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

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

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

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

1.1. Conceptualization

Pitkin (1967) established the standard account of political representation: this involves authorization, accountability and the looking out for another’s interest. Following Pitkin (1967), we can distinguish four distinct, but interconnected meanings or dimensions of representation, including formal, descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation. The descriptive dimension will be most important for our purposes. Descriptive representation, or representativeness, refers to the extent to which representatives stand for the represented (Norris & Franklin, 1997). According to this idea, an elected body should resemble a representative sample of society.

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

The social background of members of political institutions (i.e. descriptive representation) determines their life experiences, which in turn determine their insights on certain policy problems and their linked policy priorities. This suggests that the descriptive (under)representation of certain groups has powerful implications for their substantive policy impact (Kanthak & Woon, 2015; Norris & Franklin, 1997). Since women are considered as having a distinct position and a shared set of problems that characterize a special interest (Sapiro, 1981), their presence in the political arena is of great importance. According to Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005), female legislators have more impact as their numbers in the legislature grow.

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

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

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

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

2.1. Supply

The supply of aspirants is shaped by two key factors: resources, like time, money and experience, and motivation, such as drive, ambition and interest in politics (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Lawless and Fox (2005) argue that women are less politically ambitious than men caused by long standing patterns of traditional socialization that associate men with the public sphere and women with the private. This can be linked with women’s participation in the labor force. Entry into the work force not only has an impact on social roles (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), but also on attitudes. Women, entering the labor market, become part of networks and organizations, such as unions, where they are more likely to be exposed to political discussion, which in turn encourages their interest and involvement in politics (Norris & Lovenduski, 1993). Over time, this can blur the traditional differentiated sex roles.

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

2.2. Demand
In order to run for political office, one must be selected and supported by a political party (Kunovich & Paxton, 2005). There are different factors which may affect demand for women candidates. The first one is who selects and the number of people involved. Rahat, Hazan and Katz (2008) demonstrate that those parties with the most inclusive candidate selection procedures are disadvantageous towards social groups usually underrepresented in politics, including women (Wauters & Pilet, 2015). Since the party leadership is more likely to be well-educated and relatively liberal in their attitudes towards gender equality, more centralized recruitment is beneficial to women, Randall (1987) argues. Kittilson (2006) and Kunovich and Paxton (2005) found that women’s presence among the party leadership is the single most important mechanism for initiating women’s gains in parliament. This can be linked to Niven’s (1998) description of an outgroup effect where party elites prefer candidates like themselves.

Second, the selection of candidates depends on evaluations of their abilities, qualifications and experience. These assessments are strongly shaped by the preferences and opinions of political elites (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995). Party selectors are characterized by traditional conceptions of gender relations that generally disadvantage women (Kenny & Verge, 2016).

We conclude that the demand for candidates is thus highly gendered as well (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Shvedova, 2005).

2.3. Intervening factors
The supply and demand for female aspirants can be mediated by features of the broader political context. We think of three contextual factors that have an intervening role effect: electoral institutions, political parties and voters.

When it comes to the electoral institutions, numerous studies have shown that countries with PR systems have significantly more women in office, all else equal (Caul, 1999; Matland, 1998; Norris, 1985, 2004; Rule, 1987). The ballot structure also has an influence: the view that closed lists are more advantageous for the election of women has become the most common perspective since the mid-1990s (Caul, 1999; Matland, 2005; Norris, 1996; Paxton & Kunovich, 2003; Schmidt, 2009; Thames & Williams, 2010; Valdini, 2012). Empirical research also contends that higher district magnitudes are beneficial for women’s representation (Darcy, Welch, & Clark, 1994; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Krook & Schwindt-Bayer, 2013; Matland, 1993; Rule, 1987; Salmond, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005).
Another factor that can affect women’s share of legislative seats is the partisan composition of the legislature. Leftist political parties elect a significantly higher percentage of female legislators than other political parties (Caul, 1999; Kittilson, 2006; Kook, 2010; Matland, 1993; Matland & Studlar, 1996; Norris & Franklin, 1997; Vallance & Davis, 1986; Vandeleene, 2014).

In our research design, we will focus on the role of voters. Some studies suggest that voters vote primarily for the party label rather than for the individual candidates. In recent years, however, we can see a tendency towards political personalization, i.e. “a dynamic process (Brettschneider & Gabriel, 2002; Kaase, 1994) that is expressed as an increase in the weight of the individual political actor and a decline in the weight of the group (political party) in politics overtime” (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007, p. 3).

In Belgium’s flexible-list system, preference votes have a limited direct effect on the vote share. We must, however, point to the fact that these preference votes also have an indirect effect on a candidate’s prospects for a career in politics. Research by André et al. (2015) demonstrates that party nomination strategies reward preference vote-earning with better list positions in the next election, improving the candidate’s probability of gaining election in the longer term.

Although some early work found that the public was reluctant to vote for female candidates, most studies find that, when controlling for other factors, such as seat, region, incumbency, campaign expenses and media coverage, voters not only vote for male and female candidates at equal rates (Norris, Vallance, & Lovenduski, 1992; Wauters, Weekers, & Maddens, 2010), but may also express a preference for women over men (Black & Erickson, 2003; Briars, 2005; Murray, 2008). We conclude that the above mentioned factors (electoral institutions, parties and voters) mediate the supply and demand for female candidates. There is, however, a contradiction in the literature. It is suggested that voters do not discriminate against female candidates, but, when it comes to the ballot structure, it is thought that closed systems, in which voters have less choice and in which quotas have a greater impact, are beneficial for women’s representation. This conflicts with the idea that voters do not vote less for women and problematizes the voter bias.

In the next part, we will focus on one specific aspect of the voter bias, i.e. (political) gender stereotypes. These are important as they have (at least) the potential to determine voting behavior (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007; Brown, 1994; K. Dolan, 2014; Fox & Smith, 1998) and to shape people’s desire for a greater or lesser role for women in elective office (Dolan, 2010). In this research design, we will not focus on the connection between gender stereotypes and voting behavior; our aim is to identify whether voters translate general characteristic gender stereotypes into political gender stereotypes in Flanders and how they influence voters’ perception of male and female politicians. Notwithstanding that these political gender stereotypes are also present among party selectors (Kenny & Verge, 2016),
we will consider them on the side of voters. We provide a theoretical introduction on these (political) gender stereotypes below.

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

3.1. General characteristic gender stereotypes
3.1.1. Definition/conceptualization
Ashmore and Del Boca defined a sex stereotype as “the structured set of inferential relations that link personal attributes to the social categories male and female” (1979, p. 225). In short, these are a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people. Stereotyping has commonly been viewed as an automatic, involuntary cognitive process: individuals often place others into a category they believe is useful for assigning attributes (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Popkin, 1994; Rahn, 1993; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1993). These categories refer to so-called informational cues (McDermott, 1997) and heuristics (Lupia, 1994; Sniderman et al., 1993). Once individuals place a person into a category, they assign the attributes associated with that category to the person and contradictory category-based cues are less likely to be integrated into impression formation (Bodenhausen & Macrae, 1994).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

According to the trait approach, voters’ assumptions about a candidate’s gender-linked personality traits drive expectations that women and men have different areas of issue expertise. Male and female candidates are seen as competent in different policy domains, because they are stereotyped as possessing typically masculine and typically feminine traits (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993b). Female candidates are for example seen as better at dealing with the aged because women are stereotyped as more compassionate than men, while male candidates are expected to handle a military crisis more competently because men are typically seen as tougher and more aggressive than women.

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

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

**Different issue competencies and ideological positions**

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

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

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

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

3.2.2. Factors influencing the existence of political gender stereotypes
Sniderman et al.’s (Peffley, Hurwitz, & Sniderman, 1997) theory of interactions suggests that the prevalence of stereotypic expectations interacts with other contextual variables and information. Based on an extensive literature review, we have been able to identify a number of contextual
variables that could have an influence on the extent to which political gender stereotypes are present. These include the political context, the type of electoral system and individual characteristics of voters.

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

Much depends also on the positions occupied by women in society, which can be linked to the process of sex-role socialization and to female role models. According to Matland (1994) there can be remarkable differences in how voters perceive female candidates between countries with a long history of women in key political positions and those where this is not the case. Shvedova (2005) points to the existence of an ideology of a woman’s place, according to which women should only play the role of working mother, which is generally low-paid and apolitical. Men largely dominate the political arena. This traditional patriarchal value system favors thus sexually segregated roles and militates against the advancement and participation of women in any political process (Shvedova, 2005). On the other hand, seeing women actively carrying out important and essential political roles could have a positive effect on the perceptions of women’s political competence (Matland, 1994).

In our design, we will focus on Flanders, which enables us to keep the political context and culture constant.

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

**Individual characteristics of voters**
The significance of candidate’s sex to voter choice also varies within the population. Some groups may be more likely to use candidate’s sex as a significant voting cue than others. The use of sex stereotypes varies for example with the gender of the voter (Falk & Kenski, 2006; Plutzer & Zipp, 1996). It seems likely that many voters will have a preference for politicians of their own gender and take an interest in their issues (Sanbonmatsu, 2002). This assumption refers to the gender solidarity hypothesis (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007). It is argued that women are more likely to vote for a woman candidate (Dolan, 1998). Men, on the other hand, significantly favor male candidates (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) and place less importance on typical female strengths when assessing candidates (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a). However, we want to nuance this by pointing out that even women are more inclined to vote for men (Marien, Wauters, & Schouteden, forthcoming). This could indicate that women are likely to prefer male candidates and to hold political gender stereotypes as well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The existence of political gender stereotypes has been extensively documented in the United States (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Dolan, 2010, 2014; Fox & Smith, 1998; Huddy & Terkiildsen, 1993b; Koch, 2000; Rosenwasser et al., 1987; Sapiro, 1981). The results of Sapiro’s (1981) study suggest that gender provides a cue for evaluation of candidates and has an influence on voting behavior, especially under conditions of low information.

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

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

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

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

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

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

This leads to a second argument: since Belgian voters are more acquainted with women politicians in (high) political positions, they are more open to women taking up their place in politics. Previous research demonstrates that Belgian voters tend to agree strongly with the statement that political responsibilities should be equally shared between men and women (Wauters & Devroe, 2015). The traditional differentiation in gender roles, which forms the base of gender stereotypes, is thus less present in Belgium. Third, as demonstrated in tables 1 and 2, women are more equally spread over different parties in Belgium, making the link between leftist parties and women less obvious.

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

Summary based on Rosadoc (2015).
Table 2: Women in the American House of Representatives – 2015-2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Number of elected women</th>
<th>% of elected party members</th>
<th>% of total women in House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republicans</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8,9%</td>
<td>26,2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrats</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>73,8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

Fourth, the list position, which is a particular aspect of Belgium’s flexible list PR system, offers an implicit cue about the quality of candidates to voters. According to their position on the list, voters have an additional idea about the quality that a party accords to particular candidate (Millard et al., 2011), which is not the case in the United States. Finally, in Belgian’s political system there is less focus on individual leadership and personal characteristics of candidates. In American elections, there is strong influence of individual campaign expenses and fund raising. In Belgium, on the other hand, the effect of campaign expenses on the personal result of a candidate is much smaller (Maddens, Wauters, Noppe, & Fiers, 2006). Belgium can be considered as a more party-centered system, to the point that Belgium has been described as an ideal-type of pillarization and ‘partitocracy’ (Deschouwer, 2012). In the United States, personal traits of candidates are more important, which often leads to a gendered political race.

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

4. Research design

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

As shown in table 3, over the years there are fewer women elected in Wallonia than in Flanders. This could be an indication of a political culture that is less open to women taking up prominent roles in
politics. This can also be linked with the degree of women’s participation in the labor force. Women’s labor force participation rate is lower in Wallonia (57%) than in Flanders (67%) (VDAB, 2013), which is a proxy for the degree to which a country/region adheres to traditional gender roles (Andersen, 1975; Andersen & Cook, 1985). Moreover, although Wallonia follows the same electoral rules as Flanders, there are some remarkable differences when it comes to the electoral setting. Districts are for example smaller in Wallonia, as shown in table 4, which makes the electoral system less proportional.

| Table 3: Women elected in the Flemish and Walloon Parliament 1995-2014 |
|-----------------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Flemish Parliament | 21/118         | 23/118 | 40/124 | 51/124 | 55/124 |
|                  | 17,8%         | 19,5%  | 32,3%  | 41,1%  | 44,4%  |
| Walloon Parliament | 6/75          | 8/75   | 14/75  | 26/75  | 30/75  |
|                  | 8%            | 10,7%  | 18,7%  | 34,7%  | 40%    |

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

| Table 4: District magnitudes in the Flemish and Walloon Parliament |
|-------------------|-----|-----|
| Flemish Parliament | 124 | 6   |
| Walloon Parliament | 75  | 13  |

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

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

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

We will thus not focus on these general characteristic stereotypes, nor on the connection between gender stereotypes and voting behavior. Our aim is to focus solely on the political translation of general characteristic gender stereotypes (RQ1).

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

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

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

**H1a: The perceived general competences of women candidates on communal issues will be higher than that of men candidates.**

**H1b: The perceived general competences of women candidates on agentic issues will be lower than that of men candidates.**
The political translation of general gender stereotypes will also lead to a different perception of the social attitudes and political beliefs of women (Diekman et al., 2002). The finding that women are perceived as being more liberal (in European terms: more leftists) can by explained the fact that women focus more on communal issues, but also because, in the United States, the Democratic party counts significantly more women candidates and parliamentarians. This creates a link between women and party in a voter’s mind: the application of political gender stereotypes is complicated by their overlap with partisan stereotypes (Chang & Hitchon, 2004). This link is obviously less clear in Belgium, since women are more equally spread over the different parties (King & Matland, 2003). We believe, however, that, also in Belgium, female candidates will be perceived as being more leftist, since they are also seen as more competent to handle and support communal issues and to write more legislation on women’s issues (Saint-German, 1989; Welch & Thomas, 1991).

H1b: The perceived ideological position of women candidates will be more to the left than that of men candidates.

Secondly, we will analyze how the list position of a candidate (a typical feature of PR systems) intervenes with gender cues. As argued before, voters have often very limited information about individual candidates in PR list systems (Carpini & Keeter, 1997). With limited information, voters rely on different shortcuts and cues when making a voting choice (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001), including the party label, place of residence and sex. The list position of a candidate can be seen as an additional voter cue and, according to the theory of interactions (Peffley et al., 1997), this could possibly interact with stereotypic expectations about the competences of male and female candidates.

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

RQ2: What effect has the list position on the perceived general competences of female candidates?

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

Up to new, the existing literature has only given very few explanations for this effect of list position. We think of the following three explanations. First, previous research demonstrates that voters with little political interest vote less sophisticated (more list, head of list and incumbency voting). They do not really ‘choose’ candidates, but tick rather by accident the figure heads (mostly men) on the list (Wauters & Devroe, 2015). It has been shown that position effects are stronger when the population is lower in cognitive sophistication (Geys & Heyndels, 2003). As a voter decides at random, any candidate on top of the list will obtain more votes. If this is the case, we expect to find no effect of list position on gender stereotypes.

Second, the effect of list position could be due to a selection effect by political parties. Parties present their candidates in a given order to the voter. It could be that positions higher in the list are reserved for the best candidates. Candidates on top of the list receive more votes, according to this reasoning, because the party did a good job in selecting the best candidates for the top positions. We also control for this possibility, since we will provide no additional information on the competencies and qualities of the hypothetical candidates and the provided information will be exactly the same for all candidates.

Third, as a general rule, positions higher in the list are reserved for more influential and popular candidates (Geys & Heyndels, 2003). In this way, the list position in open or flexible list PR systems can be considered as an extra voting cue by which parties can send signals to voters about the quality of the candidates: those at the top, are regarded as more competent. When a woman is placed at the top, this could be a signal to voters that this is a competent and qualified candidate. This individuating information contradicts the stereotypic expectations (i.e. women are seen as less competent) and can overrule these political gender stereotypes. On the other hand, when a women has a lower list position, this could be a confirmation of the stereotypic expectations of voters.

**H2a:** The perceived general competences of women with a high list position will be higher than that of other women candidates.

**H2b:** The perceived general competences of women with a low list position will be lower than that of other women candidates.

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

| RQ3: Which voter characteristics affect the presence of political gender stereotypes? |
Research demonstrates that a large proportion of the electorate lacks the ability or motivation to obtain and assimilate a high level of information about candidates and campaigns (Verba, Nie, & Petrocik, 1976). The use of gender as voting cue and applying sex role stereotypes depends much upon the level of political interest (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) and education (Falk & Kenski, 2006). It could thus be expected that lower-educated voters and voters with little political interest are more likely to hold political gender stereotypes (Wauters, Marien, & Schouteden, 2013).

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

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

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

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

**RQ4**: Is there a difference in saliency between areas in which women are considered competent and areas in which men are considered competent?

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

**H4**: Women’s areas of expertise are of equal importance to voters as men’s areas of expertise.
In sum, we can schematically represent our research design and the way in which general gender stereotypes have an impact in the political sphere as follows. Note that the boxes marked in gray, are the ones on which we will focus. The others are no part of this research project and will be held constant in our experimental design, which will be developed in the next part.

5. Methodological design

5.1. Experimental design

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

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

5.1.1. Design

Our study uses a 2x3x6 between groups randomized complete block design. We will conduct a repeated measure (within-subjects analysis), i.e. the same respondent will be confronted with different text messages (treatments) (Druckman et al., 2011). This gives us the advantage that we can
collect more data with fewer respondents. We will include six different policy issues\(^1\) in our research design. The issues include 2 topics that are, according to previous studies, generally perceived as being communal (e.g. child care and education), topics that are generally perceived as being agentic (e.g. economics and defense) and topics that are generally perceived as being gender-neutral (e.g. the environment and justice). Regarding these gender-neutral issues, pre-tests will be used in order to be sure that men and women are actually perceived as being equally capable of handling them. The candidate’s gender (male versus female) and the list position (head of list versus position in the middle) are manipulated as treatment variables. We will also include the treatment in which the list position is not mentioned, as a kind of baseline situation, in order to be able to measure the effect of the list position.

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

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

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

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\(^1\) At the moment, we have not decided yet which issues to include, but in order to give an indication, we provide some examples.
At the beginning of the online survey, participants will be told that the experiment is a study on political attitudes and that they will be asked to fill out several measures assessing their opinion on various issues and to evaluate hypothetical political candidates. The hypothetical candidates will only be given a last name. Some set of questions will identify the candidate as “Meneer (mister) Janssen”, others as “Mevrouw (mistress) Janssen”. In addition, a gender-linked pronoun will be used in the instructional paragraph of the questionnaire. In all other respects, speeches and questionnaires will be identical, in order not to provide any cues to the salience of gender in this study.

We will be using text messages, which is the standard practice for this kind of studies. Audio-messages are more complicated to set up and the voice may bias the reaction of the respondents. In the drafting of the text messages, we must take into account that men and women can feel attracted to different layouts or to different ways of writing (word choices). The messages should also be as gender-neutral as possible. It is therefore very useful that experts in linguistics go through the different text messages in order to search for weaknesses or words that are not (gender) neutral. Next to the text messages, we will also provide an image of the ballot, where we indicate the list position of the particular hypothetical candidate. We will do this by putting the dot beside the name of the candidate in red. By doing so, we highlight the list position of the candidate and we enhance the realism of our experiment, since this is also done in election advertising.

We must also take a close look at the policy positions regarding the different issues. These positions should take a central stance (Anckar, 2000). In Belgium’s fragmented party system, it is not uncommon that parties take a central stance. Many parties compete for voters’ support (Walgrave & De Swert, 2007) and substantive and ideological party differences are smaller in Belgium than in the US. After the second World War, political parties started to resemble each other more and party competition proceeds centripetally (Bouteca, 2011). Issue-ownership is also less prominent in Belgium. The issue-ownership theory claims that voters identify parties with issues (Walgrave & De Swert, 2007). This depends, however, on the party system. According to Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans (2009) a two-party system leads to more stable issue ownership than a multiparty system. In a two-party system, one of the main parties is always considered by a majority of the voters as better able to deal with a certain issue. In multiparty systems with many parties competing for only a few issues, in contrast, more issues are controversial as other parties are constantly trying to take away the issue from their closes competitor. Therefore the link between certain issues and political parties is less straightforward. Since we will randomly assign our respondents to the different experimental groups, we will control for party preference and this will also have no influence on the evaluation of the hypothetical candidates.
There will be different sets of questions. The first set taps the respondents’ evaluations of the candidate’s competence in handling the particular policy areas. Respondents will be asked to rate the candidate’s competence using a fully-labeled 5-point scale, in which the endpoints will be marked “very incompetent” (0) and “very competent” (5). A second set will ask the respondent to indicate what they believe to be the candidate’s ideological position on a fully-labeled 5-point left-right scale. We will also include a manipulation check so that we can verify whether participants were able to correctly answer questions about the sex and the list position of the candidate whose message they read. A third set will question the character traits that respondents ascribe to these different candidates. We assume that people assign specific character traits to men and women (women are perceived as being communal, men as being agentic). To make sure that this holds for our set of respondents, we include this as a control question in our survey. We will provide a list of fifteen characteristics and ask respondents to indicate which of them are the five most suitable for the candidate in question. We will also include a set of question to measure whether the respondents would be likely to vote for the candidate.

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

We will also include some questions on characteristics that transcend the individual level. These questions are included to make sure that respondents with these characteristics are evenly distributed across the different experimental groups. We will for example ask respondents to indicate the postal code of the city where they live. This enables us to control for urban/rural region. In the post hoc analysis we can then see whether urban and rural people have different ideas about women in politics. We will also include a question on family background. We will ask respondents to indicate the occupation of their mother (working mother or not). This enables us to identify the effect of gender role socialization among respondents. Earlier research conducted in Costa Rica has found that gender neutral attitudes held even for people who grew up in traditional families with a working father and a stay-at-home mother(Taylor-Robinson et al., 2016).
At the end of the experiment, participants will be asked to report what they believed was the purpose of the experiment. Once the experiment is finished, we will send a debriefing email to the respondents in which we will reveal the true aims of the experiment and provide them with some basic results.

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

We believe that the prevalence of political gender stereotypes is influenced by three kinds of factors: the institutional context (political culture, electoral system, voting rules), voter characteristics (gender of the voter, level of education, level of political interest) and candidate characteristics (partisan affiliation, ethnic origin, age and physical outlook). As for the institutional context, we hold this constant as the focus is on Flanders’ system of proportional representation. Afterwards, results can be compared with findings from earlier research in other countries. Also the characteristics of the voters will be controlled as respondents will be randomly assigned to one of the different experimental conditions and comparison between these experimental groups will be made. In order to be able to control for age, gender and level of education of the respondents, which can be considered as confounding variables, we will use a block randomization. In doing so, we can be sure that the 6 groups are similar in all relevant respects and we can exclude effects of intervening variables.

By using hypothetical candidates without a partisan affiliation, we are not intervening in actual discussion nor will there be any effect of pre-existing preferences or personal (dis)tastes. This offers a methodologically cleaner test (Lammers et al., 2009). The attributes of the candidates (ethnic origin, age, physical outlook,...) are held as constant as possible and are to a large extent not discernible in the text messages we will be using. The only variation is constituted by sex and list position, which will be clearly communicated to the respondents. We will also use pilot-tests to verify if the different text messages are equally agreeable to read and if their lay-out, word choice and contents are as (gender) neutral as possible.

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

We are aware of the fact that working with an online survey entails the risk that we will miss out certain parts of the population, for example the elderly and the less-educated. Therefore we will make sure that these categories are overrepresented in the selection of our sample.

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

6. Conclusion

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

The existence of political gender stereotypes has been extensively documented in the United States. Since Flanders differs in a number of important aspects from the US, we cannot simply transfer the findings from the US to Flanders. This justifies our claim that it would be interesting to switch the context by studying whether political gender stereotypes also prevail in Flanders. By doing so, this project adds new insights to the limited knowledge on the prevalence of political gender stereotypes outside the US and we will be able to fill gaps in the literature regarding the prevalence of political gender stereotypes among different political systems and cultures.

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

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