

Master Thesis

Beyond Descriptive Presence: Ideological Constraints on Queer Representation

By

Floor Gaus, 4534352



Leiden University

MSc Democracy and Representation, Political Science

Thesis Supervisor: Simon Otjes

Wordcount: 9792

Over the past decades, representation in democratic institutions has increasingly been examined not only in numerical terms but also in terms of quality and inclusivity of said representation. Central to these debates are the concepts of *descriptive* and *substantive representation*, as introduced by Hanna Pitkin, political theorist (1967). Descriptive representation refers to the extent to which elected representatives mirror the demographic characteristics of the population, whereas substantive representation concerns whether those representatives actively advance the interests of the group they symbolise. While literature has explored this relationship for gender, race, and ethnicity (Mansbridge, 1999; Celis et al., 2008; Mügge, 2023), research on the descriptive and substantive representation of queer people remains comparatively underdeveloped.

This thesis addresses this gap by studying whether the descriptive representation of openly queer politicians translates into substantive representation for the broader LGBTQIA+ community in Dutch politics, and how party ideology conditions that link. In this thesis, *queer* is used as an umbrella term encompassing all members of the LGBTQIA+ community, acknowledging both its inclusivity and its political connotations as a reclaimed term of resistance. This terminology reflects both scholarly and activist trends that view “queer” not merely as an identity category, but as a challenge to heteronormative structures within politics and society (Warner, 1993; Browne & Nash, 2010). When referring to the represented citizens, the acronym LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer / Questioning, Intersex, Asexual) will be used interchangeably, whereas the politicians analysed will be described as LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) as those are the sexualities represented within the Dutch tweede kamer (second chamber). Sexual diversity in politics in general will be addressed as *queer*, further deviations of terminology will be explained in text.

Existing literature on LGBTQIA+ representation has demonstrated that the presence of openly queer legislators can have measurable policy effects. Reynolds (2013) finds that even limited queer representation in national legislatures correlates with more progressive rights legislation. Similarly, Haider-Markel (2010) and Bishin and Weller (2025) show that LGB legislators in the United States are significantly more supportive of LGBTQIA+ rights than their heterosexual counterparts. Yet, despite this evidence, much of the literature stops short of explaining *how* and *under what conditions* descriptive representation leads to substantive outcomes. In particular, party ideology, a factor long recognised as crucial in gender and minority representation, has rarely been systematically examined in relation to queer politicians.

This study builds directly on the work of Liza Mügge, whose research on women's representation in Europe reveals that descriptive presence does not automatically produce substantive outcomes. Mügge argues that the ability of women to act for women depends heavily on party ideology and institutional context. Left-wing parties tend to frame women's inclusion as a natural extension of equality commitments, whereas conservative parties often treat women's presence as symbolic, using it to project modernity while maintaining traditional policy priorities. This thesis applies Mügge's framework to queer representation, hypothesising that party ideology similarly mediates whether openly queer politicians substantively advocate for LGBTQIA+ rights. Queer MPs in left-wing parties are expected to promote more inclusive agendas, whereas those in conservative parties may be constrained by ideological boundaries, leading to narrower or more assimilationist forms of advocacy (Mügge, 2023).

Understanding this relationship is both academically and socially relevant. Academically, it expands the field of representation studies by bridging well-developed gender research with the underexplored domain of sexuality and queer identity in politics. By applying Mügge's framework to

queer legislators, this project contributes to comparative representation theory and the study of ideology's moderating effects. Societally, it offers insights into the limits of symbolic inclusion. While many Western democracies, including the Netherlands, have become increasingly diverse in the descriptive sense, questions remain about whether such diversity translates into policy outcomes that benefit the full LGBTQIA+ community, particularly transgender, non-binary, and intersectionally marginalised groups.

By combining a paired comparison of queer and straight MPs with an analysis of their parliamentary questions, this research aims to uncover the mechanisms through which ideology shapes substantive advocacy by answering the following research question: *“How does the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of Dutch LGBTQ politicians differ between left-wing and right-wing parties?”*. The Netherlands provides an ideal case: it has a high number of openly queer representatives across both left-wing and right-wing parties, a multiparty system that clearly distinguishes ideological families, and a long history of public debate around sexuality. Through this analysis, the thesis seeks to determine whether queer representation in parliament functions as a vehicle for substantive change or remains largely symbolic, an essential question for evaluating the quality of democratic inclusion.

Descriptive and Substantive Representation.

Representation is a foundational concept in political science, of which one of the most influential frameworks is Pitkin's *The Concept of Representation* (1967). Pitkin distinguishes between different types of representation, two of which are used in this thesis: descriptive and substantive representation. Descriptive representation entails that representatives share demographic or social characteristics with their constituents, for example, women representing women, or openly queer politicians representing LGBTQIA+ citizens. Substantive representation concerns what

representatives do, whether they advance policies that benefit the group they represent. On the link between descriptive and substantive representation, Pitkin was sceptical, warning against confusing standing for and acting for. Jane Mansbridge argued that descriptive representation can, in fact, have substantive value, for example, in situations where there is mistrust between marginalised groups and cases where symbolic inclusion helps histories of exclusion of those marginalised groups.

Descriptive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community.

While the available literature on descriptive and substantive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community is certainly lacking compared to the work published on gendered representation, some relevant research has been done. Reynolds (2013) studied 96 legislatures between 1976 and 2011 and found that even in small numbers, openly queer politicians are consistently associated with progressive rights and legal protection for the LGBTQIA+ community. He links this connection to, for example, familiarity through presence for colleagues and a continuous effort to keep issues of sexuality on the agenda. This study also notes an increase in the promotion of gay candidates by conservative political parties in Europe, but party ideology is not studied as a factor in the degree of representation. A study done on the U.S. Congress from 1997 to 2021 by Bishin and Weller (2025) found that LGB legislators are more supportive of queer rights than straight legislators, linking the result to shared living experience, which fosters group identity and issue prioritisation. They do, however, note that the positive effect is substantively small due to the lack of openly queer legislators, noting that an increase in queer legislators would positively impact representation. Donald Haider-Markel (2007) also notes a correlation between descriptive and substantive representation for the LGBTQIA+ community in a study conducted in the US, finding that the number of pro-LGBTQIA+ bills adopted increases when more openly queer candidates are elected, but also notes a possible negative backlash of descriptive representation.

While there have been significant studies conducted on the link between descriptive and substantive representation for the LGBTQIA+ community, these studies don't include a focus on party ideology or intersectional debates, and if they do, it is very brief. This thesis proposes a causal mechanism where party ideology mediates whether descriptive representation translates into substantive advocacy, and how broadly this advocacy can be applied to the entire LGBTQIA+ community.

Political parties in representation.

In parliamentary systems, political parties serve as the primary organisational and ideological vehicles of representation. Rather than acting solely as individual agents, legislators are embedded within party structures that mediate their behaviour, communication, and policy priorities (Katz & Mair, 1995). Parties act as gatekeepers of political careers and as collective actors that define ideological positions, determine legislative agendas, and distribute speaking time and committee assignments. As such, representation in parliamentary contexts cannot be understood without accounting for the mediating role of parties. Individual MPs operate within constraints defined by their party's ideology, internal discipline, and strategic objectives.

A crucial analytical distinction in studying representation within party systems is that between *attention* and *position* (Weldon, 2002; Walgrave & Dejaeghere, 2017). *Attention* refers to the degree to which a political actor engages with a particular issue—how often and in what contexts it is raised—while *position* refers to the stance taken on that issue, whether supportive, neutral, or oppositional. Both dimensions are essential to understanding substantive representation, but capture different mechanisms. Close attention to an issue signals agenda-setting influence: it reflects which topics enter the political conversation. Position, on the other hand, reveals ideological orientation and the substantive direction of advocacy once attention has been established.

In the context of this research, the use of parliamentary questions as data allows for the systematic measurement of *attention*. Parliamentary questions are tools through which MPs can direct governmental focus toward specific issues, request information, and signal priorities to both ministers and the public. They therefore provide an excellent indicator of which topics individual MPs consider important enough to raise within the institutional constraints of their party. By examining which MPs, queer or straight, raise LGBTQIA+ issues, and how often, this thesis captures the extent of descriptive representatives' agenda-setting role. However, attention alone does not reveal whether the representation is substantively supportive. For this reason, the analysis also incorporates *position* through qualitative coding of tone and framing. By examining whether the questions are supportive, neutral, or critical, the study links attention to normative orientation, offering insight into how descriptive representation translates, or fails to translate, into substantive advocacy.

Distinguishing between right and left-wing parties within the Dutch political system will be done by following the guidelines established by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) on party positioning in Europe, which distinguishes between economic and cultural dimensions of political competition. Rather than relying on a single left–right scale, CHES separates economic ideology, concerning redistribution and state intervention, from the cultural GAL–TAN dimension, which captures attitudes toward identity, morality, and social values. The latter is particularly relevant for the study of LGBTQIA+ representation. Parties positioned on the GAL side of the scale are culturally progressive, libertarian, and supportive of minority and LGBTQIA+ rights, whereas TAN parties emphasise traditional values, authority, and nationalism. In the Dutch context, parties such as GroenLinks–PvdA, D66, PvdD, Volt, and, to a lesser extent, the SP score clearly on the GAL side, while PVV, Forum voor Democratie, SGP, and ChristenUnie score on the TAN side. Parties such as

VVD, CDA, and 50PLUS occupy intermediate positions, combining formal support for LGBTQIA+ equality with more restrained engagement in broader queer advocacy.

While this thesis refers to VVD, CDA, and 50PLUS as centre-right parties, it does not classify them as TAN parties in the strict sense used by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. According to CHES, these parties occupy an intermediate position on the cultural GAL–TAN dimension: they are economically right-wing or centre-right, but culturally more moderate than explicitly TAN parties such as PVV, FvD, SGP, or ChristenUnie. The analytical distinction used in this thesis, therefore, contrasts progressive (GAL) parties with non-GAL parties, rather than equating all centre-right parties with culturally traditional or authoritarian positions. This distinction is particularly relevant for analysing LGBTQIA+ representation, which is shaped primarily by cultural rather than economic ideology

Mügge’s framework on women’s representation.

Mügge (2023) shows that descriptive representation of women does not automatically equal substantive outcomes. Instead, women’s ability to act for women is conditioned by party ideology and institutional setting. Mügge examined candidate recruitment and parliamentary behaviour in European contexts, and placed a focus on the fact that women are not a homogeneous group, “women’s issues” intersect with race, class, religion and many other identity factors and therefore not all women benefit equally from descriptive representation, as not all women can be represented in the same way. Building on Mügge’s framework, this thesis hypothesises that the substantive representation of LGBTQIA+ issues by openly queer politicians is conditioned by party ideology. Specifically, queer MPs in conservative parties are expected to provide less substantive representation for the broader LGBTQIA+ community than their counterparts in left-wing parties,

mirroring patterns observed in women's representation. The first two hypotheses this thesis builds on are:

H1: "Queer MPs devote a larger share of their written questions to LGBTQIA+ issues than their straight colleagues."

H2: "Queer MPs in left-wing parties devote more attention to queer issues than queer MPs in centre/right parties."

Political parties play a decisive role in shaping who gains access to elected office, and party ideology conditions both the extent and meaning of descriptive representation. Liza Mügge's research on women's representation in Europe shows that left-wing parties are more likely to recruit and promote female candidates, framing their inclusion as part of a broader ideological commitment to equality. Conservative parties, by contrast, may also recruit women, but frequently in symbolic ways, using their presence to signal modernity or inclusiveness without granting them real influence over the party agenda. This gatekeeping role means that descriptive representation is never ideologically neutral: it reflects party priorities and strategic calculations.

Applying Mügge's framework to queer politicians highlights a similar dynamic. left-wing parties tend to provide more viable opportunities for openly queer candidates and encourage them to foreground LGBTQIA+ issues. Conservative parties may also include queer candidates, but often emphasise assimilationist narratives, limiting the scope of their advocacy. Thus, ideology not only influences how many queer representatives reach office but also shapes the political meaning of their presence, which leads to the third hypothesis:

H3: "Members, specifically queer members, of left-wing parties raise more attention for diverse queer issues compared to queer members of right-wing parties"

Case selection.

This thesis examines the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation of LGBTQIA+ issues in parliamentary politics. In order to ensure both theoretical relevance and methodological feasibility, the case selection is restricted to European democracies in which openly LGBTQ+ individuals have served as members of national parliaments. Europe provides a relatively coherent institutional environment characterised by parliamentary systems, strong party organisation, and broadly comparable legislative practices. Limiting the scope to Europe, therefore, allows for meaningful comparison while reducing institutional variation that could obscure the mechanisms under study.

The initial universe of cases consisted of all European countries in which openly LGBTQ+ Members of Parliament (MPs) have served at the national level. While no single comprehensive dataset exists, the presence of LGBTQ+ parliamentarians across Europe is well documented through a combination of historical records, academic literature, NGO reporting, and publicly available biographical information. Sources such as Justapedia's overview of first LGBTQ+ political officeholders and ILGA-Europe's country monitoring confirm that openly LGBTQ+ MPs have served in a substantial number of European legislatures since the late twentieth century.

From this initial universe, cases were narrowed down using criteria directly derived from the research design. First, the study requires sustained descriptive representation: countries in which openly LGBTQ+ representation was limited to a single MP or a very brief period were excluded, as these cases offer insufficient variation for systematic comparison. Second, because this thesis analyses written parliamentary questions as an indicator of substantive representation, countries were excluded if written questions do not play a central role in parliamentary practice or if historical archives are incomplete or difficult to access. Third, the research design relies on ideological

variation across parties. Countries in which openly LGBTQ+ MPs are overwhelmingly concentrated within one ideological camp provide limited leverage for assessing how party ideology conditions substantive representation. Finally, institutional comparability was taken into account, excluding cases where parliamentary practices surrounding questions were unsuitable for this analysis.

Applying these criteria resulted in the exclusion of a number of European countries. Belgium was excluded despite the presence of openly LGBTQ+ MPs, as its federal and bicameral structure complicates the systematic comparison of written questions across chambers and levels of government. Sweden, Norway, and Denmark were excluded because written parliamentary questions play a less central agenda-setting role and because archival continuity across legislative periods is less uniform. Germany and France were excluded due to fragmented archival systems and variation in how parliamentary questions are recorded and accessed over time. Southern European cases such as Spain and Italy were excluded because openly LGBTQ+ representation has been more limited in continuity and party dispersion, reducing opportunities for within-party paired comparison. Ireland and Austria were excluded due to the relatively small number of openly LGBTQ+ MPs and limited ideological variation among them. Several Central and Eastern European countries were excluded either because descriptive representation has been highly sporadic or because institutional and political contexts surrounding LGBTQIA+ issues differ substantially from those in Western European parliamentary democracies.

The Netherlands was selected as the final case because it satisfies all criteria central to the research design. The Dutch Tweede Kamer has a long and continuous history of openly LGBTQ+ representation, dating back to the early 1980s, allowing for analysis across multiple legislative periods. Importantly, openly LGBTQ+ MPs have served in both progressive and centre-right parties, which makes it possible to examine how party ideology conditions the relationship between

descriptive and substantive representation. In addition, the Netherlands maintains a comprehensive, publicly accessible archive of written parliamentary questions spanning several decades, ensuring reliable and replicable data collection. Written questions play a central role in Dutch parliamentary practice as a tool for agenda-setting, government scrutiny, and issue signalling, making them a particularly suitable indicator of substantive representation. The Dutch parliamentary system provides a favourable setting for such analysis because written parliamentary questions offer a clear, comparable, and relatively unconstrained instrument that MPs use to signal issue prioritisation. These questions enable MPs to draw attention to neglected policy areas, pressure ministers, and communicate with interest groups. As a discretionary tool, unlike voting, which is strongly controlled by party discipline, they provide insight into MPs' individual political priorities within the boundaries of party structures. Adding to the previously mentioned analytical advantages, the Netherlands as a case also benefits from a qualitative language-based analysis due to proficiency in the Dutch language by the author.

| Country | Openly LGBTQ MPS | Included/Excluded | Justification |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Netherlands | Yes | Included | Sustained representation, strong party variation, full archival access, and language familiarity benefits |
| Belgium | Yes | Excluded | Federal complexity complicates comparison |
| Germany | Yes | Excluded | Fragmented archival access and institutional variation |
| France | Yes | Excluded | Parliamentary questions less central, archival inconsistency |
| Sweden | Yes | Excluded | Written questions less |

| | | | |
|----------------|---------|----------|------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | central to agenda setting |
| Norway | Yes | Excluded | Limited archival continuity for questions |
| Denmark | Yes | Excluded | Institutional difference in use of questions |
| Spain | Yes | Excluded | Limited continuity and ideological variety |
| Italy | Yes | Excluded | Short representation span |
| Ireland | Yes | Excluded | Small pool of LGBTQ MPs, limited party variation |
| Austria | Yes | Excluded | Limited number and continuity of LGBTQ MPs |
| Finland | Yes | Excluded | Limited data continuity and scope |
| Poland | Limited | Excluded | Hostile political context and limited representation |
| Czech Republic | Yes | Excluded | Limited continuity and small sample size |

Table 1: European countries considered with reason for exclusion

Research method.

This project investigates whether the descriptive representation of openly LGBTQ Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Netherlands translates into substantive representation of LGBTQIA+ issues, and how party ideology shapes that link. This thesis used a qualitative research design where a paired comparison was carried out based on parliamentary questions posed in the Tweede Kamer. The following section will discuss the study's research methods and justify its choices.

As explained in the previous section, the case selected for this thesis is the Netherlands, following a time period that spans from 1998 to the present. This starting point offers a reliable record of written parliamentary questions available on the official website *overheid.nl*, provided by the Dutch government. Aside from the availability of records, this time period also includes discussions regarding the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2001, one of the most relevant issues in queer history. This project will use a paired comparison strategy to isolate the effect of MPs' sexual orientation while holding constant other factors such as party affiliation, gender, and political portfolio. This ensures that observed differences in parliamentary behaviour are not simply a product of ideology or committee assignment. The sample size used is as follows: queer MPs (27), partly affiliated with left-wing parties (Groenlinks, PvdA, D66, SP and Volt), and partly with centre-right parties (VVD, CDA, 50plus). Matched straight MPs (27): for each queer MP, a heterosexual MP from the same party is selected, same gender if possible and similar political portfolio.

The paired comparison list was created by identifying all openly LGBTQ MPs since 1998 and matching them to comparable straight MPs. Matching criteria was done according to the following hierarchy: same political party, same or similar political portfolio (e.g. finance, agriculture, justice), same gender. Where no perfect match existed, for example, in smaller parties, the closest possible match was selected, compromises made in this process are explicitly named in the appendix. Within the scope of this thesis, political parties were defined as small when they had fewer seats in parliament than there are ministries, a conceptual consideration that is further elaborated on in the analysis section. This process ensures transparency in case selection and comparability across MPs. The full paired comparison with justification is included in Appendix A.

The primary evidence for this study consists of written parliamentary questions submitted to the Dutch Tweede Kamer, as written questions are an excellent indicator of substantive representation because they allow MPs to raise issues proactively, pressure ministers, and signal priorities to voters and interest groups. The official digital archive of the *Tweede Kamer* provides a searchable record of every written question since the late 1990s, which ensures the proposed time period can be properly researched. The dataset consists of a sample of 150 randomly selected questions by each politician where available, and where not, all available questions were included. The selected questions were then manually analysed.

The analysis is divided into three stages:

1. Establishing Scope and Frequency

- A 150-question sample posed by the paired MPs is read and coded for inclusion of queer issues.
- This produces a measure of how often queer MPs raise sexuality issues compared to straight MPs within the same party, as well as highlighting differences based on party ideology.

2. Tone Analysis

- Each LGBTQIA+-related question is coded for tone: supportive of LGBTQ rights, neutral, or critical/oppositional.
- This establishes whether descriptive representation translates into *positive substantive representation*, or whether some MPs raise sexuality issues without supportive framing, as well as creates a clear view on the differences identified between left-wing and right / centre parties.

3. In-Depth Thematic Reading

- A qualitative close reading of all LGBTQIA+-related questions is then conducted.

- This stage also asks whether questions reflect the *entire LGBTQIA+ community* or primarily the concerns of the most visible subgroups while undermining the interests of, for example, queer people with an immigration background, disabilities or transgender individuals. This allows analysis of inclusiveness and intersectional depth.

Several methodological options were considered for this project. One possibility considered was to apply an automated large-N text-as-data approach, using keyword filtering and dictionary coding across the full Tweede Kamer archive. While this would have generated a very large dataset and enabled statistical inference, it risks overlooking nuance. Indirect or symbolic references to LGBTQIA+ issues, such as questions framed around “family diversity” or “social cohesion,” might not be captured by rigid keyword searches. Moreover, dictionary methods cannot account for subtle differences in tone, framing, or intention, which are central to this research question. By using a manual, qualitative approach, these subtleties can be properly identified and incorporated into the analysis, assisted by the author's proficiency in the Dutch language. Another possible design would have been a purely quantitative count of the number of LGBTQIA+-related questions per MP. While this would make comparison straightforward, it would treat all questions as equal, regardless of whether they express support, opposition, or symbolic acknowledgement. Such an approach would risk missing the mechanisms by which descriptive representation is translated (or not translated) into substantive representation. A purely quantitative approach would also, again, miss the nuanced language essential to draw proper conclusions.

This thesis instead adopted a qualitative paired comparison design, applied to 150 questions posed by the selected MPs. Every question is manually read and coded for whether it concerns LGBTQIA+ issues, its tone and its thematic focus. While requiring a larger manual workload, this method ensures complete coverage and avoids the risk of missing subtle or implicit references,

leading to the choice of qualitative over quantitative research for this thesis. The choice of the approach reflects the research purpose: to uncover how and why descriptive representation may influence substantive representation, and how party ideology shapes this relationship. While some quantitative counts (e.g., frequency of LGBTQIA+-related questions) are used descriptively, the core of the analysis is interpretive, focusing on meaning, framing, and mechanisms. In this sense, the method prioritises depth over breadth, offering insights that a purely quantitative design would struggle to capture.

Two hypotheses guide the empirical analysis. The first states that queer MPs devote a larger share of their written questions to LGBTQIA+ issues than their straight colleagues. This hypothesis is grounded in earlier findings that LGBTQ elected officials tend to prioritise LGBTQIA+ rights more than non-LGBTQ legislators, due to lived experience, community ties, and heightened sensitivity to discrimination. The second hypothesis claims that LGBTQ MPs in left-wing parties devote more attention to queer issues than queer MPs in centre/right parties, following Mügge's theoretical claim that descriptive representation only becomes substantively meaningful within ideological environments that legitimise and reward equality-based claims. Conservative parties, by contrast, may tolerate descriptive diversity while discouraging identity-based representation.

Analysis.

This chapter examines whether the descriptive representation of LGBTQ Members of Parliament (MPs) in the Netherlands leads to substantive representation of LGBTQIA+ issues and how party ideology conditions that relationship.

The empirical analysis is based on 150 randomly selected written questions per MP, ensuring comparability across politicians and party families. Random selection was performed using a random

number generator, where MPs had fewer than 150 written questions in total; all available questions were analysed. This process prevents systematic bias linked to periods of high political activity, ministerial oversight responsibility, or any targeted interference by the author. The dataset, therefore, reflects a balanced sample of questions across legislative periods, capturing both long-serving MPs with extensive questioning records and MPs with more limited parliamentary tenures. This paired comparison design allows the analysis to isolate the effect of sexual identity while keeping party context constant, thereby enabling an assessment of whether and how sexual identity shapes parliamentary behaviour in different ideological environments.

The following sections examine general patterns of attention, ideological conditioning, behavioural comparisons within parties, issue-area specificity, inclusiveness, unexpected findings, and the mechanisms that appear to link identity and ideology in shaping substantive representation based on the analysis carried out as described in the previous sections.

General Patterns of Attention.

The analysis of posed questions ended up studying 5657 written questions across 54 politicians, a slightly lower number than expected, as a high number of the selected politicians posed fewer than 150 questions in their time as MPs. Across the full dataset of results, LGBTQ MPs devoted an average of 2.9% of their written questions to LGBTQIA+ issues, whereas straight MPs devoted 0.9%. To account for sampling uncertainty, margins of uncertainty were calculated using 95 per cent confidence intervals. These indicate that the share of LGBTQIA+ questions among queer MPs lies within a relatively narrow range, while the corresponding estimate for straight MPs is substantially lower. Importantly, the confidence intervals for the two groups show limited overlap, suggesting that the observed difference is not driven by random variation in the sampled questions.

This pattern supports the expectation that descriptive representation increases the likelihood of substantive engagement. The overall difference remains meaningful even when controlling for variation in party-family distribution. Indeed, the clearest outcome across the dataset is that queer MPs, on average, display a greater propensity to raise queer issues than their straight counterparts.

Yet this overall picture obscures the spread of the obtained results. Some LGBTQ MPs devote an exceptionally large share of their questions to LGBTQIA+ issues. Boris van der Ham (D66) reaches 19.3%, Boris Dittrich (D66) 9.3%, Lisa van Ginneken (D66) 9%, and Alexander Hammelburg (D66) 8.5%. These MPs devote a noticeable portion of their parliamentary agenda to LGBTQIA+ rights, more than any straight MP in the sample. Notably, all politicians with the highest percentage of queer-related questions were from the same political party, D66.

At the same time, a substantial group of LGBTQ MPs, particularly those in centre/right parties, pose no LGBTQIA+ related questions in their sampled set. This includes multiple VVD and CDA MPs, as well as some queer MPs from smaller or centrist parties. While descriptive representation increases the likelihood of substantive action, it does not guarantee it. Individual variation is wide, and identity effects are mediated by party structures, political strategy, and personal political portfolios.

It is important to emphasise that an MP's absence of LGBTQIA+ questions does not imply an absence of LGBTQIA+ advocacy. Parliamentary questions are only one instrument within a broader repertoire. Some MPs use debates, speeches, or legislative initiatives instead. For example, Henk Krol, despite scoring 0% in the dataset, played a pivotal role in campaigning for same-sex marriage during the 1980s and 1990s and remains outspoken on queer issues. Such cases illustrate that the analysis captures only one channel of representation; nonetheless, written questions remain a significant and analytically valuable signal of issue prioritisation within parliament.

The Role of Party Context.

The starkest pattern in the dataset emerges from comparing left-wing and centre/right parties. Among left-wing parties, LGBTQ MPs devote 4.5% of their questions to LGBTQIA+ issues, whereas straight left-wing MPs devote 1.1%. This substantial gap suggests that descriptive representation is strongly activated within left-wing ideological settings. The parties in this cluster typically endorse normative equality frameworks, support minority rights, and encourage representatives to foreground social justice themes.

In contrast, the centre/right sample reveals considerably lower levels of attention. LGBTQ MPs in centre/right parties devote 0.95% of their questions to LGBTQIA+ topics, and straight centre/right MPs devote 0.43%. The identity effect persists but is muted. Within conservative party contexts such as the VVD and CDA, MPs, both LGBTQ and straight, rarely use written questions to address LGBTQIA+ matters. To assess the robustness of these proportions, Table 2 below presents margins of uncertainty for each group. These patterns mirror Mügge's theoretical claim that descriptive presence in conservative settings often leads to symbolic rather than substantive representation, as party cultures emphasise neutrality, assimilation, or de-emphasis of minority identity. Moreover, the distribution of MPs with zero LGBTQIA+ questions sharply differs across ideologies: 36.1% of left-wing MPs fall into this category, compared to 55.5% of centre/right MPs. The latter group includes multiple LGBTQ MPs. This demonstrates that conservative environments significantly constrain descriptive representatives, limiting their capacity or willingness to foreground sexual identity in their parliamentary work. Ideology, therefore, exerts a strong structuring effect on whether sexual identity becomes politically salient. Descriptive representation translates into substantive representation primarily where ideological environments support equality claims.

| Group | Queer related questions (x) | Total number of questions (n) | Percentage | 95% Confidence interval | Margin of uncertainty |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| Queer left | 79 | 1759 | 4.49% | 3.62%-5.56% | ± 0.97% |
| Straight left | 25 | 2263 | 1.10% | 0.75%-1.63% | ±0.44% |
| Queer centre-right | 8 | 842 | 0.95% | 0.48%-1.86% | ± 0.69% |
| Straight centre-right | 3 | 700 | 0.43% | 0.15%-1.25% | ± 0.55% |

Table 2: Queer related questions per group.

Margins of uncertainty are based on 95% Wilson confidence intervals for binomial proportions. Percentages represent the share of LGBTQIA+ questions among all analysed questions per group. The relatively narrow margins of uncertainty for progressive MPs indicate stable estimates, while wider margins for centre-right MPs reflect small numbers of queer-related questions rather than sampling error.

Paired Comparisons Within Parties

Paired comparison within parties reinforces the identity effect but reveals important nuances. Among left-wing MPs, LGBTQ individuals typically surpass their straight counterparts in the proportion of LGBTQIA+ questions. This pattern is consistent across most pairs, suggesting that sexual identity adds distinct representational value even in ideologically favourable settings. Nonetheless, a minority of straight left-wing MPs exceed their LGBTQ counterparts. Bram van Ojik (GroenLinks) stands out as an example of a straight MP who scored higher than matched LGBTQ MPs in comparable categories. This indicates that ideological commitment can generate substantive representation independent of descriptive sexual identity characteristics. Among centre/right pairs,

LGBTQ MPs generally ask more LGBTQIA+ questions than their straight matches, but the differences are small, and several LGBTQ MPs ask none at all. This stands in contrast to left-wing contexts, where LGBTQ MPs exceed straight MPs by wider margins. Conservative contexts appear to suppress sexual identity as a political resource. LGBTQ MPs may refrain from raising LGBTQIA+ issues due to strategic concerns, limited ideological space, or internal party expectations.

These findings suggest that the additive effect of identity on substantive representation exists within all party families but is largely shaped and amplified by ideological context. Where left-wing norms prevail, LGBTQ MPs can utilise their identity to raise LGBTQIA+ concerns. In conservative contexts, this potential becomes limited or dormant.

Issue-Area Distribution and Substantive Emphases.

Examining which LGBTQIA+ issues MPs raise reveals significant distinctions across ideological lines. When studying the entire dataset of queer related questions across all politicians analysed, the largest thematic categories include international human rights, legal equality and family law, EU-related issues, trans issues, sexuality based hate crimes, queer health issues, and queer refugees/asylum issues. These categories indicate that LGBTQIA+ representation in Dutch parliamentary questions is multi-dimensional and extends beyond symbolic visibility. The table below shows the different categories identified in the qualitative analysis of the queer related questions found through the analysis, an explanation of said categories, the percentage of questions found per category, and an example question. Because parliamentary questions often address multiple policy domains simultaneously, questions were not assigned to a single exclusive topic, a good example of this is a question posed by Koekkoek in February 2022 regarding the annual review

by ILGA Europe, which poses questions on Dutch queer rights, international queer rights, queer refugees, trans issues, and healthcare (2022), and can therefore not be classified in just one category. To address this, a multi-label coding approach was used, in which each question could be coded under multiple substantive categories (e.g. legal rights, trans issues, asylum, health). Topic categories were coded as binary indicators, allowing the analysis to capture the full substantive scope of each question. As a result, aggregate topic counts may exceed the total number of questions, reflecting overlapping issue coverage rather than measurement error.

| Category | Explanation | Number of questions | Example question |
|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Trans issues | Trans rights/healthcare/gender identity | 11.2% | Questions from members Paulusma and Van Ginneken (both D66) to the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport about facial surgery in transgender care (2023) |
| EU | International issues specifically located in the EU, questions involve a call for action through the EU treaties/institutions | 16.4% | Questions from members Ten Broeke and Van Baalen (both VVD) and Van der Ham (D66) to the minister of foreign affairs regarding statement from Polish ombudsperson on a professional ban for Polish homosexuals. (2007) |
| Legal | Gay marriage, adoption, equal treatment legislation (e.g. quotas) | 20.7% | Questions from members Van der Ham and Dittrich (both D66) to the secretary of health, welfare and sport regarding the underrepresentation of homosexuals in top business positions. (2006) |
| International | Foreign policy, international human rights | 31.9% | Questions from Member Van Den Nieuwenhuijzen (GroenLinks) to the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation about the position of the LGBT+ community in Ghana. (2021) |
| Education | Education or cultural issues linked to LGBTQ topics. | 7.8% | Questions from Members Rooderkerk (D66), Westerveld (GroenLinks-PvdA), Van Campen |

| | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | | (VVD) and Heite (Nieuw Sociaal Contract) to the State Secretary for Education, Culture and Science about the state of LGBTI acceptance in education and closer supervision thereof. (2025) |
| Health | Public-health or medical issues tied to LGBTQ identity. Conversion therapy, elderly care, Covid, Aids | 11.2% | Questions from members Bergkamp and Jetten (both D66) to the Minister of Health, Welfare and Sport about the article "Wouter wanted to donate blood plasma for a corona drug, but was refused." (2020) |
| Asylum and Refugees | Queer refugees | 8.6% | Questions from Members Koekkoek (Volt) and Simons (BIJ1) to the State Secretary for Justice and Security about the security situation in asylum centers for LGBTI asylum seekers. (2021) |
| Hate crimes and safety | Violence against queer community in the Netherlands | 8.6% | Questions from Member Dibi (GroenLinks) to the Minister of Security and Justice about residents being driven away because of their sexual orientation. (2011) |
| Pride | Participation in Pride events in NL | 9.5% | Question from Member Van der Ham (D66) to the State Secretary for Defence regarding the explicit refusal to participate in the CanalParade. (2008) |
| Homonationalist questions | Anti-immigrant rhetoric | 2.6% | Questions from Member Verburg (CDA) to the Minister for Urban and Integration Policy regarding statements by Imams regarding homosexuality. (2001) |

Table 3: Question categories with examples

left-wing LGBTQ MPs dominate almost all issue areas and display the broadest substantive range. They contribute extensively to questions concerning trans rights, queer asylum seekers, queer health disparities, intersectional vulnerability, and international LGBTQIA+ persecution. Their portfolios reflect comprehensive attention to the structural, institutional, and transnational

dimensions of LGBTQIA+ politics. Left-wing straight MPs similarly demonstrate activity, though to a lesser degree. Their questioning patterns often reflect portfolio alignments in areas such as justice, asylum, and foreign affairs, where LGBTQIA+ issues intersect substantially with mainstream policy arenas. Centre/right MPs, by contrast, engage far less with LGBTQIA+ topics. Their contributions are typically limited to legal or EU-related concerns. Notably, none of the LGBTQ MPs in this ideological cluster pose questions on trans issues, queer asylum, queer health, or intersectional oppression. This creates a substantively narrower form of LGBTQIA+ representation that largely avoids the most vulnerable subgroups within the community. The table below shows the distribution of questions asked per topic, divided by the sexuality and party ideology of the politician.

| Category | LGBTQ left-wing | Straight left-wing | LGBTQ centre / right-wing | Straight centre / right-wing |
|---------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Trans issues | 13.8% | 8.0% | 12.5% | 0.0% |
| EU | 10.0% | 16.0% | 37.5% | 0.0% |
| Legal | 20.0% | 16.0% | 12.5% | 33.3% |
| International | 31.3% | 12.0% | 0.0% | 33.3% |
| Education | 8.8% | 4.0% | 12.5% | 0.0% |
| Health | 12.5% | 12.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Asylum / Refugees | 10.0% | 8.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| Hate crimes | 10.0% | 8.0% | 12.5% | 0.0% |
| Pride | 6.3% | 12.0% | 12.5% | 0.0% |
| Homonationalist questions | 0.0% | 0% | 25.0% | 33.3% |
| Total number of questions | 80 | 25 | 8 | 3 |

Table 4: Topics of queer-related questions per category

A distinct pattern emerges concerning homonationalism. All homonationalism-related questions originate from centre/right MPs. Homonationalist rhetoric positions LGBTQIA+ tolerance as part of Dutch national identity and often contrasts “left-wing Dutch values” with the perceived cultural backwardness of migrant or Muslim communities (Puar, 2007). The term is used to critique how certain LGBTQIA+ agendas are used to promote Islamophobia, xenophobia and discrimination in general by creating a divide between the “progressive West” and the “oppressive East” (Sabsay, 2012). The complete absence of such rhetoric among left-wing MPs reinforces a conceptual distinction: being “pro-LGBTQIA+” is not necessarily aligned with equality-based queer advocacy. Instead, centre/right MPs may invoke LGBTQIA+ rights to advance nationalist or exclusionary narratives. MPs emphasise LGBTQIA+ issues within a human rights or social justice framework, demonstrating an alternative mode of representation. To conclude, thematic variation not only reflects differences in the quantity of attention but also highlights ideological distinctions in the quality and political framing of LGBTQIA+ advocacy.

Inclusiveness Across LGBTQIA+ Subgroups.

Inclusiveness provides an essential dimension for evaluating substantive representation. While aggregate percentages reveal frequency, inclusiveness reflects the breadth of the LGBTQIA+ community being represented. Certain subgroups, such as trans individuals, non-binary individuals, intersex individuals, queer migrants, and bisexual individuals, are historically underrepresented in both media and policymaking arenas. The dataset demonstrates that left-wing queer MPs overwhelmingly carry the burden of representing these more vulnerable subgroups. They account for the vast majority of trans-related questions and nearly all questions concerning queer asylum seekers. They also cover specialised health issues, such as HIV treatment disparities, mental health inequities, and barriers to medical care for queer youth. Straight left-wing MPs occasionally raise

such issues, but at lower frequencies. Their contributions remain meaningful, particularly in areas such as hate crimes and legal equality, yet they rarely represent the full spectrum of LGBTQIA+ subgroups.

Centre/right MPs show minimal inclusiveness. No queer MP in this ideological cluster raises issues concerning trans rights or queer asylum seekers. Their questioning patterns emphasise equality in principle, national pride, or rule-of-law perspectives rather than advocating for marginalised subgroups. Such patterns reflect narrower, less inclusive representational practices consistent with ideological environments that view minority advocacy as politically risky or ideologically misaligned, or simply absent from the priority list. This divergence underscores the importance of ideological context in enabling inclusive representation. Descriptive identity alone does not generate broad-based representation. Instead, identity interacts with party norms, ideological commitments, and institutional organisation, resulting in widely divergent representational outcomes across ideological divides.

Gender-based findings.

The analysis aimed to pair MPs with same-gendered matches, which succeeded in 21 out of 28 paired comparisons. To assess whether gender adds explanatory value beyond the main variables of sexuality and party ideology, Table 5 below shows the share of LGBTQIA+ related questions by gender.

| Gender | Queer related questions | Total questions | Percentage | Margin of uncertainty |
|---------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Female | 22 | 1540 | 1.43% | ±0.60% |
| Male | 91 | 3922 | 2.32% | ±0.47% |
| Other | 2 | 102 | 1.96% | ±3.17% |

Table 5: Queer-related questions divided by gender

Descriptive comparison by gender shows that male MPs devote a slightly higher share of their parliamentary questions to LGBTQIA+ related questions than female MPs. The estimate for the non-binary category is accompanied by a very high margin of uncertainty due to the small sample size, as only one MP falls under this category (Ines Kostic, PvdD). Overall, the differences observed between gendered categories are substantively smaller than those observed for sexual identity and party ideology, suggesting that gender variables do not fundamentally alter the main findings of this thesis.

Party size considerations.

Beyond party ideology and sexuality based descriptive representation, party size is an important institutional factor shaping parliamentary questioning behaviour. This section examines whether party size influences the extent to which MPs raise LGBTQIA+ issues and how this institutional context conditions the translation of descriptive representation into observable substantive representation. The relevance of party size lies in its effect on internal party organisation. Larger parties possess sufficient parliamentary capacity to allocate MPs to clearly defined policy portfolios that closely mirror ministerial responsibilities. In these contexts, MPs are expected to focus their written questions on a narrow set of policy areas, while responsibility for LGBTQIA+ issues is typically concentrated among designated spokespersons. Smaller parties, by contrast, lack the capacity for strict portfolio specialisation. MPs in these parties are therefore required, and able to cover a broader range of issues, which hypothetically could raise individual discretion in issue selection and allow LGBTQIA+ topics to be raised alongside other policy concerns.

Based on this logic, the analysis expected MPs operating in small-party contexts to exhibit greater diversity in their parliamentary questioning, including closer attention to LGBTQIA+ issues.

MPs in large-party contexts would be expected to display more constrained issue engagement, regardless of sexual identity. To examine this expectation, MPs were classified according to party size during their parliamentary service, using a threshold of fifteen seats to distinguish between large and small parties. The number of 15 seats is based on the number of ministries in the most recent Dutch government, following the line of argumentation that parties with fewer seats than ministries will have more overlap in MPs' portfolios, while parties with more seats than ministries will have a more clearly defined division. Most MPs could be unambiguously classified and are presented in the first table, while three mixed-context cases are treated separately as outliers in a second table.

| Straight + Large party | Straight + small party | Queer + large party | Queer + small party |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| Weverling (VVD) 0% | Dassen (VOLT) 2.5% | van Campen (VVD) 5.2% | Koekkoek (VOLT) 6.1% |
| Pierik (CDA) 0% | Thijssen (GL) 0% | Jetten (D66) 3.6% | Gabriels (GL) 0% |
| Eurlings (CDA) 0.8% | Vestering (PvdD) 0% | Verburg (CDA) 0.7% | Kostic (PvdD) 1.7% |
| Biskop (CDA) 0.7% | Weyenberg (D66) 0% | Wijn (CDA) 0.8% | van der Ham (D66) 19.3% |
| Rutte (VVD) 0% | Bakker (D66) 0% | Koopmans (CDA) 0.7% | Dibi (GL) 4.7% |
| van Laar (PvdA) 3.2% | Peters (GL) 1.3% | Potters (VVD) 0% | Heemelaar (GL) 37.5% |
| Groot (PvdA) 0% | Grashof (GL) 0% | Oosenbrug (PvdA) 1.3% | Krol (50PLUS) 0% |
| van Gerven (SP) 0% | Klein (50plus) 0% | Smaling (SP) 0% | Wassenberg (PvdD) 0% |
| Paternotte (D66) 0.7% | Ouwehand (PvdD) 0% | Boucke (D66) 0% | Nieuwenhuizen (GL) 7.1% |
| Veldman (VVD) 0% | van Ojik (GL) 3.3% | Hammelburg (D66) 8.5% | Dittrich (D66) 9.3% |
| Ratjowski (VVD) 0% | Verhoeven (D66) 0% | van Ginneken (D66) 9% | |
| Belhaj (D66) 1.5% | Pechtold (D66) 3.3% | van den Hill (VVD) 1.1% | |
| Bevers (VVD) 0% | | Strolenburg (VVD) 0% | |
| Bouali (D66) 2.5% | | Synhave (D66) 0% | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|--|
| | | Cornielje (VVD) 0% | |
|--|--|--------------------|--|

Table 6: Percentage of queer related questions divided by party size

| MP | Party | Sexuality | Large party | Small party |
|------------|-------|-----------|----------------|----------------|
| van Velzen | SP | Queer | 2006-2010 (0%) | 2002-2006 (0%) |
| van Bommel | SP | Straight | 2006-2017 (0%) | 1998-2006 (0%) |
| Nijboer | PvdA | Queer | 2012-2017 (0%) | 2017-2023 (0%) |

Table 7: Outliers

The results from the main table support these expectations. MPs operating within small-party contexts display substantially greater variation in the share of LGBTQIA+ questions they pose. Several queer MPs in small parties devote a meaningful proportion of their written questions to LGBTQIA+ issues, in some cases at notably high levels. This pattern reflects the broader issue portfolios held by MPs in small parties, where institutional constraints on issue selection are limited and individual priorities are more readily expressed.

In contrast, MPs operating within large-party contexts, both queer and straight, rarely raise LGBTQIA+ issues in their written questions. Straight MPs in large parties typically pose no LGBTQIA+ questions at all, while queer MPs in these contexts show consistently low levels of engagement. This pattern suggests that portfolio specialisation and internal coordination in large parties suppress the visibility of substantive representation at the level of individual MPs. The absence of LGBTQIA+ questions in these cases should therefore not be interpreted as a lack of support, but as an institutional constraint on parliamentary behaviour.

The three mixed-context outliers further underline this conclusion. Although these MPs served during both large- and small-party periods, none raised LGBTQIA+ issues through written

questions. These cases illustrate that party size alone does not produce substantive representation, but rather shapes the opportunity for it to become visible when combined with individual motivation and ideological incentives. They also highlight the limitations of written questions as a comprehensive indicator of broader political engagement.

In conclusion, party size conditions the extent to which descriptive representation translates into observable substantive representation. Small-party contexts create institutional space for individual MPs, particularly queer MPs, to raise LGBTQIA+ issues across a broader set of policy areas. Large-party contexts, by contrast, constrain individual issue selection through portfolio specialisation, thereby limiting the visibility of substantive representation even when descriptive representation is present. Party size, therefore, operates as a moderating institutional factor that shapes how identity and ideology are expressed in parliamentary questioning. Taken together, these findings reinforce the central argument of this thesis: descriptive representation increases the likelihood of substantive engagement with LGBTQIA+ issues, but the extent to which this engagement becomes visible in parliamentary behaviour is fundamentally shaped by party ideology and institutional context, including party size.

Unexpected Findings and Contextual Considerations

Several unexpected patterns appear across the dataset. First, the high proportion of MPs, both queer and straight, who ask no queer related questions suggests that issue specialisation and within-party division of labour significantly shape parliamentary activity. MPs often focus on portfolios assigned by party leadership, and LGBTQIA+ advocacy may fall primarily to MPs with justice, foreign affairs, or social affairs portfolios. This partially explains why some historically significant queer activists appear inactive in this dataset. Within this observation, a large difference

can be made between smaller and larger parties. In large parties with a larger number of seats in the Tweede Kamer, political portfolios are more strictly specialised. Politicians with a housing or environment portfolio will solely ask questions relating to their speciality, as they know that there are others in their party who will ask questions on queer matters based on their portfolios.

Second, the near absence of same-sex marriage in the coded questions is striking. Despite its historical importance, this issue appears rarely in written parliamentary questions, specifically only two politicians whose questions covered the time gay marriage was legalised in the Netherlands mention the issue, Boris Dittrich and Boris van der Ham, both of D66. This likely reflects temporal patterns: major legislative and symbolic debates surrounding same-sex marriage occurred in earlier periods or in plenary debates rather than through written questions.

Third, the presence of straight MPs, primarily within left-wing parties, who raise LGBTQIA+ issues more frequently than some queer MPs highlights the role of ideology and political commitment. While descriptive representation enhances the likelihood of substantive representation, ideology remains a powerful predictor of equality-oriented behaviour. Finally, centre/right queer MPs who contribute no LGBTQIA+ questions reflect constraints imposed by conservative party cultures. These MPs may avoid identity-based advocacy to align with party messaging, appeal to broader electorates, or maintain internal cohesion. Their silence reveals potential limits of symbolic inclusion within parties where substantive representation of minority identities is not ideologically prioritised.

Mechanisms Linking Identity, Ideology, and Parliamentary Behaviour

Several mechanisms emerge from the analysis. First, sexual identity increases the likelihood that MPs raise LGBTQIA+ issues, though unevenly. Identity appears to shape sensitivity to

discrimination, awareness of marginalisation, and prioritisation of certain policy areas. Second, ideological context amplifies or suppresses identity-based advocacy. left-wing parties provide ideological frameworks that normalise and encourage engagement with equality issues, enabling queer MPs to raise LGBTQIA+ topics more frequently and more inclusively. Conservative parties, by contrast, restrict such behaviour, resulting in narrower, symbolic, or nationally framed expressions of LGBTQIA+ support. Third, inclusiveness varies substantially across ideological contexts. Left-wing queer MPs represent a broader array of LGBTQIA+ subgroups, while centre/right queer MPs focus on selective or non-controversial aspects of LGBTQIA+ issues. The full breadth of queer representation, especially for trans, intersex, and refugee subgroups, arises almost exclusively within progressive contexts. Fourth, party size influences opportunity structures. Larger left-wing parties with more MPs offer greater potential for specialisation, enabling certain MPs to develop expertise in LGBTQIA+ issues. Smaller parties or parties with small caucuses tend to have broader portfolios, limiting MPs' ability to devote attention to niche issues, but also allowing members of the party to pose broader questions in general, as portfolios are less strictly divided due to a smaller number of chamber seats. Finally, straight MPs in progressive contexts demonstrate that substantive representation does not require descriptive identity when ideological frameworks prioritise equality. This nuanced intersection between identity and ideology highlights the complex nature of substantive representation.

Conclusion.

This thesis set out to examine whether descriptive representation of openly queer Members of Parliament in the Netherlands translates into substantive representation of LGBTQIA+ issues, and how party ideology shapes this relationship. By analysing written parliamentary questions in the Dutch Tweede Kamer through a paired comparison design, the study contributes to a growing but

still limited body of scholarship on LGBTQIA+ political representation. The findings of the executed analysis offer a nuanced answer: descriptive representation does matter, but its effects are neither automatic nor uniform. Instead, the relationship between identity and substantive engagement is strongly mediated by party ideology and institutional context.

Across the dataset, openly queer MPs consistently raised LGBTQIA+ issues more frequently than their straight counterparts. This pattern holds across party families and remains visible even when controlling for differences in overall activity levels. The presence of descriptive representation, therefore, increases the likelihood that LGBTQIA+ concerns enter the parliamentary agenda. This supports the central expectation derived from theories of descriptive representation: shared identity can heighten attention to group-related issues. Importantly, however, the results also show that this effect is not simply a function of personal identity alone.

Party ideology emerges as a crucial conditioning factor. Queer MPs operating within left-wing parties not only asked more questions on LGBTQIA+ issues, but also did so in a broader and more inclusive manner, covering a wide range of policy domains such as asylum, education, health, and international human rights. In contrast, queer MPs in centre-right parties raised LGBTQIA+ issues far less frequently, and when they did, their questions were more narrowly framed and often embedded within broader policy debates. This pattern closely mirrors findings from earlier research on women's representation and confirms the relevance of Mügge's framework beyond gender. Descriptive representatives do not operate in a vacuum: party ideology shapes both the opportunities and constraints under which they act.

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that the absence of descriptive representation does not automatically imply the absence of substantive representation. Straight MPs, particularly in progressive parties, also engaged with LGBTQIA+ issues, albeit to a lesser extent. This finding

underscores that substantive representation can be produced through ideological commitment rather than identity alone. However, the markedly lower share of LGBTQIA+ related questions posed by straight MPs suggests that without descriptive representation, such engagement is more contingent and less systematic.

Several limitations of this study must be acknowledged. First, the pool of openly queer MPs in conservative parties remains small. While this reflects empirical political realities, it limits the ability to conclude more strongly conservative or far-right contexts. The conservative MPs included in this study are primarily from centre-right parties, meaning that the findings cannot be extended to parties where LGBTQIA+ issues are openly contested or rejected. As a result, the thesis cannot fully assess how descriptive representation functions under conditions of ideological hostility.

Second, the study relies on written parliamentary questions as an indicator of substantive representation. While questions are a valuable and well-established measure of agenda-setting and issue attention, they do not capture all forms of political engagement. Some politicians included in this analysis, most notably figures such as Henk Krol, have been highly active in LGBTQIA+ activism, even if they did not raise queer-related parliamentary questions. Their limited or absent engagement in this dataset should therefore not be interpreted as a lack of commitment to queer issues. Rather, the findings should be understood as reflecting one specific institutional channel of representation.

The choice for manual qualitative coding, while time-intensive, proved essential in addressing several methodological challenges. Many questions employed indirect or evolving terminology, referred to external documents, or relied on contextual cues that would likely have been missed by automated coding approaches. Language surrounding LGBTQIA+ issues changed substantially over the nearly three decades covered by this study, making a rigid dictionary-based approach unsuitable.

Manual coding allowed these shifts, ambiguities, and contextual linkages to be accounted for, strengthening the validity of the findings.

Future research could build on this thesis in several ways. Comparative studies across multiple European countries would allow for stronger generalisation and enable systematic assessment of how institutional variation shapes LGBTQIA+ representation. Additionally, expanding the analysis to regional or local levels could capture forms of representation that operate closer to citizens and may be less constrained by party discipline. Finally, combining parliamentary analysis with interviews or biographical research could help bridge the gap between institutional behaviour and broader political activism, offering a more holistic picture of LGBTQIA+ representation.

In sum, this thesis demonstrates that descriptive representation increases attention to LGBTQIA+ issues, but that its substantive impact is deeply shaped by party ideology and institutional context. Identity matters, but it matters differently depending on where, and for whom, representation takes place.

References:

- Bishin, B. G., & Weller, N. (2025). The Substantive Effects of Descriptive Representation: Gay and Lesbian Members of Congress Are More Supportive of Gay Rights. *PS, Political Science & Politics*, 58(3), 393–399. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096525000289>
- Browne, K., & Nash, C. J. (2010). *Queer methods and methodologies: Intersecting queer theories and social science research*. Ashgate
- HAIDER-MARKEL, D. P. (2007). Representation and Backlash: The Positive and Negative Influence of Descriptive Representation. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 32(1), 107–133. <https://doi.org/10.3162/036298007X202001>
- LGA-Europe. (2025). ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANS, AND INTERSEX PEOPLE IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA. In European Union, Council of Europe, United Nations, & Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, ILGA-Europe. <https://www.ilga-europe.org/files/uploads/2025/02/ILGA-Europe-Annual-Review-2025.pdf>
- Jolly, Seth, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova. 2022. “Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019.” *Electoral Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102420>
- Katz, R. S., & Mair, P. (1995). *Changing models of party organization and party democracy: The emergence of the cartel party*. *Party Politics*, 1(1), 5–28.
- Kitching, K. (2024). Contemporary, racialised conflicts over LGBT-inclusive education: more strategic secularisms than secular/religious oppositions?. *Educational Review*, 76(3), 506-525.

- Mansfield, H. C. (1969). The Concept of Representation, by Hanna F. Pitkin. *Political Science Quarterly*, 84(4), 678–680. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2147153>
- Mügge, L., & Runderkamp, Z. (2023). Political narratives in representation: Maiden speeches of ethnic minority members of parliament. *European Journal Of Political Research*, 63(2), 579–598. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12632>
- Mügge, L., Runderkamp, Z., & Spierings, N. (2025). Descriptive Representation of Marginalized Groups in Dutch Politics. In *Oxford University Press eBooks* (pp. 495–512). <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198875499.013.29>
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press.
- Reynolds, A. (2013). Representation and Rights: The Impact of LGBT Legislators in Comparative Perspective. *American Political Science Review*, 107(2), 259–274. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055413000051>
- Rovny, Jan, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Seth Jolly, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Vachudova. “25 Years of Political Party Positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill Expert Survey, 1999-2024,”
- Sabsay, L. (2012). The emergence of the other sexual citizen: orientalism and the modernisation of sexuality. *Citizenship Studies*, 16(5–6), 605–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2012.698484>
- Verkiezingen Tweede Kamer sinds 1917 | *Parlement.com*. (z.d.). <https://www.parlement.com/verkiezingen-tweede-kamer-sinds-1917#p1>
- Walgrave, S., & Dejaeghere, Y. (2017). *Surviving information overload: How elite politicians select issues for attention*. *Governance*, 30(2), 229–244.
- Warner, M. (1993). *Fear of a queer planet: Queer politics and social theory*. University of Minnesota Press.