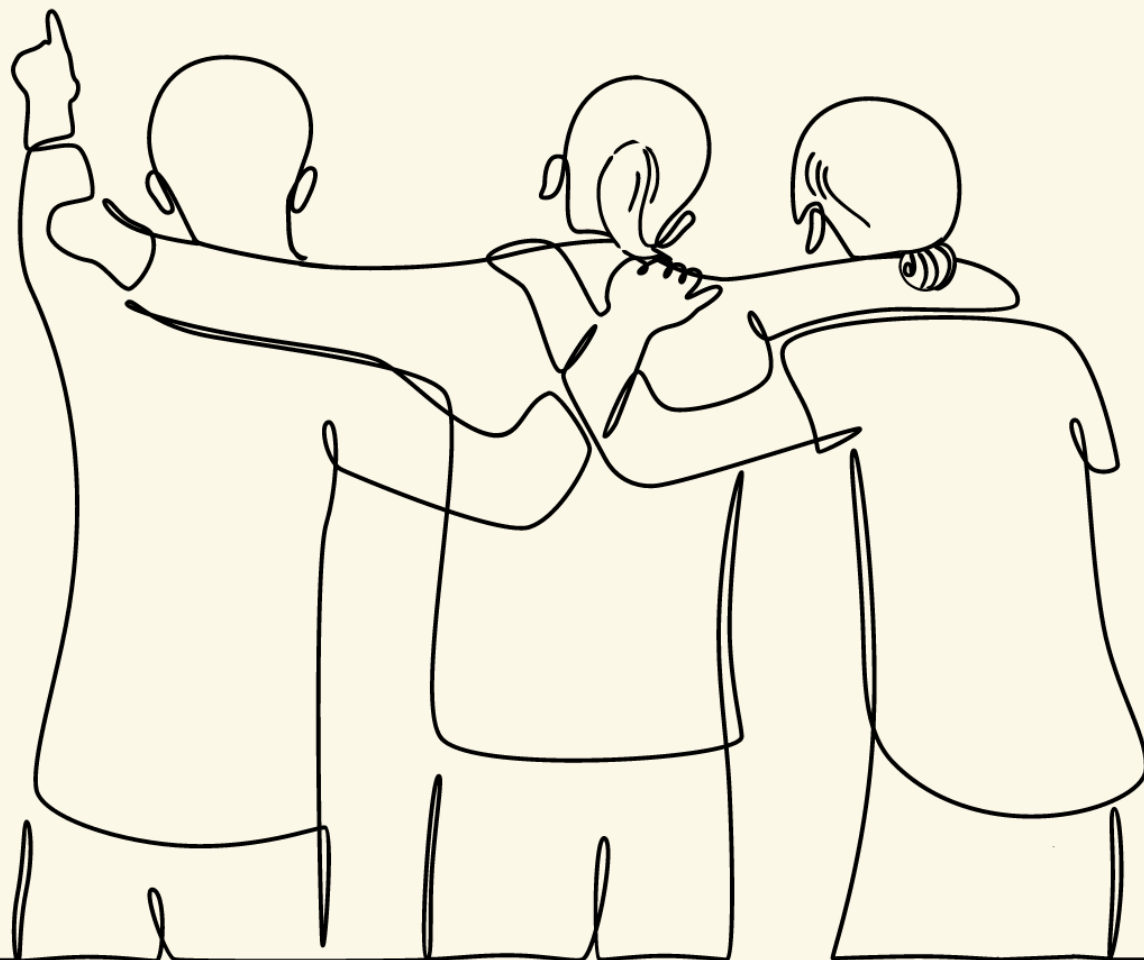


"We have to work ten times harder"

A qualitative study on women's political interest and
ambition for the municipal council.



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Master's thesis in Sociology
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Abstract

Women are underrepresented in the Dutch municipal councils, with considerable disagreement on the mechanisms behind this unequal representation of gender. Therefore, this study is based on the hurdles that politically interested or ambitious women must overcome to become an elected municipal councillor in their municipal council. A qualitative analysis of twenty semi-structured interviews was conducted to analyse these mechanisms. The inclusion criteria were being a woman, a member of a political party, of voting age and some amount of political interest or ambition. The main outcome of this study is that women feel that they have to work harder than male peers for the same amount of political opportunities. The women feel like they have to prove themselves more, feel scrutinized and belittled. However, they often do feel supported by likeminded people, either in politics or from their personal social networks. The conclusion of this paper is that in order to achieve a more equal gender balance, a radical change of the current hostile political culture is needed.

Key words

Political ambition, political interest, gender, municipal council, political culture, female councillors.

Ethical statement

Study: A qualitative study on women’s political interest and ambition for the municipal council.

Principal investigator: N.E. van der Poel

Supervisor: Deni Mazrekaj

The study is approved by the Ethical Review Board of the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences of Utrecht University. The approval is based on the documents sent by the researchers as requested in the form of the Ethics committee and filed under number 22-0817. The approval is valid through 24 June 2022. The approval of the Ethical Review Board concerns ethical aspects, as well as data management and privacy issues (including the GDPR).

1. Introduction

“Bitch” and “whiner” are just two examples of the belittling words that men use to describe women in politics on social media (Saris & van de Ven, 2021), and the Dutch prime minister has been accused of structurally interrupting female colleagues more often than male

colleagues (NOS, 2021). The current share of Dutch female politicians overall is significantly lower than the men's share. Women's share in Dutch politics has fluctuated over the past twenty years, but overall, the current gender balance is the highest and most equal it has been to date (PDC, 2017). There are about eight thousand municipal council seats in the Netherlands, of which 37 percent is filled by a female councillor (Boogers & Voerman, 2018; NU.nl, 2022). The Netherlands is above the global average of 25% women in political functions (Atske et al., 2019).

Even when women are elected, their role comes with a wave of sexism and misogyny. According to research, ten percent of all tweets addressed to female (candidate-)politicians is gendered hate. Female politicians experience more violence, are twice as often addressed with belittling female forms of address and must commit to stricter clothing standards than men. Further, female politicians are generally regarded as less professional than male politicians, who are less often scrutinized on their work life balance and clothing choices (Saris & van de Ven, 2021; Håkansson, 2021). Additionally, Gatto & Thome (2020) show that the Covid-19 pandemic has strong negative gendered implications for women's time and resources. The previous statements are just a beginning of reasons as to why there seem to be more (institutionalized) hurdles for women than for men when becoming a politician.

In this study, I will investigate women's interest and ambition in municipal politics and the gendered implications of being a woman in a municipal council. Municipal politics are under-examined in sociological research and most of the research on gender balances in Dutch politics is on national politics, according to the author's knowledge. Moreover, the percentage of women in municipal councils is, as mentioned above, low – even lower than in the parliament. It is important to have a set of politicians that represent the diversity of their community, because it improves the inclusivity of public policy and political trust (Council of Europe, 2014).

There are different explanations within the scientific community on women's lack of representation in politics. An approach often used for explaining this gap is that women appear to be less motivated to pursue candidacy than men – that there is a gender ambition gap, and thus, in order to motivate women, they have to be supported in the process of becoming an electoral candidate, more so than men (Piscopo, 2018). Krook and Norris (2014), for example, state that there is a large body of research on gender quotas in politics, but not much research on non-quota strategies that build on support. Examples of non-quota strategies include mobilising actors all throughout the social and political field, by raising awareness, recruitment initiatives, training programs, fund-raising networks, women's networks, soft targets, capacity building, etc. This approach, however, is not without its criticism, as other academics show that women are not necessarily less ambitious but have to overcome other hurdles, based in cultural expectations and political institutions. According to them, it would be better if scholars considered the gendered dynamics of candidate emergence, because individual, institutional and contextual factors interact to shape candidate emergence in gendered ways and improve gender balance in politics through changing these gendered dynamics (Piscopo, 2018; Piscopo & Kenny, 2020). When looking at such institutional factors, there is for example an effect of gender on political recruitment (Fox & Lawless, 2005), political media coverage (Pruysers et al., 2020) and allocation of councillors on different topics (e.g. social policy or defence) (Coffé et al., 2019). Thus, we know a lot about the institutional factors that influence gender balance in politics, but the individual and contextual factors seem to be less well known.

1.1 The current research

The differing explanations laid out in the section above create a knowledge gap that I am attempting to fill with this study. They oppose each other, but also overlap. My research question is therefore: *What hurdles do women with political interest have to overcome to become an elected councillor in their municipal council?* With the descriptive question being: what hurdles do women with political interest experience? And the exploratory question being: how do women with political interest overcome these hurdles? My policy advice will contain ways to lessen the hurdles that women experience, based on the answers to these questions.

This paper will be centred around women's political interest and ambition, in the sense of aspiring to join a political party and stand for election, with a special focus on how women can be supported in overcoming these hurdles. I use women's political interest as an interest in the ongoing political themes and events, without necessarily acting on this interest. I use women's political ambition as aspiring to be politically active for a political party in an institutionalized manner. There is a large body of research revolving around political participation, which is often defined as all kinds of formal political behaviour, such as voting, protesting, and discussing politics (Bari, 2005). I will not be focusing on this as an outcome of gender differences, but as a mechanism that leads to differing political ambition between men and women.

First, I will lay out the different theoretical assumptions that could explain an uneven gender balance in politics. Second, I will conduct a qualitative analysis of interviews with twenty women with varying amounts of political interest, ambition, and experience. Following these theoretical and qualitative analyses, I conclude that there are problems with the political culture that influence women in a gendered way and make policy recommendations based on these conclusions.

2. Mechanisms of an unequal gender balance

2.1 A gender gap in political ambition?

The gender gap in municipal councils entails that there are structurally fewer female councillors than male councils (Van Riel, 2022). Many scholars have discussed and researched the ambition gap as an explanation for this gender gap, claiming that women are less likely to have political ambition (Piscopo & Kenny, 2020). This debate is focussed on gender differences before people are candidates and are running for office. According to Constantini (1990), this debate can be divided in three explanations of 'male political dominance' (Ibid., p. 8): a socialization, a structural and a situational explanation. He states these explanations are overlapping, and reality might a combination of these. These explanations are rooted in the institutionalized sexism that was palpable in the nineties. Currently sexism seems more subtle, however it still exists (Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016). I will lay out the three explanations in the next few paragraphs, while adding more recent literature and findings to these classic explanations.

The socialization explanation for the gender gap in politics is that women are less likely to value, or aspire to obtain political power, because of traditional understandings of gender roles in politics, that political power is inappropriate for women to pursue (Constantini, 1990). Politics are seen as a man's game, which children realize from a young age, and gets stronger the longer children are exposed to such gendered narratives via their

family, school, and media. Men are seen as fitting the image of a standard politician, while women are the exception (Bos et al., 2021). Rudman and Phelan (2010) show that women are less likely to have an interest in typical ‘masculine careers’ and Rosenthal et al. (2003) find evidence of gendered political socialization in students. Thus, I hypothesize that,

Women feel that politics are a masculine career and are hence less likely to pursue a municipal council seat.

The structural explanation is based in the inequality of resources (education, experience) between men and women and that there are less women of a middle to high socioeconomic status in the eligible pool for candidates for public office (Constantini, 1990). The lack of education and experience is no longer an issue these days, seeing as there are more and more highly educated women in the Netherlands (more than highly educated men (UNESCO, 2022)) and there are no education requirements for becoming a political candidate (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2019). Additionally, Folke & Rickne (2016) found that when Swedish selection committees focussed more on competence, gender equality in municipal parties improved. It is true that it is often thought (and carried out by the electoral list committee) that higher educated people are better at being politicians. This is not necessarily true; democracy works best for her citizens when its politicians are a mirror of society, including experience- and education-wise. Politicians are representatives of the people and thus the people should be represented by politicians, especially on the municipal level (PDC, 2017). Thus, if all municipal councillors are highly educated, then a large part of the population is underrepresented, and the Dutch democracy is more of a meritocracy. This works roughly the same way with gender, sexual orientation, migration background, etc. Some skills, like debating, reading, and writing on a certain level are useful. It is, however, possible to acquire these skills without traditional higher education (Bovens & Wille, 2011). Although, resources like experience and education might have gendered effects for political opportunities (Herrick, 1996). Still Constantini’s (1990) structural explanation seems unsupported by current research. My second hypothesis follows:

Women do not feel that lack of education and experience is a hurdle for exercising their political ambition.

Thirdly, Constantini (1990) identifies a situational explanation, arguing that domestic responsibilities, like housecleaning and caring for children, mean that women have less time and energy to become politically active and that they have less of a political network, so it is harder for them to get started in the political arena. Just because there is technically no level of education or experience needed, it does not mean that people still feel this is true and act accordingly. Thus, the perception of such structural liabilities might still deter women from developing political ambitions (Constantini, 1990). This is an explanation that is still used in current academic debates. Although women’s time spent on domestic responsibilities is decreasing, women still spend significantly more time on domestic duties than men – regardless of having children (Roeters, 2019). Usually being a councillor in the Netherlands takes up twenty hours per week and the salary is below a living wage. Most councillors either have a second job or have a partner that supports them (Vriesema, 2017). Women’s perceptions that they might not be equipped to run could be based on the view that one needs

certain resources like time, money, and experience to be a good politician (Krook & Norris, 2014). From this, hypothesis three states that,

Women experience lack of time because of care responsibilities as a hurdle in becoming an elected municipal councillor.

Another explanation of barriers is the issue of perceived barriers besides education and experience: the fear of hate and sexism that might occur when women get into office. This fear is largely mediated by the media. Publications on sexism and conflict in Dutch politics are far from rare and can be a deterrent for young women thinking about pursuing a political career (e.g. Atria, 2022; Saris & van de Ven, 2021; Benner, 2021). The deterrence factor of such publications, although not ideal, is founded in a real problem. Politicians are often visible on social media, which means that they can be very close to the community they are serving. This also means that it is very easy to receive hate messages. Female politicians are much more likely to receive hate messages than male politicians. Such insulting messages are often specifically gender-based, with body-shaming, sexualizing, and degrading them to 'girls', 'dolls', or 'ladies' instead of grown politicians (Saris & Van de Ven, 2021).

This culture of unwelcomeness is not just visible on social media, but also within the council chamber. Female politicians share testimonies of being talked over and interrupted, having simple issues 'mansplained' (a sexist phenomenon where a man assumes a woman has no knowledge on a subject and explains it to her, even though often the woman has ample knowledge on the subject), and not getting the chance to contribute (Håkansson, 2021; Wijdeven, 2021). Pruyzers, Thomas & Blais (2020) found that the deterring effect of sexism is not just based on women's attitudes of their 'appropriateness' for pursuing political power, as Constantini (1990) suggested. Male candidates' ambitions dropped significantly when presented with sexualizing and trivializing media coverage of their person, suggesting that repeated exposure to such media has also influenced women's ambition (Pruyzers et al., 2020). Additionally, according to a world-wide media analysis, there is a significant relationship between media sexism and the share of women candidates for parliament. This means that sexist portrayals of women in the media stifle ambition among women who, in a less sexist media environment, would be willing to stand as political candidates (Haraldsson & Wängnerud, 2018). Hence, the fourth hypothesis is as follows:

Women experience fear of sexism as a hurdle when exercising their political ambition for the municipal council.

The explanations of the ambition gap show that there are persistent contemporary attitudes on who should and could pursue a political career. Part of these attitudes is rooted in rules and traditions that are no longer institutionalized, like the resources that one needs and the inappropriateness of women's political power. The others, structural liabilities and sexist media deterrence are still major problems in today's political climate. Based on this, I expect that women are, even though they are politically interested, hesitant to run for municipal council.

2.2 Fewer opportunities to get elected

There are two ways a candidate councillor can get elected in the Netherlands. The first is being high on the list and getting enough seats to cover your place on the list. The second is

with preferential votes. The voters can vote for a specific person on a list and with enough votes, they can still get a council seat, despite having a lower place on the initial list (Vriesema, 2017). An ambition gap does not necessarily mean that women are also less interested in politics and cannot fully account for why there are less women in councils. There are external mechanisms that cause the gender gap, as previously touched upon in the introduction. For example, women are often placed lower on electoral lists and have shorter office terms, which is usually not a matter of disinterest. Therefore, another important debate in the gender and politics arena is centred around the hostile political culture, which might explain why women are overall less willing to enter elections than men (Pate & Fox, 2018; Preece & Stoddard, 2015; Lawless and Fox, 2010). In this chapter, I will lay out the reasons that women with political ambitions less often enter the current political arena.

Gate keeping of male political dominance

According to previous research, women have less chances to exercise their political ambition and are less likely to be recruited for a political role by electoral gatekeepers. Electoral gatekeepers are party organizations' leaders, elected officials, and others in decision-making positions, who groom potential candidates to run for office (Krook & Norris, 2014). The electoral list is strategic to gather as much votes as possible. In certain Dutch parties, party members can give preferential votes prior to the elections to change the order of the list (Boogers & Voerman, 2018). Recruitment to public office is a selective process that reflects several dimensions of social stratification, like male dominance (Fox & Lawless, 2010). Gatekeepers have limited time and resources to get to know each candidate and rely on information short-cuts by using background characteristics as a proxy measure of abilities and character. This may lead to direct or imputed negative gender discrimination – especially with a non-diverse selection committee, as gatekeepers tend to recruit candidates who look like themselves and might expect women to have less time for dedication (Krook & Norris, 2014). Highly qualified and politically well-connected women from all political colours (US) are “less likely than similarly situated men to be recruited to run for public office by all types of political actors” (Fox & Lawless, 2010, p. 311) on all fronts and the gender differences are even larger when looking at breadth and frequency of recruitment (Ibid.). What Fox & Lawless (2010) also found, is that all potential candidates express greater levels of political ambition when they perceive that they have been encouraged to run. This means that women do not require more frequent or elaborate recruitment efforts than men to convince them that running for office, which is often thought to be the case, but the same amount. Pate & Fox (2018) found contradicting evidence on this recruitment theory for US Representative elections. Men are more likely to be recruited than women, although female potential candidates are less receptive to recruitment than male potential candidates. Encouragement is not enough (Dittmar, 2015). Research on municipal elections in the Netherlands shows that between 2006 and 2018, the average number of women on electable places on the electoral list has increased from 29% to 38%. Whether a municipal party organization has an above-average percentage of women on the electoral list is largely impacted by which selection criteria are used. If the selection is mainly based on policy knowledge, the chance that there are relatively more women on the list is 1.5 times greater (Boogers & Voerman, 2018). I hypothesize the following:

Women do not feel welcomed by municipal electoral gatekeepers.

Hostile environment for women

The political arena is generally regarded as a hostile environment for women, both literally and figuratively. Literally, in the sense that political buildings are more welcoming to men, explained by the space invaders theory by Puwar (2004). Space invaders are those who have been one of the few who have penetrated a space not designed for people like them. The political space is laden with symbolic subtexts that affect interpretations and reactions to women's presence in political institutions because these subtexts often associate women with spaces other than the political. This means that when women enter a political space, they are measured against the norm of white men, and are thus considered space invaders. This leads to women being overly scrutinised and having to prove themselves more than men in the same position (Lombardo & Meier, 2019). In an analysis of written media about Dutch politicians (interviews, columns, reports) was found that women are questioned and described differently than men. In conversations with men, words such as 'billions', 'finance', 'plans' and the 'the state' dominate. For their female counterparts it is about 'wife', 'daughter', 'mother', 'parents', 'girl' and 'life'. Even the word 'man' appears nearly twice as often in interviews with women as it does in interviews with men (Saris & van de Ven, 2021). Female Dutch politicians are more often framed as different from the norm than their male equals (Mügge & Schotel, 2017). Men who address other men with the appropriate title in administrative and political circles and not women, has major effects. This maintains – often unintentionally – a standard political balance of power in which women must work harder than men and possibly leave prematurely. As a result, female political talent is lost (Bekkers, 2020).

The political arena is hostile in the figurative sense because of a hostile political culture. Female politicians experience sexism, belittling, and online hate. Surveys issued both in the Netherlands and worldwide show that female politicians experience (online) violence specifically based on their gender. Research shows that two thirds of female politicians from all over the world have been subjected to humiliating sexual or sexist remarks (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Being young, belonging to a minority group and belonging to the opposition are aggravating factors. Neither of these studies compared women's experiences to those of male politicians, though the message is clear: female politicians experience specific gender-based violence, because men “dominate the political realm, both numerically and hierarchically” (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016, p.5). The article concludes that, “[f]or long time an exclusively male seat of power, parliament is still a place where the same kinds of sexist attitudes towards women that are found throughout society sometimes occur. Respondents described daily condescension and sexism expressed through inappropriate gestures or sounds.” (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016, p.4). These surveys are for national politicians and not for councillors. There is no specific data on this for Dutch councillors, although according to a national survey, female political office holders of decentralized political institutions, like municipal councils, experience more verbal violence than male political office holders and female politicians experience undesirable behaviour from colleagues twice as often as male colleagues (I&O Research, Bureau BING, 2020). Håkansson (2021) did a survey on local-level Swedish politicians and found that perpetrators of political violence are biased towards female politicians, especially those more visible and higher-up. Further, I have touched upon gendered online hate targeted to female politicians in paragraph 2.1 A gender gap in political ambition.

Of course, all this could be named as 'personal reasons' to either quit one's term or not run at all. However, it shows that the tough political playing field has a gendered effect: it is

tougher for women than for men. This increased difficulty for women (let alone other minorities, who might experience a double penalty) taking a toll on a women's ability to fulfil her term does not say anything about her ability to handle the 'tough political playing field', but says something about the grittiness of the political arena. Thus, the sixth hypothesis states that,

Women do not feel at home in their party and experience this as a hurdle for exercising their political ambition.

3. Qualitative research methods

3.1 Research design

This research is centred around the hurdles that women (who are interested) in politics must overcome to pursue a municipal political career. To explore these hurdles, I use a qualitative design. This is field research by conducting twenty semi-structured interviews with adult women. What I report in this paper is thus based on the twenty women in my sample and is unlikely representative for all women. The reason I chose to use a qualitative design as opposed to a quantitative design, is because I am solely interested in the mechanisms. It is well-known that women are underrepresented in the councils compared to men (NU.nl, 2022). What is less well-known is what women's own experiences and explanations are for (not) exercising their political interest (Preece & Stoddard, 2015).

To find respondents, I used the network of organisation Stem op een Vrouw by putting an ad asking for female members of a political party on their social media. I placed the ad several times, every time asking for a slightly different demographic (small/large municipality or right/left-wing party) to get diverse sample. It is, however, not a random sample and has a self-select bias. All respondents were vetted based on their experience and municipality and sent an e-mail with basic information regarding the contents of the interview and safety regarding their data (see Appendix 7.2 Information letter). Once they agreed to the interview, we set up a date and they signed an informed consent form. All respondents received the same information beforehand and thus had comparable expectations. They all had about the same time to prepare, and all interviews were roughly the same length and covered the same topics. I followed the topic list as closely as possible, to ensure all interviews had the same pace and build. This way the data collection was made to be as reliable as possible. One thing lowering the reliability was the changes in surroundings per interview. Most interviews took place in different cities, homes, both in-person and via video calling. This was unavoidable if I wanted to have a country-wide sample with little time and resources to travel. Although, all interviews were conducted in places free of distraction. People are more likely to talk more in in-person interviews, as compared to video calling (Johnson et al., 2019). However ever since the Covid-pandemic, video calling has become increasingly normalized, which might decrease the negative effects of non-person interviews.

Ethical considerations

All respondents were given the same information beforehand. They were free to opt out of the study at any point in time and were aware of the purpose, risks, and my association with Stem op een vrouw – all respondent signed an informed consent form to this effect. All identifiable data of the respondents is anonymized and stored confidentially on the UU-server. The

transcripts nor recordings are shared. There is low potential for harm in this study and the results are accurately represented.

3.2 Data characteristics

The sample consists exclusively of women because I am interested in women’s experiences only. Table 1 contains relevant demographic characteristics. All respondents report having political experience to some extent, often gained after becoming a member of their political party. The women’s experience ranges from having attended a course, handing out flyers, or attending meetings, to being campaign leader, board member, or chair of a party commission. All respondents are currently interested in municipal politics and have come in contact with the municipal council. Three quarters of the respondents have political ambition. I have defined active political interest as being member of a political party. All women with political ambition have at some point in time applied for their municipal office. The other quarter has interest in politics, but not (yet) actively pursuing candidacy have not (yet) overcome these barriers, have not been elected into office (see Appendix 7.1 Table 2). Fourteen of the twenty respondents were placed on the electoral list of their party, of which eight were placed on an ineligible place. Seven women are currently councillor. Three women got a lower placement after an internal party vote.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

#	Gender	Age	Marital stat.	Kids	Religious	P.O.C. ¹	Working	Political party	Municipality ²	Randstad
1	She/Her	50-55	Cohabiting			Yes	Freelance	National, progressive left	Large Left	
2	She/Her	40-45	Married	Yes			No	National, conservative right	Large Left	
3	She/Her	20-25	Single	Yes		Yes	Applying	National, progressive left	Large Left	Yes
4	She/Her	26-30	Single	Yes	Yes	Yes	Fulltime	National, progressive left	Large Left	Yes
5	She/Her	30-35	Married	Yes			Parttime	Local, progressive left	Small Mid	
6	She/Her	20-25	Single				Student	National, progressive left	Small Left	
7	She/Her	50-55	Married	Yes	Yes		Parttime	Local, conservative mid-right	Small Right	
8	She/Her	36-40	Married	Yes	Yes	Yes	Parttime	National, progressive mid	Large Left	
9	She/Her	26-30	Cohabiting		-		Fulltime	National, progressive left	Large Left	
10	She/Her	30-35	Married	Yes			Fulltime	National, progressive left	Small Mid-left	
11	She/Her	26-30	Single				Parttime	National, progressive mid	Large Left	Yes
12	She/Her	20-25	Single				Fulltime	Local, prog./cons. right	Small Mid-right	
13	She/Her	36-40	Cohabiting				Student	National, progressive left	Midden Mid	Yes
14	She/Her	50-55	Married	Yes			Owner	National, progressive left	Midden Left	
15	She/Her	30-35	Cohabiting				Parttime	National, progressive mid-left	Small Right	Yes
16	She/Her	36-40	Married	Yes	Yes		Parttime	Local, progressive left	Small Mid	
17	She/They	20-25	Single				Student	National, progressive left	Large Left	Yes
18	She/Her	20-25	Single				Student	National, progressive left	Small Left	
19	She/Her	45-50	Cohabiting	Yes			Fulltime	National, progressive left	Small Right	
20	She/Her	20-25	Single				Student	National, conservative right	Small Mid-right	

¹ person of colour

² small: <50.000, mid: 50.000-100.000, large: >100.000

3.3 Data analysis methods

After I conducted and transcribed the interviews, I uploaded the transcribes into NVIVO and conducted a thematic analysis to understand general themes in the data and how they are communicated. The theme list was based on the hypotheses from the literature review to ensure the validity of the questions. However, because the results of this study are based on just twenty respondents it is difficult to generalize and this lowers the validity of this study. It is possible that this research could get different outcomes with different respondents.

4. Results

4.1 Main difficulties of being a woman in a municipal political arena

The respondents were asked about the main difficulties of being a woman in a municipal political arena. The main takeaway of their responses can be summarized as ‘having to prove yourself more’. In this section I describe the ways in which the women felt was more difficult for them because of their gender.

All council and commission members report being **taken less seriously** by male colleagues. They feel that they have to prove themselves more and that male colleagues have low expectations and question the women’s experience and knowledge. They must do a lot more preparation, because it is more likely that someone challenges their arguments, solely for being women. Respondent 16 said for her it would be the hardest thing about being a female councillor and a main reason she currently has no political ambition, even though she has often been encouraged to become a councillor: *“The constant fighting, I think, that would suck the most energy. For that you can just express your opinion and shouldn’t have to emphasize how it works every time, but that people just have to listen to it. While I do think that if a man were to say something like that, it would be much more simply assumed to be true, and women have to I think defend their point much more.”*

About half of the councillors and commission members in the sample have experienced **sexism**. Not everyone expressed sexism as a doubt, stating they must deal with sexism anyway because it exists outside of politics as well. Two of the respondents who reported not having experienced sexism, said they have not experienced sexism, but then mention experiences about everyday sexism that contradict this notion. For example, respondent 6, left-wing party leader in a small, right-leaning municipality, reports that councillors from other parties make (seemingly innocent) jokes about women in the council. It shows that the women are seen as not truly fitting in the political culture and not being taken seriously by peers, much like respondent 18 from a left-wing party in a small municipality when she went to a meeting and immediately felt out of place after she was scrutinized over her looks: *“someone came to [me and my friend], asked where our heels were, because we were wearing sneakers.”*

Another thing many women mentioned is having to **work harder** than male peers. Firstly, women often have more care responsibilities (taking care of kids and housework), must deal with sexist media reporting and experience subtle sexism like being asked to bring coffee. Secondly, they feel that men interrupt them more often and have a harder time getting others to listen to their arguments and ideas. Respondent 20, a 20-25 years-old councillor for a right-wing party in a small municipality, has a lot of trouble with her party and getting them to listen to her input, especially of male party members: *“I think that a lot of male colleagues hear what you say, but do not really listen.”*

Being part of a **minority** in the council chambers, physically being with fewer numbers was also named as a difficulty. The women feel unrepresented in the council and improving representation is a large reason for them to join municipal council. However, when they are elected, they discover that they must work hard to be heard in debates and meetings and they report being the only one that fights for certain ‘female’ or ‘soft’ subjects. Younger women and women of colour report experiencing a double penalty, especially the few young black women that I interviewed.

Additionally, two women report that it is not only men that make it difficult for a woman to feel safe in the municipal council. They often feel more struggle between women than between men and women. Respondent 8, party member from a left-wing party, was up for election but not elected, reports that if she acted more like the men in her party and tried to fit in, she felt more welcomed: *“I think I more often had trouble with women without common interests than the men, they make contact a bit easier and if you are man enough, you can get in between, but I did not experience that as a threat at all either not welcome or not at all. Crazy, huh?”*

Lack of experience is a doubt that all respondents identified, though not as a hurdle. All respondents report having political experience to some extent, but most women felt unprepared and doubted their abilities anyway. They are more often challenged and doubted, which made them doubt themselves. One respondent (13, with MBO-education) felt that she was out of place due to her level of education, another (respondent 9, currently no political ambition) said about *“ruthless”* council debates: *“that would be something that would put me off, for example, even with a university education.”* Implying that council work would be easier to handle with higher education.

4.2 Outside influences that make-or-break women’s ambitions

One’s social network can have an encouraging effect or hindering effect, based on whether social contacts were pro or anti women in politics. The women who had a politically interested family or friend group reported being politically interested earlier than the ones who did not have a politically interested social network. Three respondents had a (male) family member in the same party, all of whom reported that this is the reason they applied for election when they did. Respondent 6, 20-25 years-old and party leader of her one-man parliamentary party, said that without her father’s support, she might never have applied for election. *“I only did it because they needed people, otherwise it for me it would’ve... the threshold would have been too high. So, I might have done it at a later age, but definitely not now.”* An additional eleven women knew someone (mixed genders) in their party prior to joining and report that it made the decision to join easier.

Hence, an individual’s social network may influence their choices and ambitions. The general consensus is that women do not fit the standard image of a politician (Bos et al., 2021), which they might project onto politically ambitious girls and eradicate their ambition. For example, respondent 11, currently 26-30 years-old and who was living in a small municipality at the time, recalls a defining moment when sharing her ambition to be prime minister in class when she was about eight years old: *“the teacher said, she came to me and put her hand on my shoulders. She said, ‘oh girl, don't you want to be a teacher or a nurse? Or do you want to... don't you want to be a mother then?’ That pause after, ‘don't you want to be a mother?’ That made such an impression on me that I didn't say that again for years. It's actually such a shame, that she removed all kind of ambition at once. Only in secondary school it started to blossom a bit again.”*

The women do not just sense this consensus that women are not standard politicians within their personal network, but also via online channels and media. The opinions were divided as to whether **online hate** and **media** were an issue. Some women, especially the women who had not been elected, felt that online hate and media have a negative effect on the political agenda and that it enforces sexist beliefs in the municipal political arena with its inherent sexist nature. Others, with more experience as councillor, saw it as inherent to being a politician, shrug it off and make sure their words cannot be taken out of context to minimize online hate. All in all, it was difficult for the respondents to make up their mind on they felt about it. Respondent 5, party leader for a left-wing party in a small municipality, was pictured on the campaign posters with a male party member and dubbed as ‘Beauty’ from Beauty and the Beast by local media outlets: *“And yes, I think that it’s a compliment on some level, like, I kind of look good and at the same time I find that very derogatory, that it kind of comes down to like that it is all [there is to me]. You know, I also have something substantive to bring to the table.”*

Some **partners** or **parents** were a positive influence and made the choice to become a councillor easier. Other partners or parents were more reluctant and therefore made the choice more difficult for the women. As a result, there are a few women who have (almost) chosen not to become a councillor because of their partner. Like for respondent 10, who was elected with preferential votes, but her partner asked her to wait until her children were older and thus, she waited to keep things pleasant at home.

Political culture

The respondents spoke of a certain **political culture**, present in both the party and the council: a political game, which is unwelcoming to newcomers, exceedingly more so for women than for men. They said that not everyone is treated equally by peers, and that degradation and insults are unexceptional; people are quite aggressive to each other in the council chamber. Councillors sometimes respond based on person instead of on content in debates. Several women said that subject-matter is often a lower priority and there is an unpleasant norm of interacting, which makes it hard to achieve goals. This was a reason for some women not to become a politician. Respondent 14, who is not yet councillor but closely follows her left-wing party, said there is one extremely unpleasant and misogynistic man that has been in the council of a mid-sized municipality for years, *“for instance what he does is just scream through when a woman is speaking.”*

Additionally, respondents recalled not fitting in with the rest of the party, either due to lack of diversity or due to feeling unwelcome. Also, the unpleasant way party members treat one another, especially when it comes to newcomers. Several women described this as a reason to forgo being a councillor. Respondent 18, from a left-wing party in a small municipality, felt relieved when she was not elected: *“Then I would’ve had to be in the council with [those sexist party members]. I don’t know if I would have lasted, because I feel like he doesn’t take me seriously like I can’t do anything when I have more experience politically than some of the others.”*

Placement on the electoral list

The women from progressive parties, especially the women of colour, were often placed higher on the electoral list to radiate diversity and attract votes. Several women felt uncomfortable with this role because they felt like a **diversity token** rather than being chosen

for their qualities. It made them feel like the odd one out and it raised serious doubts. It was no reason for any of the women to give up their candidacy, but it was something they discussed with party members to settle these doubts. This does not ring true for all women. Respondent 4, a 26-30 years-old woman of colour from a large municipality, experienced this the other way around. She was the only woman on the electoral list of her left-wing party, even though she was not the only eligible woman within the party. She attributes this to the lack of gender diversity in the party board: *“I think that's also the product of having a lot of men in not only the boards, but all those layers that have a decision-making position. If that is also one-sided, yeah, then you get this result.”*

Six women got higher placement, mainly because of **preferential votes**, two of whom turned down their seat. All women that were elected through the preferential voting system, give credit to the strategy by organization Vote for a woman: vote for a woman lower on the list to get more women elected. They felt it makes it easier for a woman to enter the political arena than without this commonly known strategy. Respondent 11, party member and expert in diversity and political culture, said about this: *“I think on the front that it is becoming more and more accessible for women, for example in municipal politics, to get on a list. But that once you're in politics, you still have to work ten times harder.”*

Work-life balance

All respondents thought beforehand about how to make council work fit in their work-life balance. Students and mothers especially struggled with this and report working less hours on the side than the men in their parties. The list advisory committee asked the mothers how they are going to organize it. Together with the council work, most respondents have **professional responsibilities** six days a week. The women who indicate that they have a good work-life balance decreased their workload and those who are not on the council indicate that they would work less when they become councillors. Respondent 2, a 40-45 years-old conservative, right-wing mother in a large municipality, is the only respondent who chose being councillor as her only profession. Her only other responsibility is her family but is aware that multiple responsibilities can hinder one's focus on council work: *“I don't have to manage my job on top of council work, although of course I do have to manage my family. But that works fine for now, so I have no doubts about what I should choose to do or not do, but I think that certainly doesn't apply to other people.”* Respondent 5, mother of young twins chose to get a nanny and a cleaner to help with her domestic responsibilities, *“otherwise there would be too much on my plate.”*

No one mentioned **money** as doubt, which I did expect because being a councillor does not pay very well, this might be because it is normalized to have another (fulltime) job. **Time** was more of an issue than money. All respondents had considered whether they would manage with time because they had other responsibilities: a job, taking care of children, and/or a social life. Mothers struggled with all three. Being a councillor costs twenty hours every week for four years. All jobholders in the sample work for at least three days, which means they work six days a week. This also means that they must commit to live in the same municipality and stay focused on the municipality for four years. Time and commitment were the biggest reason that the non-politically active women gave as a reason for their inactiveness.

4.3 Support

Since there is a lot of support in place that is specifically targeted for women, I asked the respondents about which forms of support they used. Most women sought or received some form of support, usually while being an aspirant and figuring out whether they want to join politics, but also while being a new councillor. The women report that the process would have been more difficult without support. Women feel they have lower confidence than men and thus need more support. Respondent 15, member of a centre-wing party, reports: *“I have the feeling that women have to get over a hurdle, more actually than men, get over themselves really. I see that often.”*

Formal support

The formal forms (structurally organized by a third party) of support mentioned were an appointed **mentor** and **training**. The consensus was that these forms of support really helped and made the process of becoming a councillor easier. Most new councillors enter a training program, provided by their party. They get campaigning training, skills training, and council-knowledge training. Municipalities struggle with getting more women on their electoral list and might offer support (often in the form of skills training) to persuade them to stand for election, but often do not have the resources so the respondents sought it out themselves. Trainings were not just useful for their taught skills, but also for confidence, the people they met during these sessions that were going through the same trials, and tribulations and signalling commitment to the list advisory committee. Several of the respondents sought out training or a mentor before they even applied. Various women felt that they could have also made it without the help, although it might have been more difficult. However, although the respondents reported gaining useful skills from training, they also felt this is not the be-all and end-all of solving gender equality, especially those who poorly supervised by their party. Respondent 14, active party member for a progressive left-wing party, disclosed: *“I think some women can really benefit from [training]. But then, of course, there must also be somewhere they can go, of course, if there is something wrong in their workplace, whether that is in the city council or elsewhere. And I also think, you could work on being more assertive, but if the culture around it doesn't change, it's of no use.”*

Informal support

Informal forms of support were feeling included in the party, social support from their non-political network, **role models**, and a **buddy**: someone they could talk to about their experiences, usually someone going through similar things. Buddies and social support are considered good sounding boards for insecurities and doubts, though not as useful as mentors. The role models that the respondents mentioned were women in national politics, or more experienced party members. Role models that the respondents could relate to made politics more approachable, see how much influence a person can have, and respondent 13 said that her role models made her realize, that *“well, maybe politics is a bit more fun than I previously thought.”*

4.4 A change of culture

The solutions that the respondents suggested are gender quotas for electoral lists, longer introduction processes, lower thresholds for expressing political interest and actively encourage women to join a party. A hostile culture is the most important hurdle that women

mentioned. It showed up in every subject of conversation. Solutions for the gender issues in politics like social support, trainings and preferential voting are useful, but without a change in the current gendered political culture, being a woman in politics is still going to feel more difficult than how they think a (white) man would feel. These solutions are like band-aids for a broken bone. One woman (respondent 14) mentioned that to reach a change of culture, councillors have to keep having conversations about (overstepped) boundaries to change this culture.

5. Discussion

5.1 Summary and conclusions

In this paper I investigated women's interest and ambition in municipal politics and the gendered implications of being a woman in a municipal council. I used a qualitative research design to gain insight into the hurdles that women must overcome to become an elected municipal councillor in their municipal council. I expected to find that women will experience certain hurdles such as gender discrimination that obstruct women's political ambition and which would make them genuinely doubt whether they should continue standing for election. I conclude that there are in fact structural mechanisms in place that impede women in developing and exercising their political interest.

Traditional gender roles were evident in the results of this study. Thus, I found evidence of the first hypothesis: women feel that politics are a masculine career and are hence less likely to pursue a council seat. Politics are seen as a man's game, and something that men dominate at; women are a deviation of the norm. Especially in the influence of the women's social networks. One's social network could have an encouraging or hindering effect, based on social contacts' attitude on women in politics. This is in line with the socialization explanation, where society's idea of a standard politician has discouraging effects on women's political ambition (Rudman and Phelan, 2010; Bos et al., 2021). Although, this was also a reason for joining politics: to improve diversity and thus make way for other women's political ambition.

I found partial support for the second hypothesis on that lack of education and experience are not a hurdle for women in exercising their political ambition. The results on lack of education were inconclusive due to lack of data, though seem to be in line with Bovens and Wille's (2011) theory that the Dutch democracy is more of a meritocracy. While the respondents did feel uncertain about their lack of experience at times, none of them reported it as a hurdle. They attributed it to being overly scrutinized in the political arena, instead of as a personal fault. This is inconsistent with Constantini's (1990) theory that women are less likely to have the right resources to be an eligible candidate.

Moreover, I conclude that women experience care responsibilities as a hurdle, in line with hypothesis three. Care responsibilities were visible in how the respondents spoke about making their work-life balance work. All respondents thought beforehand about how to make council work fit in their work-life balance. Mothers especially struggled with this and report working less hours on the side than the men in their parties. The women who indicate that they have a good work-life balance decreased their workload and those who are not on the council indicate that they would work less when they become councillors. This is consistent with previous research (Roeters, 2019). There is also an indication that electoral gatekeepers might select candidates based on proxy measures of council eligibility like Krook and Norris

(2014) theorized, seeing as respondents were asked about their domestic situation in interviews.

Yet, hypothesis four on fear of sexism as a hurdle is unfounded in my research. The respondents stated that sexism persists in all levels of society, and that politics are no exception. Women did fear online hate, which is often sexist in nature. Moreover, the fact that women are intimidated by political culture and fear online hate, could be due to media reporting. This finding aligns with Pruysers et al.'s (2020) and Haraldsson and Wägnerud's (2018) studies and implicates that sexist media reporting stifles women's political ambition.

Hypothesis five, which entailed that women feel less encouraged by municipal electoral gatekeepers, is likewise unsupported by the results of the current study. According to previous research, women have less chances to exercise their political ambition and are less likely to be recruited by electoral gatekeepers and might need more support to exercise their political ambition (Krook & Norris, 2014; Fox & Lawless, 2010). However, in the current sample, women were often placed higher on the list of progressive parties, reported feeling welcome when they joined their parties and received formal and informal support from the party.

Lastly, the sixth hypothesis, which stated that women do not feel at home in their party and experience this as a hurdle for exercising their political ambition, is corroborated by my research. I conclude that there is a hostile political environment. Female council and commission members report being taken less seriously, feel that male colleagues have low expectations, and are questioned on their experience and knowledge: it is one of the hardest things about being a female councillor. This in line with what I expected based on the theory of space invaders by Puwar (2014) and the effects of male political power by Bekkers (2020). It adds to other research on women in politics where female politicians reported experiencing unwanted behaviour, sexism and belittling (I&O Research, Bureau BING, 2020; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016; Saris & van de Ven, 2021). Additionally, women who are young or of colour might experience a double penalty. The young women in my sample more often experienced discrimination based on age than on gender. This could be because age discrimination is less taboo than gender discrimination. Women might experience higher rates of age discrimination than men, enduring a double penalty (see Islam, 2016).

5.2 Benefits and limitations

The municipal political system in the Netherlands is quite differentialized. This study brings more insight into the role of women in municipal politics, specifically for young women and for those in small municipalities. It is a first step into changing the hostile political culture and shows that the support that women are receiving right now is appreciated but lacks once they are elected. This knowledge might be very useful for organizations like *Stem op een Vrouw*, but also for political parties, to relocate their focus when trying to improve gender balance in municipal elections. Secondly, there is little qualitative research on this topic, although Kranendonk (2020) gave some insight. This study is a good base for further research into women's hurdles when beginning in politics, but also for those with more political experience. It shows that political parties are often ineffective in recruiting female candidates while lacking an institutionalized array of policies to choose from and successfully campaign or implement gender quotas (*'Raad Zoekt Vrouw', Maar Vinden Vrouwen de Raad Wel?*, 2020).

This study has its limitations. Foremost, it is based on a non-random sample with possible self-select bias. This means that with a different sample, other results might be found.

Firstly, I did not speak to a lot of right-wing women. There is a correlation between the right and conservatism and between the left and progressivism. Larger municipalities are often more left-wing, especially ones with high student populations. These are mainly situated in the Randstad (in the western region). More religious municipalities are more often conservative and more likely to be right-wing. This is clearly visible on this map that shows the major political trends per municipality (Voorn, 2021). This means that the results on for example diversity in the party (which was high according to the respondents) and electoral gatekeeping (women were placed high on lists) might have been skewed and mainly representative for mid- and left-wing women. Although, this does speak for who is interested in this topic and who is not. Diversity is usually a progressive item, so conservative women might be less interested in this subject and be less likely to follow *Stem op een Vrouw's* social media outlets. If the situation as the left-wing women describe is true, it is likely worse in right-wing parties. This calls for more action from the decisionmakers in parties to put diversity on the agenda. Secondly, nearly all respondents are still active in politics. Accordingly, the elected women in my sample have overcome the hurdles of becoming politically active but might not have encountered hurdles in fulfilling their entire term. Another limitation of this study is that, since there is a rather small body of research on the Dutch political system, especially the municipal system, the theory is quite broad and based in countries with wildly differing political systems. Therefore, some of the theoretical mechanisms that I expected to find, might have been impossible in the Dutch context, such as lack of support and the negative influence of electoral gatekeepers on the share of women in councils.

5.3 Future research

Based on the limitations in my research, I suggest the following recommendations for future research about women's ambitions and the hurdles that female politicians experience in the Dutch municipal context. The main shortcoming of my research was my non-diverse sample. Future research, with more time and resources, might include more right-wing women and women who have quit municipal politics before the end of their term and complement these findings with survey data on women's experiences. This could bring insight into which hurdles during the term were too strong for women to overcome, something that is not quite visible in my research. Further, I only included women in this research, thus I could not compare their experiences to men's experiences, and I missed men's view on the current hostile political culture. This might also be explored in future research.

Further, this study is based on women's experiences as opposed to those of men. However, there is an increase in the share of non-binary councillors. Non-binary councillors exist, but there is no data in this seeing as registration is based on the passport-registered gender and only a handful of people in the Netherlands have an X in their passport (Roele, 2021). Based on anecdotal evidence from councillors, there are more non-binary councillors than is currently reflected in data and it is likely that they experience gender discrimination on a different level than women do. Future research might investigate the gender discrimination of non-binary politicians.

5.4 Policy recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, I propose that policy focusses on improving four spheres: registration, support, education and political culture.

Registration

The application period is different for every party, this is not regulated. This means that by the time a woman gets wind of the upcoming elections, the registration periods for some parties might have already closed. There is very little candidate recruiting outside of party members, even though membership rates are dwindling every year. This coincides with the fact that a lot of political parties require a year-long membership as requirement for candidacy (Boogers & Voerman, 2018). This is outdated and an unnecessary barrier – length of membership is not the only way to show loyalty. Thus, it makes sense that not many people sign up. A solution to this problem could be two-fold. First, municipal clerks could centralize all sign-in periods to one period and launch a publicity campaign. Local media could be an effective actor in such recruitment campaigns. In these campaigns it is important to spread knowledge of how small the step is to register and how council meetings transpire. Council meetings are public, and citizens are always welcome to observe. This is often a good indication of how things are going in the municipal political arena. Second, candidate recruiters can look outside of their membership base. Membership numbers are dwindling every year (Ibid.) and might no longer be the right place to look for new female candidates. Just like those who are looking for diverse talent for political parties. Active scouting for talent is therefore advised, especially based on knowledge and talent, which has been proven to improve gender diversity (Boogers & Voerman, 2018; Folke & Rickne, 2016). Eligibility of candidates should be based more on talent and not as much based on gatekeepers' opinions. Preece (2016) found that women are often less confident about their political talent due to low self-efficacy. She found that instilling confidence in individual's political knowledge and skills increased political interest. Thus, political parties might give new recruits a test on policy knowledge, much like Preece (2016) did, and reward the candidates with a well-deserved spot on the electoral list.

Support

There are quite many support structures in place, which women often appreciate and use. One good example is the course 'Politiek Actief' (*politically active*, Kranendonk, 2020) that many respondents named. This is hosted by some municipalities and often experienced as useful (Ibid.). For women to gain the confidence they need to join their municipal council; they mainly need knowledge of the existing support and resources in their municipality.

Continuing the point of actively scouting for members in the 'Registration' section, when people join political parties, they sometimes receive a call asking whether they want to actively help with campaigning, for example, want to be on a committee, or (especially in smaller municipalities) want to be on the electoral list: political party boards could make this mandatory. If a woman knows people in politics, the threshold for entering politics herself lowers. Give politicians a bonus or a ribbon or something similar for every recruit and set up a system that makes it easy to recruit someone and, for example, give every new member a buddy or a mentor right away, so they are included right away and have a place to get information.

Political role models have been proven to mediate the transition from politically interested to politically ambitious and to combat Constantini's socialization explanation.

When women see 'others like them', it leads to more political discussion among young women. This increases their involvement in politics and democracy. This involvement means that young women are more likely to enter politics as adults. In addition, role models also help to break down stereotypes about who should be in politics (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006). The role model effect has often been verified (Bonneau & Kanthak, 2017). An effective way to create close, personal, political role models is via a political mentoring network. There are a few of its kind, like the EWL European Political Mentoring Network, Stem op een Vrouw in The Netherlands and The Fabian Network in the UK. These networks aim to increase women's participation in politics by partnering aspirant women and experienced politicians, often paired with skills trainings. This way the aspirant women can learn what to expect when (applying for a seat) in office, build a network and ask questions to a trusted colleague (European Women's Lobby, 2013; Stem op een Vrouw, 2022b; Fabian Women, 2022). Such a network is likely to make politics more welcoming and reduce the idea that politics are 'a man's game' (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006).

Further, political parties could make it possible to request higher financial compensation for people with financial instability, so that they can make more space in their personal lives to become representatives of the people. Women are more likely to have less well-paid jobs and higher care responsibilities (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2018), which makes it more difficult for them to make room for low-paying political work.

Education

Another suggestion that could help tackle the idea for girls that politics 'is not for them', is to improve the Dutch education system to show the importance of politicians and make politics feel closer to home, less intimidating, with guest lectures from politicians. Several respondents mentioned that the social studies subject in secondary school has increased their societal interest. This course explains how politics work in the Netherlands and what important themes are, but still might make politics feel far away from the students. Municipal politicians could come by for guest lectures and encourage students to join political parties by showing the importance of diversity. Talk about gender mainstreaming and the responsibility that politicians have for representing the voice of the community.

Cultural change

While the previous policy recommendations are directly focused on helping women get elected into office are important for improving the gender balance in municipal politics, this last part is focused on the outside factors: the political party, men, women's social network. There are several policy ideas that have been brought forward to soften the hostile political arena. Affirmative action to increase the gender balance in politics is controversial but can be very effective, like instilling a gender quota. A legally binding gender quota like the one in Belgium could bypass the electoral gatekeepers' bias and encourage women to apply as a candidate because they might have higher chances to be elected (Vandeleene, 2014; Tripp & Kang, 2008). Women need to be in places of decision-making like boards, they need to be in councils to show other women that it can be done (role models) and hopefully decrease the hostile work environment, like by sanctioning unacceptable behaviour and encouraging constant conversation on boundaries. Evidence from India underscores the benefits of affirmative action in the form of gender quotas: Gulzar et al. (2020) found that it strengthened minorities' positions and improved pro-poor programs. Quotas are most effective when paired

with other gender balance-improving policies, which includes mobilising actors, like civil society actors (raising awareness, recruitment initiatives, training programs, fund-raising networks), political party actors (women's sections, soft targets, capacity building, campaign funding), etc. (Krook & Norris, 2014). Further, quotas will not solve women's feeling that they have to be better than their male counterparts, and although perhaps many are – they will not be as successful in the current political climate (Kage et al., 2018). Folke & Rickne (2016) suggest recruiting solely on policy knowledge instead of implementing a quorum, as parties that recruit solely based on knowledge have better gender balance on their electoral lists. Boogers & Voerman (2018) found this to be true for Dutch parties as well. However, gender quotas might decrease ethnic diversity, so it is important that such policies are well-implemented (Celis et al., 2014).

Vote for a woman is a Dutch organization that has been successful with getting more women elected, nationally as well as municipally. They are most famous for their voting strategy: "Do you want more women to be elected? Vote smart! Don't vote automatically for the first woman on the list: due to her high position, she will usually take a seat regardless of your vote. Look down, to the women who really need your vote to be elected." They do this by campaigning, offering training to spread awareness, knowledge and support (Stem op een vrouw, 2022b). Fox & Lawless (2010) found in the US that women's organizations make it 35 percent points more likely for a woman to be recruited for office by an electoral gatekeeper than a woman with no contact with a woman's organization.

Lastly, in order to remove all hurdles for women, including care responsibilities, online hate and an unsupportive network, traditional gender roles need to be removed in all layers of society. The presence of women in politics improves policy overall and might help with this, but the breaking down of traditional gender roles is needed for an equal gender balance in politics. We still have a long way to go for this.

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7. Appendices

7.1 Table 2

Table 2.... Would you say that you...?

Respondent	... want to change things in society	... make friends easily	... enjoy being the center of attention	... enjoy meeting new people	... have a close network	... are loyal to your party	... have a sense of indignation over the current state of affairs in your municipality	Score	Elected	Placed on the electoral list	Political ambition (right now)
1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	Yes	Yes	Yes
2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	5	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	5		Yes	Yes
5	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4	Yes	Yes	Yes
6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	Yes	Yes	Yes
7	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	4	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	4		Yes	Yes
9	-	-	0	-	1	-	-	-			Yes
10	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	6		Yes	
11	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	4		Yes	
12	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6		Yes	Yes
13	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	5			
14	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	5			Yes
15	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	4			
16	1	0	0	1	1	1	0	4			
17	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7			Yes
18	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	6		Yes	Yes
19	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	5		Yes	
20	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	5	Yes	Yes	Yes

7.2 Information letter

Betreft: Uitnodiging interview politieke ambitie van vrouwen

Dit is de bijlage van een mail met de vraag of u mee zou willen werken aan een interview over uw politieke carrière. Dit is voor mijn scriptie en in samenwerking met stichting Stem op een Vrouw.

Over het onderzoek en mij

Ik ben Nanda van der Poel, masterstudent bij Utrecht Universiteit, Sociology: Contemporary Social Problems en stagiaire bij Stem op een Vrouw. [Stem op een Vrouw](#) zet zich in om de politieke representatie en emancipatie van vrouwen te verbeteren. Dat doen we door meer vrouwen verkozen en politiek actief te krijgen, maar ook door trainingen en inspirerende evenementen te organiseren. We hopen met onze inzet elke verkiezing weer meer vrouwen verkozen te krijgen. Nu is bijvoorbeeld maar 31% van de gemeenteraadsleden vrouw. Ik schrijf mijn scriptie over dit laatste: hoe kan het dat er zoveel minder vrouwen dan mannen in de gemeenteraad zitten? Hierbij focus ik vooral op de politieke interesse van vrouwen en hun keuze om wel of niet politica te worden. Ik interview zowel vrouwen die op de kieslijsten zijn gekomen als vrouwen die wel lid zijn, maar ervoor hebben gekozen om zich niet kandidaat te stellen en ik zal deze twee groepen met elkaar vergelijken. Ik werk in principe alleen aan deze scriptie, maar word begeleid door assistent professor drs. Deni Mazrekaj (e-mailadres voor vragen: d.mazrekaj@uu.nl) en Devika Partiman (oprichter Stem op een Vrouw).

Vraag aan u

Ik zou u heel graag willen interviewen voor mijn onderzoek. Dit interview zal zo'n 30 minuten duren en kan tot één uur uitlopen. In het interview worden een aantal open vragen gesteld over uw politieke carrière en achtergrond. Onder een "open vraag" versta ik een vraag op die je niet alleen met "ja of nee" kan antwoorden. Deze vragen stel ik om u de mogelijkheid te geven zelf aan te geven wat u als politica ervaart in het dagelijks leven. In dit interview duiken we daarnaast dieper in uw keuze om raadslid te worden.

Het interview draait om drie onderwerpen:

1. Uw keuze om zich aan te melden voor uw politieke partij;
2. Uw keuze om te solliciteren voor de kieslijsten, en
3. Uw eigen ervaringen als vrouw in de politiek.

De interviews zijn één-op-één en worden alleen door mij afgenomen. De deelname aan een interview is volledig vrijwillig. Ik zal rekening houden met uw werktijden en u zo veel mogelijk tegemoetkomen. Ik neem het interview het liefst live af, maar sta ook volledig open om het via videobellen te doen als u dat liever heeft. De locatie en de vorm kunnen we later bespreken! Het is ook mogelijk om vooraf een kennismakingstelefoontje te organiseren als u dat graag wilt.

Verwerking van uw gegevens

Bij het interview zal ik u vragen of ik het gesprek op mag nemen met een audiorecorder. Ik ga na het interview namelijk gelijk het gesprek transcriberen. Hiervoor ga ik u toestemming vragen. Ik zal de interviews achteraf zoveel mogelijk anonimiseren (bijv. geen gebruik van namen) en verwerken volgens AVG-wetgeving. Uw gegevens mogen alleen voor mijn onderzoek verzameld worden als u hier toestemming voor geeft. De interview-opnames die ik verzamel, worden gelijk verwijderd nadat het transcriberen van de interviews is afgerond. Identificerende gegevens (zoals e-mails) worden verwijderd zodra ze niet meer nodig zijn. De geanonimiseerde data worden in principe 10 jaar bewaard op de beveiligde server van de Universiteit Utrecht. Als u toch besluit niet mee te doen met het interview, hoeft u verder niets te doen. U hoeft niets te tekenen. U hoeft ook niet te zeggen waarom u niet wilt meedoen. Als u wel meedoet, kunt u zich altijd bedenken en op ieder gewenst moment stoppen — ook tijdens het onderzoek. En ook nadat u heeft meegedaan kunt u uw toestemming nog intrekken. Als u daarvoor kiest, hoeft de verwerking van uw gegevens tot dat moment overigens niet te worden teruggedraaid. De tot dan toe verzamelde gegevens

worden wel gebruikt voor het onderzoek, tenzij u expliciet aangeeft dit niet te willen. De onderzoeksgegevens die wij op dat moment nog van u hebben, zullen worden gewist. Als er iets is dat u liever niet vertelt tijdens het interview, laat het me dan gerust (van tevoren of tijdens) weten en we zullen het onderwerp/de vraag hierover overslaan. U krijgt het interview transcript toegestuurd zodat u het kunt nalezen, mocht u dat willen. Als u dan na het interview nog vragen, aanvullingen of wijzigingen heeft, hoeft u niet te aarzelen om contact op te nemen. Heeft u een klacht of een vraag over de verwerking van persoonsgegevens, dan kunt u terecht bij de functionaris voor gegevensbescherming van de Universiteit Utrecht (privacy@uu.nl). Deze kan u ook helpen bij het uitoefenen van de rechten die u onder de AVG heeft.

Bel of mail gerust met vragen.
Ik hoor graag van u!

Vriendelijke groet,
Nanda van der Poel

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