**An MP who looks like me?**

*Intersections of gender and ethnicity in the representational relationship between citizens and politicians*

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**Abstract**

*In which instances and how do intersections of gender and ethnicity shape the expectations and experiences of representation among individual citizens? In other words, how much does it matter to individual citizens to have an MP who looks like yourself and in which instances and how do citizens feel represented? I will test this with original survey experiments across the Netherlands, Germany and France. Representational relationships are not simple and linear: I do not assume that Dutch, German or French Turkish citizens will feel represented when there are enough parliamentarians of Turkish descent. While I emphasize that expectations and experiences of representation are shaped by identities, I move beyond the assumption that identities are tidy, top-down categories. I analyze identities from a bottom-up perspective and consider them to be mutually reinforcing, varying in degrees of membership and influenced by group status and experiences with discrimination. I will oversample ethnic minority citizens in each of the three countries, thus enabling a quadruple comparative design: not only are countries compared, but ethnic groups are also compared to each other, to the majority group and differences within ethnic groups are uncovered through this design. Intersections of gender and ethnicity shape evaluations of representatives and thus political equality and democracy. Despite the fact that our societies are diverse, our politics are far from equal. We need this data to help understand and overcome this.*

**Introduction**

In November 2014 the commercial research agency Motivaction published a report which seemed to show that 90% of Turkish youngsters in the Netherlands think that people who go to Syria to support Islamic State are heroes (Motivaction, 2014, p. 11) and that 80% think that violence is justified (Motivaction, 2014, p. 10). The former Minister of Social Affairs for the Dutch Labour Party (PvdA), Lodewijk Asscher, had commissioned the research to be done and ‘conveniently’ (VPRO, 2015) published just a day before an important debate on integration. Two Dutch Turkish members of parliament of the PvdA, Tunahan Kuzu and Selҫuk Özturk, didn’t accept the results and were subsequently expelled from the PvdA, but kept their seats in Parliament. They announced that they would stay in Parliament ‘until the very end’ for ‘all the people who do not *feel* represented’ (Volkskrant, 2014, italics mine)[[1]](#footnote-1).

Kuzu and Özturk formed a new political party called DENK[[2]](#footnote-2). They won three seats in Parliament in the 2017 parliamentary elections (Kiesraad, 2017) and established a considerable presence in many cities in the 2018 municipal elections (NOS, 2018) as well. In interviews in the media their voters and candidates often underline they do not feel ‘represented’ (e.g. NRC, 2018; Parool, 2018; Telegraaf, 2016; Volkskrant, 2017).

One could, however, argue, that despite not *feeling* represented, people from a Turkish or a Moroccan background are in fact *being* represented in parliament. There is a higher percentage of politicians with a Turkish or a Moroccan background in the Dutch parliament than there are in the population (Kiesraad, 2017; CBS, 2016)[[3]](#footnote-3). Apparently, representation is not as straightforward as it seems if feelings of not being represented are still so widespread. ‘Who is the ultimate judge … the constituency and not the theorist or other observer’ (Saward, 2010, p. 145) Moreover, it is ‘crucial … [to] address relevant constituencies and audiences and say: "It is up to you to judge”’ (Saward, 2010, p. 146). If members of the relevant constituencies do not feel represented despite some arguing that they should feel so, there is something going on. This project aims to find out what. If it isn’t representation, is it misrepresentation?

The three seats they have in parliament are all filled by men (Kiesraad, 2017). Yet, on the whole, ethnic minority women have been more common in Dutch parliaments than ethnic minority men. Possibly because party elites figure they will tick more minority boxes with just one newcomer (Celis & Erzeel, 2017) and in some cases ethnic minority women are seen as more successful models of integration (Mügge & Erzeel, 2016). On the other hand, DENK has appointed more male ethnic minority representatives than female ones in both the national and the municipal elections (Kiesraad, 2017; NOS, 2018). The way gender intersects with ethnicity also needs to be part of the equation.

This notion of misrepresentation is not a Dutch peculiarity. Ethnic minority European citizens outside of the Netherlands have voiced the need for a party like DENK in their countries as well (Akachar, 2018, p. 191) and wonder ‘[w]hat good does it do that there are people like us in parliament if they fail to represent us?’ (Akachar, 2018, p. 202). Moreover, 75% of ethnic minorities across Europe agree ‘we need more immigrant members of parliament’, 87,4% agreeing that they would be ‘better underst[ood]’ and 83,5% agreeing they would be ‘better represented’ if there were more MPs with their immigrant background (Huddleston & Tjaden, 2012). This problem is, thus, much wider than the Dutch context.

Do ethnic minority citizens who have more in common with politicians evaluate these politicians more positively? Or are ethnic minority citizens more prone to evaluate outsiders more positively? I am going to study more closely how citizens evaluate politicians who do (or do not) look like them in terms of gender and ethnicity. Because, in the end, the way people evaluate the politicians who are claimed to represent them is firmly anchored in the inner workings of our representative democracy (Dahl, 2000, pp. 192–195). Such evaluations, in turn, influence legitimacy (Craig, Martinez, Gainous, & Kane, 2006; Schwindt-Bayer & Mishler, 2005), democratic trust (Hakhverdian & Mayne, 2012; Mishler & Rose, 2001) and external efficacy and perceived responsiveness (Esaiasson, Kölln, & Turper, 2015). Since the evaluations of politicians by citizens matter so much to our democracy, we need to get straight to what extent these are shaped by the intersections of gender and ethnicity.

I will not only study the extent to which citizen/politician-similarities matter, but I will treat the concept of identity with renewed sensitivity and rigour using quantitative methods. Because, ‘[i]n the end, numbers are indispensable for any political actor to address inequality’ (Celis & Mügge, 2018, p. 210). I will do this with original survey experiments[[4]](#footnote-4) across three countries: the Netherlands, Germany and France. In each country, I will oversample specific groups of ethnic minority citizens in order to have the statistical power to study the differences not only between groups but also within groups. In doing so, I employ a quadruple comparative design: not only are three countries compared, ethnic minorities within those countries are compared to each other and to ethnic majorities. Moreover, thanks to oversampling ethnic minority groups, within-group differences can also be compared.

In the Netherlands, the oversample of groups of ethnic minority citizens will consist of 250 Dutch citizens with a Turkish background, 250 Dutch citizens with a Moroccan background and 150 Dutch citizens with a Surinamese background. Dutch citizens with no migration background will also be sampled to make for about half of all the respondents. In Germany, the oversample of groups of ethnic minority citizens will consist of 250 German citizens with a Turkish background, 250 German citizens with a background in the former Soviet Union and 500 German citizens with no migration background. In France, the oversample of groups of ethnic minority citizens will consist of 250 French citizens with a North-African background (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria), 250 French citizens with a Sub-Saharan African background (Niger, Mauritania, Ivory Coast, French Sudan, Senegal, Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo) and 85 French citizens with a Turkish background. The latter has, however, not been selected on the basis of numerical presence, but in order to have one constant category across the three countries of our selection and be able to better study ‘transnational communities’ (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 301). French citizens with no migration background will also be sampled in a similar number as the total of the other groups in order to compare and contrast to the other groups.

One challenge worth mentioning are the legal restrictions in all three countries concerning the saving of data on ethnic background (Fassmann, Reeger, & Sievers, 2009, p. 84). In the Netherlands, laws prohibiting the registration of information on ethnicity are in place but are usually bypassed in practice (Salentin & Schmeets, 2017). However, in Germany and France these legal restrictions are much more strict leading to the prohibition of saving information on ethnicity and national origin of parents (Mayer & Tiberj, 2016). This can pose challenges with regard to sampling (Bloch, 2007) especially since it is advisable to keep sampling strategies constant across countries (Kappelhof, 2014) to enable a comparative design. Stratified sampling is therefore impossible as there is no sampling frame to draw a sample from and new techniques need to be employed to overcome sampling challenges.

Therefore, I will employ a large scale filter question to a yet to be chosen panel[[5]](#footnote-5). That means that a very large sample of a panel will be asked to participate in a mini-survey. The first and only question of this mini-survey asks whether they identify with a short list of specific ethnic groups, the groups that we are interested in drawing a subsample from. If they are part of a group we want to oversample, they are immediately redirected to the survey. If they are part of a group we do not want to oversample, only a small percentage of the mini-survey respondents are redirected to the survey. In sum, this will enable us to form sizable groups of ethnic minority citizens for our final survey.

In this research, I first review three fields of literature. The field of representation studies informs the relationship between having the same gender and ethnicity as an MP and how this MP is evaluated (Pitkin, 1967), which underlines the urgency to give the identity of the represented more attention than scholars have done so far (Saward, 2010). Although looking like your assumed representative has often been understood to be fulfilled when all the identity boxes are ticked, intersectionality (Crenshaw, n.d.) offers ways to understand that the various identity categories a citizen belongs to (1) influence each other and (2) are susceptible to various degrees of membership (Hancock, 2007). Moreover, identity categories are not only shaped by cognitive connectedness (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) but also by group status (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

I then connect the field of representation, intersectionality and identity with the increasingly popular method of hypothetical conjoint experiments (Hainmueller, Hopkins, & Yamamoto, 2014). I offer innovative solutions to the limitations of this method and propose new ways to research how identities shape the evaluations of representation. I then go on to conceptualize gender as a non-binary and societally constructed concept and I conceptualize ethnicity as an umbrella term consisting of race, religion and immigrant background. Together, this leads to my two main hypotheses: the co-identities hypothesis and the complex-identities hypothesis. Then, I operationalize these conjectures by studying citizen evaluations of MPs in the Netherlands, Germany and France among the largest ethnic groups of these countries. I reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of experimental designs and propose ways to make the best out of both. I then turn to operationalizing the independent, dependent and moderating variables. After my conclusion, I propose a time table and a table of contents for my dissertation.

I seek to make the following contributions. First, I will make theoretical advancements placing the relationship between identity and evaluations as the central focus in research on representation. Second, empirical advances are made through the generation of original data with survey experiments amongst the largest ethnic groups across the Netherlands, Germany and France. Third, methodological advances will be made through the validation of hypothetical politician experiments by means of surveys of evaluations of real world politicians. Fourth, I seek to contribute to discussions in society on diversity, equality and politics with quantitative data on questions many assume to know the answers to. Indeed, ‘[c]ontemporary societies are diverse and far from equal. It is time to get these numbers right’ (Celis & Mügge, 2018).

**Synopsis conjoint experiment**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Attribute** | **Value 1** | **Value 2** | **Value 3** | **Value 4**  |
| **Sex** | Male – signaled through profile picture, name and “he” | Female – signaled through profile picture, name and “she” |   |   |
| **Migration background - Netherlands** | Turkey | Morocco | Surinam | None |
| **Migration background - Germany** | Turkey |  | Former Soviet Union | None |
| **Migration background - France** | Turkey | North-Africa (Marocco, Tunisia, Algeria) | Sub-Saharan Africa (Niger, Mauritania, Ivory Coast, French Sudan, Senegal, Chad, Gabon, Cameroon, Congo) | None |
| **Religion** | “Practices Islam” | “Practices Christianity” | “Does not practice any religion” |   |
| **Economic dimension** | For statement on redistribution, income inequality or green energy | Against statement on redistribution, income inequality or green energy |   |   |
| **Cultural dimension** | For statement on immigration, gender or sexuality | Against statement on immigration, gender or sexuality |  |  |

1. Since this incident, the research by Motivaction was placed under great scrutiny, repeated by the SCP, but without the results being replicated and subsequently retracted (Huijnk, Dagevos, Gijsberts, & Andriessen, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. DENK means *equality* in Turkish and *think* in Dutch. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In comparison, despite being a sizeable portion of society, there is not a single representative in the Dutch parliament with a Surinamese or Antillean background (Mügge & Van Stigt, 2017). Therefore, in this group the feeling of representation is likely to be even more distant. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Although I believe a mixed-methods approach to this question from the perspective from the citizens is the most fruitful, I will research this question quantitatively. A yet to be hired post-doctoral researcher will research this question qualitatively through focus-group discussions, thus complementing my research with qualitative findings. In addition, the principal investigator of this project, Dr. Mügge, will study representation from the perspective of the politician. Together, these three strands of research complement each other and will bring forward new ideas and understanding as envisioned in the vidi-proposal granted by the NWO (Mügge, 2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We are still in discussing the options with a number of research agencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)