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## **The influence of female council members on citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local Dutch government**

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**The influence of female council members on citizens' trust and satisfaction  
with the local Dutch government**

by

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## Abstract

Variations in the degree of racial and ethnic descriptive representation have been related to voter engagement, political efficacy and knowledge, and emotions of political alienation or withdrawal. The objective of this research is to look at the impacts on political trust and satisfaction regarding the descriptive representation of women in the municipal council. In descriptive representation, representatives represent the broader group they serve, for example, women legislators representing women constituents or black legislators representing black constituents (Mansbridge, 2000). This study examines, while controlling for other significant variables, the relationship between descriptive representation of women on municipal councils and public attitudes toward political trust and satisfaction, based on original survey data collected from 121 respondents from different municipalities in the Netherlands. The results show that there is a positive relationship between the number of women in municipal councils and the level of satisfaction and trust with the local government. More specifically, the results of the regression analysis show that the number of councilwomen accounts for 9.2% of the variation in citizens' satisfaction with local services provided by their municipality and 33.5% of the variation in citizens' trust in local government. These findings imply that having female representation on municipal councils impacts the levels of satisfaction and political trust in local government. However, the results also suggest that, while descriptive representation could boost satisfaction and trust among some social groups, it might not be enough to raise levels of political trust and satisfaction overall. This can be because descriptive representation alone does not address deeper structural issues or broader socio-political dynamics that influence trust and satisfaction across the entire population. For instance, individuals with minimal political awareness may not recognize the significance of descriptive representation, and those with high political awareness might prioritize substantive policy outcomes over representation. Thus, the impact of descriptive representation on overall political trust and satisfaction can be limited by varying levels of political awareness and differing priorities among citizens. Additional in-depth research is required to determine whether female descriptive representation influences these outcomes differently for other potential groups.

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## Introduction

There has been a growing emphasis on improving gender representation in many aspects of society, including politics, in recent years. This emphasis comes from the understanding that women's opinions and perspectives are critical to efficient governance and decision-making (Schneider and Bos, 2019). This recognition also applies to local government, where women's involvement is deemed necessary to address the particular issues and needs of local communities (Lowande et al., 2019). This research focuses on the presence and influence of female council members and its impact on citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local Dutch government.

The "Women in the Council 2022" report highlights the gender composition of Dutch municipal councils, showing a rise in female council members from 31.3% to 35.1% in 2022 (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). Despite this progress, the local council composition remains predominantly one-sided across the board. The majority of local council members are men, over fifty years old and highly educated (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). The relationship between municipality size and the percentage of women in municipal councils indicates that larger municipalities tend to have a higher percentage of women in council, e.g. municipalities with 200,000 or more inhabitants have an average of 44.70% of women on the council (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). However, there are some exceptions of smaller municipalities (e.g. Renkum) that exhibit high proportions of female councilors (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). Furthermore, the representation of women within political parties varies significantly, The Party for the Animals (PvdD) and Green-Left (GL) have more women than men as councilors (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). Local parties hold 44% of the council seats, with 33% of those seats occupied by women, close to the national average of 35.1% (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). This data suggests that gender diversity in municipal councils varies by municipality size and political party.

### Representation

To understand the broader context of gender representation in local councils, it's essential to delve into the concept of representation itself. Representation can be understood as making something present, even though it may not physically exist (Pitkin, 1967, p. 143). We entrust our votes to individuals who, in turn, construct a collective sentiment within their jurisdiction, which informs governance decisions. By electing representatives who advocate for our interests in parliament, citizens indirectly participate in political decision-making (Pitkin, 1967). Rohrschneider and Thomassen (2020, p. 18) describe this process as a "chain of representation, "where citizens' preferences are translated into votes for various parties that

embody diverse ideologies. These votes ultimately translate into parliamentary seats, with a subset of parties forming a government and enacting policies.

This notion of participation through absence presents a paradox: democratic representation presupposes constituencies and interests that can only materialize through the representation process (Disch, 2012, p. 600). Essentially, individuals contribute to collective decision-making by supporting parties that advocate for policies aligning with their interests.

Expanding on this concept, Pitkin (1967) delineates four forms of representation: formalistic, substantive, descriptive, and symbolic. In descriptive representation, representatives represent the broader group they serve, for example, women legislators representing women constituents or black legislators representing black constituents (Mansbridge, 2000). Representatives that share traits or experiences with the groups they represent – such as gender, race, or ethnicity – are considered to be descriptively represented (Pitkin, 1967). Descriptive representation can encompass shared experiences alongside visual characteristics (Mansbridge, 2000). This criterion of shared experience is believed to enhance accurate representation and commitment to constituent interests, which is important to strengthen legitimacy and trust in democratic institutions. (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005).

Descriptive representation is emphasized since it tackles important elements that support public trust and political legitimacy. In contrast to formalistic or substantive representation, which concentrates on for example policy results, elections, legislative processes, and legal frameworks, descriptive representation is directly related to representatives' perceived relatability and authenticity (Mansbridge, 2000). It provides a tangible connection between citizens and their representatives, which can support democracy by enhancing the perception of the government as being more inclusive and sensitive to the needs of its diverse population (Bouckaert et al., 2002). This is particularly important in democracies because trust in governance and institutional legitimacy are increasingly related to visible inclusion and engagement of various social groups (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005).

According to Sundqvist (2021), citizens' perceptions of government representatives/politicians influence their attitudes toward the government. For many years, the secret to a successful democracy has been the trust that citizens have in the government and politicians (Holum, 2022). Prior research has shown that public support programs, political preferences, and satisfaction with subnational levels of government policy preferences are significant determinants of trust in the government (Ulbig, 2007; Van de Walle & Migchelbrink, 2022; Houser et al., 2022).

The political environment in which citizens live has a significant influence on how they feel about the government. Political attitudes have long been demonstrated to be influenced by the descriptive representation of ethnic and racial minorities (Dawson, 1994). According to Mosher (1968), descriptive representation is crucial because it increases the legitimacy of government by having the bureaucracies' demographics reflect those of society. Similar connections between the descriptive representations of women and foundational political beliefs like efficiency, interest, knowledge, and the perceived legitimacy of the government have been confirmed by researchers more recently (Anderson, 2017). Researchers have also emphasized how trust can be built among citizens with the descriptive representation of politicians (Bertsou, 2019). Furthermore, Mansoor (2021) argues that the legitimacy of democratic institutions is crucial for building trust in governance.

### **Relevance of the research**

The relevance and importance of studying the influence of female council members on citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local Dutch government lies in several key factors. First, gender representation in politics is a matter of social justice and equality. One of the main principles of democracy is equal opportunities, meaning also for women in political leadership positions (Hochstenbach and Brons, 2020). Additionally, studies have demonstrated that, in comparison to men, female political leaders bring different priorities and perspectives to the table (Lovenduski, 2005; Riccucci and Van Ryzin, 2017). They frequently place a higher priority on matters such as healthcare, education, and social welfare, all of which are essential for building more inclusive and sustainable communities (Ulbig, 2005). Second, the impact that female council members have on citizens' trust and satisfaction can potentially echo throughout the public perception of democracy and governance. The political system as a whole might acquire more trust from citizens when they perceive their local government to be inclusive and responsive to their needs.

This thesis aims to shed more light on how citizens' satisfaction and trust in the local Dutch government are impacted by the presence of female council members. The concepts of satisfaction and trust are both included because they contribute to a comprehensive understanding of citizens' attitudes toward their municipality. With satisfaction, it is measured as the contentment of citizens with the services provided by their municipality, this reflects practical and immediate evaluations. Contrarily, trust is a deeper and more enduring belief in the local government's integrity and reliability. By looking at both, it is possible to analyze how female council members' descriptive representation affects citizens' trust in local government in the long term as well as their instant approval of government performance.

Specifically, the aim is to contribute valuable literature on descriptive representation in political science. This involves a nuanced exploration of various dimensions and aspects of representation. In doing so, the thesis seeks to offer new perspectives and understanding.

Is there a connection between the representation of females in the municipal council and citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local government? Although the concepts and characteristics emphasized in the literature (Mansbridge, 1999; Bouckaert et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2021) regarding citizens' trust, satisfaction and representation share a great deal in common, there hasn't been much research done to investigate the overlap, especially between female council members and citizens' trust and satisfaction. However, some research suggests that elected representation may be important in assessing trust and satisfaction with government services (Lowande et al., 2019). Many have argued that elected representation is a crucial driver of administrative output (Nielsen & Moynihan, 2017; Ritchie & You, 2019) along with the fact that the lines between politicians and administrators are becoming increasingly blurred (Alesina & Tabellini, 2007). Thus, I suggest that understanding citizens' trust and satisfaction with services may depend on elected representations, particularly those of women. To explore this potential relationship, an analysis of the impact of female representation in municipal councils on citizens' trust and satisfaction will be conducted by examining survey data, performing statistical analyses, and interpreting the findings in light of existing theories.

### **Research question**

There are thus several reasons to think that political trust perceptions will also be impacted by female passive representation. According to Mansbridge (1999), descriptive representation can "create relationships of trust" between the representative and the voter, enhancing the "sense of inclusion" and making the elected officials politically more legitimate in one's eyes. Personal characteristics may guide voters in determining which policy issues are shared with the representatives they elect, and beliefs about shared interest can aid in the establishment of trust and satisfaction in the representative-constituent relationship (Gay, 2001). Furthermore, more descriptive representation may give constituents the impression that they are more approachable and that "two-way communication is possible" (Fenno, 1978). Therefore, shared background and demographic characteristics, can serve as the foundation for stronger trust in public officials, like councilmembers (Mansbridge, 1999). The research question is the following:

*"How much does the representation of female council members influence citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local government?"*

The next chapter provides a theoretical framework and a literature review, containing different theories that exist around the descriptive representation of women and citizens' satisfaction and trust and the hypotheses. chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology, detailing data collection methods and the operationalization of variables. In chapter 4, the results of the analysis are presented. Finally, chapter 5 presents the conclusion and discussion, where the key findings, implications, and limitations are discussed.

## **Chapter 1: Theoretical framework**

To understand the mechanisms through which female council members influence citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local Dutch government, it is important to establish a framework that incorporates relevant theories and concepts. Two primary components need to be distinguished. First, it will be discussed what kind of representation will be used to frame the research. The representation framework of Pitkin suggests that having diverse voices and perspectives in political decision-making processes leads to more representative outcomes. Second, the concepts 'trust' and 'satisfaction' will be discussed, and what the correlation is between the two. Additionally, the social identity theory underscores the potential impact of gender representation in positions of power on citizens' sense of identification and connection with the political system. Furthermore, in the literature review, multiple theories will be discussed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how female representation in politics influences citizens' satisfaction and trust and to account for the roles of political interest, gender, and differentiation of trust, which the social identity theory alone cannot fully explain. Following these theoretical bases, hypotheses will be developed on female council members' influence on citizens' trust and satisfaction.

### **1.1 Definition of representation**

Democracies operate under the principle of representative governance. Representation, as defined by Urbanati (2011, p. 23), involves the delegated action taken on behalf of others. Various entities can undertake representation, including political parties, governments, as well as non-state actors such as international organizations, transnational groups, and non-governmental organizations (Dovi, 2015). This thesis focuses specifically on the representation provided by politicians within municipal councils.

### 1.1.1 Political representation

Political representation is a deceptively straightforward concept, while most people seem to understand it, there is disagreement over its exact definition. There is a large body of literature that provides numerous definitions of this concept. The notion of political representation has been extensively explored by scholars. One of the most straightforward definitions is offered by Pitkin (1967), who states that to represent is merely to “make present again”. According to this definition, political representation is the process of bringing citizens’ voices, viewpoints, and opinions “present” during the formulation of public policy. Speaking, advocating, symbolizing, and acting in the political arena on behalf of others is political representation.

### 1.1.2 Political representation of women

As mentioned previously in Pitkin’s work the framework for our understanding of political representation. The four different perspectives on representation, mentioned in the introduction, are as follows: 1) the formalistic form, which emphasizes accountability and authorization processes; 2) descriptive representation, which concentrates on how much representatives “resemble” or share experiences with the represented; 3) symbolic representation, focuses on the represented emotional reaction to the representative; and 4) substantive representative, which emphasizes the process of promoting the interests of those represented (Pitkin, 1967). Every perspective offers a different method for evaluating the effectiveness and the quality of women’s representation: women can elect representatives to the office (formalistic view) (Pitkin, 1967). Women and their representatives may be similar or have similar experiences (descriptive representation) (Pitkin, 1967). Women may experience representation by feeling heard (symbolic representation). Lastly, by promoting “women’s interests” (substantive representation), politicians can act on behalf of women (Pitkin, 1967).

## 1.2 Defining trust

Three significant and widely used measures for analyzing trust in government are the Eurobarometer for EU comparisons, the World Values Survey for global comparisons, and specifically for the US are Pew and American National Election Studies (ANES) (Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies, 2017). These metrics are often used by researchers to measure public trust in government. As Fisher et al. (2010) point out, “trust in government” often refers to a vague concept that provides a very generic understanding of its causes and consequences. The concept’s ambiguity, particularly if only one item measure is utilized, might mean various things to different individuals. According to Van de Walle (2005), researchers should concentrate on trust in certain government organizations to have a more thorough understanding of how trust occurs.

Nevertheless, several analyses of organizational trust have demonstrated that perceived trustworthiness, which includes various dimensions, is a necessary condition for organizational trust. Thus, macro-level measures based on one item are too narrow to assess trust in particular organizations (Mayer et al., 1995; McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011).

Although there is disagreement over the precise definition of trust versus trustworthiness (McEvily and Tortoriello, 2011), we consider trust as a trustor characteristic (I have trust in...), while the notion of trustworthiness points out the assumed characteristics associated with the trustee (I believe... is trustworthy). It's crucial to comprehend these characteristics to comprehend why certain organizations are considered more trusted than others. Perceived trustworthiness provides the groundwork for future additional trust development, even if it is not trust in and of itself (Mayer et al., 1995).

Hardin (1993) defined trust as a three-way relationship in which A has trust in B to accomplish X. A anticipates that B will act in a way that serves his or her interest. This triple relationship creates a risk when it comes to citizens' trust in government since citizens are unsure of whether government agencies are truly doing the tasks they have been entrusted to do. When governments use some degree of control over citizens risk becomes significant, this control may be either used legitimately or exploited. According to the concept of interdependence, one party's interest cannot be pursued independently of the other party. Therefore, in terms of trust in government, if citizens want the government to handle important problems, they rely on government organizations to make choices, implement policies, and assess their consequences. However, for the government to have effective policies citizens must cooperate and follow certain rules (Levi and Stoker, 2000). In a relationship, trust becomes important if these two elements are present (Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies, 2017).

These requirements led to the development of a widely used definition of trust by Mayer et al. (1995: 712) defined as:

“A party's willingness to be vulnerable to another party's actions in the expectation that the other will perform a specific action important to the trustor, regardless of whether they can monitor or exert control over that other party”.

This definition is often used and fits the purpose of the study. Specifically, it was meant to be generalizable to multiple levels of analysis. As a result, this definition can be applied at several levels of analysis, including studies where the focus is on a group trusting a group or, in our case, individuals trusting an organization (Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies, 2017). The vulnerable party's (citizens)

expectation is key to this concept. According to Hardin (2002), these expectations are predicated on how individuals view the “other” – that is, whether or not they believe the other’s intentions and actions to be worthy of trust. This suggests that ‘trust in government’ (e.g. the municipal council) is defined by the extent to which its citizens see it as ‘worthy of trust’ (Grimmelikhuijsen and Knies, 2017). Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) mention that perceived trustworthiness is not considered an objective attribute of government but rather a result of citizens’ perceptions.

### **1.3 Defining satisfaction**

Beginning in the early 1990s, advancements in social measurement tools and research standards in academic marketing and economics departments, coupled with a growing focus on evaluating customer orientation in the public sector, sparked additional interest in satisfaction surveys (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). This renewed interest started in North America with the creation of Servqual, a tool to measure customer satisfaction in service sectors (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Besides this, in a government context, it is important to also mention the Canadian Common Measurements Tool and the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) (Schmidt and Strickland, 1998). The European response to these initiatives has been fast, as seen by the wide range of applications and increased attention in the UK (Moore et al., 1998) and in Central Europe (SIGMA, 1998).

In defining citizen satisfaction with the government, according to Van Ryzin (2004), it is the extent to which citizens believe their demands and expectations are met by the government. This includes the evaluation of the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of public services provided by the government. The general opinion of the effectiveness and reliability of the government and the direct experiences citizens have with public services have an impact on citizens’ satisfaction.

Expanding upon this, Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) provide a comprehensive definition of citizens’ satisfaction with the government as the general assessment of the government’s performance. This is frequently based on personal experiences, news reports, and social norms. This definition emphasizes how assessments – both individual and group – shape citizen satisfaction. When assessing satisfaction levels, factors such as responsiveness, responsibility, and transparency are critical.

Similarly, James and John (2007) define citizen satisfaction as a subjective indicator of how content the general public is with government policies. It considers aspects like accessibility, reliability, and service quality, in addition to how citizens view the allocation of public services and goods.

This definition emphasizes how crucial equality and perceived fairness are in public administration. This definition is most appropriate for this study because it emphasizes subjective indicators of satisfaction with government policies while considering various aspects. This aligns well with the study's focus on how female council members' descriptive representation affects citizens' satisfaction with services provided by the municipality and trust in the local government.

The focus on trust and satisfaction is important because these two factors have been identified as key indicators of the effectiveness and legitimacy of local administration. Trust is defined in terms of particular support, indicated by citizens' satisfaction with public services, which is driven by political values and demographic aspects. According to Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2001), trust is influenced by a variety of systemic and general elements, including the legitimacy of the political-administrative system as well as more individualized encounters with the government, its services, and the dynamic interactions between the two.

### **1.3 The Social Identity Theory**

Social identity theory provides part of the theoretical basis for the research, which looks at whether citizens' trust and satisfaction with the local Dutch government are affected by female council members. According to social identity theory, people are prone to distinguishing themselves and others based on social categories, and to defining their perspective about themselves – the so-called self-concept – to their membership in a certain social group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Furthermore, this theory posits that individuals prefer to perceive the ingroup more positively than the outgroup, therefore as a result, they trust and are satisfied with the ingroup as a whole and its members (Jiang et al. 2023). Based on this theory, citizens' perceptions of female council members belonging to their ingroup may cause them to identify more strongly with them, which in turn raises their levels of trust and satisfaction with the local government. Men and women are both susceptible to this, although the outcomes may be different (Jiang et al. 2023). Women may feel more included and represented when they see other women as council members, which may boost their trust and satisfaction with the municipal council. Depending on how men feel about gender equality and representation the effect could differ (Jiang et al. 2023). Men who are more supportive of gender equality might have a favorable opinion of female council members, which might increase their sense of trust and satisfaction. Therefore, it is likely that the gender identity of council members may affect citizen's trust and satisfaction. However, the kind and degree of this impact may differ depending on personal attitudes and ideas on gender representation (Jiang et al. 2023).

## 1.4 Literature Review

### 1.4.1 Representation of women in politics in the Netherlands

In 2019, it was one hundred years ago that women had the right to vote (Hochstenbach and Brons, 2020).

There has a lot of progress been made in the representation of women in politics since this moment in history (Hochstenbach and Brons, 2020). Less than 10 percent of the House of Representatives members were women in the late 1960s (Hochstenbach and Brons, 2020). Currently, that percentage is close to 39% (Parlement.com, 2024). Comparing the Netherlands to other European countries, however, reveals that it ranks very high for gender equality. The Netherlands is ranked second in the EU by the Gender Equality Index (2023).

Furthermore, it is evident from these figures that there has been much work done to attain gender equality, but there is still no equal gender representation on many levels in politics. The percentage of women among mayors and municipal council members is even lower (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). Following the 2018 municipal elections, the proportion of women in the council exceeded 30% for the first time, and after the 2022 elections, it even rose to 35% (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). But as mentioned earlier the municipal councils still do not accurately represent the entire population in terms of gender. This is problematic from a public administration standpoint because representativeness is thought to be crucial for the legitimacy of the government and the extent to which certain issues are stood up for (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005). The degree to which each municipality experiences this differs. Municipality size has an impact on the proportion of women in municipal councils (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2022). The larger the municipality, the more female councilors. For instance, during the 2018 elections, the municipal councils of Tholen, Gennep, and Hardinxveld-Giessendam exhibited a stark underrepresentation of women, with only one or even zero female council members (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). In 2022, eight municipalities had only two seats occupied by women in the council (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). Conversely, Utrecht has the highest female representation in the council, with 26 out of their 45 council seats held by women (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). There are also major differences between political parties, for example, there are more women than men on the council for the Party for the Animals and GroenLinks. The other political parties have fewer female councilors than male ones, the parties 50PLUS (13%), DENK (18%), and the PVV (15%) have proportionately the fewest female councilors in the party (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022). In addition, the SGP has no female council members in the party (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, 2022).

### *Reasons for the underrepresentation of women*

Hence, significant variations exist among municipalities regarding the representation of women. What factors contribute to these disparities? Numerous researchers have attempted to explain the presence or absence of women in political spheres. Their contributions have greatly improved our understanding of the actors and mechanisms influencing gender parity in political descriptive representation (Dahlerup and Leyenaar, 2013). These studies have brought to light the wide range of complex elements that may be responsible for these differences (Lovenduski et al., 2005). Among these are formal and informal elements, such as the degree of inclusivity of political institutions toward women (Dahlerup and Leyenaar, 2013; Krook and Mackay, 2011). Furthermore, the influence of women's movements (Lovenduski et al., 2005), the role of gatekeepers like parties, voters, and the media (Thomas and Wilcox, 2014), as well as the personal aspirations and resources of women (Lawless and Fox, 2005) have all been explored. Lovenduski (2005) posits that the most formidable barrier is the prevailing culture of masculinity entrenched within political institutions. Gender biases are apparent in personnel recruitment, organizational policies, and the prevailing culture of political entities. These biases include prejudiced perceptions of what constitutes a competent candidate, often aligning with stereotypically masculine traits associated with positions of power (Murray, 2010, 2015).

#### 1.4.2 The presence of female politicians

Distributing the outcomes of public policies is the responsibility of public agencies. Public bureaucrats who work in agencies are frequently the public's initial and occasionally only point of contact with them. Their attitudes, views, and predispositions are crucial in understanding how policies are implemented because this contact often involves bureaucrats who may utilize discretion (Lipsky, 1980). The theory of representative bureaucracy examines how the demographics of bureaucrats influence how outputs are distributed to clients who share these demographics. The literature makes a distinction between descriptive and substantive representation. According to Mosher (1982), descriptive representation focuses on the bureaucracy's alignment with the population it serves in terms of gender, race, income, class, and religion. Studies on descriptive representation focus on whether the demographic of the bureaucracy matches that of the broader population or whether minorities and women are underrepresented there (Kellough, 1990; Naff and Crum, 2000; Dolan, 2000; Riccucci and Saidel, 2001). Only occasionally are the impacts of representation or a lack thereof on the agency's policy outputs examined in research. In contrast, substantive representation is concerned with how representation affects the formulation and application of policy. In substantive representation, it is assumed that bureaucrats will take deliberate action on behalf of the people they represent in the general population (Pitkin, 1967). Because bureaucrats share fundamental attitudes, values, and beliefs with the social groupings they are drawn from, descriptive representation happens. Their opinions are the result of typical socialization

experiences that were significantly influenced by things like racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

According to the theory of representative bureaucracy, when bureaucrats exercise discretionary authority, their choices are influenced, at least in part, by the attitudes, values, and beliefs they have developed as a result of their social upbringing (Krislow and Rosenbloom, 1981; Meier, 1993a; Saltzstein, 1979). In other words, it is assumed that descriptive representation will result in substantive representation.

The relationship between descriptive and substantive representation is studied empirically, with a focus on whether and how the presence of government officials from underrepresented groups affects the results of policies that help women or minority groups. Substantive bureaucratic representation is positively correlated with outcomes for women and minority groups. This correlation is explained by the underlying logic that bureaucrats who share citizens' norms, values, and experiences tend to incorporate these values into their decision-making, increasing the likelihood that their decisions will benefit citizens of these groups (Selden, 1997). A second connection, known as symbolic representation, maintains that citizens respond favorably to bureaucrats who resemble them and go on to act in ways that result in positive results. Therefore, symbolic representation creates a second channel of causal processes functioning through citizens' perceptions and behaviors in addition to bureaucrats creating consequences through their discretionary acts. The social background of a bureaucrat may foster trust and legitimacy among citizens who have similar backgrounds, leading to cooperation from citizens and, in the end, the development of more effective policy results (Ricucci and Van Ryzin, 2017).

The presence of female politicians may result in the adoption of policies that favor women and increase requests for female bureaucrats. Female politicians require political alliances and administrative support when pursuing women's interests, and this situation generates motivation for them to seek out more female bureaucrats with authority (Meier and Funk, 2017). Female bureaucrats are potential allies of elected politicians since they are more inclined to understand women's concerns and be supportive of women's rights and interests. According to Gilmer (2002), legislators who believe that bureaucrats support a policy are more willing to grant them control over it. First, more women in a legislature, like a municipal council, are likely to introduce and pass more laws about women's concerns and policies that support them (Meier and Funk, 2017; Yun, 2020). Female bureaucrats are more inclined to comprehend the significance of these issues, support policy aims, and be passionate about policy execution (Meier and Funk, 2017). Therefore, the impact of bureaucratic representation can be amplified. Second, having women present in politics can increase the effectiveness of bureaucratic representation by having a symbolic influence on the attitudes and behavior of female bureaucrats. Female bureaucrats may believe that advocating for women's concerns is politically acceptable and that the legislature will support their

representation role if they observe more women in legislatures, for example in the municipal council. According to Schwindt-Bayer (2006), the presence of women in the legislature can boost the confidence of female bureaucrats in their actions, even in cases where they do not actively support policies that are favorable to women or a female agenda.

#### 1.4.3 Citizen's satisfaction and trust

Satisfaction is a multifaceted phenomenon that incorporates expectations, experiences, and prior attitudes (Van de Walle, 2018). Assessing public service experiences is crucial for determining citizen satisfaction (Bradford et al., 2009). It is argued by Oliver (2010) that satisfaction is an opinion on the product or service experience that is based on a comparison of pre- and post-service provision. When expectations and the actual service experience are compared, satisfaction is the result. When the standard of public service meets citizens' expectations, citizens are generally satisfied. Public service quality has a greater influence on citizen satisfaction. If citizens receive good public services, they have a greater tendency to be satisfied. That could be the reason why Oliver (2010) argued that satisfaction relates to quality. In addition to fostering satisfaction, excellent public service also increases the trust of citizens. Therefore, to meet the expectations of the public, public agencies should provide high-quality service.

Bouckart and Van de Walle (2001) suggest that public service satisfaction, particularly about trust, can be viewed from both a broader and a narrower performance perspective. According to the broad performance perspective, certain public reforms imply improved public service quality and, as a result, high levels of public satisfaction and trust in government. Citizens' trust in government indicates their belief in the government's activities in accomplishing what is right and fair. It is among the most crucial pillars on which political systems are based to maintain their legitimacy. Trust in government is critical for social cohesion and satisfaction since it impacts the government's ability to rule and allows it to act without compulsion. As a result, trust is necessary for public institutions to function fairly and effectively (OECD, 2013). Researchers have shown a correlation between citizens' satisfaction with the democratic functioning of political systems to trust in government and political institutions (Putnam, 1993; Norris, 1999; Newton, 2001; Mishler and Rose, 2001).

#### *Relationship between trust and satisfaction*

When citizens have political trust, they perceive responsibility, responsiveness, and transparency from their elected governments (Mansoor, 2021). Studies have shown that citizens' perceptions of elected politicians significantly impact their trust in the government (Han et al., 2021). According to Ulbig (2007), these perceptions of politicians are influenced by their personalities, attitudes, and behaviors. Citizens have a crucial role in the democratic process by voting for government officials/representatives (Kayran &

Erdilmen, 2021). Voters elect political leaders who reflect their ideals and interests. As a result, political satisfaction is mostly determined by elected officials (Antoniades et al., 2022). In addition, different personality traits attitudes, and actions of the politicians are important in fostering the public interest in taking part in the democratic process (Bertsou, 2019). The degree to which citizens are content with the country's political system determines how much they participate in government matters or political activities (Lebrument et al., 2021). Their dependence on politicians is also critical to their political involvement (Vigoda-Gadot, 2007). In organizational contexts, researchers have shown a strong correlation between trust and satisfaction (Wilson et al., 2021). For instance, Wilson et al. (2021), asserted that when citizens are satisfied with the administrative services of the government, they have greater trust in the government.

#### 1.4.4 Trust and satisfaction in government – trends and numbers

Political trust has been a focus of attention for a long time not only for political scientists but also for politicians and journalists (Steenvoorden, 2023). Since the 1970s, scientists in the Netherlands have been measuring trust in politics through survey research (Steenvoorden, 2023). All of that research has not alleviated concerns about trust in politics, or rather the lack thereof (Steenvoorden, 2023). The Netherlands scores relatively high; compared to other European countries the Netherlands is in the sub-top, following the Scandinavian countries (Torcal, 2017). However, political trust is very volatile, and there are large fluctuations that can be traced back to events such as the fall of a cabinet, new elections, and crises that increase political trust, such as the nationalization of ABN AMRO, 9/11, and the historic high in trust at the start of the coronavirus crisis (Den Ridder et al., 2020). As expected, decline in trust in politics to the normal range as the coronavirus crisis became more manageable. Since then, trust has been relatively low by Dutch standards, comparable to the level of trust in the fall of 2013 (during austerity rounds of Rutte II) (Miltenburg et al., 2022). On the other hand, these reassuring and nuanced figures do not seem to match the attention and report about the 'angry' citizen (De Lange & Zuure, 2018). Moreover, the average trends of trust are reassuring, but when broken down by different groups the figures are not (Miltenburg et al., 2022). They do not do justice to differences between groups of citizens, and those differences are significant. For example, 50% of the group of citizens with a secondary vocational education (MBO) indicate sufficient trust in politics, while of the group of citizens with a university 71% have sufficient trust in politics (Miltenburg et al., 2022). Party preference shows even greater difference, from 83% with sufficient trust among voters of the most recent coalition parties (D66, VVD, CDA, CU) to 21% among voters of right-wing opposition parties (Miltenburg et al., 2022). The municipality of citizens also makes a difference, citizens in the Randstad (the Netherlands' most densely populated region) have more trust than those in more rural areas or the countryside parts of the Netherlands (Huijsmans et al.,

2021). Moreover, there are indicators that these differences in trust are embedded in very different experiential worlds of groups of citizens, with different perspectives on politics (Cramer, 2016).

#### 1.4.5 Differentiation or generalization of trust in government

In this paragraph, we will examine if trust in government implies a comprehensive unity or if it is made up of trust in the various entities that make up government. Most surveys ask respondents to rate their level of trust in each government organization on a scale of, for example, 1-4 or 1-5 after showing them a list of those institutions (Bouckaert et al., 2002). But it turns out, that there are several clusters in such lists and that not all of these trust opinions perfectly correlate (Bouckaert et al., 2002). Despite variations, trust in one government organization frequently translates into trust in all of them (Elchardus, 1998). However, some institutions – like the parliament – might have a major impact on public trust in government as a whole. Several researchers have observed a generalization process (Stipak, 1977; Elchardus, 1998, Bouckaert et al., 2002). Evaluations of all government institutions appear to be influenced by a similar factor. Citizens do not conceptually differentiate between different opinions, which would imply that there is only one opinion regarding trust in government (Bouckaert et al., 2002). Two conclusions are drawn from this observation: first, government is viewed as though it were a single, amorphous concept; second, trust in institutions does not always have anything to do with government (Bouckaert et al., 2002). Regarding the second statement, there is among researchers no agreement on this (Bouckaert et al., 2002). Klingemann (1999) has the most extreme point of view, claiming that actual performance determines everything and that there is no such thing as a generalization. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that particular experiences with government services will have a significant influence on trust in government if citizens view government as a single, amorphous unity (Bouckaert et al., 2002). According to Stipak (1977), there is generalization when it comes to satisfaction with government services, for example, certain views are based on broad judgments due to a lack of information and knowledge. Therefore, higher levels of education and political awareness should lead to more belief system differentiation (which implies the use of less general evaluations) among respondents. It gets more difficult to assess the independent impact of government services if citizens are unable to distinguish between various institutions (Stipak, 1977). Generalization, or the opposite of it, differentiation, is a process that involves a learning process and is a component of socialization (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Therefore, generalization can indicate a lower degree of political awareness or a (deviant) type of socialization, where people are taught to view the government as a uniform bloc without differentiation, making it easier to assign it very good or bad characteristics (Bouckaert et al., 2002).

#### 1.4.6 Political trust and female descriptive representation

There is a diverse range of literature exploring the themes of women's representation in politics, political trust, and citizen satisfaction. While the focus of the literature primarily examines Western democracies, its generalizability may be somewhat restricted. Nonetheless, this body of literature remains valuable and insightful for this current study. Political trust is widely recognized as essential for the functioning of democratic systems, with implications for civic participation and adherence to governmental institutions and policies (Easton, 1965; Nye, 1997). While previous research has primarily focused on trust at the federal level (Hetherington and Globetti, 2002; Rudolph and Evans, 2005), the significance of trust in local governments cannot be understated. Understanding the determinants of political trust at the local level is crucial for enhancing governance and fostering civic engagement within communities. Existing literature has identified various factors contributing to political trust, ranging from individual-level characteristics to assessments of governmental performance and processes (Craig, 1980). However, other studies have revealed that various demographic characteristics and attitudinal factors are not necessarily correlated to public trust (Citrin and Luks, 1998; Dennis and Owen, 2001). Many of these studies have largely overlooked a critical aspect of the political landscape – the composition of elected legislative bodies. It's argued that minority citizens often feel marginalized or disempowered due to political environments that exclude them from influencing governmental processes (Gilliam, 1996; Pantoja and Segura, 2003). Research has shown that minority citizens feel more empowered and trustful of government when they are descriptively represented, suggesting that representation plays a crucial role in fostering political inclusion and trust (Pantoja and Segura, 2003; Ulbig, 2005).

Similarly, studies have indicated that increased female descriptive representation correlates with greater political engagement and policy changes benefiting women (Bratton and Ray, 2002; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005). This underscores the importance of gender representation in shaping perceptions of governmental legitimacy and responsiveness. There are compelling arguments suggesting that female descriptive representation can impact feelings of political trust. Mansbridge (1999) contends that descriptive representation fosters trust between representatives and constituents, thereby enhancing a sense of inclusion and legitimizing the polity in individuals' eyes. Moreover, personal attributes can help constituents identify shared policy concerns with their representatives, facilitating trust in the member-constituent relationship (Gay, 2001). Additionally, constituents may perceive increased accessibility and the potential for two-way communication when they are represented descriptively (Fenno, 1978). Consequently, shared backgrounds, although not perfectly captured by descriptive representation, can serve as a foundation for greater trust in public officials and institutions (Mansbridge, 1999).

#### 1.4.7 The effects of political interest and gender

When it comes to expressing trust in and satisfaction with politicians, individuals and groups respond differently (Mansbridge, 1999), there are several arguments regarding how political trust and satisfaction may be impacted by female descriptive representation, but different social groupings may probably react differently to a rise in the number of women in municipal councils (Bouckaert et al., 2002). Men may respond differently than women when the descriptive representation of women rises at the expense of men's descriptive representation (Rosenthal, 1995).

Men could experience a decline in their political influence, while women might feel more powerful and that policies are responding to their needs (Rosenthal, 1995). Feelings of political trust and female descriptive representation may be impacted by a second significant mitigating factor, which is political awareness (Rosenthal, 1995). Arguments linking descriptive representation to individual behavioral and attitudinal changes presuppose that people are conscious of the political world they live in (Rosenthal, 1995). A person has to think two things to feel mistrust, or disempowered because their group has little political influence. Firstly, that their group is not descriptively represented; and secondly, that their group's underrepresentation is the cause of their exclusion from power (Mansbridge, 1999). Both of these factors are likely influenced by individuals' level of political awareness (Bouckaert et al., 2002).

Individuals with minimal political awareness may not realize that their demographic lacks representation, for example in their municipal council (Bouckaert et al., 2002). This lack of awareness often stems from a disengagement with political news and a tendency to abstain from electoral participation and political discourse (Bouckaert et al., 2002). On the other hand, highly politically aware citizens are typically cognizant of the underrepresentation of their group (Bouckaert et al., 2002). However, their trust in the political system tends to be rooted more in substantive concerns, rather than solely from a sense of descriptive inclusion.

Individuals with moderate levels of political awareness are inclined to recognize the representation status of their demographic group (Dennis and Owen, 2001). They often rely on this descriptive indicator rather than substantive policy considerations when assessing their government. Those with moderate awareness are particularly influenced by media coverage of current events, as noted by Koch (1998), while individuals with lower awareness tend to rely on more readily available cues, as suggested by Mondak (1993).

## 1.5 Hypotheses

The literature on women's political representation, political trust, and citizen satisfaction, predominantly focused on Western democracies, mentioned before provides substantive insights for this study. Political trust is a pivotal factor in democratic systems, and it positively correlates with descriptive representation (Ulbig, 2005). With the increase in the level of female representation, their votes or opinions are more likely to be considered and influenced in legislative decisions (Bratton and Ray, 2002; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005). Therefore, inclusiveness in terms of female representation is necessary for trust-building between the representative and represented. This assimilation propels descriptive representation, which enhances general trust in the government (Mansbridge, 1999). Trust and satisfaction are described as interdependent concepts because citizens who are satisfied with the standard of government service are inclined to trust the government more (Wilson et al., 2021). Besides this, there are many arguments in which women's descriptive representation can create political satisfaction for the public (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019). This correlates with the widely acknowledged fact that female politicians are more responsive and effective than the opposite gender in solving citizens' demands (Schneider and Bos, 2019). Based on the previously mentioned theories, my hypotheses are:

**H1: In municipalities with a larger number of women in the council the level of satisfaction with local government is higher**

**H01: There is no effect for women in municipal councils on the level of citizens' satisfaction.**

**H2: In municipalities with a larger number of women in the council the level of trust in local government is higher.**

**H02: There is no effect for women in municipal councils on the level of citizens' trust.**

## **Chapter 3: Research design and methodology**

This chapter focuses on the research approach and design and the used data collection to examine the impact of the representation of women in municipal councils on the trust and satisfaction of citizens. This quantitative research relies on a survey conducted to achieve the research objective. The study has an explanatory nature, aiming to comprehensively understand and explain the influence of female council members on citizens' trust and satisfaction in the local Dutch government.

### **3.1 Research approach and design**

The research method is quantitative, indicating that this type of research focuses on the use of numerical data to test the hypotheses. As well as, examining patterns and establishing relationships between variables. To generalize the findings to a large population. By using a large-N design the generalizability of the results is enhanced. The analysis of data from a sizable sample of respondents allows for drawing conclusions that are more robust and reliable.

The data collection instrument is a survey since this is a useful method for gathering uniform data from a large and diverse population. By using a survey, it is possible to measure a large number of variables and use statistical analysis to be able to test hypotheses and identify patterns. The survey has one measurement moment of 121 number of cases.

This study is a cross-sectional descriptive study and not an experiment. In order to collect data from a large number of respondents at one time and examine connections across variables without requiring a longitudinal approach, a cross-sectional design was selected. The purpose of this study is to describe and explain current phenomena without changing variables, which justifies the observational approach as opposed to an experimental design. This approach works well for comprehending complicated social concerns like satisfaction and trust with local government.

### **3.2 Data collection**

This study employs a primary data collection method. This quantitative method is designed to explore the relationship between female representation in municipal councils and citizens' trust and satisfaction with municipal. A quantitative survey was conducted among 121 citizens to gather primary data on various aspects of trust and satisfaction with the local government. The survey was designed to capture citizens' demographics, political views, satisfaction with local services, trust in the municipal council, and perceptions of gender diversity in the municipal council. The sample size was chosen based on Green's (1991) rule of thumb, which suggests that for studies with linear regression analysis with two independent

variables, a sample size of at least 66 participants is recommended ( $n = 50 + 8 \cdot 2 = 66$ ). This means that the sample size of this study (121) is sufficient for reliable statistical analysis. Responses were mostly collected by using a four- and five-point Likert scale, the other measurements are mentioned in the operationalization table.

### **3.3 Selection of research units and sampling method**

This study is based on a survey, which was conducted in May 2024. The survey was made using the software program Qualtrics. By distributing the survey multiple channels were used to ensure a broad reach and diverse respondent pool. The research involves assessing the trust and satisfaction of Dutch citizens of the municipal council, particularly the female council members. The data that has been gathered comes from a smaller subset of the Dutch population because it would be impossible to collect data from every citizen in the Netherlands.

The kind of sampling method used for this research is non-probability sampling, specifically convenience sampling, meaning that the respondents are “convenient” to acquire. This method involved distributing the survey through social media, LinkedIn, and various Whatsapp groups. In order to increase the sample size and heterogeneity, a snowball sampling technique was also employed, in which initial respondents were requested to ask other potential respondents to participate in the survey. Practical limitations led to the use of non-probability sampling techniques. Convenience and snowball sampling allow for the efficient collection of sufficient sample size in a relatively short period, guaranteeing that the study can be carried out with the resources at hand.

### **3.4 Operationalization of variables**

Dependent variables

*Trust:* This variable is measured by the responses regarding trust in the municipal council.

*Satisfaction:* This variable is measured by the responses regarding satisfaction with the quality of local services provided by the municipality.

Independent variable

*Female councilmembers:* This variable is measured as the number of women in the municipal council

Control variables

The reason for selecting the control variables education, age, political views, and population size (municipality) is based on the understanding that these factors have a significant influence on the perceptions of political trust and satisfaction with government services. Stipak (1977) argues that there is generalization when it comes to satisfaction with government services, for example, certain views are based on broad judgments due to a lack of information and knowledge. Therefore, higher levels of education and political awareness should lead to more belief system differentiation (which implies the use of less general evaluations) among respondents.

Age is another critical variable; perceptions of government and politicians can vary among age groups. It is mentioned by Ulbig (2007), that these perceptions are influenced by personal experiences attitudes, and behaviors. Individuals in an older age group may have different expectations and trust levels compared to citizens in a younger age group, influencing their satisfaction with government services.

Population size, particularly of the municipality, is also an important control variable. According to the research by Huijsmans et al. (2021), citizens who live in highly populated places, such as the Randstad, generally have greater levels of trust in the government than citizens who live in rural areas. These differences imply that the size of the municipality has an impact on citizens' trust and satisfaction levels. Lastly, citizen's political view is also a crucial factor, as it influences how they understand government policies and look at the government. Cramer (2016) argues that differences in trust are embedded in very different experiential worlds of groups of citizens, with different perspectives on politics.

By controlling for these variables (education, age, population size, political view) it is aimed to isolate the influence of gender diversity (number of female council members) on trust in the municipal council and satisfaction with the municipal services.

The number of female council members is measured by asking the respondents, to capture data and their awareness of female representation. The trust and satisfaction levels were measured using Likert scales to capture the degree of these sentiments; by using these scales the responses are ordered into levels without assuming equal intervals. To make the questions straightforward demographic variables were operationalized using nominal and ordinal scales. The choices of this operationalization have certain limitations that are discussed at the end of this chapter (paragraph 3.6) and in the discussion chapter.

**Table 1. Variables operationalization**

Variable	Definition of variable	Indicator	Category of data	Measure
Female councilmember	Politicians on the council that are women	<i>How many female councilmembers are</i>	1. 21 to 27 councilwomen 2. 14 to 20 councilwomen	Ordinal

		<i>in your municipal council?</i>	3. 7 to 13 councilwomen 4. 1 to 6 councilwomen	
Trust	Level of trust with local government	<i>How much of the time do you trust your municipal council?</i>	1. Most of the time 2. Only some of the time 3. Almost never 4. Not at all	Likert scale (ordinal)
Satisfaction	Level of satisfaction with local government	<i>How satisfied are you with the quality of local services provided by you municipality?</i>	1. Very satisfied 2. Somewhat satisfied 3. Neutral 4. Somewhat dissatisfied 5. Very dissatisfied	Likert scale (ordinal)
Population size	Total number of residents in the municipality	How many inhabitants does your municipality have?	1. 900 to 49.999 inhabitants 2. 50.000 to 99.999 inhabitants 3. 100.000 to more than 900.000 inhabitants	Ordinal
Gender	Gender of citizens	<i>How do you identify yourself?</i>	1. Female 2. Male	Binary
Age	Age of citizens	<i>What is your age group?</i>	1. 18 to 24 2. 25 to 34 3. 35 to 44 4. 45 to 54 5. 55 to 64 6. 65 to 74 7. 75 or older	Ordinal
Education	Level of education attained by citizens	<i>What is the highest level of education you have completed?</i>	1. Highschool diploma 2. Secondary vocational education (MBO) 3. Higher professional education (HBO) 4. University bachelor (WO) 5. University master (WO) 6. PhD	Ordinal
Political view	Citizens' political orientation	<i>How would you describe your political view?</i>	1. Conservative 2. Liberal 3. Progressive 4. Socialism	Nominal

### 3.4.1 Respondents' characteristics

Out of the 121 responses:

- 70% of the respondents are female and 30% of the respondents are male.
- Age ranges from '18 to 24 years' to '75 or older', with most respondents in the '18 to 24 years' category (36.7%).
- Educational backgrounds vary, with 30% having a secondary vocational education, 25.2% having a higher professional education, 19% having a master's degree, 15% completing a bachelor's degree, 10% having a high school diploma, and 0.8% completing a PhD.
- Political views included Progressive (38%), Liberal (27%), Conservative (20%), and Socialist (15%).
- Municipality sizes vary, with most (58%) living in small municipalities (900 to 49.999 inhabitants).

#### **Descriptive statistics of the survey**

The data collected with the survey has multiple variables, these have been converted into dummy variables represented binarily (0 (all other categories), 1 (the category of the number)).

To dummy variables are explained:

The number of councilwomen is divided into four categories. Each category is a dummy variable.

- 1: 21 to 27 councilwomen
- 2: 14 to 20 councilwomen
- 3: 7 to 13 councilwomen
- 4: 1 to 6 councilwomen (reference category).

Satisfaction is divided into five levels. Each level is a dummy variable.

- 1: Very satisfied
- 2: Somewhat satisfied
- 3: Neutral
- 4: Somewhat dissatisfied
- 5: Very dissatisfied (reference category)

Trust is divided into four levels of trust. Each level is a dummy variable.

- 1: Most trust
- 2: Some trust
- 3: Almost no trust

- 4: No trust (reference category)

Gender is represented with a binary variable where 1 indicates female and 0 male.

Age is divided into seven categories, with each category being a dummy variable.

- 1: 18 to 24 years
- 2: 25 to 34 years
- 3: 35 to 44 years
- 4: 45 to 54 years
- 5: 55 to 64 years
- 6: 65 to 74 years
- 7: 75 or older (reference category)

Education is divided into six categories, with each category being a dummy variable.

- 1: High school diploma
- 2: Secondary vocational education (MBO)
- 3: Higher professional education (HBO)
- 4: Bachelor's degree
- 5: Masters' degree
- 6: PhD (reference category)

The political view is divided into four categories, with each category being a dummy variable.

- 1: Conservative
- 2: Liberal
- 3: Progressive
- 4: Socialist (reference category)

Population size is divided into three categories, with each category being a dummy variable.

- 1: 900 to 49.999 inhabitants (reference category)
- 2: 50.000 to 199.999 inhabitants
- 3: 200.000 or more inhabitants

The data from the survey is analyzed by using SPSS. In the analysis, there will be looked at the correlation between the variables and a simple linear regression will be conducted. Below are the descriptive statistics of the variables presented.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of all variables in the analysis**

Variables	Valid <i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
21 to 27 councilwomen	121	0,18	0,38	0	1,00
14 to 20 councilwomen	121	0,19	0,39	0	1,00
7 to 13 councilwomen	121	0,27	0,44	0	1,00
Very satisfied	121	0,19	0,40	0	1,00
Somewhat satisfied	121	0,58	0,49	0	1,00
Neutral satisfied	121	0,07	0,26	0	1,00
Somewhat dissatisfied	121	0,12	0,33	0	1,00
Most trust	121	0,56	0,49	0	1,00
Some trust	121	0,15	0,36	0	1,00
Almost no trust	121	0,26	0,44	0	1,00
Gender (1=female)	121	0,70	0,45	0	1,00
18 to 24 years	121	0,36	0,48	0	1,00
25 to 34 years	121	0,10	0,31	0	1,00
35 to 44 years	121	0,34	0,96	0	1,00
45 to 54 years	121	0,20	0,40	0	1,00
55 to 64 years	121	0,10	0,31	0	1,00
65 to 74 years	121	0,07	0,26	0	1,00
High school diploma	121	0,10	0,30	0	1,00
Secondary vocational education	121	0,29	0,45	0	1,00
Higher professional education	121	0,26	0,44	0	1,00
Bachelor's degree	121	0,14	0,35	0	1,00
Masters' degree	121	0,19	0,39	0	1,00
Conservative	121	0,18	0,38	0	1,00

Liberal	121	0,32	0,46	0	1,00
Progressive	121	0,36	0,48	0	1,00
50.000 to 199.999 inhabitants	121	0,23	0,42	0	1,00
200.000 or more inhabitants	121	0,27	0,44	0	1,00

Reference categories: 1 to 6 councilwomen, very dissatisfied, no trust, 75 or older, PhD, socialist, 900 to 49.999 inhabitants.

### 3.6 Validity and reliability

To conclude if the results of the research are accurate, it is important to look at the research design and the data collection method. The survey was conducted during the first two weeks of May 2024. This does not mean that the findings of this study represent a snapshot. It is more likely that the opinions and views of the respondents have been the same for a longer time and will give a good impression of the feelings of trust and satisfaction with the municipal council and the representation of council women.

Ethical considerations:

- The participants of the survey should be ensured that the results will be handled with confidentiality and anonymity. Before participating in the survey, respondents received information about the study and how the data would be used. Specifically, the results contain no identification numbers or names, and the information would only be used for this study. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the survey would be voluntary, the participants could opt in or out at any moment in time. It is also of importance that there is informed consent, the consent of the respondents was obtained at the beginning of the survey, by agreeing to the aforementioned statements.

Limitations:

- Several limitations need to be considered. First, is that the result's generalizability may be limited due to the sampling strategy that is used. When using the methods of convenience sampling and snowball sampling to get a representative sample, there are challenges due to the logistics of the survey distribution. The survey is distributed across several platforms, including WhatsApp groups, LinkedIn and social media. By using these methods, there is limited control over who will fill out the survey (e.g. different age groups, or different educational backgrounds). Furthermore, the limited time and resources for distributing the survey can lead to a sample size that is on the

smaller side. These factors may affect the sample's representativeness, which might lead to biases and limit the extent to which the findings can be generalized to the wider population.

- There are a few limitations in the operationalization choices that should be noted. Numerous variables were measured using nominal or ordinal levels, which has significant drawbacks. Measurement at the ordinal level reduces the granularity of variables such as age and the number of female council members. Therefore, more precise differences are obscured when detailed numerical data is reduced into broader categories. Besides this, the types of statistical analysis that can be carried out are limited by ordinal and nominal data. The interpretation is also restricted because ordinal data can be interpreted less precisely than interval data. It can be difficult to see minor correlations between variables as it is unknown how much each category differs from the others.
- By determining the number of female council members based on respondents' perceptions rather than official records, there is a possibility of inaccurate statistics. Respondents may not have accurate knowledge of these numbers. Furthermore, while the use of Likert scales for variables like satisfaction and trust is useful for capturing general attitudes, they cannot provide comprehensive details into the extent of these attitudes. Besides, they assume equal intervals that might not accurately reflect differences in perceptions. Furthermore, self-reporting bias can be introduced by depending on respondents to supply information about demographic variables and political views, as they may misclassify themselves.

## Chapter 4: Main results

In this section, the results of the data analysis will be explained, and the hypotheses presented in 1.7 will be accepted or rejected based on the results.

### 4.1 The effect of female councilmembers on citizens' satisfaction and trust in local government

This hypothesis focuses on women's descriptive representation to create political satisfaction for the public as introduced by Barnes and Beaulieu (2019). In municipal councils with more representation of women, there could be more satisfaction from citizens with their local government. Based on our hypothesis, we expect that an increase in the number of women represented in the municipal council will result in a higher level of satisfaction from citizens. Before we estimate a simple linear regression model to test our hypothesis, we want to see how our variables are correlated to each other. This is done by using the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ), the correlation coefficient ranges from -1 (negative linear relationship) to 1 (positive linear relationship).

#### 4.1.1 Correlations

Table 3 presents the correlation between various variables in the study, highlighting the relationships between the number of councilwomen, satisfaction levels, and trust levels. '14 to 20 councilwomen' has a positive correlation  $r = 0.193$ , with 'somewhat satisfied' at  $p < 0.05$ . '7 to 13 councilwomen' has a positive correlation with all satisfaction variables but are all not significant. There are no significant correlations for age with satisfaction or councilwomen variables. Education is positively correlated,  $r = 0.160$ , with '21 to 27 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.05$ . The political view is positively correlated,  $r = 0.279$ , with '21 to 27 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.01$ . And positively correlated,  $r = 0.249$ , with 'somewhat satisfied' at  $p < 0.01$ . Besides this, is political view negatively correlated,  $r = -0.281$ , with 'somewhat satisfied' at  $p < 0.01$ . Population size is positively correlated,  $r = 0.602$ , with '21 to 27 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.01$ . And positively correlated,  $r = 0.323$ , with '14 to 20 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.01$ .

'21 to 27 councilwomen' has a negative correlation,  $r = -0.373$ , with 'most trust' at  $p < 0.01$ . And '21 to 27 councilwomen' has a negative correlation,  $r = -0.203$ , with 'some trust' at  $p < 0.05$ . '21 to 27 councilwomen' also has a negative correlation,  $r = -0.234$ , with 'almost no trust' at  $p < 0.01$ . '14 to 20 councilwomen' has a negative correlation,  $r = -0.300$ , with 'most trust' at  $p < 0.01$ . '14 to 20

councilwomen' has a negative correlation,  $r = -0,209$ , with 'some trust' at  $p < 0.05$ . But '7 to 13 councilwomen' has a positive correlation,  $r = 0,195$ , with 'some trust' at  $p < 0.05$ . The control variable age correlates negatively,  $r = -0,167$  with 'some trust' at  $p < 0.05$ . Education has a positive correlation,  $r = 0,160$ , with '21 to 27 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.05$ . The variable political view has a positive correlation,  $r = 0,279$ , with '21 to 27 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.01$ . Population size has a positive correlation,  $r = 0,465$ , with 'most trust' at  $p < 0.01$ . Population size has a negative correlation with 'some trust' at  $p < 0.01$ . Population size has also a negative correlation,  $r = -0,313$ , with 'almost no trust' at  $p < 0.01$ . Population size has a positive correlation,  $r = 0,602$ , with '21 to 27 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.01$ . Population size has a positive correlation,  $r = 0,323$ , with '14 to 20 councilwomen' at  $p < 0.01$ .



Some trust	,184*	-,053	-,036	-,093	-,063	-,489**	1,000										
Almost no trust	-,204*	,008	,187*	,002	,024	-,679**	-,259**	1,000									
No trust	-,184	-,078	-,056	,023	,038	-,783	-,278	-,134	1,000								
21 to 27 council women	-,020*	-,127	-,052	,278**	-,126	-,373**	-,203*	-,234**	-,304	1,000							
14 to 20 council women	-,083	,193*	,023	-,182*	-,213	-,300**	-,209*	-,147	-,236	-,228**	1,000						
7 to 13 council women	,021	,024	,039	-,061	-,153	-,020	,195*	-,115	-,179	-,289**	-,297**	1,000					
1 to 6 council women	,014	,021	,036	-,078	-,103	-,109	-,229	-,102	-,108	-,230**	-,227**	-,289**	1,000				
Age	,002	0,41	-,003	-,051	-,30	,020	-,167	,093	,078	-,119	-,057	-,062	-,029	1,000			
Education	,075	-,006	-,019	-,044	-,25	,135	-,080	-,055	,033	,160*	,109	-,056	-,067	,065	1,000		
Political view	,139	-,281**	-,034	,249**	,034	,065	-,012	-,046	-,037	,279**	,062	-,054	-,078	-,226**	,126	1,000	

Populati on size	,053	-,015	-,077	,066	,039	,465 **	-,213 **	-,313 **	-,340 **	,602 **	,323 **	-,108	-,059	-,213 **	,230 **	,268 **	1,00 0
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\*\* p < 0.01, \* p < 0.05 (1-tailed)

#### 4.1.2 Regression analysis: satisfaction

To understand the relationship between the number of female council members and the level of satisfaction among respondents, there will be a regression analysis done. This examination will allow us to model the relationship between the dependent variable (satisfaction) and the independent variable (number of female council members). By doing so, it is possible to assess the extent to which changes in the number of councilwomen predict changes in satisfaction levels. Additionally, regression analysis allows for controlling other variables that may influence satisfaction, providing a more accurate picture of the direct impact of female representation in councils.

The effect of the number of councilwomen on citizens' satisfaction is represented by the regression line  $Y=3,53+0,25*X$

The  $R^2$  value (0.092) indicates how much of the variance in satisfaction can be explained by the number of women in the council. The  $R^2$  is 0.092, meaning that approximately 9.2% of the variation in citizens' satisfaction can be explained by the number of council women.

In the regression analysis table (table 4), the constant coefficient of 3.767 signifies the baseline level of satisfaction when all independent variables, including the number of councilwomen and control variables, are zero. The coefficient for '21 to 27 councilwomen' at 0.778 suggests the increase in satisfaction linked with having 20-26 councilwomen. Together with '14 to 20 councilwomen' and '7 to 13 councilwomen' it is revealed that the number of councilwomen has a significant positive effect on satisfaction levels. Additionally, while the control variables, age, education, political views, and population size were included in the analysis, their coefficients are non-significant. This indicates minimal influence on satisfaction levels.

**Table 4. Regression analysis of the influence of women in council on satisfaction**

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	3,767*** (0,137)	3,510*** (0,388)
21 to 27 councilwomen	0,778*** (0,235)	0,826*** (0,392)
14 to 20 councilwomen	0,493*** (0,232)	0,535*** (0,321)
7 to 13 councilwomen	0,323*** (0,208)	0,349*** (0,233)

<i>Control variables</i>		
Age	0	0,003 (0,048)
Education	0	0,073 (0,064)
Political view	0	0,060 (0,095)
Population size	0	-0,083 (0,169)
N	121	121
$R^2$	0,092	0,109

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

*Note reference category: councilwomen (4)*

Model 1 shows that the number of councilwomen remains a significant predictor of citizens' satisfaction with local government services, with a standardized coefficient of 0,323 for '7 to 13 councilwomen', 0,493 for '14 to 20 councilwomen', and 0,778 for '7 to 13 councilwomen'. This suggests that increasing the number of women in the council will significantly boost citizens' satisfaction, independent of the effect of age, education, political view, and population size. Based on this we can reject our null hypothesis that the number of women in municipal council has no impact on the level of satisfaction in favor of the alternative hypothesis that it does.

#### 4.1.3 Regression analysis: trust

The effect of the number of council women on the trust of citizens is the regression line  $Y=2,27+0,45*X$ . The  $R^2$  (0.335), indicates how much of the variance in trust can be explained by the number of women in council. The  $R^2$  is 0,335<sup>2</sup> meaning that approximately 33,5% of the variation in citizens' trust can be explained by the number of council women.

To control for the effect of other variables on  $Y$  (citizens' trust), we use four control variables: age, education, political views, and population size (of the municipality). Table 5 presents the regression analysis of the influence of women in the council on trust.

The coefficient in Model 2 for councilwomen (1) is 1,437 (0,328) with a p-value of <0.001, meaning there is a significant positive effect. This indicates that '21 to 27 councilwomen' results in a significant increase in trust, compared to the reference category. For '14 to 20 councilwomen' in Model 2, there is a positive coefficient of 1,212 (0,269) with a p-value of <0.001. Indicating having '14 to 20 councilwomen' will

have a significant increase in trust. For '7 to 13 councilwomen' in Model 2, there is a positive coefficient of 0,804 (0,195) with a p-value of <0.001. The control variables in Model 2 have no significant influence on trust.

The significant positive coefficients in both models for '21 to 27 councilwomen', '14 to 20 councilwomen', and '7 to 13 councilwomen', indicate that the number of councilwomen leads to higher levels of citizens' trust, even after controlling for age, education, political views, and population size.

**Table 5. Regression analysis of the influence of women in council on trust**

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	2,605*** (0,115)	2,724*** (0,325)
21 to 27 councilwomen	1,304*** (0,197)	1,437*** (0,328)
14 to 20 councilwomen	1,134*** (0,194)	1,212*** (0,269)
7 to 13 councilwomen	0,759*** (0,174)	0,804*** (0,195)
<i>Control variables</i>		
Age		0,023 (0,040)
Education		0,007 (0,054)
Political view		-0,089 (0,079)
Population size		-0,023 (0,142)
N	121	121
R <sup>2</sup>	0,335	0,347

\*\*\* p < 0.001

*Note reference category: 1 to 6 councilwomen*

## Conclusion

The regression and correlation analysis results provide comprehensive insights into the relationship between the number of female council members and citizens' satisfaction and trust in local government.

### Satisfaction

The correlation analysis showed one positive, but weak, correlation ( $r = 0,193, p < 0.05$ ), between having 14 to 20 councilwomen and being 'somewhat satisfied' with the local services provided by the municipality. The regression analysis further supported this by demonstrating a more detailed positive relationship. In particular, the results of the regression analysis showed that the proportion of female council members accounts for roughly 9.2% of the variation in citizens' satisfaction with the local services provided by the municipality can be explained by the number of female council members. In detail, the coefficients from the regression analysis showed that municipalities with 21 to 27 female council members have the most substantial positive effect on satisfaction ( $\beta = 0,778, p < 0.001$ ). Similarly, municipalities with 14 to 20 female council members ( $\beta = 0,493, p < 0.001$ ) and 7 to 13 female council members ( $\beta = 0,323, p < 0.001$ ) also had significantly higher satisfaction levels compared to the reference category of 1 to 6 female council members. These findings suggest that a higher number of female council members enhances citizens' satisfaction with the local services, supporting the hypothesis that female representation positively influences satisfaction.

### Trust

The correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between the categories of female council members and levels of trust. There is a significant negative correlation ( $r = -0,373, p < 0.01$ ) between having 21 to 27 councilwomen and the highest trust level. This finding highlighted the complex dynamics at play and prompted regression analysis to be used for a more thorough analysis.

The regression analysis provided a more nuanced understanding, showing that 33.5% of the variation in citizens' trust can be explained by the number of female council members. In municipalities with 21 to 27 female council members, trust levels significantly increased ( $\beta = 1,304, p < 0.001$ ), indicating a strong positive effect. Additionally, municipalities with 14 to 20 female council members ( $\beta = 1,134, p < 0.001$ ) and 7 to 13 female council members ( $\beta = 0,759, p < 0.001$ ) also showed significant positive effects on trust compared to the reference category. The results suggest that, despite the initial negative correlation, a higher number of councilwomen ultimately leads to higher levels of trust in their local government among citizens.

The control variables (age, education, political view, and population size) included in the regression models did not show significant effects on satisfaction or trust. For satisfaction, the control variables had minimal influence, as indicated by the low coefficients and lack of statistical significance. Similarly, for trust, none of the control variables significantly influenced the outcomes, suggesting that the number of female council members is a more critical factor in explaining variation in satisfaction and trust levels.

Based on the analysis of the data, the null hypotheses can be rejected. Strong evidence is shown by the data, indicating that the number of female council members has a positive effect on both citizens' satisfaction and trust in local government. Municipalities with more women in the council have greater levels of citizen satisfaction and trust, supporting the alternative hypotheses that female representation in municipal councils positively impacts these outcomes.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion and discussion

In this chapter, the results are discussed, focusing on the explanation and evaluation in relation to the theoretical framework. Lastly, the limitations of this research and an outline for potential avenues for future research will be addressed.

The research question of the thesis is: *“How much does the representation of female council members influence citizens’ trust and satisfaction with the local government?”*

To answer this question, there are two hypotheses formulated based on a broad literature review. To answer the hypotheses, I surveyed citizens on satisfaction with government services and trust in the municipal council. The data supports both alternative hypotheses. The results show that councilwomen affect the level of satisfaction and trust. It does differ between the number of councilwomen and the effect on the level of satisfaction and trust. Overall, has female representation in municipal councils a positive effect on the citizens’ satisfaction and trust.

The findings support the theoretical framework, suggesting that descriptive representation enhances political trust and satisfaction. According to Mansbridge (1999), descriptive representation increases trust by creating a sense of inclusion. Which in turn lends the government legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Ulbig (2005) argues that descriptive representation positively correlates with political trust. This is significant because female politicians are more inclined to address issues that affect women, which in turn increases public satisfaction and trust. Additionally, the literature review provides evidence that female politicians are seen as being more responsible and efficient in meeting the citizens’ needs than male politicians (Schneider and Bos, 2019). Research by Bratton and Ray (2002) and Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005) shows that descriptive gender representation is linked to higher political participation and policy changes benefiting women. This underlines the role of gender in influencing the perceptions of governmental legitimacy and responsibility. This resonates with our findings that female representation in councils will lead to higher levels of trust and satisfaction among citizens.

There are several limitations of this study. One of them can be linked to the sampling strategy. Non-probability sampling techniques were used because of practical limitations, whereas probability sampling is preferable for hypothesis testing because of its potential for increased generalizability. The choice to use non-probability sampling techniques, namely convenience and snowball sampling, restricts the findings’ generalizability. The findings’ generalizability may be limited as a result of this decision, which is acknowledged. To overcome this limitation, probability sampling approaches may be used in future

studies. Additionally, there are limitations in the operationalization choices that should be noted. There are several disadvantages to measuring variables with ordinal and nominal levels. When comprehensive numerical data is broken down into broader categories, the granularity of variables such as age and the number of female council members decreases when measured at the ordinal level, concealing more precise differences. Due to ordinal data being less precise than interval data, it is more challenging to find minor correlations between variables, this also restricts the kind of statistical analysis that can be performed and limits interpretation. By determining the number of female council members based on respondents' perceptions rather than official records, there is a possibility of inaccurate statistics because respondents may not have accurate knowledge about this. Furthermore, while Likert scales help capture overall attitudes for variables like satisfaction and trust, they do not offer detailed information on the intensity of these attitudes and assume equal intervals that might not accurately reflect differences in perceptions. To avoid these limitations future research should use interval and ratio scales where applicable, utilize probability sampling techniques, and make use of established measuring instruments that are more in line with theoretical conceptualizations.

Further research could provide more insight into the role of political parties as gatekeepers in determining the number of women in municipal councils (Lovenduski et al., 2005). The results of the elections in 2022 show that there is more representation of women than in 2018, but the divide between parties is not equally distributed. Left-wing parties, like GreenLeft and Party for the Animals, have a higher percentage of women in council than more right-wing and conservative parties, like SGP. It would be interesting to research if women because of personal preferences are more lenient towards more left-wing parties or that there are other forms of barriers for women. According to Lovenduski (2005), the most significant obstacle is the dominant masculinity culture that is ingrained within political institutions. Another area for future research could be on the long-term effects of gender representation, which would entail undertaking longitudinal studies to monitor changes in trust and satisfaction over time as female representation increases or decreases in municipal councils. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore how citizens' trust and satisfaction with female representation varies among countries with diverse political systems and cultural backgrounds. This could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic and its universal application.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that a greater representation of women on municipal councils has a positive effect on citizens' satisfaction with local services and trust in local government. These results emphasize how crucial it is for women to be represented in government positions and the important role they play in shaping the public's opinion of government effectiveness and legitimacy. By enhancing

the descriptive representation of women, local governments can foster greater trust and satisfaction among citizens, particularly in municipalities where there are very few or no women on the council.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Survey

1. What is your age group?
  1. 18 to 24
  2. 25 to 34
  3. 35 to 44
  4. 45 to 54
  5. 55 to 64
  6. 65 to 74
  7. 75 or older

2. How do you identify yourself?

1. Female
2. Male

3. What is the highest level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, highest degree received.

1. Highschool diploma
2. Secondary vocational education (MBO)
3. Higher professional education (HBO)
4. University bachelor (WO)
5. University Master (WO)
6. PhD

4. How would you describe your political views?

1. Conservative
2. Liberal
3. Progressive
4. Socialism

5. How many inhabitants does your municipality have?

1. 900 to 49.999 inhabitants (small)
2. 50.000 to 99.999 inhabitants (medium size)
3. 100.000 to 900.000 inhabitants (large)

6. How long have you lived in your current municipality?

1. Less than 1 year
2. 1-5 years
3. 6-10 years
4. More than 10 years

7. What is your approximate household income?

1. Less than 25.000 euro
2. 25.001 – 50.000 euro
3. 50.001 – 75.000 euro

4. 75.001 – 100.000 euro
5. More than 100.000 euro
6. Prefer not to say

8. How satisfied are you with the quality of local services provided by your municipality?

1. Very satisfied
2. Somewhat satisfied
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied

9. Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that people are mostly just looking out for themselves?

1. Most of the time people try to be helpful
2. People are mostly just looking out for themselves

10. How closely do you follow news about local politics and government?

1. Very closely
2. Somewhat closely
3. Not very closely
4. Not at all

11. Do you know the number of council members in your municipal council?

1. Yes
2. No

12. How many female council members are in your municipal council?

1. 21 to 27
2. 14 to 20
3. 7 to 13
4. 1 to 6

13. Do you think the views of the average citizen influence the decisions made by the municipal council?

1. Definitely yes

2. Probably yes
3. Might or might not
4. Probably not
5. Definitely not

14. How much of the time do you think you can trust the municipal council in your municipality?

1. Most of the time
2. Only some of the time
3. Almost never
4. Not at all

15. How important do you consider gender diversity (men/women) in your municipal council for effective governance?

1. Very important
2. Somewhat important
3. Neutral
4. Not important

16. To what extent do you believe female council members advocate for issues that are important to you and your community?

1. To a great extent
2. To some extent
3. Neutral
4. To a small extent
5. Not at all

17. Have you observed any specific initiatives or policies championed by female council members that positively impacted your community?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

18. Do you feel that having a more balanced gender representation (men/women) in the municipal council would enhance decision-making processes and outcomes?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

19. How satisfied are you with the current level of gender diversity (men/women) in your municipal council?

1. Very satisfied
2. Somewhat satisfied
3. Neutral
4. Somewhat dissatisfied
5. Very dissatisfied
6. I don't know/ not sure

20. Do you believe that increasing the number of female council members would improve overall trust in the local government?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

21. In your opinion, how well does the current municipal council represent the diversity of your community in terms of gender (men/women)?

1. Very well
2. Moderately well
3. Not very well
4. Not at all
5. Not sure