can still be compared because both questions have ordinal answer options.

For Amersfoort the question asked to the respondents was: *What is the chance that you will participate in the transition from gas to renewable (sustainable) energy sources at the moment?* Respondents had the option to answer the question with: 0-20% - 21-40% - 41-60% - 61-80% - 81-100%.

For Houten the question asked to the respondents was: *I am planning on participating in the municipalities' policies to stop using gas* Respondents had the option to answer question with: *completely disagree – disagree – neutral – agree – Completely agree.*

The dataset of Utrecht used four questions to measure willingness to participate in the energy transition. These questions were tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, and had a reliability coefficient of .775. For all the other municipalities singular questions were used to create the willingness to participate in the energy transition variable, these questions are available in the appendix.

Table 3 *Descriptive statistics for the variable willingness to participate in the energy transition per municipality*

Descriptives willingness to participate in the energy transition					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.Deviation
Zeist	115	1.00	4.00	2.770	0.820
Utrecht	109	1.00	5.00	2.908	0.939
Houten 2019/2020	86	1.00	3.00	1.840	0.765
Houten 2020/2021	57	1.00	5.00	2.930	1.116
Amersfoort	81	1.00	5.00	2.620	1.463

3.4 Procedure

The data was collected for a policy and evaluation research course at the Utrecht University. The data from different municipalities has been collected by different groups of students, the author of this research was part of one of these groups. Respondents were presented a confidentiality agreement before the interview, which can be found in the appendix. Because this is secondary use of this data, the data has been approved by the Student Ethics Review & Registration Site and will be treated with care and Confidentiality. The 2019/2020 data collection was done in face-to-face interviews in the homes of the respondents. In some of

the municipalities, the residents were informed before the data collection took place via a card or flyer. The students went door-to-door with printed questionnaires and conducted an interview using these quantitative questions with the residents of the neighbourhoods. The questionnaires differ between the municipalities but concern the same main subject, the energy transition. Due to government restrictions because of the covid-19 crisis, the data collection in 2020/2021 was done online. To reach respondents social media platforms were used, like Facebook or informational websites about the energy transition. In the neighbourhoods, the students and municipality were collecting the data, flyers with a QR-code to the survey were distributed. The program Qualtrics was used to collect the data, which has both qualitative and quantitative elements, of which only the quantitative part was used in the analysis. The data collected in 2020/2021 might be subject to selection bias in the respondents. Because the data in 2019/2020 was collected by going to the homes of the residents there was no difference in the chance of whether someone could participate in the research or not. For the 2020/2021 participants, the data was collected online, which could mean that more people who were already interested in the subject of sustainability have participated in the research. The questions that were used to create the variables that were used in the analysis are noted in the appendix of this research. The questions were transformed to a standardized variable for trust in the municipalities capabilities, and a standardized variable for willingness to participate in the energy transition to perform the regression analysis. People who didn't answer either the willingness questions or the trust questions were excluded from the analysis. People who didn't answer questions about their gender or age were also excluded from the analysis. After respondents were removed who didn't answer all of the questions statistical analysis were done.

3.5 Analysis

First, to test the hypothesis that an increase in the level of trust in the municipality is followed by an increase in the willingness to participate in the energy transition a simple regression analysis with the standardized trust and willingness variables was performed. The dependent variable in the regression is the standardized score for willingness to participate in the energy transition for all municipalities, and the independent variable is the standardized score for trust in the municipality. Using this analysis it was tested whether the level of trust respondents have in their municipality has a significant effect on their willingness to participate in the energy transition. The effect is controlled for age and gender. Before using a linear regression analysis four assumptions need to be made (Agresti, 2018). The first assumption is that there is a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variable. This

assumption was checked by visually inspecting the data distribution using a scatter plot. The second assumption is that the data has a normal distribution. This assumption was checked by checking the residuals in a normal predicted probability plot. When the residuals are normally distributed in this plot this assumption is met (Davis, 2020) The third assumption is that the residuals have a constant variance, the homoscedasticity assumption. This assumption was checked by inspecting a scatterplot of the residuals. The final assumption is that the sample is randomly selected. The assumption of a random sample is based on the equal chance of being involved in the data collection for all citizens in the municipalities. Because a simple linear regression is used the multicollinearity is of no importance in this analysis (Allison, 2019).

Second, to test the hypothesis that trust in the municipalities is lower as a result of covid-19, a t-test was used to statistically interpret the average level of trust in the municipalities between the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 data. Before the analysis is done there are five assumptions that should be met (Bradburn, 2018). The first assumption is that the dependent variable is measured on a continuous scale, which was tested methodologically. The second assumption is that the samples are independent, this means that a respondent can not be included in both groups of the analysis. The third assumption is that there are no outliers in the analysis, this was checked using a scatterplot of the data. The fourth assumption is that the data is normally distributed. For samples with more than thirty respondents this can be assumed when performing a T-test (Bradburn, 2018). The final assumption is that there is the homogeneity of variances, this was tested using Levene's test for equality of variances.

4. Results

4.1 The effect of trust in municipalities on willingness to participate in the energy transition

To test the hypothesis that when trust in the municipalities is higher, the citizens are more willing to cooperate with the municipality in the energy transition a simple linear regression analysis has been done. The four mentioned assumptions were checked before the analysis was run. The visual inspection of the scatterplot showed a linear relationship between the dependent and independent variable, showing that the first assumption was met. The second assumption of a normal distribution was met after inspection of the distribution of residuals in the normal predicted probability plot. The third assumption of homoscedasticity was met after inspecting the scatterplot of the residuals, which showed no signs of heteroscedasticity. The final assumption of random sampling was met based on the equal chance of participating for citizens in the survey. The results are controlled for the gender and age of the respondent, and

can be found in table 4. Model 1 of the table shows the results of the analysis before controlling for gender and age, model 2 shows the results after controlling for these variables. The analysis shows that 7.9% of the variance in willingness to participate in the energy transition can be ascribed to trust in the municipalities. The regression coefficient is .281, and significant ($t(446) = 6.169; p < .001/2$). Because of the one-sided test of the hypothesis, the original p-value of .000 has been divided by two, totalling to $p < .001$. It can be concluded that there is support for hypothesis 1. An increase of a value of one on the standardized level of trust in the municipality scale would result in an increase of 0.281 on the willingness to participate in the energy transition scale. The positive effect of the trust in the municipalities on the willingness to participate in the energy transition stays significant after controlling for gender and age of the respondent. Even more, the effect of trust in the municipalities on the willingness to participate in the energy transition increases to 0.284, while staying significant. When the control variables are added the R-square increases to .084, meaning that 8.4% of the variance in Willingness to participate in the energy transition can be ascribed to trust in the municipalities after controlling for age and gender.

Table 4. *Results of regression analysis for willingness to participate in the energy transition*

	Variable	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Model 1	Willingness to participate (Constant)	.002	.045	.044	.965
	Trust in municipalities	.281	.045	6.169	.000
Model 2	Willingness to participate (Constant)	.328	.214	1,533	.126
	Trust in municipalities	.284	.046	6.245	.000
	Gender	-.118	.092	-1.276	.202
	Age	-.056	.056	-.990	.323

4.2 The effect of covid-19 on Trust in the municipalities

To test the hypothesis that the level of trust in the municipalities in the province of Utrecht will be lower for respondents during the covid-19 crisis compared to respondents from before the covid-19 crisis, an independent samples t-test has been done. Where the unstandardized means of trust in the municipality for the 2019/2020 respondents are compared to the unstandardized means of trust in the municipality for the 2020/2021 respondents. The first assumption that the dependent variable is measured on a continuous scale was met. Because the respondents are either in the 2019/2020 data collection or the 2020/2021 data collection the assumption of independence was possible. The third assumption was also met

after checking for outliers in the scatterplot. Because there are more than thirty respondents it was assumed that the data has a normal distribution. For the final assumption, the Levene's test for equality of variances was interpreted, and with a significance of $p < .005$ the hypothesis that the variances are equal was not assumed, this assumption was not met. Even though this is a limitation the t-test could still be interpreted, but the sample variance was not pooled. The analysis showed that there is a significant difference in the mean level of trust between the 2019/2020 respondents compared to the 2020/2021 respondents with a mean difference of .470. The average level of trust for respondents in 2019/2020 ($M=3.081$; $SD=1.100$) was higher than the average level of trust for respondents in 2020/2021 ($M=2.611$; $SD=0.934$). The difference between these groups was statistically significant $t(306)=4.655$; $p < .001$.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the research question: *Is there a decline in trust in the municipalities in the province of Utrecht during the covid-19 crisis, and how does this affect the citizens' willingness to participate in the energy transition?* Previous research from the likes of Cho & McLeod (2007) Falcone et al. (2020) and Bosch (2007) had established a relationship between trust in the government and the willingness to participate in plans of the government. This research aimed to explore whether this relationship can also be found at municipality level government, specifically in regards to the energy transition. The data collected by students of the Utrecht University provided the opportunity to research the effect of the covid-19 pandemic on the level of trust citizens have in their municipality. This is because the first cohort of the data was collected shortly before the pandemic, and the second cohort was collected when the pandemic was still happening. Both the influence of the Rally round the flag theory and more general theories like that of Ervasti (2019) were used to form the hypotheses. After the literary assessment, two hypotheses were made, and tested with the available data. The first hypothesis predicted that people who have more trust in the municipalities are more willing to participate in the energy transition. The second hypothesis predicted that the level of trust in the municipalities in the province of Utrecht will be lower for respondents during the covid-19 crisis compared to respondents from before the covid-19 crisis

First, the regression analysis shows that there is a significant relationship between the level of trust of the respondent and their willingness to participate in the energy transition. The addition of control variables to the regression analysis did not affect this significant relation. This result is in line with the hypothesis. This result is in line with the works of researchers who found a similar relation between trust in the government and willingness to participate in

governmental plans (Neblo et al, 2010; O'Connor et al, 1999; Schmeets, 2017), it adds to the existing literature by looking at trust in the government at a municipality level. Which are important actors in the Dutch energy transition (Ministry of Economics and Climate, 2019), and research on the relationship between trust of individuals on municipality level government and their willingness to participate is lacking.

Second, the comparison of means for the level of trust in the municipality between the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 data collections showed that there is a significant difference, where the mean level of trust in the municipalities is higher in the municipalities from the 2019/2020 data. This is in line with the hypothesis. This result shows that the decline in trust after the rally round the flag (Mueller, 1970; Van der Meer et al. 2020; Esaiasson, 2020) and the decline in trust in times of crisis argued by Ervasti et al (2019) and Braun & Tausenpfund (2014) can also be observed in the context of municipality governments. This result adds to the existing literature on the relationship of crisis and trust in governments which is almost exclusively focussed on the context of trust in the national government. Ultimately in regards to the research question, it can be concluded that there is a significant decrease in the level of trust in the municipalities in Utrecht during the covid-19 crisis. And because of the significant positive relationship between the trust in the municipalities and the willingness to participate in the energy transition, it can be concluded that the willingness to participate will be lower as a result of the decrease in trust.

6. Discussion

The results of the statistical analysis are in line with the theoretical framework for both hypotheses. Both the influence of trust in the municipalities on the willingness to participate in the energy transition and the influence of covid-19 on the level of trust in the municipalities are as hypothesised. This research adds to the literature by focussing on trust in the government on a municipality level, where previous research has almost exclusively been done on a national level. The results of this research are however of exploratory nature because of the secondary use of data, and nature of this data. The data collection has been commissioned by the municipalities, who also decided what neighbourhoods were of interest. The selection of the municipalities was not specifically done with the intention of generalising the results from the data analysis. This does however not mean that it is impossible to generalise the results, because the neighbourhoods included in the data differ in demographic, location and include 607 respondents of which 446 are used in the analysis (De Bruijn, 2020; Gemeente Utrecht, 2019; Gemeente Zeist, 2019; Gemeente Houten, W.D.). Because of the difference in characteristics

between the different neighbourhoods in the analysis and the reasonable sample size, there is no need to disregard all of the results but it is important to regard the limitations to the dataset. The results show a significant relationship between the trust in the municipality and the willingness to participate in the energy transition, but the results are possibly limited to the context of the province of Utrecht. The inclusion of more control variables could have influenced the results of the regression analysis, but the inclusion of more control variables was limited because of the available data. These limitations show that the results of this research are premature, and there is need for further analysis before definitive conclusions about this subject can be made, suggestions for further research are given at the end of the discussion.

When interpreting the conclusions of this research it should be taken into account that the data collection limits the comparability of the different municipalities. Because this research uses secondary data there was no influence on the data collection. The data was collected by different groups of students, and albeit that the subjects they asked the respondents about are comparable, the questions do differ between the municipalities, making it impossible to claim that all the variables used in the analysis are measured in exactly the same way. This difference in data collection was also a reason to use standardized means to do the analysis for the first hypothesis, because not all the questions from the different municipalities were measured on the same scale. Another limitation in regards to the hypothesis that the level of trust in the municipalities has declined following the covid-19 pandemic is that the respondents from the 2019/2020 cohort and the 2020/2021 cohort are not from the same municipality. As for the results of the analysis of this hypothesis it should also be regarded that the equal variances could not be assumed, even though this did not affect the significance of this T-test. With regards to the first hypothesis, that trust in the municipalities has a positive effect on the willingness to participate in the energy transition, the data limited the number of control variables that could be used. Because not all of the data collections from the different municipalities provided the same variables for which control analysis could have been done. A further limitation to the dataset is the aforementioned possible selection bias for respondents in the 2020/2021 data collection. Because the data collection was done online it is possible that only respondents who were already interested in the topic of the energy transition are included in the data collection.

Further research could focus on further exploring the relationship between trust in the government at a municipality level and the willingness to participate in the energy transition. Because the data was not collected with generalisability in mind this could be researched with new data collection and analysis, where generalisability is kept in mind. New data could also

result in the inclusion of more control variables. Research with generalisability and more control variables could give this result more power, and could help further explain the relationship between trust in the municipality and the willingness to participate in the energy transition. Further research should also look at the long term effects of the covid-19 pandemic on the level of trust in the government. This research could focus on both the effect on the regional and national government, and should use a longitudinal approach to gain further insights on how this effect evolves. Research with this longitudinal approach could add to the existing literature about the influence of crisis on the level of trust in the government and the rally round the flag theory. The final recommendation would be to research whether the trust in the municipality and the influence on willingness to participate in their plans differs significantly from the trust in the national government and the influence on willingness to participate in their plans. Research about the difference between the influence of trust on the national and regional level could add to the existing literature, because currently research on whether there is a significant difference between trust in the national or regional government in relation to the willingness to participate in the energy transition is lacking.

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Appendix 1: Questions used for the variables

Variables used to measure trust in the municipalities

Zeist 2019/2020

De volgende vragen gaan over uw vertrouwen in de gemeente in het algemeen.

Geef van onderstaande stellingen aan in welke mate u het ermee eens bent.

Stelling 1: Ik vind mijn gemeente geloofwaardig.

Helemaal oneens Oneens Eens Helemaal eens Wil ik niet zeggen

Stelling 2: Ik voel me als burger gehoord door de gemeente.

Helemaal oneens Oneens Eens Helemaal eens Wil ik niet zeggen

Stelling 3: De communicatie van de gemeente naar de bewoners is goed.

Helemaal oneens Oneens Eens Helemaal eens Wil ik niet zeggen

Houten 2019/2020

39. Het is een haalbaar doel van de gemeente om in 2040 klimaat- en energieneutraal te zijn.

Hiermee wordt aardgasvrij bedoeld. Helemaal oneens Oneens Neutraal Eens

Helemaal eens

Utrecht 2019/2020

Ik vertrouw erop dat de gemeente zich over het algemeen aan de regels houdt
(R45_gemeente_vertrouwen) (5 punts schaal)

Ik vind dat de gemeente het algemeen belang van haar inwoners dient
(R46_gemeente_belang) (5 punts schaal)

Amersfoort 2020/2021

Vertrouwen is ook gemeten aan de hand van een stelling op een 5-punt Likertschaal: “Ik heb vertrouwen in de gemeente om mij te ondersteunen in de energietransitie.”

(other questions were qualitative)

Houten 2020/2021

(5 puntsschaal meting)

De gemeente is eerlijk en oprecht.

De gemeente komt afspraken na omtrent haar warmtetransitiebeleid.

De gemeente is deskundig omtrent het warmtetransitiebeleid.

The variables used to measure willingness to participate

Zeist 2019/2020

Stelling 4: Ik ben bereid om zelf medewerking te verlenen aan de gemeente wanneer dit gevraagd wordt.

Helemaal oneens Oneens Eens Helemaal eens Wil ik niet zeggen

Houten 2019/2020

42. Heeft u plannen om uw huis te verduurzamen? Ja Nee Misschien

Indien vorige vraag: 'Ja' of 'Misschien': 43. Wat zijn deze plannen?

Utrecht 2019/2020

19. "Ik vind dat Overvecht-Noord in 2030 aardgasvrij moet zijn."

Helemaal mee eens

Mee eens

Neutraal

Niet mee eens

Helemaal niet mee eens

Geen mening

20. "Ik voel me verantwoordelijk voor het aardgasvrij maken van Overvecht-Noord."

Helemaal mee eens

Mee eens
Neutraal
Niet mee eens
Helemaal niet mee eens
Geen mening

21. “Ik sta positief tegenover de beleidsplannen van de Gemeente om Overvecht-Noord aardgasvrij te maken in 2030.”

Helemaal mee eens
Mee eens
Neutraal
Niet mee eens
Helemaal niet mee eens
Geen mening

22. Ik voel me betrokken bij de beleidsplannen om Overvecht-Noord aardgasvrij te maken.”

Helemaal mee eens
Mee eens
Neutraal
Niet mee eens
Helemaal niet mee eens
Geen mening

23. “Ik ben bereid samen te werken met buurtbewoners, als dat betekent dat we makkelijker en sneller van het aardgas af kunnen gaan.”

Helemaal mee eens
Mee eens
Neutraal
Niet mee eens
Helemaal niet mee eens
Geen mening

Amersfoort 2020/2021

1. “Welk rapportcijfer zou u uzelf geven voor uw motivatie om uw huis energieneutraal te maken (zoals huis isoleren, zonnepanelen plaatsen, warmtepomp installeren,

elektrische/inductie koken etc.) op een schaal van 1 tot 10? 1 staat voor helemaal geen motivatie en de 10 staat voor volledige motivatie”.

2. “Welk rapportcijfer zou u uzelf geven voor uw inzet om uw huis energieneutraal te maken (zoals huis isoleren, zonnepanelen plaatsen, warmtepomp installeren, elektrisch/inductie koken etc.) op een schaal van 1 tot 10? 1 staat voor helemaal geen inzet en de 10 staat voor volledige inzet”. Hierin geven de respondenten zichzelf een cijfer in hoeverre ze zich inzetten voor de energietransitie.

3. “Hoe schat u op dit moment de kans dat u zal participeren aan de transitie van aardgas naar hernieuwbare (duurzame) energiebronnen?”. De antwoordopties zullen achtereenvolgens zijn: ‘0% t/m 20%’, ‘21% t/m 40%’, ‘41% t/m 60%’, ‘61% t/m 80%’, ‘81% t/m 100%’.

Houten 2020/2021

Ik ben van plan te participeren in het beleid om van het aardgas af te gaan van de gemeente Houten

Questions used for control variables

Zeist 2019/2020

Wat is uw geslacht?

Man Vrouw Wil ik niet zeggen

Wat is uw leeftijd?

18-25 jaar 26-45 jaar 46-65 jaar Ouder dan 65 jaar Wil ik niet zeggen

Utrecht 2019/2020

1. Wat is uw leeftijd in jaren?

A. Vul in:

B. Wil ik niet zeggen

2. Wat is uw geslacht?

A. Man

B. Vrouw

C. Anders

D. Wil ik niet zeggen

Houten 2019/2020

1. Wat is uw leeftijd?

2. Wat is uw geslacht? Vrouw Man Anders: _____

Amersfoort 2020/2021

- Wat is uw leeftijd?
- Wat is uw gender?

Houten 2020/2021

Q5 Wat is uw leeftijd? (in jaren)

Q6 Wat is uw geslacht? o Man (1) o Vrouw (4) o Wil ik liever niet zeggen (2) o Anders, namelijk: (3)

Appendix 2: Ethical approval letters per municipality

Zeist 2019/2020

Informed consent

Geachte heer/mevrouw,

In dit onderzoek wordt de houding van de bewoners uit de Pedagogebuurt en Austerlitz (Gemeente Zeist) ten aanzien van de energietransitie onderzocht. Het doel van dit onderzoek is om inzicht te krijgen in de steun en betrokkenheid van de burgers aan de transitie naar gasvrij verwarmen en koken. Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door tweedejaars studenten van de cursus Beleid- en evaluatieonderzoek (Sociologie) van de Universiteit Utrecht in opdracht van de gemeente Zeist. De uitkomsten van dit onderzoek zullen worden gepresenteerd aan de gemeente Zeist, waarop de gemeente de resultaten zal meenemen in haar beleid. Uw deelname is van grote waarde voor dit onderzoek.

Uw gegevens zullen zorgvuldig worden behandeld. Alle gegevens zullen **anoniem** worden verwerkt. Alle persoonlijke kenmerken worden verwijderd, waardoor u niet te herleiden bent. Na het verwerken van de data, zullen de vragenlijsten worden vernietigd. De enquête zal maximaal 20 minuten in beslag nemen. Tijdens het beantwoorden van de vragenlijst, heeft u ten alle tijden de mogelijkheid om een vraag niet te beantwoorden, een pauze te nemen of te stoppen met uw deelname. Het invullen van deze vragenlijst is geheel vrijwillig. Indien u naderhand nog vragen heeft over dit onderzoek, kunt u contact opnemen met Remco Spoelstra (R.Spoelstra@odru.nl) van de gemeente Zeist. Ook kunt u via Remco Spoelstra (R.Spoelstra@odru.nl) de resultaten van dit onderzoek aanvragen in februari 2020.

Door deze vragenlijst in te vullen verklaard u achttien jaar of ouder te zijn en gaat u akkoord met deelname aan dit onderzoek.

Alvast hartelijk dank voor uw medewerking!

Houten 2019/2020

Beste,

Deze vragenlijst is opgesteld door studenten van de Universiteit Utrecht als onderdeel van een onderzoek naar de warmtetransitie in de wijk de Muren. Het onderzoek streeft er naar inzicht te verwerven in de kennis en de houding van de inwoners tegenover de warmtetransitie. Alle informatie is vertrouwelijk en het onderzoek wordt onafhankelijk van de gemeente uitgevoerd. Het invullen van de vragenlijst zal ongeveer 20 min. duren.

Tijdens de Klimaatovereenkomst van Parijs (2015) zijn er afspraken gemaakt tussen landen die verdere opwarming van de aarde moeten stoppen. Nederland heeft zichzelf tot doel gesteld het aantal broeikasgassen in 2050 met 95% te verminderen ten opzichte van 1990. Om dit voor elkaar te kunnen krijgen, moeten alle huizen in Nederland van het gas af en overstappen op hernieuwbare energiebronnen (zoals wind- en zonne-energie). Dit wordt ook wel de warmtetransitie genoemd. De gemeenten zijn nauw betrokken bij deze transitie omdat het op lokaal niveau een grote verandering in de infrastructuur teweeg zal brengen. Ook de gemeente Houten is op dit moment bezig met een warmtetransitie.

Houten 2020/2021

Beste deelnemer,

In het Klimaatakkoord is afgesproken dat alle woningen, kantoren en andere gebouwen worden verduurzaamd. Dat betekent minder energieverbruik én van het aardgas af. De gemeente Houten heeft de ambitie om in 2040 energieneutraal te zijn. Dat wil zij doen op een voor iedereen haalbare en betaalbare manier.

De gemeente Houten is daarom benieuwd naar uw mening. Hoe kijkt u aan tegen de overgang van aardgas naar andere manieren van koken en verwarmen? Uw medewerking is van groot belang!

De gemeente gaf ons, studenten sociale wetenschappen aan de Universiteit Utrecht opdracht om bewoners van de dorpen Schalwijk, 't Goy en Tull en 't Waal daarover te bevragen. In de volgende vragenlijst worden vragen gesteld over onder andere uw mening en kennis over de

zogenaamde 'warmtetransitie', de overgang naar aardgasvrij.

U helpt ons en de gemeente door de vragenlijst in te vullen. Het invullen van deze vragenlijst kost ongeveer 15 minuten en kan tot 6 januari 2020. Daarnaast is er de mogelijkheid om met onderzoekers verder te praten over dit onderwerp. U kan zich daarvoor opgeven aan het einde van de vragenlijst.

Let op: U kunt aan dit onderzoek deelnemen indien u 18 jaar of ouder bent. Deelname is vrijwillig en u kunt op elk moment besluiten om te stoppen. De verkregen onderzoeksgegevens worden altijd vertrouwelijk behandeld. We delen antwoorden en informatie niet met derden. Uw antwoorden worden geanonimiseerd: ze zijn voor de gemeente dus niet terug te leiden naar u persoonlijk.

Mochten er achteraf dingen zijn die u wilt bespreken naar aanleiding van dit onderzoek, dan kunt u contact met ons opnemen via warmewijkenhouten@gmail.com.

Indien u bereid bent om uw medewerking aan dit onderzoek te verlenen, vink dan aan dat u toestemming geeft en klik op volgende om verder te gaan naar de volgende pagina.

Ik geef toestemming voor gebruik van mijn gegevens voor wetenschappelijk onderzoek en ga akkoord met deelname aan dit onderzoek (1)

Amersfoort 2020/2021

Toestemmingsformulier

Geachte heer/mevrouw,

Voor u ligt een toestemmingsverklaring met betrekking tot uw deelname aan het onderzoek over de energietransitie in de wijk Nieuwland in gemeente Amersfoort. Deze toestemmingsverklaring bestaat uit twee delen. In het eerste deel komt de informatievoorziening aan orde waarin de details van het onderzoek beschreven worden met betrekking tot uw deelname. In het tweede deel komt de toestemmingsverklaring naar voren waarin wordt beschreven waaraan u toestemming geeft als u mee zou doen aan het onderzoek. U kunt na het lezen van deze verklaring de beslissing nemen of u meedoet met het onderzoek. Wij vragen u deze toestemmingsverklaring dus goed door te lezen voordat u akkoord zou gaan.

Informatievoorziening

Dit onderzoek wordt uitgevoerd door sociologie studenten van Universiteit Utrecht in opdracht van de gemeente Amersfoort. Het algemene thema van dit onderzoek is de energietransitie, waarin alle huizen in Nederland voor het jaar 2050 CO₂ neutraal moet zijn wat beschreven staat in het Parijs akkoord. De gemeente Amersfoort heeft interesse in uw mening, houding, ervaring en betrokkenheid omtrent de energietransitie met als doel om burgers meer te laten betrekken in dit onderwerp en zo dus het beleid van energietransitie succesvoller te laten verlopen. Als u besluit deel te nemen aan het onderzoek zorgt u er potentieel voor dat het energietransitie beleid in Nieuwland effectiever en efficiënter wordt uitgevoerd door de gemeente, dit is niet alleen gunstig voor u, maar ook voor iedereen die in Nieuwland woont. Het onderzoek bevat een interviewsessie met een student van de faculteit sociale wetenschappen aan Universiteit Utrecht Daarnaast is uw deelname geheel anoniem. Met anoniem wordt bedoeld dat de gegevens die u overhandigt niet te traceren zijn naar uzelf. Dit zorgt ervoor dat gegevens onherkenbaar zijn en dat bijvoorbeeld de gemeente niet informatie kan linken aan bepaalde inwoners van een wijk. De informatie van het interview wordt opgeslagen in een databestand waar alleen de desbetreffende studenten en docenten toegang tot hebben. Wees er wel van bewust dat niet uitsluitend de interviewer met u gegevens werkt, maar dat alle betrokken studenten tot het onderzoek deze data kunnen gebruiken.

Deelname tot dit onderzoek is **altijd** vrijwillig. Als u besluit niet mee te willen doen aan het

interview is dat uiteraard aan de goede orde. Als u besluit mee te doen aan het onderzoek is het niet verplicht om op elke vraag van de interviewer antwoord te geven. Een ander scenario dat kan voorkomen is dat u akkoord gaat en dat u tijdens het interview voelt dat u de sessie niet wil laten doorzetten. U kunt dit dan aangeven aan de interviewer, het interview wordt dan per direct gestaakt. U hoeft niet een reden te geven voor deze staking.

Toestemmingsverklaring

Als u de intentie heeft om mee te doen aan dit onderzoek, dan geeft u toestemming voor de volgende tien punten:

1. Ik verklaar dat ik volwassen ben en wilsbekwaam.
2. Ik verklaar dat ik geheel vrijwillig aan het onderzoek meedoe.
3. Ik verklaar dat ik voldoende geïnformeerd ben over het onderzoek.
4. Ik verklaar dat ik de gelegenheid had om vragen te stellen aan de interviewer waar hij of zijn informatief op reageerde waardoor mijn vragen beantwoord werden.
5. Ik ga akkoord dat mijn gegevens anoniem zijn en dat deze gebruikt mogen worden voor onderzoeksdoeleinden.
6. Ik ga akkoord dat mijn gegevens voor een langere periode bewaard worden in een databestand, na de afronding van het onderzoek worden deze vernietigd.
7. Ik ga akkoord dat het volledige interview wordt opgenomen voor de wetenschappelijk doeleinden.
8. Ik ga akkoord dat mijn gegevens gepubliceerd kunnen worden in het onderzoeksrapport wat overhandigd wordt aan de gemeente Amersfoort.
9. Ik ga akkoord dat meerdere onderzoekers van de opleiding sociologie aan Universiteit Utrecht toegang hebben om mijn gegevens te gebruiken.
10. Ik verklaar dat ik de volledige toestemmingsverklaring heb gelezen voorafgaand aan het onderzoek.

Als u besluit om niet akkoord te gaan met minimaal één van deze punten, dan wordt het interview niet afgenomen. Mocht u vragen hebben over de toestemmingsverklaring dan kunt u dit stellen aan de desbetreffende interviewer. Wilt u na het interview vragen stellen, dan kunt u deze mailen naar:

Amersfoortnieuwland2020@gmail.com

Wanneer u deelneemt aan het onderzoek, geeft u een mondelinge verklaring dat u akkoord gaat met de algemene voorwaarden en geeft u dus toestemming. Deze verklaring wordt opgenomen als bewijsstuk.