

# **Stereotypes, who to blame?**

## **Exploring individual-level determinants of Flemish voters' political gender stereotypes.**

### **Abstract**

The gender of political candidates is associated with particular personality traits, capacities and opinions. The extent to which voters apply these political gender stereotypes to their evaluation of political candidates is influenced by both contextual and individual-level attributes. This article, based on an experimental study conducted among a representative sample of the Flemish (Belgian) population examines the individual-level determinants of voters' political gender stereotypes. Our results indicate that political gender stereotypes are only present to a limited extent in Flanders, even among the most likely groups such as older and lower educated voters. Furthermore, stereotype reliance is generally not conditioned by individual-level determinants. Most importantly, the finding that respondents' perceptions of female candidates is primarily based on their level of agreement with the content of the presented policy position, demonstrates that other cues outweigh the importance of candidate gender.

### **1. Introduction**

The starting point of many studies on gender and politics has been that men are overrepresented in politics, whereas women only constitute a small minority of elected officials (Ballington, 2005; Bjarnegård, 2013). Several explanations, both on the side of party selectors and voters, have been provided for this political underrepresentation of women. Previous research exploring the mechanisms behind voter biases points out that gender stereotyping processes explain, at least, a part of the puzzle.

Voters lack resources, time or interest to become informed about all election candidates. Therefore, they rely on voting cues (McDermott, 1997), such as the gender of these candidates, and unconsciously associate this gender with particular personality traits, capacities and opinions (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993), which are referred to as political gender stereotypes (Dolan, 2014a). Following Huddy and Terkildsen (1993), our interpretation given to political gender stereotypes is twofold: ideas that female and male candidates have different (issue) competences and hold different ideological positions.

However, some studies argue that even though gender stereotypes may be widely held, people do not necessarily apply them to their evaluations of political candidates (Brooks, 2013; Schneider & Bos, 2014). Indeed, stereotype reliance is considered as a conditional process depending on both context and characteristics of the perceiver (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). In terms of context, the present study is set in a favourable environment. Besides working with a highly controlled experimental design, in which very little information about the presented hypothetical candidates is given, this research takes place in Flanders, the largest region of the federal state Belgium. It has a high share of female representatives (42.6% of the federal Chamber of Representatives are female) and Flemish voters have been intensively exposed in the last decades to female politicians, both in leftist and rightist parties, taking up prominent roles in politics (such as party leader, Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice and Minister of Home Affairs). Consequently, Flemish voters have been more confronted with gender equal information (such as the presence of women in top political positions) and tend to be more open to women in politics. This results in less biased perceptions of female candidates: research demonstrates that on the aggregate level stereotyped attitudes are less prevalent in Flanders (Author's own, 2018), compared to, amongst others, the United States (US), in which the major part of the research on political gender stereotypes is set (see for example Dolan, 2014a; Holman, Merolla, & Zechmeister, 2016; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 2002).

However, this gender-neutral context does not necessarily imply that stereotyping patterns are completely absent. Put differently, it is not because the average voter does not hold stereotypes, that there might not be specific groups of voters that do hold stereotypes. Therefore, also within the same political context we can expect differences to occur among individuals. Delineating the types of individuals most likely to apply stereotypes to evaluate female candidates is important to understand the factors impeding the equal representation of women in politics. A recent study by Bauer (2015b) demonstrates that, in the US, stereotype reliance varies depending on individual attributes, such as attention to politics, knowledge and partisanship. The aim of this article is to explore which individual-level factors determine the prevalence of political gender stereotypes among Flemish voters. The central

research question unfolds as follows: **Which voter characteristics moderate the presence of political gender stereotypes in Flanders?**

We base our understanding of the individual-level determinants of stereotype reliance on social categorization and exposure theory. **Social categorization theory** presents an explanation for why people prefer candidates of their same gender (Taylor-Robinson, Yarkoney-Sorek, & Geva, 2016). This baseline gender preference (Sanbonmatsu, 2002) is found to be even stronger among women. This also originates from the idea that women want to show solidarity to candidates of their own group (Marien, Wauters, & Schouteden, 2017) or that female candidates will defend women's interests (Erzeel, 2012). **Exposure theory** (Jennings, 2006) posits that differences in role conceptions about women in politics can be explained by differences in exposure to practices of gender equality in the political sphere and to discussions about the political underrepresentation of women. Although exposure theory is generally applied to the contextual level (i.e. explaining variance between different countries and regions), it can also be extended as a useful theoretical framework to understand individual-level features. Exposure to female politicians is indeed also found to correspond with individual-level attributes, such as level of education, level of political interest and age. Taken together, it can be expected that both personal experiences (related to education and political interest) and demographic status (related to gender and age) work in tandem to create attitudes about the role of women in politics.

Surprisingly, our results indicate that, unlike in the US, all types of individuals rely on similar processes to form evaluations of female candidates. Political gender stereotypes are only present to a limited extent in Flanders and voters' perceptions of women's ideological position and general competence are generally not conditioned by individual-level voter characteristics. The only exception is that respondents with higher levels of political interest hold more stereotyped attitudes towards female candidates' ideological positions. This may be attributed to an indirect media effect (see *infra*). More interestingly, we also found that voters base their evaluation of the competence of the candidates first and foremost on the extent to which they agree with the policy positions presented by the candidates. This indicates that voters' perceptions of candidates' competence is rather evidence-based than stereotype-based.

The paper proceeds as follows. The following section conceptualizes political gender stereotypes. In the third section, we will elaborate on social categorization and exposure theory, which provides a general direction for the development of our hypotheses. In the fourth section, our methodological approach will be charted. This will be followed by a presentation and a thorough discussion of the research results. The concluding section argues that, in the presence of other information, voters are less likely to rely on gender cues to form impressions of candidates.

## **2. Political gender stereotypes**

Stereotyping is the process by which people, through either direct experience or other exposure, develop beliefs about group characteristics (Dolan, 2014b). Applied to gender characteristics, gender stereotypes can be defined as “*consensual beliefs about the attributes of women and men*” (Eagly & Karau, 2002). On a general level, a typical woman is viewed as warm, gentle, kind, passive, loyal, communal, concerned with the wellbeing and welfare of others, compassionate and moral, whereas a typical man is viewed as tough, aggressive, assertive, ambitious, analytical, competitive, controlling, decisive, independent, individualistic and a stronger leader (Huddy & Capelos, 2002). Eagly (1987) summarized this in terms of two dimensions, the communal and the agentic. Women are believed to have more attributes of the communal dimension, which describes a concern with the welfare of other people, and men are supposed to have more attributes of the agentic dimension, which refers to an assertive and controlling tendency.

These invisible, yet persistent stereotypes about men and women also affect the political scenery (Dolan, 2014a; Taylor-Robinson et al., 2016). Voters lack resources, time or interest to become informed about all election candidates. Therefore, they rely on voting cues (McDermott, 1997), such as the gender of these candidates, and unconsciously associate this gender with particular personality traits, capacities and opinions (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993), which are referred to as political gender stereotypes (Dolan, 2014a). For the remainder of this article, we focus on political gender stereotypes in the strict sense, thereby limiting our scope to ideological and competence stereotypes. Personality traits stereotypes (describing general social characteristics of women and men) are merely seen as triggering these ideological and general competence stereotypes and are therefore not taken into account.

The existence of political gender stereotypes has been extensively documented in the US and in some countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia. These studies point to a number of stereotypical patterns: female candidates are more likely to be perceived as competent in communal issues linked to the traditional domain of the family, such as education, health care and helping the poor, whereas the men are thought to excel in agentic issues, such as military spending, foreign trade, agriculture and taxes (see for example Dolan, 2014a; Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Sapiro, 1981). Besides these (issue) competence stereotypes, other studies also found considerable evidence for the existence of ideological position stereotypes in which female candidates are generally perceived as more liberal (leftist in European terms) than male candidates of the same party (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 2002).

It is, however, important to note that the prevalence of political gender stereotypes is not an automatic process or naturally occurring phenomenon. Stereotype reliance is rather found to be a conditional process depending on both the context and the individual characteristics of the perceiver (Kunda & Spencer, 2003). When it comes to the context, research demonstrates that there are differences in how voters perceive female candidates between societies with a long history of women in key political positions and those where this is not the case: in contexts in which voters have extensive experience with women in government, voters display more gender neutral attitudes (Taylor-Robinson et al., 2016).

Furthermore, although most individuals can define feminine stereotypes, this does not necessarily mean that all individuals will apply feminine stereotypes to their evaluations of female candidates (Bauer, 2015b; Blair & Banaji, 1996; Dolan, 2010). Therefore, assuming that gender stereotypes are homogenous packages within countries and regions is faulty. Stereotype reliance also differs across segments of the population. We will elaborate on this in the next section.

### **3. Which voters hold stereotypes?**

A wide variety of demographic and political characteristics have been shown to affect attitudes about women in office (Bauer, 2015b; Falk & Kenski, 2006). This article builds on social categorization and exposure theory to shape expectations about which kind of voters will apply political gender stereotypes to their evaluation of political candidates.

**Social categorization theory** refers to the idea that people tend to view individuals as belonging to distinct social categories based on their salient attributes, such as gender, ethnicity and age (Turner, 1987). These social categories influence our sense of connection with or alienation from others, because people are likely to evaluate whether they belong to the same social category as someone they are evaluating. It has been demonstrated that individuals tend to rely less on stereotypes when evaluating in-group members, categorized as members of their own group, than out-group members (Bauer, 2015b). In-group members are generally assumed to be similar to the perceiver in terms of attitudes, values and personality. This assumption of similarity can be very significant when a subjective evaluation must be made, as similarity induces assumptions of competence (Klahr, 1969). Out-grouping inhibits individuation, such that qualities associated with the group are associated with the individual.

Applied to political gender stereotypes, social categorization theory provides an explanation for why people will prefer candidates of their same gender. Existing research finds women to be among the most supportive of a female candidate (see for example Dolan, 2008; Taylor-Robinson et al., 2016). Female voters are found to rely less on stereotypes when evaluating female candidates (Taylor-Robinson et al., 2015) and are more likely than men to say that a woman would do a better job as president (Falk & Kenski, 2006). This baseline gender preference (Dolan, 2008; Sanbonmatsu, 2002) makes women more likely to support female candidates and to show solidarity to candidates of their own group. Female voters may be more likely to exhibit this in-group bias, because candidate gender may be more salient to women since they are underrepresented in politics (Paolino, 1995).

Male voters, on the other hand, place less value than women on typical female strengths when assessing candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). This can be explained from a vested-interest perspective (Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius, & Siers, 1997), which states that men are more likely to endorse traditional roles for women in order to protect their own privileged status. This leads to the first hypothesis:

**H1: Men will be more likely to perceive female candidates as more leftist and less competent compared to male candidates.**

Also **exposure theory** (Jennings, 2006) can help us form expectations about what kind of voters will hold more positive attitudes towards female candidates. This theory posits that differences in role conceptions about women in politics could be explained by differences in exposure to practices of gender equality in the political sphere and to discussions about the political underrepresentation of women. This theoretical mechanism thus specifically refers to exposure to female politicians. Although this theory is most often applied to the contextual level and used to explain variance between countries and regions, it can also be extended as a useful theoretical framework to understand individual-level features. Exposure to female politicians is indeed found to be linked with certain individual-level attributes, such as educational attainment (1), political interest (2) and age (3), that are generally found to correspond with political behaviour.

Knowledgeable and interested voters are found to spend a greater share of their time and cognitive resources to deciphering information from the political world (Bauer, 2015a; Dolan, 1997; Rosenwasser, Rogers, Fling, Silvers-Pickens, & Butemeyer, 1987). Hence, they are more intensively exposed to prominent female politicians and to discussions about women's political underrepresentation. Furthermore, they are also found to make greater use of individuating information to construct impressions of candidates' competences and ideological positions, which lessens their reliance on category-based stereotypes (Koch, 2002). Therefore, these voters will be less likely to hold stereotyped views on female candidates.

The same applies to younger voters, because they have never witnessed the (almost) all-male governments and parliaments in the past (as older voters did) and are more familiarized with prominent female politicians, taking up responsibilities in office. Conversely, given the relatively new phenomenon (at least in certain regions) of women holding widespread political office, older voters, although they do not oppose this new role for women in society, are simply more accustomed to men as political officeholders, which makes them more likely to apply gender stereotypes to their evaluation of political candidates.

Taken together, it can be expected that lower-educated, older, and voters with lower levels of political interest will be more likely to hold stereotyped views on female candidates, because of their lower level of exposure to (prominent) female politicians. This leads to the following set of hypotheses:

**H2a: Lower-educated voters will be more likely to perceive female candidates as more leftist and less competent compared to male candidates.**

**H2b: Voters with lower levels of political interest will be more likely to perceive female candidates as more leftist and less competent compared to male candidates.**

**H2c: Older voters will be more likely to perceive female candidates as more leftist and less competent compared to male candidates.**

#### **4. Methodology**

Our results stem from an online experiment, ran in Spring 2017 among a representative sample of the Flemish population.<sup>1</sup> This experiment is restricted to one monolingual region of Belgium, since it is crucial that the context in which the research takes place should be as constant as possible. Although Wallonia, the other main region of Belgium, uses the same electoral rules as Flanders, there are some remarkable differences regarding the electoral setting, such as smaller districts, and a political culture that is less open to women, justifying a separate analysis.

The bulk of the research on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes is set in the context of the US. Flanders differs on a number of important respects from the American political context, which makes it an interesting case. It has one of the highest shares of elected women (42.6% of the federal Chamber of Representatives are female) in the advanced, industrialized democracies. Flanders is ranked on the 14<sup>nd</sup> position of the IPU-classification (IPU, 2019) and has stringent electoral gender quota. This implies that Flemish voters have been extensively exposed to female politicians, taking up prominent roles in politics. Research on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes in Flanders indicates that this results in less biased evaluations of female candidates on the *aggregate* level (Author's own, 2018). Flanders can therefore be considered as a least-likely case for the development of stereotyped patterns among voters.



In this study, hypothetical candidates were presented to respondents in written messages in which only their gender, their position on the list and their policy position on a particular issue were mentioned. The party affiliation of the presented candidates was not mentioned and the policy statements all took a centrist position in order not to influence the assessment of the ideological position of the presented candidates.

We used a 2x3x6 mixed complete block design. The candidate's gender (male versus female) and the list position<sup>ii</sup> (head of list, position in the middle of the list or no list position mentioned) were manipulated as between-group factors. Six different policy issues were manipulated as within-groups factor. We included two topics that are generally perceived as being communal (health care and education), two agentic topics (defense and finance) and two gender-neutral topics (tourism and climate).<sup>iii</sup> The different experimental conditions are graphically presented in Figure 1.

<<Figure 1 about here>>

Respondents were randomly assigned to six different treatments (one for each policy issue). After each candidate profile, they were asked to complete a questionnaire about the presented candidate and message before continuing to the next profile. The order of the issue domains was randomized in order to control for order effects. There was also a random variation of male and female candidates, and of head of list and middle of list candidates across the different issue domains. The presented stimuli included several elements: a written statement, an image of the ballot (where we indicated the list position of the candidate) and a facial silhouette of the hypothetical candidate (as a subtle cue about the gender of the candidate). The written statements were made as centrist as possible, and were based on a mix of the party programs of the four Flemish center parties (CD&V, Open VLD, N-VA and sp.a)<sup>iv</sup>, the Flemish government agreement and Flemish parties' press statements. An example of the presented profiles and a translation of the six different statements can be found in the Appendix.

The experiment was conducted in March-April 2017. Respondents were drawn from iVOX's internet-based access panel, which is the largest online panel in Flanders with about 150,000 potential respondents. An invitation to participate was sent to 21,526 respondents. 11,837 of them actually

received and read<sup>v</sup> the invitation and 4,052 agreed to participate. After discarding respondents who could not correctly answer the first manipulation check about the gender of the first presented candidate, we retained 2,500 participants. From this sample, we additionally excluded two categories of respondents: speeder respondents (those who completed the survey in less than half of the average completion time<sup>vi</sup>) and respondents who were able to find out the purpose of the study (which was asked by a question at the end of the survey). Our final sample consists of 2,362 respondents (which is a response rate of 19,95%). A description of the basic characteristics of the respondents, compared to the general population, can be found in the Appendix (see Table A.1).

The external validity of our experiment is enhanced by conducting the study among a sample of the population, whereas most other studies on political gender stereotypes analyse university students. Unlike student samples, our sample is more diverse in terms of socio-demographic characteristics. This enables us to explore which individual-level variables determine the presence of political gender stereotypes.

Since every respondent had to evaluate six candidates, the total number of observations amounts to 14,172. For each candidate, respondents were asked to position the presented candidate on a left-right scale, ranging from 1 (very leftist) to 7 (very rightist). The perceived ideological position of the presented candidates is the first main dependent variable. Furthermore, respondents were also asked to rate how competent the presented candidate would be for functioning in politics in general (on a fully-labelled 7 point scale ranging from very incompetent (1) to very competent (7)). The perceived general competence of the presented candidates is our second main dependent variable. The basic descriptive results for the two dependent variables (i.e. ideological and competence stereotypes) can be found in the Appendix (see Table A.2).

Several predictor variables were included in the multiple linear regression models. We included a dummy-variable for candidate's gender (female versus male) and several interaction terms with this variable and individual-level variables of respondents. The individual-level determinants include both general attitudes (interest in politics) and basic socio-demographics (gender, age and level of education).<sup>vii</sup> In order to grasp respondents' level of political interest, they were asked to indicate how

often they follow politics in the news (daily, 2 or 3 times a week, once a week, less than once a week, never). This was recoded in a binary variable: 'High level of political interest' including those respondents who follow politics daily, 2-3 times a week or once a week versus 'Low level of political interest' including all the other respondents. The gender variable for the respondents is a simple binary variable with the categories Male (1) and Female (2). The age variable consists of two categories: <55 (1) and 55+ (2), because we expect the generational effects to be most strongest for those respondents older than 55. Level of education was measured by the highest obtained degree and consists of 6 categories: 1=no degree, 2=primary education, 3=lower secondary education, 4=higher secondary education, 5=non-university higher education and 6=university education. This was recoded in a binary variable: 'Lower educated' (including categories 1, 2, 3 and 4) and 'Higher educated' (including categories 5 and 6).

A number of control variables were also included in the analyses. First, we controlled for the extent to which the respondents agreed with the presented policy statement.<sup>viii</sup> This is a variable with three categories: 'Agreeing' (including those respondents who are rather or very much in agreement with the statements), 'Neutral' and 'Disagreeing' (including those respondents who are rather or very much disagreeing with the statements). Second, we also controlled for the policy domain for which the presented candidate took a position. This domain variable consists of 6 categories: 1=Defense, 2=Education, 3=Tourism, 4=Climate, 5=Finance and 6=Healthcare. Third, we also included a control for the list position of the presented candidate, consisting of three categories: 1=Head of list, 2=Middle of list and 3=Control group. Fourth, a control variable was included for the ideological position of the respondents. Conover and Feldman (1989) suggest a tendency for individuals to assume that others hold similar views to their own. Consequently, voters' placement of candidates on an ideological scale may reflect their own ideological orientation (Koch, 2000). Ideological positioning was measured by self-placement on a 7-points left-right scale ranging from very rightist (1) to very leftist (7).

## **5. Results**

Different multiple linear regression analyses were performed to examine the relationship between respectively the perceived ideological position (section 6.1) and general competence (section 6.2) of the

presented candidates, and various (potential) predictors. For each analysis, five different models were computed. Throughout the article, only the model including all interaction terms will be presented. However, as inclusion of multiple interaction terms in the same model introduces some concerns about model instability and interpretation (Brambor, Clark, & Golder, 2006), separate models including just one interaction term at the time are displayed in the Appendix (see Table A.3 and Table A.4). Similar results can be found across the different models, which adds to the robustness of our findings.

### 5.1. Perceived ideological position

For the first part of the analysis, we focus on the individual-level determinants of voters' perception of the presented candidates' ideological positions. The dependent variable (i.e. the perceived ideological position of the presented candidates) is constructed in such a way that the higher the score, the more rightist the candidate is perceived to be. The mean score for perceived ideological position is 3.87 (on a 7-point scale), which indicates that the presented candidates were clearly perceived as centrist candidates. More basic descriptive results for the dependent variable can be found in the Appendix (see Table A.2).

The regression coefficients are presented in Table 1.

<<Table 1 about here>>

When it comes to the main effects we see that there is a statistically significant effect for candidate's gender: female candidates are consistently perceived as being more leftist (indicated by the negative sign) than male candidates, which is a confirmation of previous research on ideological belief stereotypes (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993; Koch, 2000).

When it comes to the socio-demographic variables (i.e. gender, age, level of education and level of political interest) of the respondents, they all add significantly to the models. We also see that there is a statistically significant effect for ideological orientation ( $p = .000$ ): the more rightist respondents are, the more rightist they perceive the presented candidates. The perceived ideological position also varies among the issue domains, with candidates taking a position on climate issues perceived as 1.204 points more to the left compared to candidates taking a policy position on defence ( $p = .000$ ).

Taking a look at the interaction terms, only the interaction between candidate's gender and respondent's level of political interest adds significantly to the model. Rather surprisingly, respondents with low levels of political interest (i.e. those who follow the political actuality less than once a week) have a less leftist perception of female candidates. This result does not support our hypothesis stating that highly politically interest respondents would be less likely to apply stereotyped perceptions to their evaluation of female candidates.

Explaining this counter-intuitive finding is not straightforward. First, it could be argued that respondents with high levels of political interest are better able to evaluate the ideological position of the presented candidates. Notwithstanding the fact that we provided definitions of 'leftist' and 'rightist'<sup>ix</sup>, it requires certain skills to link the proposed definitions to the presentation of the hypothetical candidates and the contents of their policy statements. However, the distribution of the answers for the different subsamples (respondents with low levels of political interest versus high levels of political interest) contradicts this explanation (see Table A.6. in Appendix). This table shows that the distribution of the answers is similar for both groups: only few respondents choose the scale ends, whereas the majority of the respondents pick the safer middle positions. Second, it might be that our motivation for the hypothesis (i.e. interested voters are more intensively exposed to female politicians and therefore make use of more individuating information) only goes for real-world politicians, but not so much for hypothetical candidates. Voters that follow politics intensively probably know much more about (male and female) political office-holders, but when confronted with a fictional candidate, they know as little as the next person, which might result in a more stereotyped view.

A third explanation may be related to an indirect media representation effect. Research on gender bias in media reporting indicates that the distorted representation of female politicians in the news (Hooghe, Jacobs, & Claes, 2015) has an impact on the preferences and attitudes of voters (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). The reasoning is then that highly interested voters are more likely to be influenced by this gendered presentation of political candidates because they follow the political actuality on a more frequent basis. Those with low levels of political interest have a vague idea about the political reality, but lack deeper insights to know that female politicians are most often found among leftist parties. In

the current composition of the Flemish government, female (top) ministers mostly come from (centre-)rightist parties. The disproportionately large span of media-attention that is attributed to this group hides the fact that at a lower level, female Members of Parliament (and more generally candidates for political office) are more commonly found among leftist parties. The latter is only visible for those who are really interested in politics and follow the political actuality more closely (for example by monitoring the debates in Parliament). Therefore, it can be stated that top ministers (from rightist parties) hide the dominance of female leftist MPS and candidates, which is only visible for those who are really interested in politics. Following this reasoning, the change in the direction of the coefficient for respondents with low levels of political interest can also be explained.

However, interpreting the results based on regression coefficients alone is not straightforward. Therefore, predicted values for each of the subsamples were computed.

<<**Figure 2 about here**>>

Figure 2 presents the predicted values, and accompanying confidence intervals, of respondents' assessment of the ideological position of the presented candidate depending on respondents' gender, age, level of education and level of political interest. All other covariates were held at the mean. This figure confirms the results derived from the regression analysis: the leftist perception of female candidates is in general not conditioned by individual-level voter characteristics. However, non-overlapping confidence intervals (also see Table A.5 in Appendix) were only found for the predicted values for respondents with high levels of political interest and the lower educated (indicated by the asterisks in the figure). Although it can be logically explained that people with an university education are more accepting of female candidates, these results seem to contradict each other. However, taking a look at the regression table, the significant effect for the interaction between candidate's gender and respondents' level of education disappears. This seems to indicate that the effect for level of education is absorbed by respondents' level of political interest. As outlined above, this statistically significant effect for respondents with high levels of political interest may be explained by an indirect media representation effect.

## 5.2. Perceived general competence

For the second part of the analysis, we will focus on the individual-level determinants of respondents' evaluation of women's competence for functioning in politics in general. The predicted dependent variable is the candidates' perceived general competence. This variable is constructed in such a way that the higher the score, the more competent the candidate is perceived to be. The mean score for perceived general competence is 4.65 (on a 7-point scale). More basic descriptive results for this dependent variable can be found in the Appendix (see Table A.2).

The regression coefficients are presented in Table 2.

<<Table 2 about here>>

Regarding the main effect, candidate's gender does not add significantly to the model. On a general level, respondents do not differentiate between male and female candidates in terms of perceived general competence. This can be linked to the fact that the prevalence of political gender stereotypes is found to be dependent upon the political context (Holman et al., 2016; Taylor-Robinson et al., 2016). This study presented a very stringent test of the prevalence of political gender stereotypes by means of a highly controlled experimental design, preventing the activation of stereotyping patterns, and took place in a favorable context. Apart from a high number of female MP's, linked to the long existence of electoral gender quotas, women have recently been well represented in the Flemish government (with several female deputy prime-ministers) and in parties (with several female party leaders). Flemish voters have been intensively exposed to female politicians in high political positions, which seems to result in gender-neutral attitudes. This is in line with the findings from Taylor-Robinson et al. (2016) in Costa Rica and Israel, which highlight that in contexts in which voters have extensive experience with women in government (such as Costa Rica), voters display more gender neutral attitudes.

In terms of the socio-demographic variables, respondents' gender ( $p = .000$ ), ideological position ( $p = .000$ ) and level of political interests ( $p = .003$ ) add significantly to the model. Level of education and age do not add significantly to the models. Neither do the interaction terms. Unlike for perceived ideological position, the interaction term for level of political interest is not statistically significant ( $p = .996$ ) in this

case. Consequently, on a general level, all kinds of respondents perceive women as being equally competent as men. Taking a look at the predicted values for the different subsamples (see Figure 3), the results of the regression analyses are confirmed.

<<Figure 3 about here>>

Indeed, Figure 3 clearly shows that across all subsamples, female candidates are considered as (almost) equally competent as men. Consequently, respondents' perception of the presented candidates' is in general not conditioned by individual-level determinants. More interestingly, the regression analysis points out that the perceived general competence is strongly influenced by the extent to which respondents agree with the content of the policy position and the nature of the issues at stake. Respondents disagreeing with the presented policy statements perceive the candidates as 1.898 points less competent compared to respondents agreeing with the statements ( $p = .000$ ). This seems to indicate that voters' perceptions of political candidates is rather evidence-based (i.e. related to the direction and the content of the policy that they pursue). To test whether the effect is similar for female candidates compared to male candidates, we also ran another multiple linear regression model with the interaction between candidate's gender and level of agreement included (not in the table). The interaction term for candidate gender and disagreeing (.015) has a positive sign, but the effect fails to reach statistical significance ( $p = .743$ ). This indicates that female candidates, compared to male candidates, are not punished more by voters disagreeing with their policy positions.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

This article considers individual differences in political gender stereotype reliance. The prevalence of these stereotypes is found to be conditioned by both contextual and individual-level factors. Consequently, also within the same political context, we can expect differences to occur among individuals in the level of stereotype reliance. Social categorization and exposure theory provide useful insights that enhance our understanding of the individual-level attributes that determine stereotype reliance. The former builds on the notion of in-groups and presents an explanation for why people will hold less stereotyped views on candidates of their same gender. Exposure theory (Jennings, 2006), on



the other hand, theorizes that interested and higher educated voters, but also younger voters, who have been intensively exposed to female politicians, are more likely to hold less gendered attitudes towards female candidates (Bittner, Terry, & Piercey, 2010).

The present article, based on the results of an experimental study conducted among a representative sample of the Flemish population, explores which kind of individual-level variables determine the presence of gender stereotyping patterns in Flanders. Our results indicate that, unlike in the context of the US (Bauer, 2015b), stereotype reliance is generally not conditioned by individual-level determinants. In terms of perceived general competence, respondents do not seem to differentiate between male and female candidates. None of the included interaction terms added significantly to the regression models, which indicates that all kind of voters perceive women as being equally competent than men. This can be linked to the favorable context in which this study was set. We presented a very stringent test of the prevalence of political gender stereotypes by making use of a highly controlled experimental design. Furthermore, Flanders has a high share of female representatives and there are several women in top political positions. Consequently, Flemish voters have been more frequently confronted with gender-equal information, which results in less biased perceptions of female candidates (Author's own, 2018).

When it comes to ideological position, female candidates are consistently perceived as being more leftist than male candidates across all subsamples. One rather counter-intuitive result regarding voters' level of political interest was uncovered: respondents with lower levels of political interest are less likely to apply stereotyped views to their evaluation of female candidates' ideological position. A possible explanation could be related to an indirect media representation effect. More politically interested citizens spend a greater share of their time and cognitive resources to deciphering information from the political world. Consequently, they are more likely to be influenced by the gendered presentation of women in the media because they follow the political actuality on a more frequent basis. This indicates that stereotypes are not necessarily inherently present in voters' minds, but must be triggered or activated (see *infra*), for example in news reporting. However, this could also be linked to the fact that these results relate to fictional candidates, about whom interested and knowledgeable voters know as little as all other

voters. It remains an open question whether voters evaluate fictional candidates the same way as real-world politicians.

From a gender perspective, one could argue that the most important finding is that voters' perceptions are strongly influenced by the extent to which respondents agree with the content of the policy position and the nature of the issues at stake. Voters' perceptions of candidates is rather evidence-based (i.e. related to the direction and the content of the policy that they pursue) than stereotype-based. This is a positive outlook for female candidates, especially because further analyses indicates that female candidates, compared to men, are not punished more by voters disagreeing with their policy positions.

Our findings have a number of implications. First, it remains challenging to grasp the presence, or absence, of political gender stereotypes among Flemish voters from a theoretical point of view. Although the results of this study seem to suggest that stereotypes of women and men may be easing, it would be incorrect to assume that gender and gender stereotypes no longer matter to the fate of political candidates. Gender stereotypes may exert an influence on other stages of the electoral process, for example when women decide to run (or not), when they make choices on how to campaign, or when party selectors compose party lists. This can also be linked to Bauer's (2015a) argument that stereotypes do not automatically enter into a voting decision when a female candidate is on the ballot, but rather require activation. It is argued that this is dependent on the type of information voters have about a candidate and that this follows from exposure to stereotypic information that leads voters to rely on stereotypes to form impressions of female candidates. In this study, a very stringent test of the prevalence of political gender stereotypes was conducted. This context differs from real-world situations in which voters receive different kinds of information about political candidates since they are frequently covered in the news and the media and they also communicate themselves. It could therefore be that political gender stereotypes are not inherently present, but must be triggered or activated by the media or by the way the political candidates portray themselves. Furthermore, the impact of political gender stereotypes should also be weighed against other influences, such as political party, incumbency and other (contextual) factors. Echoing Dolan's (2014b) claim that stereotypes do not act in a vacuum, it would prove useful to extend the current framework of analysis: more in-depth comparative analysis has the

potential to provide us with a better understanding of the interplay between the political context and individual-level determinants of stereotyping patterns.

Second, the finding that voters' perceptions of candidates' competences is rather evidence-based relates to the idea that heuristic cues, such as candidate gender, are most important in low-information contexts (McDermott, 1997). In the presence of other information, such as the policy positions included in our design, voters are less likely to rely on gender cues in order to form impressions of candidates. This seems to indicate that (female) candidates are more likely to be evaluated on the basis of what they do, and not of who they are. It can therefore be concluded that other factors outweigh the cue of candidate gender. This decreased stereotype reliance is potentially beneficial for female candidates because it also decreases the chances of a voter bias (Bauer, 2015b).

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**Table 1: Linear regression model predicting the perceived ideological position of the presented candidates (on an individual level)**

\* p < 0.1 ; \*\* p < 0.05 ; \*\*\* p < 0.001

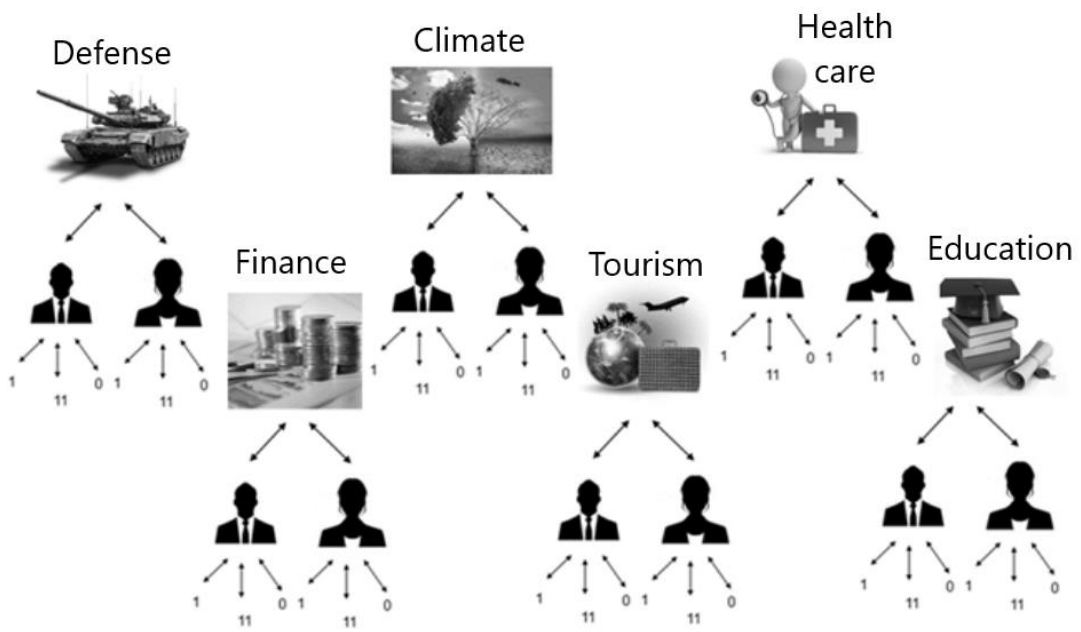
	<b>Dependent variable = perceived ideological position of the presented candidates</b>	
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>
<b>Female candidate</b> (versus male candidate)	-.124**	.045
<b>Female respondent</b> (versus male respondent)	-.137***	.033
<b>+55</b> (versus -55)	.165***	.036
<b>Ideological positioning</b> (from very leftist to very rightist)	.051***	.008
<b>Low level of political interest</b> (versus high level of political interest)	-.271***	.040
<b>Higher educated</b> (versus lower educated)	.053	.034
<b>Level of agreement</b> (ref=Agreeing)		
Neutral	.057**	.028
Disagreeing	.129***	.032
<b>List position</b> (ref=Head of list)		
Middle of list	-.020	.028
Control group	-.034	.028
<b>Issue domain</b> (ref=Defense)		
Education	-.641***	.039
Tourism	.798***	.040
Climate	-1.204***	.039
Finance	.015	.039
Healthcare	-.840***	.039
<b>Interaction female candidate x female respondent</b>	-.008	.046
<b>Interaction female candidate x low level of political interest</b>	.112**	.056
<b>Interaction female candidate x higher educated</b>	.049	.048
<b>Interaction female candidate x 55+</b>	.014	.045
<b>Constant</b>	<b>4.322***</b>	
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.112</b>	
<b>F</b>	<b>(19, 14046) = 97.60</b>	
<b>N</b>	<b>14066</b>	

**Table 2: Linear regression model predicting the perceived general competence of the presented candidates (on an individual level)**

\* p < 0.1 ; \*\* p < 0.05 ; \*\*\* p < 0.001

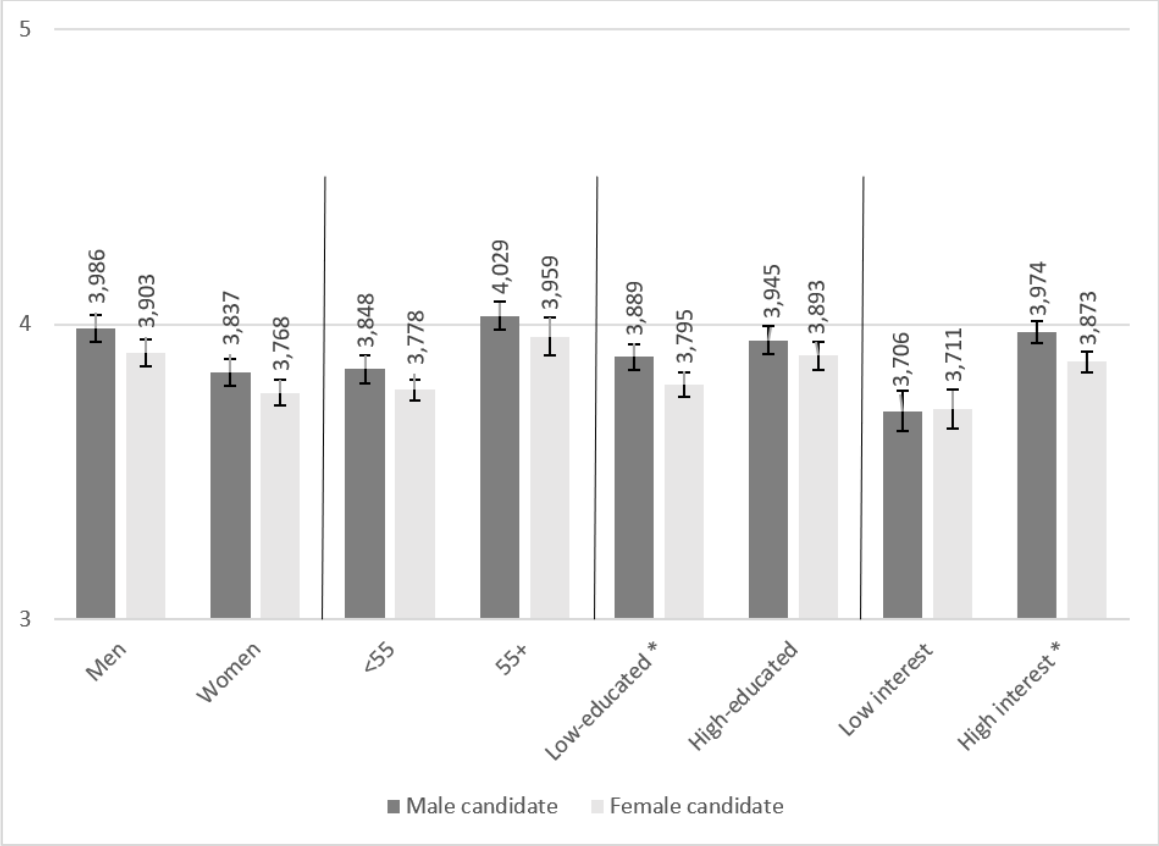
	<b>Dependent variable = perceived general competence of the presented candidates</b>	
	<b>B</b>	<b>SE</b>
<b>Female candidate</b> (versus male candidate)	-.005	.032
<b>Female respondent</b> (versus male respondent)	.083**	.024
<b>+55</b> (versus -55)	.041	.026
<b>Ideological positioning</b> (from very leftist to very rightist)	-0.400***	.006
<b>Low level of political interest</b> (versus high level of political interest)	-.078**	.029
<b>Higher educated</b> (versus lower educated)	-.026	.024
<b>Level of agreement</b> (ref=Agreeing)		
Neutral	-.909***	.021
Disagreeing	-1.898***	.023
<b>List position</b> (ref=Head of list)		
Middle of list	-.063**	.020
Control group	-.060**	.020
<b>Issue domain</b> (ref=Defense)		
Education	-.085**	.028
Tourism	-.295***	.029
Climate	-.307***	.028
Finance	-.010	.028
Healthcare	-.073**	.028
<b>Interaction female candidate x female respondent</b>	-.040	.034
<b>Interaction female candidate x low level of political interest</b>	.006	.041
<b>Interaction female candidate x higher educated</b>	.008	.034
<b>Interaction female candidate x 55+</b>	-.027	.037
<b>Constant</b>	<b>45.496***</b>	
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.378</b>	
<b>F</b>	<b>(19, 14046) =</b> <b>451.45</b>	
<b>N</b>	<b>14066</b>	

**Figure 1: Graphic overview of the different experimental conditions<sup>x</sup>**



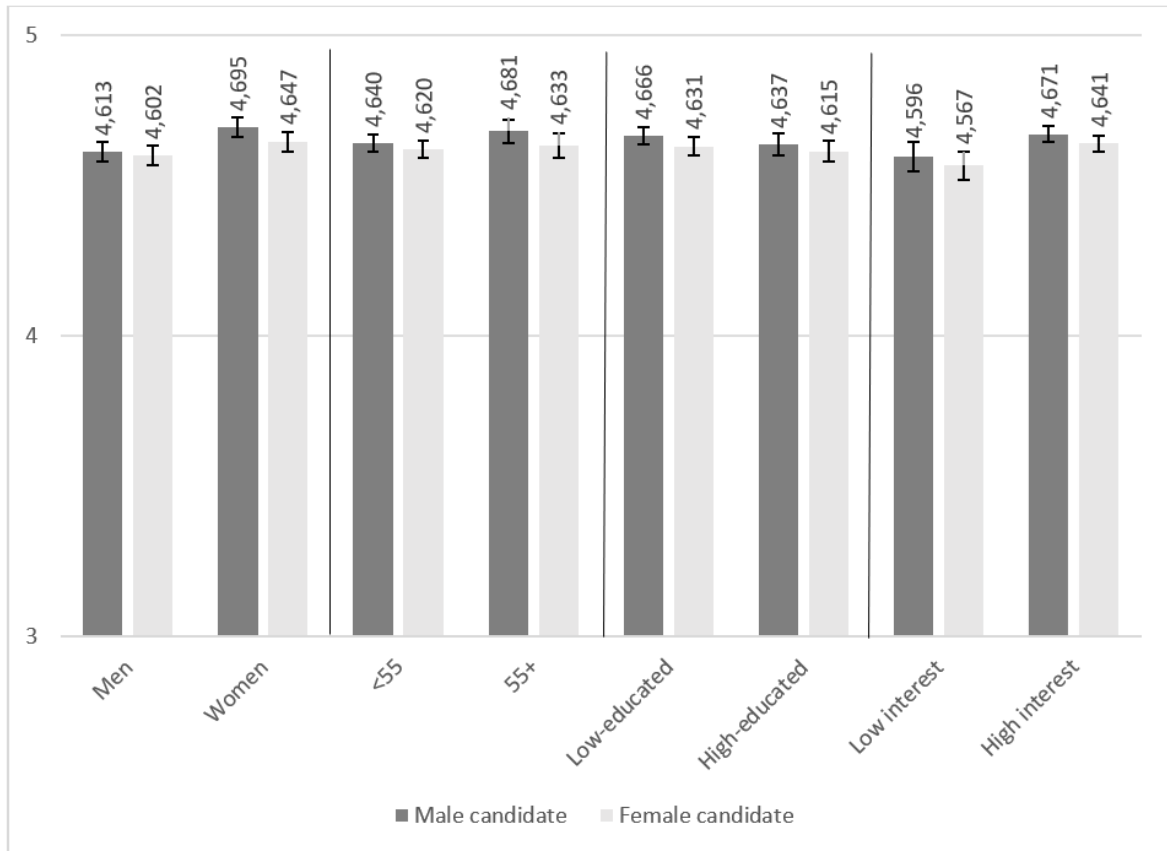


**Figure 2: Predicted values of respondents' assessment of the ideological position of the presented candidate depending on their gender, age, level of education and level of political interest**



All covariates are held at the mean – Significant effects are marked with an ‘\*’

**Figure 3: Predicted values of respondents' assessment of the general competence of the presented candidate depending on their gender, age, level of education and level of political interest**



All covariates are held at the mean – Significant effects are marked with an ‘\*’

# Appendix

## Presented candidate profiles




**Candidate X**  
 Head of list

"I am **candidate X** and I am **head of list** for my party. My views regarding **defense** are as follows: in order to take up our responsibilities in the international community, there is the need for a **credible diplomacy policy**. A **small** but well-**organized** Belgian army must, in accordance with our neighboring countries, be a **reliable partner** within **NATO**, which is an important framework for collaboration with other countries such as the US. A **realistic investment path** should allow us to prepare for future security challenges. In doing so, we demonstrate that we take **international solidarity** seriously, and that we continue to contribute to **international peace-building**, for which we are currently already internationally recognized."




<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>Candidate X</b>
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 2
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 3
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 4
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 5
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 6
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 7
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 8
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 9
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 10
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 11
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 12
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 13
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 14
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 15
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 16
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 17
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 18
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 19
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 20



**Candidate X**  
 Position 10

"I am **candidate X** and I am placed **10<sup>th</sup>** on the ballot. These are my views on **education**: our Flemish educational system is of a **high quality**. This needs to be valued. We can build on our strengths, but have to **address and resolve** our bottlenecks. Investments in **infrastructure** and the creation of **additional places** are of great importance. In the next three years, we will invest € 150 000 000 in order to create additional places in cities and municipalities who are struggling with population growth and a lack of space. In addition, we will focus on a **permanent monitoring** of the allocated funds to ensure that these resources also actually result in additional places."



<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 1
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 2
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 3
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 4
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 5
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 6
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 7
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 8
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 9
<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<b>Candidate X</b>
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 11
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 12
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 13
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 14
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 15
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 16
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 17
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 18
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 19
<input type="radio"/>	Candidate 20

**Tourism:** “I am candidate X. My views on tourism are the following: tourism and holidays play an important role in our lives. The Flemish tourist sector must further develop as an efficient and sustainable sector. Central to our tourism policy are some important leverage projects. I would like to invest € 1 300 000 in the construction of 44 tourist accommodations, spread throughout Flanders. These investments are necessary to increase family friendliness and accessibility. This investment must focus on our main tourist attractions, such as cycling, walking, dining, art, heritage, nature, the diamond and fashion sector. These tourist attractions could also be pleasant for our citizens if they are also given the opportunity to enjoy them.”

**Climate:** “I am candidate X and I am the head of list for my part. These are my views on climate: global warming is our main global challenge. Flanders must be ambitious to achieve the Belgian climate targets. I call for ambitious, but at the same time realistic long-term greenhouse gas reduction targets. For the Flemish share in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, we must follow a gradual trajectory in the coming years to achieve a 15,7 percentage decline by 2020. A more solid dealing with energy resources and the usage of renewable energy sources should make a significant contribution to achieving the climate goals.”

**Finance:** “I am candidate X and I am placed 10<sup>th</sup> on the ballot. My views on finance are as follows: a balanced budget is needed in order to provide good prospects to the future generations. This is a difficult task in the current uncertain economic climate. Nevertheless, our aim should be to maintain sound economic policies and not to pass the burden to the next generations. Certainly as the effects of aging are becoming increasingly apparent, a balanced budget is a prerequisite for securing our future propensity. It is therefore also important that we continuously monitor and adjust our budgetary plans.”

**Health care:** “I am candidate X. These are my views on health care: the expansion and strengthening of health care services is crucial, especially in times of increasing need for good chronic, mental health and elderly care. I am in favor of a care-model in which the individual patient becomes more involved in decisions about his/her own care. We must do our utmost to empower the individual patient and to consider him/her as a full partner in the care relationship. The individual patient should be in charge of his/her care path as much as possible. Furthermore, it is also important to strengthen the patient’s social network.”

**Table A.1: Description of the experiment's participants – weighted for age and gender (N=2129) compared to the general population (if data available)**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>General population</b>
Male	50,2%	49,4%
Female	49,8%	50,6%
<b>Age</b>		
<35	26,5%	23,1%
35 – 54	36,8%	35,1%
55+	36,7%	41,7%
<b>Level of education</b>		
Primary education	4,5%	13,9%
Lower secondary education	20,0%	20,5%
Higher secondary education	40,8%	35,7%
Non-university higher education	21%	15,3%
University education	13,7%	14,6%
<b>Average left right positioning (1=very leftist, 7=very rightist)</b>	3,97	/
<b>Preferred party</b>		
CD&V	12,9%	20,5%
Groen	16,6%	8,7%
N-VA	33,9%	31,9%
Open VLD	11,0%	14,1%
PVDA	6,4%	2,5%
Sp.a	9,6%	13,9%
Vlaams Belang	9,6%	5,9%
<b>How often do they follow politics in the news?</b>		
On a daily basis	53,5%	/
2-3 times a week	23,6%	/
Once a week	8,1%	/
Less than once a week	10,6%	/
Never	4,2%	/

**Table A.2: Basic descriptives of the dependent variables**

	<b>Ideological position</b>	<b>General competence</b>
<b>N</b>	14 066	14 066
<b>Mean</b>	3,87	4,65
<b>Std. Error of the Mean</b>	,012	,010
<b>Median</b>	4,00	5,00
<b>Std. Deviation</b>	1,424	1,233
<b>Skewness</b>	-,014	-,636
<b>Std. Error of Skewness</b>	,021	,021
<b>Kurtosis</b>	-,922	,070
<b>Std. Error of Kurtosis</b>	,041	,041
<b>Variance</b>	2,029	1,519
<b>Minimum</b>	1	7
<b>Maximum</b>	1	7

**Table A.3: Linear regression models predicting the perceived ideological position of the presented candidates (on an individual level) (N=14066)**

\* p < 0.1 ; \*\* p < 0.05 ; \*\*\* p < 0.001

	Perceived ideological position			
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
<b>Female candidate</b> (versus male candidate)	-.084** (.032)	-.100*** (.053)	-.094** (.030)	-.070** (.028)
<b>Female respondent</b> (versus male respondent)	-.149*** (.033)	-.141*** (.026)	-.142*** (.023)	-.142*** (.023)
<b>+55</b> (versus -55)	.172*** (.025)	.173*** (.023)	.172*** (.025)	.181*** (.035)
<b>Ideological positioning</b> (from very leftist to very rightist)	.051*** (.008)	.051*** (.025)	.051*** (.008)	.051*** (.008)
<b>Low level of political interest</b> (versus high level of political interest)	-.215*** (.028)	-.268*** (.008)	-.215*** (.028)	-.215*** (.028)
<b>Higher educated</b> (versus lower educated)	.077** (.024)	.078** (.039)	.056* (.033)	.077** (.024)
<b>Level of agreement</b> (ref=Agreeing)				
Neutral	.057** (.028)	.128** (.028)	.057** (.028)	.057** (.028)
Disagreeing	.130*** (.032)	.130*** (.032)	.130*** (.032)	.130*** (.032)
<b>List position</b> (ref=Head of list)				
Middle of list	-.021 (.028)	-.021 (.028)	-.020 (.028)	-.021 (.028)
Control group	-.034 (.028)	-.034 (.028)	-.034 (.028)	-.034 (.028)
<b>Issue domain</b> (ref=Defense)				
Education	-.642*** (.039)	-.642*** (.039)	-.642*** (.039)	-.642*** (.039)
Tourism	-.798*** (.040)	-.798*** (.040)	-.798*** (.040)	-.798*** (.040)
Climate	-1.204*** (.039)	-1.204*** (.039)	-1.203*** (.039)	-1.204*** (.039)
Finance	.015 (.039)	.015 (.039)	.015 (.039)	.015 (.039)
Healthcare	-.842*** (.039)	-.841*** (.029)	-.842*** (.039)	-.842*** (.039)
<b>Interaction female candidate x female respondent</b>	.015 (.045)			
<b>Interaction female candidate x low level of political interest</b>		.105* (.054)		
<b>Interaction female candidate x higher educated</b>			.043 (.046)	
<b>Interaction female candidate x 55+</b>				-.018 (.048)
<b>Constant</b>	<b>43303***</b>	<b>4.311***</b>	<b>4.308***</b>	<b>4.296***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.115</b>	<b>0.115</b>	<b>0.115</b>	<b>0.115</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 115.58</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 115.85</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 115.64</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 115.58</b>

**Table A.4: Linear regression models predicting the perceived general competence of the presented candidates (on an individual level) (N=14066)**

\* p < 0.1 ; \*\* p < 0.05 ; \*\*\* p < 0.001

	Perceived general competence			
	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
<b>Female candidate</b> (versus male candidate)	-.011 (.023)	-.030 (.019)	-.035 (.021)	-.020 (.020)
<b>Female respondent</b> (versus male respondent)	.082** (.024)	.063*** (.017)	.063*** (.017)	.063*** (.017)
<b>+55</b> (versus -55)	.027 (.018)	.027 (.018)	.027 (.018)	.041 (.025)
<b>Ideological positioning</b> (from very leftist to very rightist)	-.040*** (.006)	-.040*** (.006)	-.040*** (.006)	-.040*** (.006)
<b>Low level of political interest</b> (versus high level of political interest)	-.075*** (.020)	-.075** (.028)	-.075*** (.020)	-.075*** (.020)
<b>Higher educated</b> (versus lower educated)	-.022 (.017)	-.022 (.017)	-.028 (.024)	-.022 (.017)
<b>Level of agreement</b> (ref=Agreeing)				
Neutral	-.909*** (.020)	-.909*** (.020)	-.909*** (.020)	-.909*** (.020)
Disagreeing	-1.898*** (.023)	-1.898*** (.023)	-1.898*** (.023)	-1.898*** (.023)
<b>List position</b> (ref=Head of list)				
Middle of list	-.063** (.020)	-.063** (.020)	-.063** (.020)	-.063** (.020)
Control group	-.061** (.020)	-.061** (.020)	-.061** (.020)	-.061** (.020)
<b>Issue domain</b> (ref=Defense)				
Education	-.086** (.028)	-.085** (.028)	-.085** (.028)	-.085** (.028)
Tourism	-.296*** (.029)	-.295*** (.029)	-.295*** (.029)	-.295*** (.029)
Climate	-.307*** (.028)	-.307*** (.028)	-.307*** (.028)	-.307*** (.028)
Finance	-.010 (.028)	-.010 (.028)	-.010 (.028)	-.010 (.028)
Healthcare	-.074** (.028)	-.074** (.028)	-.074** (.028)	-.073** (.028)
<b>Interaction female candidate x female respondent</b>	-.037 (.033)			
<b>Interaction female candidate x low level of political interest</b>		.000 (.039)		
<b>Interaction female candidate x higher educated</b>			.013 (.033)	
<b>Interaction female candidate x 55+</b>				-.028 (.034)
<b>Constant</b>	<b>5.499***</b>	<b>5.508***</b>	<b>5.511***</b>	<b>5.503***</b>
<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>0.378</b>	<b>0.378</b>	<b>0.378</b>	<b>0.378</b>
<b>F</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 536.14</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 536.00</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 536.02</b>	<b>(16, 14049)</b> <b>= 536.07</b>

**Table A.5: Predicted values of respondent’s assessment of the ideological position of the presented candidate depending on their gender, age, level of education and level of political interest**

	Male candidate	Female candidate
<b>Gender of respondent</b>		
Men	3.986 [3.942; 4.031]	3.903 [3.858; 3.947]
Women	3.837 [3.792; 3.882]	3.768 [3.724; 3.813]
<b>Age of respondent</b>		
<55	3.848 [3.800; 3.895]	3.778 [3.742; 3.813]
55+	4.029 [3.981; 4.077]	3.959 [3.894; 4.024]
<b>Level of education of respondent</b>		
Low-educated	3.889 [3.847; 3.930]	3.795 [3.753; 3.836]
High-educated	3.945 [3.896; 3.993]	3.893 [3.844; 3.942]
<b>Level of political interest of respondent</b>		
Low level of political interest	3.706 [3.639; 3.773]	3.711 [3.645; 3.776]
High level of political interest	3.974 [3.938; 4.010]	3.873 [3.838; 3.909]

95% confidence intervals in parentheses – All covariates are held at the mean



**Table A.6: Distribution of answers depending on respondents' level of political interest**

	Low level of political interest	High level of political interest
<b>Extreme leftist</b>	2,8%	4,7%
<b>Leftist</b>	15,2%	17,7%
<b>Rather leftist</b>	24,5%	28,4%
<b>Centrist</b>	15,9%	17,2%
<b>Rather rightist</b>	27,2%	22,3%
<b>Rightist</b>	12,9%	8,9%
<b>Extreme rightist</b>	1,5%	0,8%

**Table A.7: Predicted values of respondent's assessment of the general competence of the presented candidate depending on their gender, age, level of education and level of political interest**

	Male candidate	Female candidate
<b>Gender of respondent</b>		
Men	4.613 [4.580; 4.645]	4.602 [4.570; 4.634]
Women	4.695 [4.663; 4.728]	4.647 [4.615; 4.679]
<b>Age of respondent</b>		
<55	4.640 [4.611; 4.668]	4.620 [4.591; 4.648]
55+	4.681 [4.641; 4.721]	4.633 [4.594; 4.673]
<b>Level of education of respondent</b>		
Low-educated	4.666 [4.636; 4.696]	4.631 [4.601; 4.660]
High-educated	4.637 [4.602; 4.673]	4.615 [4.580; 4.651]
<b>Level of political interest of respondent</b>		
Low level of political interest	4.596 [4.548; 4.644]	4.567 [4.519; 4.614]
High level of political interest	4.671 [4.645; 4.697]	4.641 [4.616; 4.667]

95% confidence intervals in parentheses – All covariates are held at the mean

<sup>i</sup> The data are publicly available and online accessible at <https://zenodo.org/record/1162716#.WnBwHLpFzI>.

<sup>ii</sup> List position was included in the design to make the presentation of the hypothetical candidates as realistic as possible.

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<sup>iii</sup> This categorization is based on an extensive review of 16 international studies on the assignment of policy issues to men and women by three key actors, i.e. (mass) media, voters and party elites.

<sup>iv</sup> These are also the biggest parties in terms of vote shares.

<sup>v</sup> The other invitations were apparently sent to invalid or outdated email addresses.

<sup>vi</sup> The average completion time was 996 seconds. The boundary duration from which a response is considered valid was set at 498 seconds.

<sup>vii</sup> We only included interaction terms for the independent variables, and not for the control variables (see *infra*).

<sup>viii</sup> This was asked for each presented statement separately after respondents read the candidate profile and evaluated the presented candidate.

<sup>ix</sup> Leftist politicians were defined as standing for solidarity and taking care of the weak and minorities. Rightist politicians were defined as standing for freedom and the belief that everyone is responsible for themselves. These definitions have come about by juxtaposing various definitions of leftist and rightist, which have been used in previous research, in order to come to short, clear and comprehensive descriptions.

<sup>x</sup> All respondents had to evaluate six different candidates (i.e. one for each policy issue) out of these 36.