The descriptive underrepresentation of women: an experimental research design focusing on the existence of political gender stereotypes in Flanders

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The starting point of many studies on gender and politics has been the observation that men are overrepresented in politics, whereas women constitute only a small minority of elected officials (Ballington, 2005; Sapiro, 1981; Shvedova, 2005). In this project outline, we take the underrepresentation of women in politics as our starting point. It is our aim to search for factors that prevent women from being elected. Our attention will be directed to the role of voters.

More specifically, it is our aim is to highlight the role of political gender stereotypes held by voters. The existence of political gender stereotypes has been extensively documented in the United States, a country using a majoritarian electoral system (Dolan, 2010; Fox & Smith, 1998; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Koch, 2000). Since the idea of voters' gender stereotypes has very rarely been analyzed outside the US, it would be interesting to run such a study in continental Europe. Therefore, we will switch the institutional context by studying whether political gender stereotypes also prevail in Belgium/Flanders, which differs in a number of aspects (including the electoral system) from the US.

This paper is structured as follows: in the first part, we will broaden our understanding of the concept of political representation. In the second part, we will elaborate on different factors that prevent women from being elected. We suggest that women's representation can be explained by the four-stages model of political recruitment and that supply and demand factors can be considered as an intervening process in this model.

In the third part, we will focus on one specific aspect of voter bias, i.e. political gender stereotypes. We will start with a broad conceptualization of general characteristic gender stereotypes and then proceed to the existence of these stereotypes in the political sphere. More in particular, we will discuss the different ways in which these general characteristic stereotypes can be translated into political gender stereotypes. We will also dig deeper into some contextual variables that (have the potential to) determine the extent to which political gender stereotypes are prevalent. We summarize all this in our definition of the problem, in order to come to a number of specific research questions and related hypotheses. In the last section, we discuss our methodological design.

1. Women's political (under)representation

1.1. Conceptualization

Pitkin (1967) established the standard account of political representation: this involves authorization, accountability and the looking out for another's interest. Following Pitkin (1967), we can distinguish four distinct, but interconnected meanings or dimensions of representation, including formal, descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation.

Formal representation refers to the institutional rules and procedures through which representatives are chosen (Pitkin, 1967). *Descriptive representation*, or representativeness, refers to the extent to which representatives stand for the represented (Norris & Franklin, 1997). According to this idea, an elected body should resemble a representative sample of society. *Substantive representation* is defined as *"acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them"* (Pitkin, 1967, p. 209). This is also called policy responsiveness: the extent to which representatives enact laws and implement policies that are responsive to the needs or demands of citizens (Eulau & Karps, 1977). *Symbolic representation* is not concerned with who the representatives are or what they do, but how they are perceived and evaluated by those they represent (Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005). This refers to the sense of being represented and is related to public views regarding, for example, women in politics.

These different dimensions cannot be separated from each other: to be representative, an institution must achieve some minimum on all dimensions of representation, Pitkin (1967) argues. There is a fierce scientific debate about the link between descriptive and substantive representation. Following Phillips (1995), political representation can be understood in terms of a politics of ideas, i.e. a belief that policy positions are important and thus that the personal traits of the representatives are irrelevant, or a politics of presence, i.e. an assertion that the personal features of representatives are crucial, as they may influence the substance of public policies. The politics of ideas is challenged because it recognizes that certain social groups are excluded from politics because of their social identity, referring to the importance of the descriptive representation of all members of society (Meier, 2000).

The social background of members of political institutions (i.e. descriptive representation) determines their life experiences, which in turn determine their insights on certain policy problems and their linked policy priorities. This suggests that descriptive representation has the potential to make a substantive policy impact (Norris & Franklin, 1997). Since women are considered as having a distinct position and a shared set of problems that characterize a special interest (Sapiro, 1981), their presence in the political arena is of great importance. According to Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005), female legislators have more impact as their numbers in the legislature grow.

Notwithstanding some currents in literature suggest that the substantive dimension is the more important, we argue that descriptive representation emerges from our analysis as the keystone to the representation of women. It can be considered as the glue that binds the several dimensions together. So far, we have outlined the importance of women's political representation. In the next part we will elaborate on the different factors that prevent women from being elected.

2. Supply & demand and the political recruitment model

Candidate selection is often explained by the four-stages model of political recruitment. This model can be understood as a sequential model, progressing from the large number of citizens who are eligible to run for political office (1) to the smaller pool of citizens who aspire to run for political office (2) to the small group of citizens who are nominated to run for political office (3) to the smallest band of citizens who are elected to political office (4) (Norris & Lovenduski, 1993). In our design, we will focus on the final stage of the process, where candidates face voters.

As Matland (2005) argues, women need to pass three crucial barriers: first, they need to select themselves; second, they need to be selected as candidates by the parties; and, third, they need to be selected by the voters. In what follows, we will focus on these three crucial barriers. The first step (i.e. the formal requirements to be eligible) will not be discussed.

When no discrimination is at work, the characteristics of the individuals present at each of these stages should be roughly the same. However, women often miss out in greater rates in the transition from each stage to the next. We consider Randall's (1987) supply and demand model as the dominant theory for explaining the number of elected women. This model states that the number of elected women is the combined result of the qualifications of women as group to run for political office (supply) and the desire or willingness of elites to select female aspirants (demand) (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Supply and demand factors act on the three crucial barriers of the recruitment model and can therefore be considered as an intervening process in this model. In the next part, we will give an overview of the factors that shape the supply- and demand-side.

2.1. Supply

The supply of aspirants is shaped by two key factors: *resources*, like time, money and experience, and *motivation*, such as drive, ambition and interest in politics (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Lawless and Fox (2005) argue that women are less politically ambitious than men caused by long standing patterns of traditional socialization that associate men with the public sphere and women with the private. Gender role socialization refers to a process whereby culture defines the appropriate ways of thinking, feeling and behaving for men and women (Eagly, 1987a; Eagly & Wood, 1991; Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 1998).

This can be linked with women's participation in the labor force. Entry into the work force not only has an impact on social roles (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), but also on attitudes. Women, entering the labor market, also become part of networks and organizations, such as unions, where they are more likely to be exposed to political discussion, which in turn encourages their interest and involvement in politics (Norris & Lovenduski, 1993). Over time, this can blur the traditional differentiated sex roles.

In sum, the supply of female candidates is shaped strongly by ideologies of gender. Once applicants come forward, their selection as candidates depends on evaluations of their qualifications by the preferences and opinions of political elites. Given that parties play a large role in candidate selection processes, the success of those women who do run can rather be explained by contextual factors which lead them to calculate whether or not to risk candidacy. This brings us to the demand-side explanations.

2.2. Demand

Candidate selection is viewed as an essential function of political parties (Gallagher & Marsh, 1987; Rahat & Hazan, 2001). Therefore, in order to run for political office, one must be selected and supported by a political party (Kunovich & Paxton, 2005). Parties are systematically discriminating against women by different practices. First, parties are denying women candidacies in winnable parliamentary seats (Kunovich, 2003). Second, party elites are nominating women in less attractive districts, and third, they are granting smaller campaign budgets to women and put them less forward in the media (Wauters, Maddens, & Put, 2010).

There are different factors which may affect demand for women candidates. The first one is who selects and the number of people involved. Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008) demonstrate that those parties with the most inclusive candidate selection procedures are disadvantageous towards socials groups usually underrepresented in politics, including women (Wauters & Pilet, 2015). Research by Pruysers, Cross, Gauja and Rahat (2015) suggests that, when party members have full authority to select candidates, significantly fewer women are nominated.

Since the party leadership is more likely to be well-educated and relatively liberal in their attitudes towards gender equality, more centralized recruitment is beneficial to women, Randall (1987) argues. Kittilson (2006) and Kunovich and Paxton (2005) found that women's presence among the party leadership is the single most important mechanism for initiating women's gains in parliament. This can be linked to Niven's (1998) description of an outgroup effect where party elites prefer candidates like themselves. As this elite group has been disproportionally made up of men, they express a consistent preference for traits associated with themselves. Party leaders make assumptions of positive similarity with in-group members (i.e. men) and not with the outgroup (i.e. women) (Niven, 1998).

Second, the selection of candidates depends on evaluations of their abilities, qualifications and experience. These assessments are strongly shaped by the preferences and opinions of political elites (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Party selectors hold sex-role stereotypes which reinforce images of women in traditional roles, and thereby undermine the qualities and experience which women bring to public life (Rasmussen, 1983). We conclude that the demand for candidates is thus highly gendered as well (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Shvedova, 2005).

We believe that, depending on the stage of the recruitment process, some critical actors take a different role. In the first phases, the supply consists of women who are eligible to run for political office and political parties shape the demand-side. In later phases, particularly in the fourth, political parties shape the supply-side by offering lists with female candidates included and the demand-side is shaped by voters who may (or may not) be willing to vote for these female candidates. We will come back to the critical role of voters in this four-stages model later on.

2.3. Intervening factors

There are substantial cross-national variations in the numbers of women in politics. Therefore, the tendency to speak in general terms about whether supply-side or demand-side factors are more important overlooks crucial variations across countries and across political parties. The supply and demand for female aspirants can be mediated by features of the broader political context. In the next part, we will elaborate on three contextual factors that have an intervening role effect: electoral institutions, political parties and voters.

2.3.1. Electoral institutions

Krook and Schwindt-Bayer define electoral institutions as "*the formal and informal rules governing the electoral process*" (2013, p. 554). In what follows, we will briefly discuss the three main electoral institutions, i.e. electoral formulas, ballot structures and district magnitude, that affect levels of women's representation.

Electoral formulas refer to whether an electoral system allocates seats in proportion to votes that are received (proportional representation; PR) or based on candidates or parties winning at least a plurality of votes (majoritarian or plurality systems). Empirically, numerous studies have shown that countries with PR systems have significantly more women in office, all else equal (Caul, 1999; Matland, 1998; Norris, 1985, 2004; Rule, 1987). The role of the electoral system should, however, not be exaggerated. The explanations for why PR should lead to more women in office often relies on intervening variables, such as the choice between the open-list and closed-list forms of PR (i.e. the ballot structure) (Matland, 2005).

Ballot structure refers to whether party ballots are closed to preference voting or whether rules permit open or flexible ballots whereby voters can indicate the particular candidates they prefer (Krook & Schwindt-Bayer, 2013). We can distinguish among three basic types of ballot structure in list PR systems: closed, open and flexible. Since the mid-1990s the view that closed lists are more advantageous for the election of women has become the most common perspective (Caul, 1999; Matland, 2005; Norris, 1996; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003; Schmidt, 2009; Thames & Williams, 2010; Valdini, 2012). This tendency to view closed lists as more women-friendly coincides with the increasing use of electoral gender quota and placement mandates (Schmidt, 2009)., i.e. requirements that female candidates should be distributed throughout the list, especially in electable positions, rather than clustered at the bottom (Schmidt, 2009, pp. 193-194). Placement mandates make little sense in open lists in which seats are primarily allocated by preferential votes. In closed formats, electoral quota can be less easily overruled and guarantee that a certain minimum percentage of women will be elected (Schmidt, 2009).

Another intervening variable that nuances the importance of the electoral formula, is the size of the **district magnitude**, i.e. the number of seats elected in a district (Rule, 1981). This can be measured by dividing the number of seats by the number of constituencies. Higher district magnitudes are beneficial for women's representation for at least two reasons. First, when the number of representatives in constituencies increases, the percentage of the vote needed for election diminishes (Rule, 1987). And second, also election strategies change (Darcy, Welch, & Clark, 1994; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Matland, 1993; Salmond, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005): contests in single-member districts are by definition zero-sum games, whereas multimember districts create incentives for parties to balance their tickets (Krook & Schwindt-Bayer, 2013).

2.3.2. Political parties

Another factor that can affect women's share of legislative seats is the partisan composition of the legislature. Leftist political parties elect a significantly higher percentage of female legislators than other political parties (Caul, 1999; Kittilson, 2006; Krook, 2010; Matland, 1993; Matland & Studlar, 1996; Norris & Franklin, 1997; Vallance & Davis, 1986; Vandeleene, 2014). We think of three possible explanations. First, a broad explanation put forward by Caul (1999) is that leftist parties express a greater commitment to disadvantaged groups in society, including women, are more supportive of women's issues (Thames & Williams, 2010) and therefore also tend to be more likely to nominate women as candidates (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999).

A second explanation is that parties with women in their highest ranks, will be more likely to have a high commitment towards women (Bashevkin, 2010; O'Neill & Stewart, 2009). Female party leaders are thought to be a support for female politicians in the candidate selection process (Kunovich &

Paxton, 2005; Wauters & Pilet, 2015). A third possible explanation is that the electorate of these leftist parties is more sensitive to gender equality. This leads us to the third intervening variable, i.e. voters.

2.3.3. Voters

The critical role of voters in the four-stages model of political recruitment can be considered from different angles. On the one hand, voters can have a direct influence through their vote choice in the fourth phase (elections). On the other hand, voters can also be considered as an intermediate factor throughout earlier stages: the party elite, when drawing up the lists, keeps in mind which candidates are preferred by voters. In this respect, voters have an indirect influence in the earlier phases of the model.

Some studies suggest that voters vote primarily for the party label rather than for the individual candidates. In recent years, however, we can see a tendency towards political personalization, i.e. "*a dynamic process* (Brettschneider & Gabriel, 2002; Kaase, 1994) *that is expressed as an increase in the weight of the individual political actor and a decline in the weight of the group (political party) in politics overtime*" (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007, p. 3). There is, however, no clear trend: some research confirms that politics in advanced industrial democracies has become increasingly personalized over the past decades (Adam & Maier, 2010; McAllister, 2007), others point to the fact political personalities do have a discernible effect on voter choice, but that this effect is reduced by other (usual) suspects, such as party identity and socioeconomic factors (Karvonen, 2007).

Although some early work found that the public was reluctant to vote for female candidates, most studies find that, when controlling for other factors, such as seat, region, incumbency, campaign expenses and media coverage, voters not only vote for male and female candidates at equal rates (Norris, Vallance, & Lovenduski, 1992; Wauters, Weekers, & Maddens, 2010), but may also express a preference for women over men (Black & Erickson, 2003; Brians, 2005; Murray, 2008). Although there is evidence that voters are willing to vote for women, we still find that female candidates have to struggle to get elected.

We conclude that the above mentioned factors (electoral institutions, parties and voters) mediate the supply and demand for female candidates. However, we want to point to a contradiction in the literature. It is suggested that voters do not discriminate against female candidates, but, when it comes to the ballot structure, it is thought that closed systems, in which voters have less choice and in which quotas have a greater impact, are beneficial for women's representation. This conflicts with the idea that voters do not vote less for women and problematizes the voter bias.

In the next part, we will focus on voters, and more in particular on one specific aspect of the voter bias, i.e. (political) gender stereotypes. On the basis of gender, people ascribe particular general

characteristic traits to other individuals (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b). We suggest that these stereotyped characteristic traits have an influence on how voters perceive male and female political candidates. These general gender stereotypes could also manifest themselves in politics and can thus be translated in political gender stereotypes. These are important as they have (at least) the potential to determine voting behavior (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Brown, 1994; Dolan, 2014; Fox & Smith, 1998) and to shape people's desire for a greater or lesser role for women in elective office (Dolan, 2010).

In this research design, we will not focus on the connection between gender stereotypes and voting behavior; our aim is to identify whether voters translate general characteristic gender stereotypes into political gender stereotypes in Belgium/Flanders and how they influence voters' perception of male and female politicians. Notwithstanding that these political gender stereotypes are also present among party selectors (Rasmussen, 1983), we will consider them on the side of voters. We provide a theoretical introduction on these (political) gender stereotypes below.

3. (Political) gender stereotypes

In this part on (political) gender stereotypes, we start with a broad definition and conceptualization of gender stereotypes in the public and private sphere. We also elaborate on their origins and their contents. Next, we try to dig deeper into the existence of these gender stereotypes in the political sphere.

3.1. General characteristic gender stereotypes

3.1.1. Definition/conceptualization

Ashmore and Del Boca defined a sex stereotype as "*the structured set of inferential relations that link personal attributes to the social categories male and female*" (1979, p. 225). In short, these are a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people. Stereotyping has commonly been viewed as an automatic, involuntary cognitive process: individuals often place others into a category they believe is useful for assigning attributes (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Popkin, 1994; Rahn, 1993; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1993). These categories refer to so-called informational cues (McDermott, 1997) and heuristics (Lupia, 1994; Sniderman et al., 1993). Once individuals place a person into a category, they assign the attributes associated with that category to the person and contradictory category-based cues are less likely to be integrated into impression formation (Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1994). This process is often referred to as category-based impression formation and forms the core of stereotyping. An alternative strategy is the data-driven process of impression formation, i.e. making use of specific information about someone (Koch, 2002).

3.1.2. Origins

We assume that gender stereotypes are closely linked to traditional social roles and power inequalities between women and men (Eagly, 1987b). The assignment of child-rearing and other domestic work to women and the tendency for women and men to carry out different types of paid employment (Eagly & Wood, 1991) lead to different gender roles, which can be defined as the shared expectations about appropriate conduct that apply to individuals solely on the basis of their socially identified sex (Eagly & Wood, 1991).

Gender stereotypes thus reflect perceivers' observations of what people do in daily life and arise when women and men are observed typically to carry out different social roles. Cultural universality in social roles (Eagly, 1987b) has thus been considered as one of the main sources of universal sex role stereotypes. There is, however, some controversy over whether gender roles are purely cultural creations or whether they reflect natural and pan cultural differences between the sexes in abilities and predispositions (Costa Jr, Terracciano, & McCrae, 2001). Williams and Best (1982) found substantial similarities across countries for the psychological characteristics associated with male and female gender stereotypes. However, even if all cultures show the same pattern of gender differences, they may show variations in the magnitude of differences seen. We will come back to this later on.

Now that we have discussed the origins of the perceived gender differences, we will elaborate on the contents of these gender stereotypes in the next part. More in particular, we will focus on the personality attributes and character traits that are considered as being typical male/female.

3.1.3. Contents

There are remarkably uniform differences in the personality traits ascribed to men and women. Based on previous research, we believe that a typical women is stereotyped as warm, gentle, kind, passive, loyal, soft-spoken, tender, communal, concerned with the wellbeing and welfare of others, compassionate and moral (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Huddy & Capelos, 2002; Prentice & Carranza, 2002b). Whereas a typical man is viewed as tough, aggressive, assertive, ambitious, analytical, competitive, controlling, decisive, independent, individualistic, emotionally stable, rational and a stronger leader (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Huddy & Capelos, 2002; Prentice & Carranza, 2002a). Eagly (1987b) has summarized these findings in terms of two dimensions, the communal and the agentic. Women are believed to have more attributes of the **communal** dimension, which describes a concern with the welfare of other people, and men are believed to have more attributes of the **agentic** dimension, which describes an assertive and controlling tendency.

So far, we have focused on the origins and the contents of general characteristic gender stereotypes in different spheres of public and private life. In the next part, we will try to dig deeper into the existence of gender stereotypes in the political sphere.

3.2. Political gender stereotyping

In this part we will elaborate on political gender stereotypes. First, we will provide a definition and we will dig deeper into the two varieties of political gender stereotypes, those based on women's traits and those based on their beliefs. We will also discuss the major findings regarding the different issue competencies and ideological positions that are associated with female and male politicians. Second, we will discuss some contextual variables that influence the existence of political gender stereotypes: political context, type of electoral system and individual characteristics of voters. In the third part, we will assess the implications of these political gender stereotypes and how they impact on voting behavior.

3.2.1. Definition and conceptualization

Voters have various cues (categories) at their disposal, including demographic ones. Candidate gender can usually be determined by the candidate's first name. Therefore, even when a voter knows nothing about a candidate, candidate gender can be a source of information about a candidate's views and capabilities. Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b, p. 120) define political gender stereotyping as "*the gender based ascription of different traits, behavior or political beliefs to male and female politicians*". Voters have different expectations about the issues handled well by male and female politicians, about their character traits and their ideological positions (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Matland, 1994; Sapiro, 1981).

In our research design, we are particularly interested whether voters translate general characteristic gender stereotypes to political gender stereotypes and how they influence voters' perceptions of male and female candidates. Following Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b), we argue that there are two varieties of political gender stereotypes, those based on women's traits and those based on their beliefs.

According to the **trait** approach, voters' assumptions about a candidate's gender-linked personality traits drive expectations that women and men have different areas of issue expertise. Male and female candidates are seen as competent in different policy domains, because they are stereotyped as possessing typically masculine and typically feminine traits (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b). As Lawless (2004) argues, voters attribute different levels of expertise to men and women candidates and elected officials, depending on the issue domains at hand. Female candidates are for example seen as better at dealing with the aged because women are stereotyped as more compassionate than men, while

male candidates are expected to handle a military crisis more competently because men are typically seen as tougher and more aggressive than women.

Gender stereotypes of politicians also include a political component. The **belief** approach stresses this more political aspect: male and female politicians are stereotyped as holding different political views. This refers to expectations that women are more liberal (in European terms: more leftist) and democratic than men (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b). The belief approach predicts thus that the political translation of stereotyped characteristic traits leads to different assessments of the ideological position of candidates.

In sum, what we mean by political gender stereotypes is a different evaluation of the perceived issue competencies and ideological positions of male and female politicians. In the next part, we will elaborate further on the results of previous (US-based) studies on political gender stereotypes. We will focus on the different issue competencies and ideological positions that are associated with female and male candidates. These findings generally stem from US-based studies on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes.

Different issue competencies and ideological positions
According to the trait approach, male and female candidates are viewed as having different **issue competencies**. Because men are seen as competitive and assertive and women as communal and social, research has shown that people expect male politicians to be better at competitive issues in which the primary aim is to defeat the competition, while female politicians are expected to be better in communal issues, in which the primary aim is to help people (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Brown, 1994; Kahn, 1996; Matland, 1994). Some issues, such as crime, defense, economic development, military, trade, agriculture and foreign policy issues are therefore typically perceived to be handled better by men. It is thought that women are more able to deal with social and feminist issues, such as child care, poverty, education, health care and the environment (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Kahn, 1992; Koch, 1999; Leeper, 1991; Rosenwasser, Rogers, Fling, Silvers-Pickens, & Butemeyer, 1987; Sapiro, 1981; Shapiro & Mahajan, 1986; Witt, Matthews, & Paget, 1995).

The issues and traits associated with women are linked to the traditional domain of the family, whereas the policy expertise and characteristics linked to men tend to be visible in the public sphere (Lawless, 2004). Matland (1994) suggested that this gender bias might not necessarily harm the chances of female candidates, as it merely reflects that women are perceived to have different areas of expertise, not that these areas are less important. This can be linked to the concept of issue salience, on which we will elaborate later on.

The belief approach, on the other hand, predicts that male and female politicians are stereotyped as holding different **ideological positions**. Research demonstrates that the sexes differ in their social and political attitudes (Diekman, Eagly, & Kulesa, 2002). Koch (1999) and Huddy and Terkildsen (1993b) argue that women candidates are generally perceived as more liberal than men candidates of the same party. There is good reason to perceive female candidates as liberal (in European terms: leftist), because they are also seen as more competent to handle domestic and social welfare issues, but less adept at dealing with economic and defense issues (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b). Moreover, especially in majority systems, women are more common found among left-wing parties: in these systems the Democratic and liberal parties count significantly more women candidates and parliamentarians. This creates a link between women and party in a voter's mind.

However, as mentioned before, gender differences and stereotypes are not equally present in all cultures. The influence of political gender stereotypes must be considered alongside more central political and contextual variables to gain a fuller understanding of the way people evaluate and choose women candidates (Dolan, 2014). In the next part, we will dig deeper into some contextual variables that determine the extent to which political gender stereotypes are prevalent.

3.2.2. Factors influencing the existence of political gender stereotypes

We suggest that the following contextual variables have an influence on the extent to which political gender stereotypes are prevalent: political context, type of electoral system and individual characteristics of voters.

Political context and culture

The political context consists, on the one hand, of the dominant norms and values in any country (i.e. political culture) and, on the other hand, of the positions occupied by women in society. Political culture can be defined in two ways, Pye (1972) argues. In this research design, we focus on the 'system level' approach (Pye, 1972), which refers to the collective orientation of people toward the basic elements in their political system. Cultural values and attitudes towards women differ among societies (Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2002): some societies are more tolerant and supportive towards the public participation of women, while other societies are more conservative and restrictive (Wauters & Pilet, 2015).

Much depends also on the positions occupied by women in society, which can be linked to the process of sex-role socialization. Shvedova (2005) points to the existence of an ideology of a woman's place, according to which women should only play the role of working mother, which is generally low-paid and apolitical. Men largely dominate the political arena: they formulate the rules of the political game and political life is organized according to male norms and values. A traditional strong, patriarchal value

system favors thus sexually segregated roles, and traditional cultural values militate against the advancement and participation of women in any political process. (Shvedova, 2005).

Seeing women actively carrying out important and essential political roles should have a positive effect on perceptions of women's political competence (Matland, 1994). The actual roles that women have occupied in politics do play an important role in this respect: there can be remarkable differences in how voters perceive female candidates between countries with a long history of women in key political positions and those where this is not the case.

Type of electoral system

A second major contextual variable is the type of electoral system. As we already mentioned before, we can distinguish between proportional and majoritarian electoral systems. It has been demonstrated that gender stereotyping exists in the American political arena, which is an example of a presidential, majoritarian system, both in terms of general traits and issue competencies that citizens accord to men and women candidates (Lawless, 2004). Also when it comes to ideological positions, we know that especially in majoritarian systems, women are perceived as belonging to the most leftist major party and as being more leftist in general (Koch, 2000). This could be explained by the fact that this kind of parties count more women candidates and parliamentarians, which create a link between women and party in a voter's mind. In Belgium/Flanders, however, women are more equally spread over the different parties (King & Matland, 2003), making the link between leftist parties and women less obvious. Furthermore, the list position, a typical feature of our open/flexible list PR system, offers an implicit cue about the quality of candidates to voters, which is absent in America's majoritarian system. According to a candidate's position on the list, voters have an additional idea about the quality that the party accords to this particular candidate (Millard, Popescu, & Toka, 2011).

Moreover, Belgium can also be considered as a more party-centered system, with fewer incentive for candidates to seek personal votes. It is found that party-centered systems elect more female legislators and are more open to female political participation (Thames & Williams, 2010). Aalberg and Jenssen (2007) point, however, to the fact that personal characteristics of candidates are becoming more and more important for the vote, even in countries with a party-oriented electoral system, such as Belgium. Voters are less loyal to parties and are more open to short-term factors such as popular candidates.

Individual characteristics of voters

The significance of candidate's sex to voter choice also varies within the population. Some groups may be more likely to use candidate's sex as a significant voting cue than others. The use of sex stereotypes varies for example with the **gender of the voter** (Falk & Kenski, 2006; Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). It seems likely that many voters will have a preference for politicians of their own gender and take an interest in their issues (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). This assumption refers to the gender solidary hypothesis (Aalberg

& Jenssen, 2007). It is argued that women are more likely to vote for a woman candidate (Dolan, 1998). Men, on the other hand, significantly favor male candidates (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) and place less importance on typical female strengths when assessing candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a). However, we want to nuance this by pointing out that even women are more inclined to vote for men (Marien, Wauters, & Schouteden, forthcoming). This could indicate that women are likely to prefer male candidates and to hold political gender stereotypes as well.

Besides voter gender, there are a number of other characteristics that are important as well. **Education** is also a significant predictor of gender preference: the higher educated a person is, the more likely he or she is to say that gender does not make a difference in handling important issues (Falk & Kenski, 2006) and the less likely it will be that he/she relies on certain cues in order to make a vote choice. Higher educated voters are also more likely of being aware of what is happening in the political world. The less knowledgeable respondents are about the candidates, the more likely it is that traditional stereotypes come into play (Koch, 2002).

The use of gender as voting cue and the application of sex role stereotypes also depends much upon the level of **political interest** (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007). The exposure hypothesis put forward by Jennings (2006) is relevant in this case. This hypothesis posits that differences in the role conceptions about women in politics could be explained by differences in exposure to practices of gender equality and to discussions about political underrepresentation of women. This is especially relevant for women politicians, who in general receive less media attention than their male counterparts (Kahn, 1994; Wauters, Weekers, et al., 2010). In sum, politically interested voters, who have been intensively exposed to prominent female politicians, are more likely to be open to women in the political sphere.

3.2.3. Implications

We suggest that there is a fourth intervening variable that should be taken into account: **issue salience**. In contrast to the previously discussed contextual variables, issue salience has no influence on whether or not political gender stereotypes are prevalent. This variable can rather be situated on the effect-side of political gender stereotypes and has an impact on the overall evaluation that voters make of female and male politicians, which in its turn has an influence on their voting behavior.

The degree to which people favor a male versus a female politician is at least partially determined by what people think is the most important problem facing the country (Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2009). Falk and Kenski (2006) found that citing, for example, homeland security as the most important problem facing the US, is significantly associated with being more likely to say that a male president would do a better job handling this issue.

Kahn (1996) concludes that, when the salient issues and traits of the campaign complement a woman candidate's stereotypical strength, women will receive an advantage from stereotypes. In contrast, when the important campaign themes correspond to a woman's perceived weaknesses, people's stereotypes will hinder her bid for office. A crucial question for research is therefore whether the issues that are emphasized by women are considered just as important by voters, the media and political parties as those where men are seen as having superior expertise.

3.3.　　Definition of the problem

We have found that people ascribe to women and men certain stereotyped general character traits, which are closely linked to their traditional social roles (Eagly, 1987b). Women are perceived as being communal, whereas men are seen as agentic (Eagly, 1987a; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991). Studies have demonstrated that voters do evaluate candidates' performance differently on the basis of candidate's gender (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Koch, 1999, 2000, 2002; McDermott, 1997). In this research design, we are particularly interested in the link between these stereotyped characteristic traits and perceptions voters have of male and female candidates. In other words, we will dig deeper into the translation of these characteristic traits into political gender stereotypes, by which we mean the different evaluation of the perceived issue competencies and ideological positions of male and female politicians.

The existence of political gender stereotypes has been extensively documented in the United States (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Dolan, 2010, 2014; Fox & Smith, 1998; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b; Koch, 2000; Rosenwasser et al., 1987; Sapiro, 1981). The results of Sapiro's (1981) study suggest that gender provides a cue for evaluation of candidates for office, especially under conditions of low information: women are seen as better able to deal with improving the educational system, maintaining honesty and integrity in government and dealing with health problems (Sapiro, 1981).

The purpose of Rosenwasser et al.'s (1987) study was to examine attitudes towards a hypothetical male or female presidential candidate. Female candidates were more likely to be perceived as competent in three areas: improving our educational system, maintaining honesty and integrity in government and dealing with health problems, while men were more likely to be rated as competent in dealing with military issues and making decisions on farm issues. The participants believed that the female, compared to the male candidate, would be less likely to win the election (Rosenwasser et al., 1987). Alexander and Andersen (1993) also found that voters believe that male and female candidates possess distinct skills and capabilities. Female candidates would do a better job with day care, education, helping the poor and needy, AIDS, health care, environment and civil rights. The male candidate, on the other hand, would do a better job with military spending, foreign trade, agriculture and taxes (Alexander & Andersen, 1993).

The results of Huddy and Terkildsen's (1993b) study indicated that candidates described as masculine were seen as more competent to handle military issues and less competent on compassion issues. Typical female traits such as warmth, sensitivity, and compassion were thought to qualify female candidates for dealing better with compassion issues, such as education, health care and the problems of the poor and aged. Assertiveness, aggressiveness and self-confidence, typical male traits, were thought to aid male candidates in coping better with military or police crises. Huddy and Terkildsen also found considerable evidence for the existence of gender-belief stereotypes, which portray a female politician as more liberal, Democratic and feminist than a male politician (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b).

More recently, the results from Lawless' (2004) study reveal that gender stereotyping in the American political arena continues to exist. Citizens prefer masculine traits and characteristics in their leaders and believe that men are more likely than women to possess these qualities (Lawless, 2004). Dolan's (2010, 2014) results also confirm the presence of gender stereotyped thinking with regard to women and men in politics. A majority of respondents sees women as better able to handle education and health care and men as more competent at handling terrorism. The results demonstrate that stereotyped thinking on both female and male policy issues is central to people's evaluations of women candidates (Dolan, 2010, 2014).

Few experimental studies evaluating women candidates have been conducted outside the United States. Matland (1994) found that in Norway, despite its reputation for a progressive political culture, there was a substantial projection of gender stereotypes onto candidates with differences in perceived policy competencies. Herrick and Sapieva (1998) found male candidates to be perceived as more competent on a large number of policy areas in Kazakhstan. Recently, Taylor and colleagues (Taylor, Yarkoney-Sorek, & Geva, 2016) found no evidence of the male domineering stereotyping effect in the Costa Rican context, but rather an opposite trend. Results indicate that candidate gender affects the perception of candidate abilities, but it favors women candidates. In Israel, on the other hand, the researchers (Taylor et al., 2016) obtained a significant gender stereotyping effect: female candidates are evaluated lower than male candidates.

Since gender differences and gender roles can differ between countries and cultures, we cannot simply transfer these, mostly US-based, findings to other countries and cultures. The idea of voters' gender stereotypes has very rarely been analyzed outside the US. Therefore, it would be interesting to run a study on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes in continental Europe. We will run this study in Belgium/Flanders, which is an interesting case for several reasons and differs from the US-context on several important aspects.

First, the number of female representatives is higher in Belgium/Flanders compared to the United States. 40% of the members of the Belgian's House of Representatives are female (Rosadoc, 2015). This stands in sharp contrast with the about 20% in the American House of Representatives. This can be linked with the differences in electoral formulas. Numerous studies have shown that countries with PR systems, such as Belgium, have significantly more women in office than majoritarian systems, all else equal (Caul, 1999; Matland, 1998, 2005; Norris, 1985, 2004; Rule, 1987; Sanbonmatsu, 2006). This is even reinforced by the existence of electoral gender quota, which are absent in the American system.

This leads to a second argument: since Belgian voters are more acquainted with women politicians in (high) political positions, they are more open to women taking up their place in politics. Previous research demonstrates that Belgian voters tend to agree strongly with the statement that political responsibilities should be equally shared between men and women (Wauters & Devroe, 2015). The traditional differentiation in gender roles, which forms the base of gender stereotypes, is thus less present in Belgium. Third, as demonstrated in the tables below, women are more equally spread over different parties in Belgium, making the link between leftist parties and women less obvious.

Belgian Chamber of Representatives – 2014-2018			
Party	Number of elected women	% of elected party members	% of total women in Parliament
Groen	3	50%	4,91%
Vlaams Belang	2	66,67%	3,28%
Open VLD	7	50%	11,46%
Sp.a	7	53,85%	11,46%
N-VA	14	42,42%	22,95%
CD&V	6	33,33%	9,83%
cdH	4	44,44%	6,55%
Ecolo	2	33,33%	3,28%
MR	8	40%	13,11%
PS	7	30,43%	11,46%
FDF	1	50%	1,64%

Summary based on Rosadoc (2015).

American House of Representatives – 2015-2017			
Party	Number of elected women	% of elected party members	% of total women in House
Republicans	22	8,9%	26,2%
Demoratics	62	33%	73,8%

Summary based on Center for American Women and Politics (2016).

Fourth, the list position, which is a particular aspect of Belgium's flexible list PR system, offers an implicit cue about the quality of candidates to voters. According to their position on the list, voters have an additional idea about the quality that party accords to particular candidate (Millard et al., 2011), which is not the case in the United States. Finally, in Belgian's political system there is less focus

on individual leadership and personal characteristics of candidates. Belgium can be considered as a more party-centered system, with fever incentives for candidates to seek personal votes. Parties are central social and political actors, to the point that Belgium has been described as an ideal-type of pillarization and '*partitocracy*' (Deschouwer, 2012). In the United States, personal traits of candidates are more important, which often leads to a gendered political race (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Matland, 2005).

These differences between the United States and Belgium clearly show that we cannot simply transfer the findings from the former to the latter. This justifies our claim that it would be interesting to switch the institutional context by studying whether political gender stereotypes also prevail in Belgium. We want to explore whether findings from the US, which does not have a strong record for electing or appointing women to top posts in government, are generalizable to other contexts. By doing so, this project adds new insights to the limited knowledge on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes outside the US and we will be able to fill gaps in the literature regarding the prevalence of political gender stereotypes among different political systems and cultures. We will discuss our research design in the next section.

4. Research design

The central objective of this project is to identify the prevalence of gender stereotypes in Belgium. We have decided to restrict our analysis in a first phase to one monolingual region of Belgium, i.e. Flanders. As we will argue later on, it is important that the context in which our research will take place, should be as constant as possible. Although the cultural and institutional differences with Flanders are relatively limited, there are some reasons to expect that the inclusion of Wallonia in our research design makes it less likely that we can control for all variables that determine the (political) context.

As shown in the table below, over the years there are fewer women elected in Wallonia than in Flanders. This could be an indication of a political culture that is less open to women taking up prominent roles in politics. This can also be linked with the degree of women's participation in the labor force. Women's labor force participation rate is lower in Wallonia (57%) than in Flanders (67%) (VDAB, 2013), which is a proxy for the degree to which a country/region adheres to traditional gender roles (Andersen, 1975; Andersen & Cook, 1985). Moreover, although Wallonia follows the same electoral rules as Flanders, there are some remarkable differences when it comes to the electoral setting. Districts are for example smaller in Wallonia, which makes the electoral system less proportional.

Women elected					
	1995	1999	2004	2009	2014
Flemish Parliament	21/118 17,8%	23/118 19,5%	40/124 32,3%	51/124 41,1%	55/124 44,4%
Walloon Parliament	6/75 8%	8/75 10,7%	14/75 18,7%	26/75 34,7%	30/75 40%

Summary based on Instituut voor de Gelijkheid van Vrouwen en Mannen (2016).

When we look at the images citizens have of politicians and the political system, Wallonia stands out for its very negative picture of political life. Proportionately fewer Walloon than Flemish voters are satisfied with democracy (Billiet, Maddens, & Frognier, 2006), which could have an impact on the way voters look at politics and politicians. There is also a bigger focus on individual leadership in Wallonia. Based on the results of the 2009 election for the Flemish and Walloon Parliament, we see that 61,9% of Walloon voters cast a preference vote, whereas this is only 59,7% in Flanders. When we look at the proportion of preference voters that only voted for men, we see that they represent 43,2% of the preference voters in Flanders and 47,9% in Wallonia (André, Wauters, & Pilet, 2010). This could indicate that the personal characteristics of politicians are more important in Wallonia. Therefore, we believe that the inclusion of Wallonia in our design would mean that the we have less control and that we can no longer hold the (political) context constant.

In the following part, we will develop our research questions and the associated hypotheses.

4.2. Research questions and hypotheses

We can distinguish between four distinct questions. **First**, we would like to find out whether voters translate general stereotyped characteristic traits to the Belgian political sphere. Based on previous research, we assume that women are generally stereotyped as being communal and men as agentic (Eagly, 1987a; Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 1991). We are particularly interested if these general characteristic gender stereotypes have an influence on the perception voters have of male and female politicians.

We will thus not focus on these general characteristic stereotypes, but on the translation of these characteristic traits into political gender stereotypes. As mentioned before, these political gender stereotypes have the potential to determine voting behavior (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Brown, 1994; Dolan, 2014; Fox & Smith, 1998). We will, however, also not focus on this connection between gender stereotypes and voting behavior: our aim is to focus solely on the political translation of general characteristic gender stereotypes (RQ1).

RQ1: Do voters translate general characteristic gender stereotypes into another evaluation of the perceived issue competencies and ideological positions of male and female political candidates?

Despite the fact that more women are politically active in Flanders (compared to the US), we still expect to observe an effect of these general characteristic gender stereotypes in the political sphere. When these stereotyped characteristic traits come into play in the political sphere, they influence how people perceive female and male political candidates. Following Huddy and Terkildsen's (1993b) definition of political gender stereotypes, we argue that these characteristic traits can be linked to political behavior (trait approach) or to political beliefs (beliefs approach). We expect that this will lead to two varieties of political gender stereotypes, those based on women's issue competencies and those based on their ideological positions.

H1a: Voter's evaluation of male and female candidates will differ on their perceived issue competencies and their perceived ideological positions.

We are not only interested in the presence of these political gender stereotypes, but also in their contents and the direction of the perceived differences between male and female candidates. When it comes to the different areas of issue expertise, we expect that women, because they are typically seen as communal and social, will be stereotyped as having more competence in communal issues, in which the primary aim is to help people (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Brown, 1994; Kahn, 1996; Matland, 1994). A 1994 European Election Study asked voters about the expected policy impact of women. The impact was thought to be most positive on family policy (81%), equal opportunities policy (79%) and education (69%), while there was far less support for the impact of women in the fields of industrial or foreign policy (Norris & Franklin, 1997). Also in the European context, the issues and traits associated with women are linked to the traditional domain of the family, whereas the policy expertise and characteristics linked to men tend to be visible in the public sphere (Lawless, 2004).

H1b: Female politicians will be stereotyped as having more competence in communal issues.

The political translation of general gender stereotypes will also lead to a different perception of the social attitudes and political beliefs of women (Diekman et al., 2002). Koch (1999) argues that women candidates are generally perceived as more liberal (in European terms: more leftists) than men candidates of the same party. This can be explained by the fact that women focus more on communal issues, but also because, in the United States, the Democratic party counts significantly more women candidates and parliamentarians. This creates a link between women and party in a voter's mind: the application of political gender stereotypes is complicated by their overlap with partisan stereotypes (Chang & Hitchon, 2004). This link is obviously less clear in Belgium, since women are more equally spread over the different parties (King & Matland, 2003). We believe, however, that, also in Belgium, female candidates will be perceived as being more leftist, since they are also seen as more competent

to handle and support communal issues and to write more legislation on women's issues (Saint-German, 1989; Welch & Thomas, 1991).

H1c: Female politicians will be stereotyped as having more leftist ideological positions.

Secondly, we will analyze how the list position of a candidate (a typical feature of PR systems) intervenes with gender cues. Additional voter cues that have been studied before as intervening variable in the few studies on PR systems include party affiliation (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) and physical appearance (Lammers et al., 2009), but not list position. We would like to include the influence of the list position in our analysis in order to expand our knowledge on the application of political stereotypes and the factors that play an intervening role in this area. By taking list position along in the analysis, a new and crucial element of this kind of electoral systems will be explored. The question is whether this additional cue lifts, reinforces or does not affect political gender stereotypes (RQ2)?

> **RQ2: What is the role of list position? Is this moderating or reinforcing this evaluation, or has this no effect all?**

Regarding this second question, it has been shown that candidates in prominent positions on the ballot form, in open or flexible formats, automatically draw more votes, even when other factors are controlled for (Maddens, Wauters, Noppe, & Fiers, 2006). This can be labelled Ballot Position Effect (Geys & Heyndels, 2003; Lutz, 2010; Maddens et al., 2006). In Belgian elections, the most favorable positions are those at the top and the bottom of the list. Female candidates used to be underrepresented at the top of the list.

Moreover, previous research demonstrates that voters with little political interest vote less sophisticated (more list, head of list and incumbency voting). They do not really 'choose' candidates, but follow the figure heads (mostly men) put forward by the party (Wauters & Devroe, 2015). We believe that the list position in open or flexible list PR systems offers an extra voting cue about the quality of candidates: those at the top, are regarded as more competent. Therefore, we expect that the list position will have a reinforcing effect on the perceived general competence of female political candidates.

H2: The list position reinforces the evaluation of the general competence of female candidates made by voters.

Third, we will analyze what kind of voters are more prone to hold political gender stereotypes. To that end, we will investigate which individual voter characteristics impact on the existence of gender stereotypes (RQ3).

RQ3: Which voter characteristics affect the presence of political gender stereotypes?

Research demonstrates that a large proportion of the electorate lacks the ability or motivation to obtain and assimilate a high level of information about candidates and campaigns (Verba, Nie, & Petrocik, 1976). The use of gender as voting cue and applying sex role stereotypes depends much upon the level of political interest (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) and education (Falk & Kenski, 2006). It could thus be expected that lower-educated voters or voters with little political interest are more likely to hold political gender stereotypes (Wauters, Marien, & Schouteden, 2013).

H3a: Lower-educated voters or voters with little political interest are more likely to hold political gender stereotypes regarding women's issue competencies and ideological positions.

The use of sex stereotypes also varies with the gender of the voter (Falk & Kenski, 2006; Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). Men significantly favor male candidates (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) and place less importance on typical female strengths when assessing candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a). Therefore we expect that men are more likely to hold negative political gender stereotypes regarding women's issue competencies and ideological positions.

H3b: Men will be more likely to ascribe stereotyped issue competencies and ideological positions to female politicians.

Fourth, we would also like to include the role of issue salience in our design. The prevalence of political gender stereotypes would be less problematic, if the issues for which women are found to be competent are considered as being equally important as the issues for which men are seen as competent. The crucial question in this regard is thus whether issue salience has a positive or a negative impact on the overall evaluation of female politicians (RQ4)?

RQ4: Does the degree of issue salience has a positive (or a negative) impact on the overall evaluation of female political candidates?

Scholars point to the existence of a "different-but-equal" paradigm in egalitarian countries, suggesting that there are distinct differences between the sexes in their areas of competence, but that each set is equally valued (Matland, 1994). This paradigm emphasizes women as being more competent in policy areas concerned with family issues, but with the important provision that women's areas of expertise are of equal importance to men's areas of expertise (Matland, 1994). We expect to find this different-but-equal paradigm among Belgian voters as well.

H4: Women's areas of expertise are of equal importance to voters as men's areas of expertise.

In sum, we can schematically represent our research design and the way in which general gender stereotypes have an impact in the political sphere as follows. Note that the boxes marked in gray, are the ones on which we will focus. The others are no part of this research project and will be held constant in our experimental design, which will be developed in the next part.
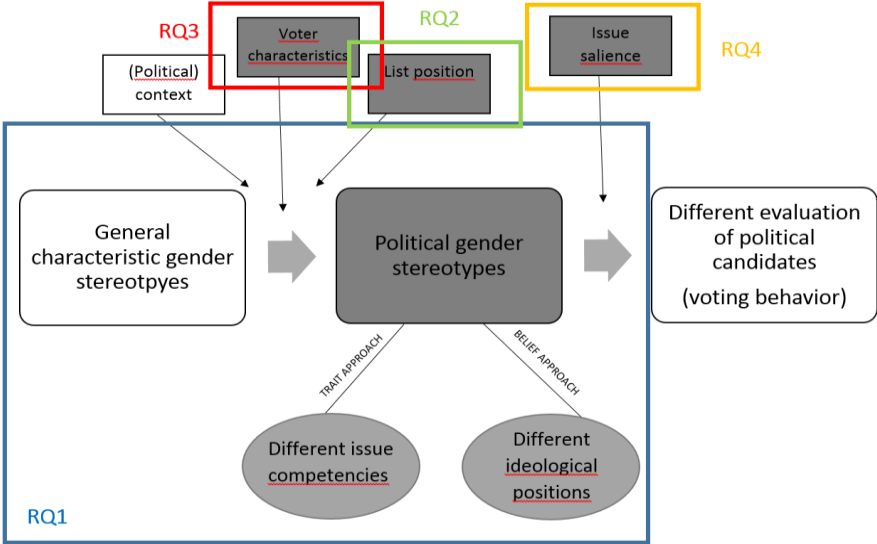
5. Methodological design

5.1.   Experimental design

We will set up an experimental design in which hypothetical candidates are presented to respondents. In brief, these candidates will be presented in text messages in which only their sex, their position on the list and their policy position on a particular issue will be mentioned. We will also mention some arguments to come to these positions, which will always be literally the same for all experimental groups.

The methodology is original for this kind of studies. (Quasi-) experimental methods are rather scarce in political science (Druckman, Green, Kuklinski, & Lupia, 2011), but its use tend to increase in recent years (e.g. Blais, Lachat, Hino, & Doray-Demers, 2011). The most important advantage of experiments is the possibility to control for a number of intervening factors.

5.1.1. Design

Our study uses a 2x3x6 between groups randomized complete block design. We will conduct a repeated measure (within-subjects analysis), i.e. the same respondent will be confronted with different text messages (treatments) (Druckman et al., 2011). This gives us the advantage that we can collect more data with fewer respondents. We will include six different policy issues[1] in our research

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[1] At the moment, we have not decided yet which issues to include, but in order to give an indication, we provide some examples.

design. The issues include 2 topics that are, according to previous studies, generally perceived as being communal issues (e.g. child care and education), topics that are generally perceived as being agentic issues (e.g. economics and defense) and topics that are generally perceived as being gender-neutral (e.g. the environment and agriculture). The candidate's gender (male versus female) and the list positon (head of list versus position in the middle) are manipulated as treatment variables. We will also include the treatment in which the list position is not mentioned, as a kind of baseline situation, in order to be able to measure the effect of the list position.

In sum, for each policy issue, there will be six experimental groups: a group confronted with a female list puller (1), a male list puller (2), a woman candidate on a middle position (3), a male candidate on a middle position (4), a woman candidate whose list position is not mentioned (5) and a male candidate whose list position is not mentioned (6). This leads us to 36 different treatments (6 policy issues x 2 genders x 3 list positions).

Respondents will be randomly assigned to 6 different treatments. We will alternate the order of the treatments, in order to be able to control for learning or order effects (Chang & Hitchon, 2004). If respondents are able to find out the aim of the experiment (which will be asked at the end of the survey), we will only take the first treatment into consideration. An important consideration in the drafting of the text messages is that they should be relatively short to avoid that respondents lose their attention and to be sure that they read the entire text. This will be tested in our pilot-study.

5.1.2. Set-up
We will work with an online-based survey. This is a relatively inexpensive and accessible way to collect data and it brings in the advantage that respondents are not confronted with an interviewer. Therefore we can exclude interviewer effects and do not have to control for this confounding variable. One of the problems associated with an online design, is the inability to know how much time and attention the respondents devote to the experiment. In order to be able to grasp the time devoted to the experiment, text timers will be installed. If respondents stick too long (or too little) on the same page (e.g. text message or question), their responses will not be taken into account since this could mean that they were doing other things in the meantime.

At the beginning of the online survey, participants will be told that the experiment is a study on political attitudes and that they will be asked to fill out several measures assessing their opinion on various issues and to evaluate hypothetical political candidates. The hypothetical candidates will only be given a last name. Some set of questions will identify the candidate as "Meneer (mister) Jansssen", others as "Mevrouw (mistress) Janssen". In addition, a gender-linked pronoun will be used in the instructional

paragraph of the questionnaire. In all other respects, speeches and questionnaires will be identical, in order not to provide any cues to the salience of gender in this study.

We will be using text messages, which is the standard practice for this kind of studies. Audio-messages are more complicated to set up and the voice may bias the reaction of the respondents. In the drafting of the text messages, we must take into account that men and women can feel attracted to a different layouts or to different ways of writing (word choices). Certain words may also have a greater significance for some people: some words can for example be interpreted differently by the extreme right or leftists. The messages should also be as gender-neutral as possible. It is therefore very useful that experts in linguistics go through the different text messages in order to search for weaknesses or words that are not (gender) neutral. We must also take a close look at the policy positions regarding the different issues. These positions should take a central stance.

There will be different sets of questions. The first set taps the respondents' evaluations of the candidate's competence in handling the particular policy areas. Respondents will be asked to rate the candidate's competence using a 10-point scale, in which the endpoints will be marked "very incompetent" (0) and "very competent" (10). A second set will ask the respondent to indicate what they believe to be the candidate's ideological position on a 10-point left-right scale. We will also include a manipulation check so that we can verify whether participants were able to correctly answer questions about the sex and the list position of the candidate whose message they read. A third set will question the character traits that respondents ascribe to these different candidates. We assume that people assign specific character traits to men and women (women are perceived as being communal, men as being agentic). To make sure that this holds for our set of respondents, we include this as a control question in our survey. We will provide a list of fifteen characteristics and ask respondents to indicate which of them are the five most suitable for the candidate in question. We will also include a set of question to measure whether the respondents would be likely to vote for the candidate.

We will also develop a set of questions about the characteristics of the respondents. The following topics will be included: sex, age, political party identification, ideological position, religion, ethnicity, level of political interest (e.g. frequency of watching the news, reading (online) newspapers), level of education. We will also ask to rate the importance of each policy issue presented on a 10-point scale varying from not at all important to very important. This could provide us a clue about how salient the different policy issues are to the respondents. Finally, the own opinions of the respondents about the issues at stake will serve as a control variable, since this has the potential to influence their evaluation of the candidates.

At the end of the experiment, participants will be asked to report what they believed was the purpose of the experiment. Once the experiment is finished, we will send a debriefing email to the respondents in which we will reveal the true aims of the experiment and provide them with some basic results.

5.1.3. Control

As mentioned before, the most important advantage of using experiments is the possibility to control for a number of intervening factors. The largest risk of this project lies in the quality of the data. It will be a challenge to ensure that only the two variables at stake (gender and list position) will play a role in the evaluation made by the respondent. We will conduct pilot studies (among student samples) in order to detect weaknesses in the methodological approach and to remedy them before data gathering takes place.

We believe that the prevalence of political gender stereotypes is influenced by three kinds of factors: the institutional context (political culture, electoral system, voting rules), voter characteristics (gender of the voter, level of education, level of political interest) and candidate characteristics (partisan affiliation, ethnic origin, age and physical outlook). As for the institutional context, we hold this constant as the focus is on Flanders' system of proportional representation. Afterwards, results can be compared with findings from earlier research in other countries. Also the characteristics of the voters will be controlled as respondents will be randomly assigned to one of the different experimental conditions and comparison between these experimental groups will be made. In order to be able to control for age, gender and level of education of the respondents, which can be considered as confounding variables, we will use a block randomization. By using hypothetical candidates without a partisan affiliation, we are not intervening in actual discussion nor will there be any effect of pre-existing preferences or personal (dis)tastes. This offers a methodologically cleaner test (Lammers et al., 2009). The attributes of the candidates (ethnic origin, age, physical outlook,…) are held as constant as possible and are to a large extent not discernible in the text messages we will be using. The only variation is constituted by sex and list position, which will be clearly communicated to the respondents. We will also use pilot-tests to verify if the different text messages are equally agreeable to read and if their lay-out, word choice and contents are as (gender) neutral as possible.

5.1.4. Selection of respondents

In contrast to previous studies, we enhance the external validity of our experiment by conducting the study among a sample of the population, whereas most other studies analyze students. In doing so, we hope to increase the generalizability of our results. Although students are of voting age and vary in their level of involvement in politic, they are a more homogeneous population than the general population (Chang & Hitchon, 2004). Moreover, it is quite reasonable to hypothesize that students, the youngest voters, may be more liberal in their attitudes toward female candidates (Kahn, 1994).

When it comes to the selection of respondents, we have considered different options. One option was to randomly select respondents from the population register, after having obtained permission from the Privacy Commission. Since this is a costly and rather time-consuming procedure, we think that it might be more useful to request a representative set of respondents with the help of a research facilitator. We will select 1500 respondents spread over the entire Flemish region. We include a number of incentives to obtain a higher response rate: we will provide a participation fee, the online setting makes the threshold to participate smaller and we will send reminders and follow-up e-mails to the selected respondents.

6. Conclusion

We believe that descriptive representation can be seen as the keystone to the representation of women. It is therefore fair to further investigate the problems that are related with the observed imperfections in the relationship between the representatives and the represented, and more specifically the underrepresentation of women. It is our aim to search for factors that prevent women from being elected. We will focus on the role of political gender stereotypes held by voters. By addressing one of the many factors that contribute to the descriptive (under)representation of women, we hope to make a meaningful contribution to the fascinating debate about (ideal) political representation.

There are remarkably uniform differences in the personality traits ascribed to men and women. Women are believed to have more attributes of the communal dimension, and men are believed to have more attributes of the agentic dimension. We are particularly interested in the link between these stereotyped characteristic traits and perceptions voters have of male and female candidates. We will dig deeper into the translation of these stereotyped characteristic traits into political gender stereotypes, by which we mean the different evaluation of the perceived issue competencies and ideological position of male and female politicians.

The existence of political gender stereotypes has been extensively documented in the United States. Belgium/Flanders differs in a number of aspects from the US: more female representatives, voters are more open to women taking up their place in politics, women are more equally spread over the different parties, the list position offers an implicit cue about the quality of candidates to voters and there is less focus on individual leadership and personal characteristics of candidates. These differences show that we cannot simply transfer the findings from the US to Belgium/Flanders and justifies our claim that it would be interesting to switch the institutional context by studying whether political gender stereotypes also prevail in Belgium/Flanders. By doing so, this project adds new insights to the limited knowledge on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes outside the US and

we will be able to fill gaps in the literature regarding the prevalence of political gender stereotypes among different political systems and cultures.

We can distinguish four distinct questions. First, we would like to find out whether voters translate general stereotyped characteristic traits to the Belgian political sphere. Despite the fact that more women are politically active in Flanders, compared to the US, we still expect to observe an effect of these general characteristic gender stereotypes in the political sphere: voters' evaluation of male and female candidates will differ on their perceived issue competencies and their perceived ideological positions. Secondly, we will analyze how the list position of a candidate, which is a typical feature of PR systems, intervenes with gender cues. By taking list position along in the analysis, a new and crucial element of this kind of electoral system will be explored. We believe that the list position offers an extra voting cue about the quality of candidates. Therefore, we expect that this will have a reinforcing effect on the perceived general competence of female political candidates. Third, we will analyze what kind of voters are more prone to hold political gender stereotypes. It could be expected that lower-educated voters, those with little political interest and men are more likely to hold negative political gender stereotypes. Fourth, we will also include the role of issue salience in our design. We expect to find that women's areas of expertise are of equal importance to voters as men's areas of expertise.

To these ends, a quasi-experimental design, in which hypothetical candidates are presented to respondents, will be set up. The methodology is original for this kind of studies and gives us the possibility to control for a number of intervening factors. In contrast to previous studies, we will enhance the external validity of our experiment by conducting the study among a sample of the population, whereas most other studies analyze students. In doing so, we hope to increase the generalizability of our results.

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