

Social Media (Dis)Connecting the World?

Effects of Self-Selective Exposure to Partisan Content on Social Media on Political Tolerance.

by

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Abstract

This study investigates whether self-selective exposure affects the level of political tolerance. Social media is an essential aspect in the lives of many people across the globe. Despite several positive aspects of social media, there are some negative characteristics such as self-selective exposure. Self-selective exposure means that people are more inclined to interact with information that reconfirms pre-existing beliefs. Self-selective exposure could probably affect the level of political tolerance, and this could hurt the liberal democratic system which is based on the fact that voters are exposed to several political opinions and ideas to make free choices based on these opinions and ideas. From a scientific point of view, this research is significant because most research is done on this topic in the United States, where there is a two-party system based on competition rather than a multi-party system based on consensus.

A survey to investigate the relationship between self-selective exposure and political tolerance was conducted in Enschede among people aged between 18 to 35. Furthermore, the variables education, gender, where people live in a city or rural area, social media use, partisanship, political interest, political knowledge, and populist attitudes were hypothesized to affect self-selective exposure and political tolerance. In total, 216 respondents participated in this study.

Analyses of the data from the survey presented some significant outcomes. Left-winged respondents who are higher educated are more politically tolerant. Furthermore, when people are more active on social media they are less politically tolerant. Politically partisan people are more inclined to be self-selective in their exposure. Additionally, politically partisan people are less tolerant of left-winged extremists. People who are more interested in politics have a higher level of political tolerance. Finally, people who have higher populist attitudes are more self-selective in their exposure.

This study found that people who are more self-selective in their exposure to partisan content on social media are sometimes less political tolerant. When people block or unfriend someone on social media, they are less politically tolerant towards right-wing extremists. Self-selection in the search for information does not affect the level of political tolerance.

Keywords: self-selective exposure, political tolerance, politics, populism, social media, political extremism, filter bubble, pillarization, political parties, political partisanship.

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List of Abbreviations

VVD	<i>People's Party for Freedom and Democracy</i>
PVV	<i>Party for Freedom</i>
CDA	<i>Christian Democratic Appeal</i>
D66	<i>Democrats 66</i>
GroenLinks	<i>GreenLeft</i>
SP	<i>Socialist Party</i>
PvdA	<i>Labour Party</i>
CU	<i>Christian Union</i>
PvdD	<i>Party for the Animals</i>
50PLUS	<i>Pensioners Party</i>
SGP	<i>Reformed Political Party</i>
DENK	<i>Minority Rights Party</i>
FvD	<i>Forum for Democracy</i>

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1. Introduction

Social media is an essential aspect in the lives of many people across the globe. It helps to connect people no matter where they are, information travels the world faster than it ever did, people can participate and ask questions in an online discussion, and it helps to build communities of like-minded people. Nonetheless, next to the positive aspects of social media there are some negative parts that social media provides such as hateful comments and propagandic messages of extremists (Rieger, Schmitt & Frischlich, 2018). Additionally, what people often see on the internet is personalised, this means that the content that people see on social media is different than what other people see (Costello, Hawdon, Ratliff, & Grantham, 2016). People see content that mirrors the opinions, attitudes, and lifestyles of the user. This algorithm is called the filter bubble (Costello et al., 2016). Due to the filter bubble, people create their own biases without them knowing it (Hawdon, 2012).

Nonetheless, with the existence of social media like Twitter and Facebook, people can share their messages with their entire network and many more. This leads to a fast number of opinions, considerably more than ever before. Besides, there is substantially more information accessible to people (Flaxman, Goel, & Rao, 2016). Despite a large number of opinions, people are more likely to interact with sources that underline their pre-existing beliefs. In different academic sources, this phenomenon is called *self-selective exposure* (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2011; Spohr, 2017; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016). The self-selective exposure theory proposes that people are more likely to expose themselves to content that they already agree with (Trilling, Van Klingeren, & Tsfati, 2016). Iyengar and Hahn (2009) researched that even though there is an unlimited amount of information accessible people will visit sources they support. Spohr (2017) argued that individuals are more expected to see and interact with information that confirms the beliefs and opinions that people already have.

Moreover, Mutz (2002) argued that if people only see comparable world views, they are less tolerant of opposing ideas. According to Kehrberg (2007), political tolerance is about the acceptance of public rights for people in all situations even when people are in disagreement. Less political tolerant people are therefore less likely to grant certain civil rights to people such as publish books, hold public rallies, and run for office (Sullivan, Piereson, & Marcus, 1982). A tolerant citizen is someone who does not support limitations and discrimination from the government on the rights of persons to take part in politics (Gibson, 2006). Self-selective exposure could probably affect the level of political tolerance, and this could hurt the liberal

democratic system (Kim, 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to study the connexion between political tolerance and self-selective exposure.

This study investigates if self-selective exposure to partisan content on social media affects political tolerance among people aged between 18 till 35. To research this the following central question is given: *To what extent are people aged between 18 till 35 who are more self-selective in their exposure to partisan content on social media, less political tolerant?*

People are more likely to see content on social media that confirms their views. This can affect the level of political tolerance. Because with social media it is possible to be in a group that has a like-minded ideology and is homogenous (Pauwels & Schils, 2014). Rieger et al. (2018) argue that tolerance will increase when there are counter-voices. Additionally, Mutz and Mondak (2006) state that seeing different opinions is positively related to political tolerance.

Furthermore, Garrett (2009) confirms that society will be less political fragmented if people expose themselves to different opinions. Moreover, Stroud (2010) writes that people are less tolerant, and the electorate is more fragmented due to exposure to media that is partisan and self-selected. Johnson, Zhang, and Bichard (2011) found that people select their own partisan political websites and share what they believe. Finally, when people interact with multiple opinions, they are more politically tolerant, and when people are more selective in their exposure it is possible that people become less political tolerant.

In this research, self-selective exposure is the independent variable, and the dependent variable is political tolerance. This research can help to understand if self-selective exposure is a significant problem in the Netherlands. Furthermore, this study tries to help to understand if more self-selective exposure possibly leads to people being less political tolerant because they only see opinions that reaffirm their pre-existing beliefs. To answer the central research question the following sub-questions are defined:

- To what extent are people aged between 18 till 35 selective in their exposure to partisan content on social media, if at all?
- To what extent can an explanation be found for self-selective exposure among people aged between 18 till 35?
- To what extent can an explanation be found for political tolerance among people aged between 18 till 35?
- To what extent leads selective exposure to partisan content on social media among people aged between 18 till 35, to less political tolerance?

The reason to study people in this age group is that according to the Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek (2018), 97% of Dutch people aged between 18 till 35 use social media. This is a higher percentage than any other age group in the Netherlands. Additionally, younger people hesitate, doubt and change party more often than older people in the Netherlands (Thomassen, Aarts, Van der Kolk, 2000). Therefore, this age group is interesting to study because younger people are more active on social media and this could affect their political views more than with older people because they are not as strongly connected to a political party as older voters (Thomassen et al., 2000).

This research topic can be considered to have real-world significance because liberal democracies are based on the fact that voters are exposed to several political opinions and ideas to make free choices based on these opinions and ideas (Garrett et al., 2011; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016). With self-selective exposure, there is a chance that people see less information because they only see the information that they already approve of. Therefore, selective exposure can affect political tolerance and the idea of liberal democracy (Mutz, 2002). Additionally, social media is becoming more prominent in politics for example in campaigning and the rise of *fake news*. Furthermore, Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. (2016) state that self-selective exposure can lead to more extreme viewpoints because they see no alternatives. Therefore, it is interesting to see if selective exposure affects political tolerance.

Moreover, this research has scientific purpose because most of the research about selective exposure and political tolerance is done in the United States (Garrett, 2009; Garrett et al., 2011; Iyengar & Hahn 2009; Johnson et al., 2011). Trilling et al. (2016) underlined this and argue that research must be done on self-selection in a multi-party system where consensus is essential like the Netherlands with thirteen parties in the House of Representatives, rather than a two-party system (Tweede Kamer der Staten Generaal, nd).

Furthermore, Zhang, Johnson, Seltzer, and Bichard (2009) social networking is an item that many researchers are interested in. According to the researchers, there are many studies done on the characteristics of social media but not on how social media affects the democratic process of people. As a future research Zhang et al. (2009) suggest that researchers can look at social networking sites and the effect it has on different political attitudes. Rieger et al. (2018) argue that the internet created a space of hate and negativity to specific individuals or social groups. Therefore, research is needed on social media and the possible negative influences of social media on political tolerance.

Additionally, it is not yet clear if people on the internet are more likely to use the internet to find opinions that they already agree with or that the internet allows exposure to multiple perspectives (Stroud, 2014). This research will help to understand if people experience selective exposure on social media. Johnson, Kaye, and Lee (2017) state that future research about selective exposure should include other political measures such as tolerance and ideology, this could help to further develop the theory to clarify the relationship between self-selective exposure and other political variables.

In this study, the theory about self-selective exposure and political tolerance is first discussed. The theory chapter is used to get a further understanding of the topic, and several hypotheses are created. After this, the research design where the method of the research and type of research that is done is discussed. In the methodology paragraph, the design of the research is sketched and how the data is collected is discussed. Subsequently, the descriptive results of the survey are shown. With the data from the survey, statistical tests are done in the result chapter. In this chapter, it becomes clear which hypotheses are accepted or rejected. Afterward, the results are discussed and explained in the conclusion chapter. In the concluding chapter the answer to the main question is given, the limitations of the research are examined, and suggestions for future research are made. Finally, references which this thesis is built on are shown in the reference list. Lastly, the appendix is shown which include the survey.

2. Theoretical Framework

There are almost no studies carried out that investigate the relation between exposure and tolerance, according to Harell (2010). Therefore, in this theory chapter, the foundation is laid to research the relation between self-selective exposure and political tolerance. To do this several theories from literature are used to support this study. In this theory chapter, the theories about self-selective exposure and political tolerance are discussed. Furthermore, several hypotheses are formulated that arise from the discussed literature. Moreover, a conceptual model of the relation between the variables that will be discussed can be seen in figure 1.

2.1. Self-Selective Exposure

The idea of selective exposure is first noted by Lazarfeld, Berselon, and Gaudet in 1948 as cited by Stroud (2014). The researcher observed that people encountered pleasant messages more frequently than unpleasant messages during the 1940 presidential campaign in the U.S.

Selective exposure that is in-line with pre-existing beliefs and partisan content is not only from this time. Various European political parties had a strong party press, where party members were being exposed to information that was like-minded to their own opinion (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016). In the Netherlands, for example, there was a strong pillarization (*verzuiling*) in society. Since the final quarter of the 19th century, Dutch society was pillarized; this means that Dutch people were divided into different communal sections on the foundation of moral and religious grounds. The different pillars were named after their doctrine, there was, for instance, the Roman Catholic pillar, the Calvinist pillar, the socialist pillar or the liberal pillar (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001).

According to Spiecker and Steutel (2001), this is not enough for a society to be pillarized; there were active forms of organization in the different pillars. These enclosed and controlled the life of the members of the pillar to a significant extent. The pillars all had their own ideological organizations such as political parties, schools, newspapers and broadcasting companies. Furthermore, the pillars founded several different organizations such as hospitals, housing companies, and animal protection societies. Lijphart (1990) describes that Dutch people who were protestant only read protestant newspapers went to protestant schools, voted for a protestant political party and joined a protestant sports club. The different pillars had their own strongly organized society whereas the leaders of the pillars cooperated peacefully in a consociational democracy. The members of the pillars had a high degree of political passivity and loyalty to the top (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001). Religious-based voting, for example, has

regularly been high in Dutch society since confessional political parties got their support from their religious group (Jansen, 2011). The Netherlands was known for voters who seldom changed their political preference (van der Meer, Lubbe, van Elsas, Elff, & van der Brug, 2012)

The pillars in the Netherlands declined quickly since 1970 (Spiecker & Steutel, 2001). The organisations like labour unions and newspapers were fused into neutral organisations or disappeared completely even the Roman Catholic, and Dutch Reformed political parties merged into one political party.

Additionally, the election in the Netherlands now is one of the most volatile in Western Europe (van der Meer et al., 2012). One important cause of the erosion of the political pillars was less ideological; people became less passive in their political preference and their support to the elites of the pillars. Finally, there was an increase in social contacts between people and different political parties (Lijphart, 1990).

It used to be that people read the newspaper of the corresponding pillar. Therefore, the information that people saw was selected by the pillar during the pillarization. This changed during the unpillarization, where people no longer got their information from the pillar, but the information search of people became more of an individual process. The selection of information can now be described as even more individualistic because of the use of social media. It can be stated that the information that people got in contact with changed from what the newspapers of the pillars chose which is more selective exposure to an individual process where people choose the information for themselves which is more self-selective exposure.

People are expected to see and interact more with information that confirms the beliefs and opinions that people already have (Spohr, 2017). Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. (2016) support this idea and affirm that people are likely to avoid exposure to content that is not in line with their pre-existing opinion. This effect is possibly strengthened by the fact that people read fewer newspapers and read more news on the internet in the Netherlands (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, 2018).

The self-selective exposure theory proposes that people are more likely to expose themselves to partisan content that they approve within advance; therefore, political tolerance could decrease (Trilling et al., 2016). Garrett et al. (2011) conducted a study where political news consumption over a period of four years was researched. The number of blogs that were researched was 133 million, such as the Huffington Post and Breitbart. Additionally, five surveys were conducted to measure the use of online political data. What they found was that the use of ideological websites was positively correlated with different websites. Garrett et al. (2011) argued that people select their own content that they already agree with. Garrett (2009)

conducted prior research where several hypotheses have been tested. The research showed that people are more likely to look at the information that confirms their opinions; they also devote more time to look at the content. Furthermore, people have a small aversion to information that challenges their opinion. They do however look at the challenging information while knowing that their own opinions are supported (Garrett, 2009).

Stroud (2014) argues that unlike what most researchers say selective exposure is not a dichotomous variable. In real life, it is not likely that someone will always interact with compatible views. Stroud (2014) states that as a consequence, there is no selective exposure but more preference for compatible views. Additionally, in social media it is easy to avoid information you do not want to see, like removing friends or hiding someone's updates (Jeong, Zo, Lee, & Ceran, 2019; Malinen, Koivula, Keipi, & Koiranen, 2018) Stroud (2014) furthermore, argues that with the internet it is essential to find characteristics that facilitate selective exposure.

Next, to self-selected exposure, there is pre-selected personalisation. This is an indirect result of self-selected personalisation where the online algorithms of for example YouTube or online shopping websites determine what the user gets to see or gets recommended (O'Callaghan, Greene, Conway, Carthy, and Cunningham. 2014). Because this is more about the algorithm behind social media and less about what people select for themselves, this will not be further discussed in this thesis.

2.2. Political Tolerance

In this research, political tolerance is the dependent variable. Mutz (2002) argued that the concept of the connection between exposure and political tolerance is seldom directly measured. Therefore, it will be interesting to see if the level of political tolerance can be directly influenced by selective exposure.

There is a high agreement among researchers what the definition is of political tolerance. According to Sullivan et al. (1982), tolerance suggests a preparedness to tolerate things that a person is actually against. Political tolerance suggests the preparedness to permit expression of thoughts and interests by others that a person opposes or dislikes. Sullivan et al. (1982) argue that a tolerant person is a person who does not limit or suppress other people's ideas even if it challenges its own principles. People are tolerant when they are prepared to give other people democratic guarantees such as the right to publish, speak or run for office (Sullivan et al., 1982).

Gibson (2006) states that the basic framework of the concept is well known, tolerating is about allowing. However, several questions arise with this definition that political tolerance is about allowing. What should be allowed and who should be allowed? According to Gibson (2006) few people would allow terrorism or other illegal actions therefore, the definition of political tolerance would be to be the most precise liberal democratic political tolerance. Higher levels of tolerance should support liberal democracy but tolerating illegal actions could hurt a democracy (Gibson, 2006). Therefore, tolerance is about tolerating the liberal democratic system and that political movements have the opportunity to compete for political power. Kehrberg (2007) describes that political tolerance is about the acceptance of public rights in all situations. Gibson (2006) argues that tolerance is about tolerating opposing views of other people and to allow a political opponent to compete in the political arena. Therefore a tolerant citizen is someone who does not support restrictions and discrimination from the government on the rights of persons to take part in politics (Gibson, 2006). The definition from Gibson (2006) is used in this research.

According to Gibson (2006), political tolerance is vital for democracy because political tolerance is about the preparedness to put up with other worldviews that one could find unacceptable (Sullivan et al., 1982). Political tolerance is important, for the reason that open competition is vital in a liberal democracy (Peffley, Hutchison, & Shamir, 2015).

Sullivan et al. (1982) established a technique to measure political tolerance by the least-liked measurement method. Different researchers used this method to study political tolerance (Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2003). The researchers asked people several questions about some unpopular groups such as communists, atheists, the radical right or radical left groups. Later

Sullivan et al. (1982) used a technique to ask the respondent what their most disliked group was and asked questions about this group to the respondent Peffley et al. (2015) used this method to measure the impact of terrorism on political tolerance. Gibson discussed in 1992 if tolerance must always be about unpopular groups and found that there is not a perfect way to measure tolerance. According to Gibson (1992), the method put forward by Sullivan et al. (1982) to measure unpopular groups is a robust way to measure political tolerance and gave valid and reliable data. Additionally (Gibson, 1992) argued that asking respondents questions about two groups functioned equally good as more complex methods.

Stroud (2010) states that people are less tolerant, and the electorate is more fragmented due to exposure to media that is partisan and self-selected. Johnson et al. (2011) found that people select their own partisan political websites based on what they believe in and share these websites. According to Kim (2015), information that is in line with pre-existing beliefs is easier to process and requires less cognitive resources.

Some research has been conducted by political communication researchers on what the effects are of selective media consumption on democratic societies. According to Kim (2015), selective exposure will probably hurt democracy. People need different experiences to develop a better understanding of others and share common experiences with other people, possibly lead to social consensus. By contrast, according to Mutz (2002), if people are not exposed to other people's opinions, they are less likely to be aware of other people their motives and their motivations. Moreover, if people only see comparable world views, they are less tolerant of challenging viewpoints (Mutz, 2002). Stroud (2010) studied the American election survey information and showed that people who see more homogenous partisan news are more extreme in their beliefs during election campaigns. Price, Cappella, and Nir (2002) found that it is vital for democracies to have information from both sides of the story. The research concluded that people who came across different views in the media are better in reasoning for their beliefs and in knowing the motives of other people's perspectives (Price et al., 2002).

Additionally, Trilling et al. (2016) researched in the Netherlands and did a survey (N=501) to study the polarization attitudes of self-selective exposure. The research found that selective exposure happens in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, this does not lead to more polarization. One of the explanations the researchers put forward was that the research was done in a European multi-party system while most of the other studies are conducted in the United States where there is a two-party system and possibly more partisan media.

To investigate if selective exposure leads to less political tolerance, the following hypothesis is formed:

- Main hypothesis: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more self-selective in their exposure are less political tolerant.*

In figure 1, the variables that are found in the literature are used to further explain self-selective exposure and political tolerance. The demographic variables are expected to be related to both self-selective exposure and political tolerance. Additionally, the political variables are considered to be related to self-selective exposure and political tolerance as well. As can be seen, the demographic variables and political variables are expected to be explanatory variables to the relationship between the independent variable self-selective exposure and the dependent variable political tolerance because they influence both variables. To research the causalities between the variables several hypotheses will be formulated in the next paragraphs.

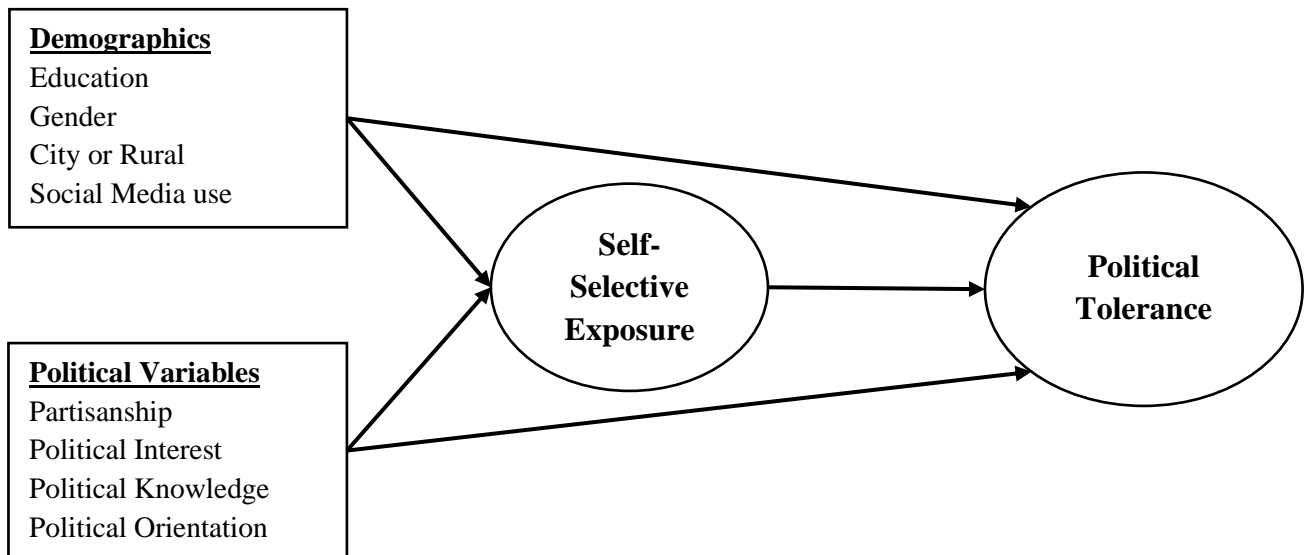


Figure 1 Conceptual Model of Self-Selective Exposure on Political Tolerance

2.3. Demographics

Johnson et al. (2011) studies the pathways to selective exposure and used several variables. A number of these variables were demographic variables such as gender and education. In this study, the demographic variables of education, gender, if people live in a rural place or the city and the use of social media is expected to have an influence on the level of self-selective exposure and political tolerance.

Education

According to Bobo and Licari (1989), education has a strong relation to political tolerance. This exists according to the authors because education is linked with a more sophisticated way of thinking. The educated person will possibly look at more sources than a less educated person. However, Kim (2011) argued that education is a significant variable that touches selective exposure and found that higher educated people are less exposed to different points of view than less educated people. Johnson et al. (2011) emphasise this and theorise that a higher level of education is connected to an increase in selective exposure.

Nonetheless, according to Mutz (2002), there are numerous empirical relationships that explain exposure to dissonant views. Stouffer (1955) cited in Mutz (2002) put forward that exposure to contradictory opinions is an important reason why education and tolerance are closely connected. Stouffer (1955) cited in Mutz (2002) states that education gives the opportunity to people to get in touch with contradicting ideas and values and this is important for tolerance. The researchers theorize and find different conclusions; therefore, it is interesting to hypothesize if education is negatively or positively related to the level of self-selective exposure. However, many researchers theorize that the level of education is positively related to the level of political tolerance. Sullivan et al. (1982) found that people who are higher educated are more politically tolerant than lower educated people. Kehrberg (2007) agrees and argues that a more educated person is more tolerant.

Because of these reasons, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher level of education have a lower level of self-selective exposure.*
- H1b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher level of education have a higher level of political tolerance.*

Gender

Gender is an explanatory variable in this study because it affects both political tolerance and selective exposure. Johnson et al. (2011) hypothesise that men will perform self-selective exposure more often than women. Nonetheless, Kim (2011) found no evidence that gender affects the level of selective exposure to different opinions on social media. However, according to Stroud (2010), gender does affect the level of selective exposure.

There is a difference between women and men when it comes to political tolerance. Mutz (2002) theorized that women are less tolerant because they are less exposed to different opinions. Because men work more outside of the home and are therefore exposed to a diversity of opinions. Mutz's theory could be less of influence because of the emancipation of women in the Netherlands. Golebiowska (1999) argued that women have a higher political tolerance level than men.

Nonetheless, in 1999 when Golebiowska did empirical research the conclusion was that the tolerance level of men was higher than women. Sullivan et al. (1982) agree and found that men were more politically tolerant than women. Sullivan et al. (1982) state that the political tolerance of women was going down instead of up between 1950 and 1970 in the U.S. this could be explained by the fact of an increase in more religious opinions of women (Sullivan et al., 1982).

Therefore, it is interesting to research the gender variable in this study; the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H2a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are women have a higher level of self-selective exposure than men.*
- H2b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are women have a lower level of political tolerance exposure than men.*

City or Rural

The place where people live influences both the level of selective exposure and the level of political tolerance. Some researchers state that there is an urban/rural cleavage on political tolerance (Harell, 2010). Harrel (2010) states that people living in a city have a higher level of political tolerance. Mutz (2002) agrees and theorizes that people living in a rural area are less politically tolerant than people living in a city. This can be explained by that people in the city have more interactions with different people and therefore come in contact with different opinions, this will increase their political tolerance. Sullivan et al. (1982) agree with this and argue that people who live in a more populous area like a city are more tolerant than people that live in a rural place.

People living in rural areas are less exposed to different people and opinions; therefore, it could be the case that these people do not expose themselves to opinions that are not in line with their pre-existing beliefs on social media.

To see if this is the case and to research the effect of the place where people live on political tolerance, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H3a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who live in a rural area have a higher level of self-selective exposure than people that live in a city.*
- H3b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who live in a rural area have a lower level of political tolerance than people that live in a city.*

Social Media Use

According to Zhang et al. (2009) voters who are young depend on social media as an essential source of political information. Most young people in the Netherlands use different forms of social media to get information. With the existence of social media, everyone can share their opinion. Therefore people who are more active on social media will come in contact with different opinions (Flaxman et al., 2016). However, what most people see on social media is personalized (Costello et al., 2016). Even with a fast amount of opinions people are more likely to interact with information they agree with (Garrett et al., 2017). People do not see more information on social media because information can be avoided effortlessly on social media by unfriending someone or blocking a user (Jeong et al., 2019).

Additionally, because with the self-selective exposure on social media, people who use social media more often can have less political tolerance because people operate more in groups of like-minded people (Pauwels & Schils, 2014). Consequently, Rieger et al. (2018) state that tolerance would increase when people are confronted with opinions that are not in line with their own political views.

Therefore, people who are more active on social media could come into contact with different opinions. This could increase political tolerance. However, with the possibility to select one's own information easily on social media the political tolerance could decrease, and self-selection could increase.

The following hypotheses are put forward to see if social media affects the level of self-selective exposure and political tolerance:

- H4a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more active on social media have a higher level of self-selective exposure.*
- H4b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more active on social media have a lower level of political tolerance.*

2.4. Political Variables

Several variables of the pathway of Johnson et al. (2011) to selective exposure are used to see if these affect the level of self-selective exposure and political tolerance. Additionally, because the independent and dependent variables are closely related the political variables can be used as explanatory variables.

Partisanship

Political partisanship and self-selective exposure are closely related. Stroud (2010) used partisanship as a control variable to measure the effect of partisan selective exposure on polarization which can create political intolerance Johnson et al. (2017). Stroud (2010) theorized that people who are more partisan are more motivated to select political information that confirms pre-existing opinions. Garrett (2009) found that there is empirical evidence that people who are more partisan have a higher probability of being self-selective. According to Garret and Stroud (2014), people use the internet to confirm their partisan feelings. Stroud (2014) states that partisans have a higher probability of selecting news that confirms their views.

Kim (2011) hypothesized that partisanship is correlated with more self-selective exposure and found empirical evidence for this. Kim (2011) found no evidence that partisanship is correlated with the use of social media. Iyengar and Hahn (2009) hypothesize that partisanship would significantly affect the selection of news. Johnson et al. (2017) found that political partisanship is a strong predictor for selective exposure. Johnson et al. (2017) furthermore state that partisanship is a strong predictor for internet use. However, Knoblach-Westerwick and Meng (2008) argue that people who have a strong party affiliation are also more likely to look at counterarguments to their pre-existing beliefs because than they would be better in debates to defend their point in the future. Johnson, Bichard, and Zhang (2009) disregarded this idea and formulated that political partisanship increases the probability of people to be selective in their exposure.

According to Johnson et al. (2017), there is a consensus that people who are partisan are more polarized, and this can create intolerance of other people their viewpoint. Sullivan et al. (1982) describe that people who are more involved in politics have a higher tolerance level. This possibly suggests that people who are more partisan are also more politically tolerant. Despite what Sullivan et al. (1982) found Johnson et al. (2011) theorize that partisans have a higher chance of being selective in their exposure and are consequently more polarized. Another critical factor to consider is that the media is becoming more partisan (Johnson et al., 2011).

The following hypotheses are formulated to study partisanship, selective exposure, and political tolerance.

- H5a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more partisan are more self-selective in their exposure.*
- H5b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more partisan have a lower level of political tolerance.*

Political Interest

Johnson et al. (2011) speculate that with the increasing information available via the internet, the interest in politics would rise. Additionally, Iyengar and Hahn (2009) hypothesize that self-selective exposure would increase thanks to political interest. Knoblach-Westerwick and Meng (2008) found that people who have a greater interest in politics are more likely to look at counterarguments made by their opponents. Therefore, interest in politics would be positively related to self-selective exposure. Other researchers such as Johnson et al. (2009) argue that political interest would increase the prospect of people to perform selective exposure. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2009) hypothesize that political interest is positively connected to selective exposure.

Mutz and Mondak (2006) argue that people who are interested in politics have an increased tolerance for other people's perspectives. Sullivan, Marcus, Feldman, and Piereson (1981) argue that there is enough theoretical reason to suspect that political interest is related to political tolerance.

The following hypotheses are formulated to study political interest, selective exposure, and political tolerance:

- H6a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are interested in politics are more self-selective in their exposure.*
- H6b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are interested in politics have a higher level of political tolerance.*

Political Knowledge

Stroud (2010) used political knowledge as a control variable to measure the effect of self-selective exposure on polarization. Empirical research was found by Garrett in 2009 that political knowledge is positively correlated to selective exposure. Furthermore, according to Johnson et al. (2011), political knowledge predicts an increase in the level of self-selective exposure. Stroud (2010) agrees and states that people who have more knowledge in politics have a higher likelihood to be selective in their exposure. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2009) agree and hypothesize that people who are more knowledgeable about politics are more likely to be self-selective in their exposure. Therefore, an essential characteristic of selective exposure is political knowledge. People who have more political knowledge have a higher probability of selecting sources close to their pre-existing beliefs (Stroud, 2014). Johnson et al. (2011) state that even though exposure to multiple sources of information on politics will make people more knowledgeable, people who have political knowledge will look at the information that reaffirms their ideas.

According to Peffley, Knigge, and Hurwitz (2001), political knowledge is among ideology, education, and gender an essential control variable for political tolerance. People who are more knowledgeable in politics have a higher level of political tolerance. Peffley et al. (2001) confirmed this with their empirical study and found that political tolerance increased with more political knowledge.

The following hypotheses are expressed to further develop the understanding of the effect of political knowledge on self-selective exposure and political tolerance.

- H7a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have more knowledge of politics are more self-selective in their exposure.*
- H7b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have more knowledge of politics have a higher level of political tolerance.*

Populist Attitudes

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) theorized that self-selective exposure is related to different ideologies. Ideology is related to how people see the world (Garrett & Stroud, 2014). Stroud (2010) states that people who have extreme attitudes are more likely to have a higher level of selective exposure. Much research is done on this topic in the U.S. where the focus lay on the two-party system with Democrats and Republicans and an explicit partisan media (Garrett & Stroud, 2014; Johnson et al., 2017; Kim, 2011; Knoblock-Westerwick & Meng, 2011).

In the Netherlands, there are almost no explicit partisan media anymore since the pillarization. That is why in this study the focus will be more on the difference between populist attitudes of people. To support this self-selective exposure possibly lead to more extreme viewpoints of people because they see no other alternatives (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2016).

Three parties in the Netherlands are considered to be populist political parties the Partij voor de Vrijheid and Forum for Democracy (Van Kessel, 2011; Verloo 2018). According to Garrett (2009), extreme political groups have a significant presence on the internet. This can explain that populist parties in the Netherlands are very active on social media. *Forum for Democracy (FvD)*, founded in 2016, has for example 195 thousand likes on Facebook while the largest political party in the House of Representatives the *VVD* only has 89 thousand likes (Facebook, FvD, June 16, 2019; Facebook, VVD, June 16, 2019). Additionally, Geert Wilders, the leader of the *PVV*, has the most followers on Twitter compared to any other political leader in the Netherlands, about 811 thousand (Twitter, geertwilderspvv, June 16, 2019).

People with extreme attitudes are more likely to have higher levels of self-selective exposure according to Stroud (2010). Therefore, it is not only enough to see if people vote for a populist party but also if people have higher populist attitudes. Populist attitudes focus on the three core items of populism: sovereignty to the people, opposition to elites and a separation between good and evil (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2013).

These more populist attitudes could affect political tolerance because populists see a separation of good and evil and could therefore not respect another opinion. With this separation, there is us versus them boundary (Pauwels & Schills, 2014). It could be that populists do not grant certain civil rights to other groups and the elite. Therefore, it is interesting to see if populist attitudes affect self-selective exposure and political tolerance.

- H8a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher populist attitude are more self-selective in their exposure.*
- H8b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher populist attitude have a lower level of political tolerance.*

3. Research design

3.1. Research type

The four sub-research questions are researched via survey research. This research is quantitative because the hypotheses are best studied via a quantitative method.

Primary sources of data are used in this study. The primary source of data is a conducted survey by the researcher. With this source of data, the hypotheses are researched, and the four research questions are answered.

3.2. Sources

To answer the empirical sub-questions, a survey among Dutch people between the age of 18 to 35 years old is conducted. Dutch youth between the age of 18 till 35 years old is the unit of analysis. This group is chosen because people are allowed to vote above the age of 18 and this age group is the most active on social media (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2018). The subjects for the study are selected by conducting the survey in and around the city of Enschede where people were asked to fill out the survey.

Additionally, the survey is published online via two Facebook groups for students to share their survey. The survey is not published in personal circles of the researcher such as a personal Facebook account. The aim of the research to get two hundred respondents to fill in the survey has succeeded.

In this survey respondents are collected by a convenience sample. This method is used because there was no contact information available for the entire population to do a random sample. This method has the downside of that only people that are willing to participate in the study participate. Additionally, only people that have time and are at the place where the survey was conducted were able to participate; this could have an effect on the results. Furthermore, the researcher was almost always physically present when the survey was conducted. Thus, the answers respondents give can be influenced. Therefore, there is a probability that the measured items are biased.

In the city of Enschede, four different locations were selected to hand out the survey to minimize the effect of the bias of time and place during the conduction of the survey. The first location is in the city centre of Enschede; the second location is at the University of Twente, the third location is the train station, and the fourth location is the shopping centre in the south of Enschede. To limit the time, bias the locations are visited in two different time slots.

The survey is furthermore spread on Facebook to limit the bias that the researcher is physically present during the survey. Additionally, a link and QR-code is handed out to people that they can fill in the survey on their own in their own time. These measures are taken to minimize the influence of the researcher being present during the time that the respondents filled in the survey.

Table 1 Time and Location when the Survey was held

Days	Time	City of Enschede	University of Twente	Train station	Enschede Zuid
Tuesday 2 July	8:00 - 12:30			X	
	13:00 -17:30	X			
Wednesday 3 July	8:00 - 12:30		X		
	13:00 -17:30				X
Thursday 4 July	8:00 - 12:30	X			
	13:00 -17:30			X	
Friday 5 July	8:00 - 12:30				X
	13:00 -17:30		X		

3.3. Methods

Because the respondents cannot be drawn from a database, the respondents are collected via different means. This survey was made with Qualtrics to make sure that the survey could be distributed online, via a web link and a QR-code. Additionally, the survey is in Dutch to get a higher response rate and to minimize translation mistakes from the respondents.

To conduct the survey, offline and online equipment was used. The survey was made available online to share with other people who do their survey via two Facebook pages. The survey was not available for people close to the researcher. During the conduction of the survey, the researcher stood with a tablet and papers so the respondents can fill in the survey by themselves or with the researcher. Additionally, because the survey was available online, a link and a QR-code to the survey are handed out during the offline survey conduction.

Finally, to count the number of people that are approached for this survey a hand counter was used.

3.4. Practicalities

The timespan of the survey to collect the respondents was two weeks. During the first week, the survey was made available on the Facebook groups, and the survey was conducted according to table 1.

There are multiple obstacles in this research design, like how to make sure that people participate in the study? One way to deal with this was an incentive in the form of a lottery among the respondents were two gift cards of fifteen euro were distributed. When people want to take part in the lottery they needed to fill in their email address making the survey no longer anonymous. To handle this the data mail addresses were copied into another file. Moreover, another way to increase the number of respondents was by using techniques of how to start a conversation with people to let them fill in the survey.

The data from the survey is filled in online and offline. All the data should be in one file to do calculations with the data. To do this, all data was collected with the use of Qualtrics, and the offline surveys were manually filled into the survey program.

3.5. Measures

In this paragraph, it is discussed how the different variables are measured. The questions that are asked in the survey can be found in Appendix A. The descriptive statistics of the variables can be found in tables 3 and 4.

Self-Selective exposure

Three items are used to investigate the level of self-selective exposure among the respondents. The first item that is measured for the variable self-selective exposure is based on a question used by Johnson et al. (2011). This question is: *When I search for political information, I rather view information that matches my beliefs*. This item is measured on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree).

The next two items are based on self-selection on social media because social media is a place to connect to people who come into contact with opinions that contradict one's own (Johnson et al., 2011). If a person does not like political comments or messages of another person on social media it is easy to unfriend or block this person (Jeong et al., 2019). Therefore, it was asked whether or not someone has unfriended or blocked someone on social media because of political comments or messages someone shared. This variable is coded into 0 (never unfriended and blocked someone) and 1 (unfriended or blocked someone).

The third item for self-selective exposure is if the respondent follows a political party and/or leader of the same party that the respondent would vote for. In the survey, it is asked from a list of the thirteen parties and leaders which political party the respondent follows and which political leader the respondent follows. If the respondent only follows the party or leader, the respondent would vote for it is coded as 1 because this is more self-selective behaviour. If the respondent follows not only their preferred party and/or leader the result is coded as 0 indicating not self-selective in exposure on social media. For which Dutch political party a respondent would vote for is needed to measure this item. Therefore, the respondent can select a political party they would vote for that is represented in the House of Representatives.

The different items of self-selective exposure are measured separately in the statistical tests because the Cronbach's alpha level of the combined items does not reach higher than .7.

Political Tolerance

To measure political tolerance, the theory of Sullivan et al. (1982) is used. This means that the respondents were asked several questions if they agree if a disliked group should have certain civil rights or not. The question scale ranges from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree). The questions that were asked are:

1. *Should a person from this group be allowed to run for office?*
2. *Should a person from this group be able to teach at a university?*
3. *Should this person be outlawed?*
4. *The members of the group should be allowed to hold public rallies in the city.*
5. *I would be upset if a member of the group moved in next door to me.*

The groups that are measured are somewhat different from the groups used in Sullivan et al. (1982). The World Values Survey measures political tolerance across the globe and uses the theory of Sullivan et al. (1982) (Peffley & Rohrschneider, 2003). They used the groups: Jews, capitalists, communists, immigrants, homosexuals, criminals, and right extremists. The communists and right extremists can be changed for another more functional group per country.

Two groups of people are researched to measure political tolerance. These groups are left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists. To see if there is a difference in political tolerance, it is essential to know if a person sees themselves as politically right-wing or left-wing. That is why it is asked to respondents to fill in where they would place themselves on an 11-point index ranging from 1 (left-wing) to 11 (right-wing) (Van der Kolk & Tiller, 2010).

The five items were used to measure the tolerance level for left-winged extremists and right-winged extremists. With both groups, the Cronbach's alpha was only higher than .7 when the third and fifth item was deleted. Therefore, the third and fifth item for political tolerance for left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists is not calculated into the level of political tolerance. Three items for both groups are added together to compute a mean score of political tolerance for left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists. A missing value of one of the three items is accepted to calculate the mean. The mean political tolerance variable is computed by adding the six items together to compute a mean score. A missing value of two out of six items is accepted to calculate the mean score.

Demographic Variables

Education is measured by asking the respondent what their highest level of education is that they finished. These education levels and the number of respondents for every education level are: no education (N = 2), vmbo (N = 6), havo (N = 12), vwo (N = 16), mbo (N = 29), hbo (N = 71) and university level (N = 80). The education levels are recoded as a dummy variable to use in statistical tests. The items no education, vmbo, havo, vwo, and mbo are covered by the lower educated category and is coded as 0. The items hbo and university level are covered by the higher educated category and is coded as 1.

The gender of the respondent is asked in the survey to answer the hypotheses 2a and 2b. The variable is coded as male is 0 and female is 1.

To measure if people live in a rural or more urban area, it was asked if respondents live in the city or more in a rural area such as a village. This item is coded as 0 (rural) and 1 (city).

Social Media Use

The social media use is measured by asking respondents to what extent on a 7-point scale where 1 means never to 7 which indicates that the respondent uses social media daily. In this study Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are researched. These four platforms are chosen because they are the most popular social media platforms when looked at the number of daily users in the Netherlands (Statista, 2019). Furthermore, with these platforms sources are easily shared not only with one's own network but with the entire world. With WhatsApp and Snapchat, two popular social media platforms, contact is more personal and not everybody can see content that a person shares. Therefore, these four platforms are included in the survey to measure social media use.

Political Variables

Partisanship is measured by using the four items put forward by Bankert, Huddy, and Rosema (2016). The researchers state that the four-item scale can predict partisan attitude.

These four items are questions in the survey where the respondents could answer (*Always, Often, Sometimes and Never*) the questions are:

1. When I speak about this party, I refer to them as “my party”.
2. When people criticize this party, it feels like a personal insult.
3. When I meet someone who supports this party, I feel connected with this person.
4. When people praise this party, it makes me feel good.

To use these questions the following question is asked: *For which political party would you vote if there were elections?* If people did not answer this question the following question is asked: *To which political party do you feel strongly attracted to?*

The variable partisanship is computed by adding the four items to measure partisanship together to compute a mean. Before computing a new variable the score of Cronbach’s alpha was computed which gave a Cronbach’s alpha of .79. The mean partisanship of people in this study is 1.93 (SD = 0.63) on a 4-point index, whereby a higher score is a higher level of partisanship towards the party the respondent votes for or feels close to.

Johnson et al. (2011) used a Likert scale with 11-points to measure political interests. 1 (Absolutely not interested in politics) 11(Absolutely interested in politics). This question is also used to measure political interest in this study. However, the scale that was used was a 7-point scale because this brought more consistency in the survey.

To measure political knowledge, the theory of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) is used. The researchers studied the validity and reliability of five items to measure political knowledge. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1993) concluded that the items are recommended for measuring political knowledge but that every well-thought items can measure political knowledge with excellent reliability and validity.

Therefore questions from the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study of 2017 were used to measure political knowledge. (Van der Meer, Van der Kolk, & Rekker, 2017). The questions are about the most recent government. The score of political knowledge is calculated by using these two questions:

1. *Which political parties form the current government in the Netherlands?* (Respondent can select several parties from a list).
2. *Who chooses the members of the Senate?* (Respondents can choose between citizens, members of the House, members of city councils, or provincial members of state).

Political knowledge is measured by adding the two items together. When respondents gave the four correct political parties (VVD, CDA, D66, and CU) they got a score of four when with every wrong answer the respondent got minus 1 point with a minimum of 0 points. This gave a score ranging from 0 to 4. When respondents gave a correct answer to the question have the representatives are chosen for the first chamber the score is four with a wrong answer the score is zero. These two questions are computed in a new variable political knowledge ranging from 0 (no political knowledge) to 4 (high political knowledge). The mean political knowledge of the sample was 2.00 (SD = 1.62).

To measure populist attitudes, the theory of Akkerman et al. (2013) is used. This theory measured populist attitudes of the respondents. The following statements are rated by the respondents on how far they agree with the statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very much disagree*) towards 7 (*very much agree*):

1. *The politicians in the Dutch parliament need to follow the will of the people.*
2. *The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions*
3. *The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people.*
4. *I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician.*
5. *Elected officials talk too much and take too little action*
6. *What people call “compromise” in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.*

The populist questions all where significant to measure if people did vote for a populist party Akkerman et al. (2013). The Cronbach’s alpha of these items was .82. The new variable was computed into a mean score and gave a mean of 3.99 (SD = 1.19) on a 7-point index where a higher score indicates a higher level of populist attitudes. The mean score was computed when three out of the six items were answered by the respondent.

Additionally, as discussed before an 11-point scale of political self-placement is used to measure where people put themselves on a scale ranging from 1 (left-wing) to 11 (right-wing). This scale comes from the National Parliamentary Election Study (Van der Kolk & Tiller, 2010). The scale was reduced into three categories because than the file could then be split into three categories to further analyse the variable political tolerance. The score 1 till 4 was changed into left-wing (N = 66), 5 till 6 was considered centrist (N = 84) and 7 till 11 was regarded as right-wing (N = 66).

3.6. Response Rate

The response rate is the percentage of respondents who completed the survey divided by the number of people who were approached to participate in the survey. In this study in total, 1119 people were approached to participate in the study, excluding the online dispersion of the survey. 178 participants completed the study, which gave a response rate of 15.9% and an extra 38 completed the study via Facebook; this gave an N of 216. The Facebook respondents are not taken into account to calculate the response rate because it is unknown how many people saw the Facebook post. In table 2 the number of people who were approached and the response rate per location is calculated.

Table 2: Sample Descriptive Statistics

Location	Twente University	Central station Enschede	Centre of Enschede	Shopping centre South	Total	Facebook groups
Approached	189	440	300	190	1119	
Response	61	47	44	26	178	38
Response rate	32.3%	10.7%	14.7%	13.7%	15.9%	
N	216					

3.7. Statistics

To give more information about the survey, a table of descriptive statistics is shown, in tables 3 and 4 the most essential information of the dependent and independent variables is shown.

The sample size of the survey was $N = 216$. In table 2, the number of people that were approached for this survey, on the different locations and Facebook, and the response rate on these locations is shown. In total 1119 people were approached in this study; this gave a response rate of almost 16%.

The sample was relatively even considering gender 53% was male, and 47% that filled in the survey was female. Most people that took part in this research lived in a city less than a quarter of the respondents lived in a village. Most respondents were highly educated; the largest group had a university degree or studies at the university, and the second-largest group had a degree or studies at a university of applied sciences. Almost another third of the respondents had an education level of mbo or lower.

Most people gave an answer for which political party they would vote for if there were elections. The most popular parties among the respondents were GroenLinks, VVD, D66, and Forum voor Democratie. Almost the largest group where people who did not know for which party they would vote, would not go vote and blank votes (16.7%). The group that would vote for a populist party was 17.6% which include the political parties PVV, SP, and Forum voor Democratie.

In table 4, the scale variables are shown with a mean, standard deviation, and a minimum and maximum score. The average age of the group that was studied between 18 till 35 is 23.8 years old. Respondents have a mean political interest of 4.6 on a 7-point index.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics Nominal and Ordinal Variables

Variables	Labels and Code	N	Percentage
Gender	Male (0)	114	52.8
	Female (1)	102	47.2
City or Rural	Rural (0)	51	23.6
	City (1)	165	76.4
Education	Lower Educated (0)	65	30.1
	Higher Educated (1)	151	69.9
Self-selective exposure social media unfriend or blocked (2)	Never unfriend and blocked someone (0)	127	58.8
	Unfriend and/or blocked someone (1)	89	41.2
Self-selective exposure follow political leader or party (3)	Follows only own leader and/or party (0)	51	71.8
	Follows not (only) own leader and/or party (1)	20	28.2

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics Scale Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Minimum Maximum		N
			Score	Score	
Age	23.78	4.45	18	35	216
Social media use	4.5	1.19	2	7	216
Partisanship	1.93	0.63	1	4	197
Political Interest	4.63	1.73	1	7	214
Political Knowledge	2	1.62	0	4	216
Political Orientation Left – Right	5.93	2.31	1	11	216
Populistic Tendencies	4.03	1.21	1.5	7.00	215
Self-selective exposure self-placement on scale (1)	4.26	1.49	1	7	210
Political Tolerance	5.04	1.24	1.5	7	216
Left-wing Political Tolerance	5.04	1.32	1	7	216
Right-wing Political Tolerance	5.05	1.32	1	7	216

4. Results

In this chapter, the hypotheses that are discussed in the theoretical framework are tested with the use of t-tests, bivariate tests, logistic regression analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

4.1. Testing Hypotheses

The focus of this paragraph will be on testing the hypotheses that are formulated in this study. To make statements about the hypotheses the relationships between the variables are analysed and tested with the use of different statistical tests. For the education, gender and city or rural hypotheses several t-tests on the variables self-selective exposure and political tolerance are computed. For the other hypotheses bivariate tests, logistic regression analysis and two multiple regression analyses are performed.

For the final multiple regression analysis for political tolerance, the data is altered. The data used for this test is altered because the political tolerance score is different among left-wing respondents, right-wing respondents and centrist respondents. This distinction is made in the data because of the difference in political tolerance results among left-wing respondents and right-wing respondents. Left-wing respondents are more tolerant towards left-wing extremists ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.24$) than right-wing respondents ($M = 4.75$, $SD = 1.48$), $t(126) = 2.30$, $p < .05$. Whereas right-wing respondents are more tolerant towards right-wing extremists ($M = 5.08$, $SD = 1.33$) than left-wing respondents towards right-wing extremists ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.34$). For this group the t-test result was not significant. However, the data will be altered because of the mean difference.

In the multiple regression analysis, the third item for self-selection is no longer used to predict tolerance. The reason for this is because this item found no significant effects on political tolerance and other variables in the other tests.

Table 5: T-tests for Demographic Variables on Self-selective Exposure

Variables		N	Mean	SD	t-test (two-tailed)
Self-selective exposure scale (1)					
Education	Lower Educated	62	4.32	1.65	.38
	Higher Educated	148	4.24	1.42	
Gender	Male	110	4.08	1.52	-1.85
	Female	100	4.46	1.44	
Rural or City	Rural	51	4.39	1.44	.72
	City	159	4.22	1.50	
Self-selective exposure unfriend or blocked (2)					
Education	Lower Educated	65	.38	.49	-.54
	Higher Educated	151	.42	.50	
Gender	Male	114	.46	.50	1.40
	Female	102	.36	.48	
Rural or City	Rural	51	.29	.46	-2.05*
	City	165	.45	.50	
Self-selective exposure follow political leader or party (3)					
Education	Lower Educated	24	.17	.38	-1.66
	Higher Educated	47	.34	.48	
Gender	Male	38	.18	.39	-1.95
	Female	33	.39	.50	
Rural or City	Rural	15	.4	.51	1.14
	City	56	.25	.44	

Note. SD = standard deviation, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 6: T-tests for Demographic Variables on Political Tolerance

Variables		N	Mean	SD	t-test (two-tailed)
Political tolerance (left-wing) respondents					
Education	Lower Educated	18	4.59	1.16	-2.36*
	Higher Educated	48	5.34	1.16	
Gender	Male	28	5.12	1.33	-.12
	Female	38	5.15	1.12	
Rural or City	Rural	16	5.08	1.10	-.21
	City	50	5.16	1.24	
Political tolerance Centrists respondents					
Education	Lower Educated	27	5.44	1.04	1.95
	Higher Educated	57	4.89	1.28	
Gender	Male	42	5.19	1.24	.87
	Female	42	4.95	1.22	
Rural or City	Rural	17	5.05	1.27	-.08
	City	67	5.07	1.23	
Political tolerance (right-wing) respondents					
Education	Lower Educated	20	5.00	1.16	.37
	Higher Educated	46	4.88	1.36	
Gender	Male	44	4.86	1.40	-.46
	Female	22	5.02	1.06	
Rural or City	Rural	18	4.65	1.25	-1.03
	City	48	5.02	1.30	

*Note. SD = standard error, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.*

Education

In this study, the respondents were largely higher educated around 70% and 30% was lower educated. Two hypotheses are tested with regard to the level of education. The first hypothesis H1a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher level of education have a lower level of self-selective exposure.*

To test this hypothesis, a t-test is executed for education level and the three different measurements for self-selective exposure. In table 5 it can be seen that for none of the self-selective exposure measurements a significant difference between lower and higher educated respondents on self-selective exposure could be found. Additionally, in table 9 a multiple regression analysis and logistic regression analysis are performed and gave no significant effects for education on the three items of self-selective exposure. Therefore, the first hypothesis cannot be accepted.

The second hypothesis H1b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher level of education have a higher level of political tolerance.* To test this hypothesis first, the SPSS file was split into three categories of people who are left-wing, centrist and right-wing. In table 6 this split can be seen, and education is tested to have an effect on political tolerance. Among left-wing respondents, a significant difference between higher education and lower education is found on political tolerance, $t(65) = -2.36, p < .05$. Therefore, higher educated respondents have a higher level of political tolerance only if the respondent is left-wing. In tables 10 and 11 no significant scores were found for education predicting political tolerance. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially accepted and is only applicable if the respondent is left-wing.

Gender

In this study, the number of women (47%) is almost similar to the number of men (53%). The first hypothesis for gender is H2a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are women have a higher level of self-selective exposure than men.*

Women state that they have a higher level of self-selective exposure for the first and third items of self-selective exposure, as shown in table 5. However, male respondents are more inclined to unfriend or block someone on social media. Nonetheless, none of the results are significant as can be seen in table 5 and table 9. Therefore, there is no difference found between men and women on the level of self-selective exposure.

The second hypothesis for the variable gender is H2b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are women have a lower level of political tolerance than men.* The mean of how political tolerant women and men are is not so different as can be seen in tables 6 and 10. If the data is changed among right-wing and left-wing respondents to analyse the political tolerance in table 11 no significant differences are found between gender and political tolerance. This indicates that there is no difference between men and women and their level of political tolerance. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Rural or City

Most of the respondents in this study live in a city (76%) compared to a more rural area (24%). The hypothesis that is tested is H3a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who live in a rural area have a higher level of self-selective exposure than people who live in a city.* In table 5, it can be seen that the mean difference of self-selective exposure among respondents who live in the city or a rural area does not differ significantly for the first and third items. For the second item a significant difference is found for where people live and the self-selective exposure. People in the city are more inclined to block or unfriend someone than people living in a rural area. This effect is the opposite as was hypothesized. In the logistic regression analysis of table 9 this effect was no longer found. Therefore this hypothesis is rejected.

The mean political tolerance is higher if people live in the city. However, this is not a significant difference, as table 6 shows. In table 10 and 11 this effect was also not found to be significant. Therefore, the hypothesis H3b: *people aged between 18 till 35 who live in a rural area have a lower level of political tolerance than people who live in a city* is rejected.

Table 7: Bivariate Tests for Political Variables on Self-selective Exposure

Variables	Self-selective Exposure					
	Scale Self-selective Exposure (1)		Unfriend/Blocked (2)		Follow Politics on Social Media (3)	
	<i>r</i>	N	<i>r_s</i>	N	<i>r_s</i>	N
Social Media Use	-.03	210	.04	216	.00	71
Political Partisanship	.17*	193	.10	197	-.07	67
Political Interest	-.03	209	.14*	214	-.08	70
Political Knowledge	-.10	210	.02	216	-.11	71
Populist Attitudes	.16*	184	.02	215	.10	71

Note. *r* = Pearson's Correlation coefficient, *r_s* = Spearman's Rho, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001. The first item is measured by Pearson's Correlation the two second items are measured by Spearman's Correlation.

Table 8: Bivariate Tests for Political Variables on Political Tolerance

Variables	Political Tolerance	Left-wing extremists		Right-wing extremists		Political tolerance	
		<i>r</i>	N	<i>r</i>	N	<i>r</i>	N
		Scale Self-selective Exposure (1)	-.01	210	.02	210	.01
Unfriend/Blocked (2)	-.11	216	-.19**	216	-.16*	216	
Follow Politics on Social Media (3)	.07	71	.03	71	.05	71	
Social Media Use	-.14*	216	-.11	216	-.14*	216	
Political Partisanship	-.03	197	.02	197	-.00	197	
Political Interest	.14*	214	.07	214	.11	214	
Political knowledge	.12	216	.05	216	.09	216	
Populist Attitudes	-.13	215	-.03	215	-.09	215	

Note. *r* = Pearson Correlation coefficient, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 9: Summary of Multiple Regression and Logistic Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-selective Exposure

Variables	Scale Self-selective Exposure (1) (N = 191) (multiple regression)			Self-selective exposure Unfriend/Blocked (2) (N = 195) (logistic regression)			Self-selective exposure Follow Politics on Social Media (3) (N = 67) (logistic regression)		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	Exp(B)	B	SE B	Exp(B)
Constant	2.56	.83		-3.45	1.25		-3.01	3.40	
Education	.25	.24	.08	.42	.36	1.52	1.46	.76	4.30
Gender	.21	.22	.07	-.17	.31	.84	.86	.60	2.37
Rural or City	.00	.26	.00	.65	.39	1.91	-.43	.83	.65
Social Media Use	-.04	.01	-.03	.15	.14	1.17	.09	.31	1.09
Political Partisanship	.43	.19	.18*	.25	.27	1.28	.04	.53	1.04
Political Interest	.00	.08	.00	.20	.11	1.22	.03	.24	1.03
Political Knowledge	-.05	.08	-.05	-.12	.12	.88	-.22	.24	.81
Populist Attitudes	.22	.10	.18*	.14	.15	1.15	.21	.36	1.24
R ²	.07								
Nagelkerke pseudo R ²				.08			.17		
F (8, 183)	1.80								
X ² (8)				12.36			8.55		

Note. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient, *SE B* = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient, *Exp(B)* = odds ratio, where a positive effect is higher than 1 and a negative effect is between 0 and 1, *X*² = Chi Square test, **p* < .05, ***p* < .01, ****p* < .001.

Table 10: Multiple Regression Analysis Political Tolerance

	Tolerance Left-wing Extremists			Tolerance Right-wing Extremists			Mean Tolerance		
	B	Std. Error		B	Std. Error		B	Std. Error	
		B	β		B	β		B	β
Model 1									
Constant	5.23	.34		5.33	.34		5.28	.32	
Scale Self-selective Exposure	-.02	.07	-.02	.05	.07	.05	.01	.06	.02
Self-selective Exposure Unfriend/Blocked	-.08	.16	-.04	-.35	.16	-.17*	-.22	.15	-.11
R2	.00		.03		.01				
F	(2, 189)	.20	(2, 189) 2.48		(2, 189) 1.04				
Model 2									
Constant	5.49	.77		5.56	.79		5.52	.74	
Scale Self-selective Exposure	.01	.07	.01	.05	.07	.06	.03	.07	.04
Self-selective Exposure Unfriend/Blocked	-.13	.16	-.06	-.39	.17	-.18*	-.26	.16	-.13
Education	-.01	.22	-.00	-.16	.23	-.06	-.08	.21	-.03
Gender	.32	.2	.12	.02	.20	.01	.17	.19	.07
Rural or City	.09	.23	.03	-.02	.24	-.01	.03	.22	.01
Social Media Use	-.19	.09	-.16*	-.12	.09	-.11	-.16	.08	-.14
Political Partisanship	-.34	.17	-.16*	-.10	.18	-.05	-.22	.17	-.11
Political Interest	.19	.07	.23**	.12	.07	.15	.16	.07	.20*
Political Knowledge	.07	.08	.08	.01	.08	.01	.04	.07	.05
Populist Attitudes	-.03	.10	-.03	.02	.10	.02	-.00	.09	-.00
R2	.09		.06		.07				
F	(10, 181)	2.12	(10, 181) 1.05		(10, 181) 1.27				
ΔR^2	.09		.03		.05				

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; Std. Error = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 11: Multiple Regression Analysis on Tolerance for the Opposite Group

	B	Std. Error B	β
Model 1			
Constant	5.34	.35	
Scale Self-selective Exposure	-.02	.07	-.02
Self-selective Exposure Unfriend/Blocked	-.24	.16	-.11
R2	.01		
F	(2, 189) 1.30		
Model 2			
Constant	5.89	.80	
Scale Self-selective Exposure	.01	.07	.01
Self-selective Exposure Unfriend/Blocked	-.29	.27	-.32
Education	.00	.23	.00
Gender	.26	.20	.09
Rural or City	.06	.24	.02
Social Media Use	-.20	.09	-.17*
Political Partisanship	.33	.18	-.15
Political Interest	.18	.07	.21*
Political Knowledge	.03	.08	.03
Populist Attitudes	-.03	.10	-.02
R2	.08		
F	(10, 181) 1.62		
ΔR^2	.07		

Note. B = unstandardized regression coefficient; Std. Error = standard error, β = standardized regression coefficient, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Social Media Use

The hypothesis tested is H4a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more active on social media have a higher level of self-selective exposure.* In tables 7 and 9, it can be seen that there is no correlation between social media use and the items of self-selective exposure. Therefore this hypothesis is rejected.

The following hypothesis is tested to see if social media use influence political tolerance H4b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more active on social media have a lower level of political tolerance.* First, table 8 shows that social media has a weak negative correlation with how people view left-winged extremists and the mean political tolerance, $r(214) = -.14, p < .05$. Table 10 shows that social media only has a negative correlation in the multiple regression analysis with how people view left-winged extremists $\beta = -.16, p < .05$. Furthermore, in table 11, it shows that mean social media use negatively correlates with political tolerance $\beta = -.17, p < .05$; therefore, the hypothesis is accepted that people who use more social media are less tolerant.

Political Partisanship

To test the hypothesis H5a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more partisan are more self-selective in their exposure.* A correlation coefficient is calculated in table 7 this test shows there is a weak positive correlation between partisanship and the first item of self-selective exposure, $r(191) = .17, p < .05$. For the other items on self-selective exposure, no correlation is found. Table 9, where the multiple regression analysis and a logistic regression analysis is presented shows a significant positive correlation between partisanship and the first item of self-selective exposure $\beta = .18, p < .05$. This means that when people are more partisan they are also more inclined to be self-selective in their exposure. Consequently, the hypothesis is partially accepted.

The next hypothesis on the subject partisanship is H5b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more partisan have a lower level of political tolerance.* With the use of a Pearson Correlation, no significant statistics could be found as can be seen in table 8. There is a negative effect between partisanship and political tolerance for left-wing extremists, $\beta = -.16, p < .05$, in table 10 this can also be seen. This shows that when people are more partisan they are less tolerant towards left-wing extremists. In table 11 no significant effect could be found for this hypothesis. Therefore the hypothesis is partially accepted for how partisanship for how people view left-wing extremists.

Political Interest

To discuss the first hypothesis H6a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more interested in politics are more self-selective in their exposure* for political interest a Pearson Correlation coefficient is constructed to analyse if there is a correlation between the two variables. In table 7, it can be seen that political interests weakly correlates with the second self-selective exposure item, $r_s(212) = .14, p > .05$. In table 9 where the logistic regression analysis data can be found, there is no significant effect between the two variables. Therefore, respondents who are more interested in politics are not more likely to unfriend or block someone on social media because of political messages. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected

The next hypothesis that is tested is H6b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more interested in politics have a higher level of political tolerance*. First, a Pearson Correlation coefficient is calculated as can be seen in table 8, which gave a significant positive correlation for how left-wing extremists are viewed $r(212) = .14, p < .05$. Next, a multiple regression analysis is executed which can be seen in table 10. The test shows that there is a significant effect between interest and political tolerance for left-wing extremists, $\beta = .23, p < .01$ and for the mean political tolerance, $\beta = .20, p < .05$. Table 11 shows that there is a significant positive effect between interest in politics and political tolerance, $\beta = .21, p < .05$. Therefore, the hypothesis that people who are more interested in politics have a higher level of political tolerance is accepted.

Political Knowledge

Political knowledge is hypothesized to have a positive influence on the level of self-selective exposure. H7a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have more knowledge of politics are more self-selective in their exposure*. Table 7 and table 9 show no significant effects that knowledge has on the three items of self-selective exposure. Therefore the hypothesis is rejected.

The next hypothesis is H7b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have more knowledge of politics have a higher level of political tolerance*. This hypothesis is rejected because no effects could be found between the variables as can be seen in tables 8, 10, and 11.

Populist Attitudes

The hypothesis studied for political orientation is H8a: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher populist attitude are more self-selective in their exposure.* Tables 7 and 9 show that the populist attitudes have a weak positive correlation with the first item of self-selective exposure $r(182) = .16, p < .05$ and $\beta = .18, p < .05$. Because a weak positive correlation is found more populist attitudes of people predict more self-selective behaviour. Therefore, this hypothesis is partially accepted.

The hypothesis for political tolerance is H8b: *People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher populist attitude have a lower level of political tolerance.* In tables 8, 10 and 11 no significant result can be found for the variables. The hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Self-selective Exposure

To see if self-selective exposure affects the level of political tolerance, the main hypothesis of the research was formulated: *People aged between 18 till 35 who are more self-selective in their exposure are less political tolerant.* To study this affect the first two items of self-selective exposure are further investigated in the multiple regression analysis of tables 10 and 11. The third item of self-selective exposure is not selected because this never gave a significant effect on the other independent variables. Table 10 shows that the second item of self-selective exposure is negatively correlated with the level of political tolerance for right-winged extremists. Therefore, when people block or unfriend more people on social media they are less tolerant towards right-winged extremists $\beta = -.17, p < .05$. For the other items of self-selective exposure, no significant effect was found. Therefore, the hypothesis is partially accepted.

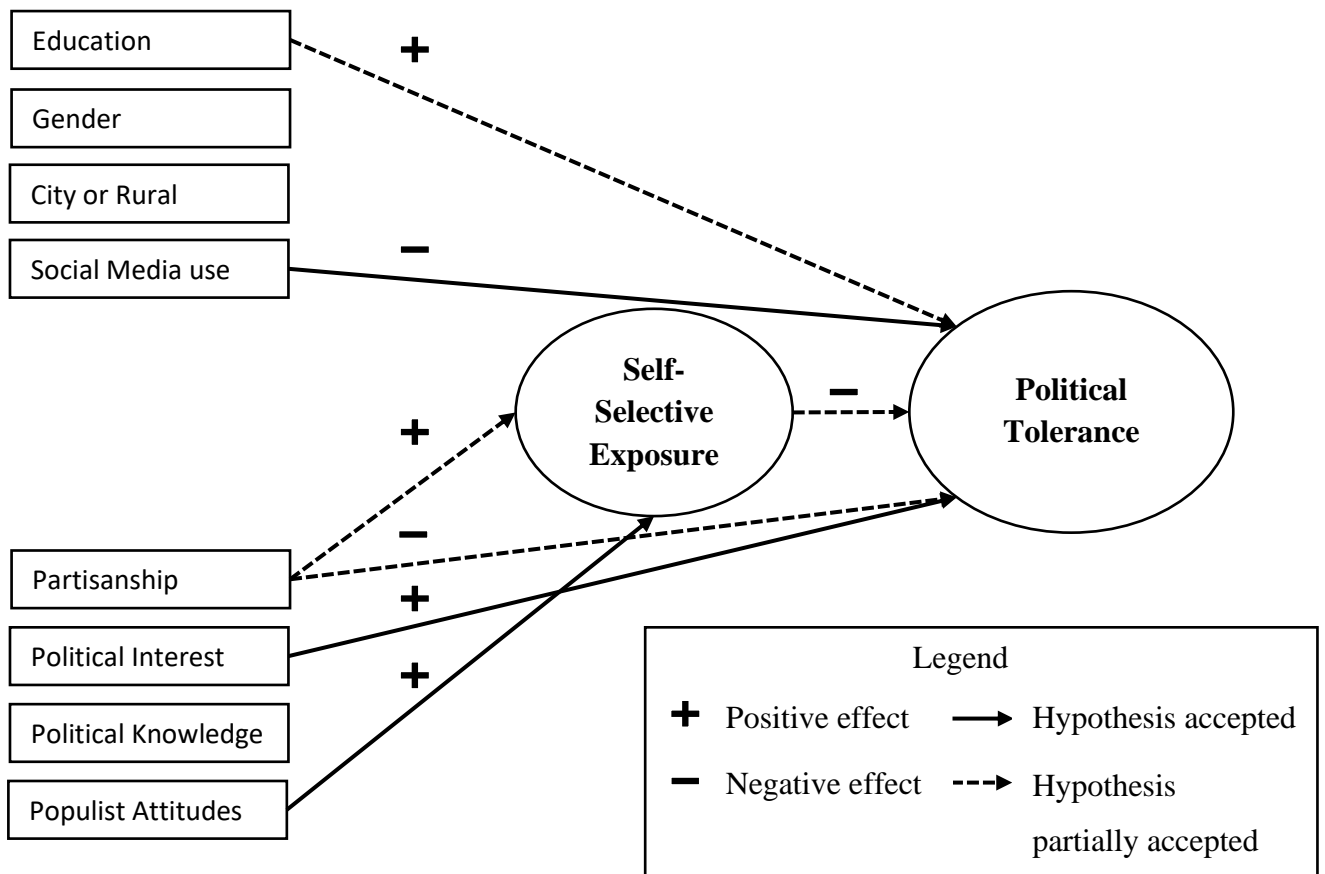


Figure 2 Accepted and Partially Accepted Hypotheses

Table 12: Hypotheses Tested

Hypothesis		Rejected or Accepted
H1a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher level of education have a lower level of self-selective exposure.</i>	Rejected
H1b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher level of education have a higher level of political tolerance.</i>	Partially Accepted
H2a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are women have a higher level of self-selective exposure than men.</i>	Rejected
H2b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are women have a lower level of political tolerance than men.</i>	Rejected
H3a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who live in a rural area have a higher level of self-selective exposure than people who live in a city.</i>	Rejected
H3b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who live in a rural area have a lower level of political tolerance than people who live in a city.</i>	Rejected
H4a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more active on social media have a higher level of self-selective exposure.</i>	Rejected
H4b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more active on social media have a lower level of political tolerance.</i>	Accepted
H5a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more partisan are more self-selective in their exposure.</i>	Partially Accepted
H5b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more partisan have a lower level of political tolerance.</i>	Partially Accepted
H6a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more interested in politics are more self-selective in their exposure</i>	Rejected
H6b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more interested in politics have a higher level of political tolerance.</i>	Accepted
H7a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who have more knowledge of politics are more self-selective in their exposure.</i>	Rejected
H7b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who have more knowledge of politics have a higher level of political tolerance.</i>	Rejected
H8a	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher populist attitude are more self-selective in their exposure.</i>	Partially Accepted
H8b	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who have a higher populist attitude have a lower level of political tolerance.</i>	Rejected
Main hypothesis	<i>People aged between 18 till 35 who are more self-selective in their exposure are less political tolerant.</i>	Partially accepted

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study investigated whether self-selective exposure and other independent variables significantly affect the level of political tolerance among people in the age group between 18 and 35. To research this, the following main research question was formulated: *To what extent are people aged between 18 till 35 who are more self-selective in their exposure to partisan content on social media, less political tolerant?*

The existing literature showed that there was an effect of self-selective exposure on political tolerance in the United States. However, because the US has a two-party system, these results could not be generalized to a European multi-party system. Additionally, the literature showed that there were variables that both influenced the level of self-selective exposure and the level of political tolerance. Therefore, these variables were investigated in this study in the form of hypotheses. These hypotheses were tested with the use of a survey held in Enschede among people aged between 18 till 35 (N = 216). The results of this research showed some expected and some unexpected outcomes.

Firstly, the education level did not lower the level of self-selective exposure, as was hypothesized. According to Bobo and Licari (1989), an educated person will possibly look at more sources than a less educated person. This effect is not found among the respondents. It could be the case that the level of education does not affect the source intake anymore because of political information being easily accessible due to social media. Nonetheless, the education level did affect the level of political tolerance among left-wing respondents. Sullivan et al. (1982) found that people who are higher educated are more politically tolerant than lower educated people. The effect that education only affects left-wing respondents is an unexpected outcome. It would make more sense if education influenced the political tolerance level for everyone. Could it be possible that political tolerance cannot be thought to right-winged people?

Secondly, gender does not affect political tolerance and self-selective exposure. This is the same conclusion that Kim (2011) found that gender does not affect the level of selective exposure to different opinions on social media. There was already disagreement in the literature when it came down to this variable. Additionally, the sources where this hypothesis was based on were sometimes more than 35 years old. In the Netherlands, it could probably be the case that men and women are treated more equally and have equal opportunities. Therefore, it could be the case that no significant differences between men and women were found.

Thirdly, no difference between the place where people live has been found on the level of political tolerance and self-selective exposure. Harrel (2010) states that people living in a

city have a higher level of political tolerance. This effect and the effect of self-selection is not found. This can possibly be explained because respondents were found in the city of Enschede. This means they visited the city and therefore the hypothesized effect a city has on self-selection and political tolerance could already affect people that do not live in a city. Additionally with the existence of the internet it could possibly be that people living in a rural area come in contact with different cultures and this increases their political tolerance and decreases the city or rural split.

Fourthly, people that are more active on social media are not more self-selective in their exposure. This means that these people do not select their own information more than people who use less social media. It could be the case that people are already inside their own online group and therefore, do not need to be self-selective anymore. The level of political tolerance is however affected by social media use. There is a negative correlation of $-.17$ which means that for every higher level of social media use, which is measured from 1 till 7, the political tolerance drops by $-.17$ where the level of political tolerance is also measured by a 7-point scale. People who use more social media are less political tolerant. Pauwels and Schils (2014) described this effect and argued that people who use more social media can possibly have less political tolerance because people operate more in groups of like-minded people on the internet.

Fifthly, there is a correlation between partisanship and the first item to measure self-selection in exposure. This positive correlation means that for every level of partisanship, which is measured from 1 till 4, the level of the first item of self-selective exposure goes up by $.18$. The level of self-selective exposure is measured on a 7-point scale. This confirms what Stroud (2010) argued, that people who are more partisan have a higher incentive to select information that confirms their beliefs. In 2009 Garrett already found empirical evidence that suggested this phenomenon. Garret and Stroud (2014) later argued that people use the internet to look at information that confirms their beliefs. Additionally, Johnson et al. (2017) came to the same conclusion that partisanship is a predictor for self-selective exposure.

Furthermore, partisanship is correlated negatively with political tolerance for left-wing extremists. The negative correlation of $-.16$ means that for every level of partisanship the level of political tolerance towards left-wing extremists decreases by $-.16$. This means that more partisan people have a lower political tolerance level for left-wing extremists. This result suggests what Johnson et al. (2017) stated that there is agreement among researchers that more partisan people are more polarized, which can create intolerance. That this effect is only found for how people view left-wing extremists is an unexpected outcome.

Sixthly, respondents who were more interested in politics are not more likely to be self-selective in their exposure. This could suggest what Knoblach-Westerwick and Meng (2008) found could be applicable, that people who are more interested in politics want to look at counterarguments made by their political opponents to sharpen their own arguments.

Moreover, Sullivan et al. (1981) theorized that political interest and political tolerance are related. Additionally, Mutz and Mondak (2006) state that people who are more politically interested have an increase in their political tolerance. This corresponds with the findings in this study that political interest is positively linked with political tolerance by a correlation of .21 where both items were measured on a 7-point scale. This finding could suggest that people who are interested in politics come into contact with different opinions and therefore have a higher level of political tolerance. It could be possible that people who are more interested in politics have a greater network of people on social media who are also more interested in politics and therefore share more political messages on social media. Therefore, people who are more interested in politics have a higher possibility to be more politically tolerant.

Seventhly, the findings on political knowledge do not correspond with what Garrett (2009) found, that political knowledge is positively correlated with selective exposure. No evidence was found in this study that this is the case. Johnson et al. (2011) argued that people who look at multiple sources of information become more knowledgeable of politics, but knowledgeable people look at information that reaffirms their beliefs. In this study no evidence was found for this relation.

Additionally, no relation was found between and political tolerance and political knowledge. This finding suggests, despite what Peffley et al. (2001) found that political tolerance increased with more political knowledge, that these two items are not related.

Eighthly, populist attitudes are positively correlated with the first item of self-selective exposure. With a correlation of .18 which means that for every level of populist attitudes which is measured on a 7-point scale the level of self-selective exposure increases by .18. Zuiderveen Borgesius et al. (2016) argued that self-selective exposure can possibly lead to more extreme viewpoints of people because they do not see other alternatives. This theory corresponds with the finding that respondents who have a higher populist attitude also indicate that their political news consumption is more self-selective.

Moreover, the results do not indicate that populist attitudes influence the level of political tolerance. It could be the case that the effect is already explained by the other variables. Therefore there is no relation between populist attitudes and political tolerance. It could be

possible that people with populist attitudes have a more extreme opinion and therefore accept other people's extreme opinions for left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists.

5.1. Answering the Research Question

Firstly, it is concluded that self-selective exposure to content that the respondent already agrees with happens in the Netherlands among people in the age group 18 to 35. Additionally, it can be said that with an average score of 5 out of 7 people are politically tolerant towards left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists. However, the tolerance level for left-wing extremists or right-wing extremists differs from respondents who think of themselves as left-wing or right-wing.

To answer the main question, people between 18 till 35 who are more self-selective in their exposure to partisan content on social media are sometimes less political tolerant. A negative correlation between self-selective behaviour unfriending and unblocking someone and tolerance towards right-wing extremists is found. With a correlation of .17. This means that people who ever unfriend or block more people on social media due to political messages are on average .17 less tolerant towards right-wing extremists which is measured on a 7-point scale. This is not a very large effect because the item unfriend or unblocked is a dichotomy tolerance that only decreases by .17 on a 7-point scale.

It could be possible that people who unblock or unfriend someone on social media because they share right-winged messages. Therefore, this person does not see the opinions and develops less tolerance towards these opinions. As discussed before right-winged populist parties are very present on social media. It is therefore not hard to imagine that people who do not agree with these messages block or unfriend someone.

The relationship could also be the other way around because someone could be less tolerant towards right-winged extremists they are possibly more likely to block or unfriend someone who shares these opinions on social media.

Mutz (2002) stated that there was hardly any evidence that political tolerance can possibly be affected by self-selected exposure. This study found almost the same result as Trilling et al. did in 2016, where they saw no relation between selective exposure and polarization in the Netherlands. In this study, a relation between the second item of selective exposure and political tolerance for right-wing extremists is found.

Most studies that researched this phenomenon were done in the United States where they found a relation between the two variables (Garrett, 2009; Iyengar & Hanh, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). Therefore the results are different for the Dutch

example. As Trilling et al. (2016) argued that in the United States there are possible more partisan media than in a European multi-party system. When the media is less partisan for a specific political party or ideology than the person who comes into contact with that news source will not develop less tolerant world-views. Therefore, it could be possible that in a two-party system with more partisan media self-selection is a better predictor for political tolerance than a multi-party system with a diverse media landscape and no clear alliances.

The results and conclusions of this study need to be assessed and interpreted cautiously, where the limitations of the study need to be taken into account. In the next paragraph, the limitations of the study are assessed

5.2. Limitations

During the research process, some limitations for the research were present that could perhaps influence the results and therefore the conclusions of the thesis.

Firstly, the measurement for self-selective exposure did not have a Cronbach's alpha level higher than .7; therefore, three items were constructed to measure the variable. This way of measuring one variable is not desirable. It was challenging to find a measurement to research the variable because in a survey the questions are filled in how the respondents see it themselves rather than what is the case. Therefore, a limitation of this research is the method in which the variable self-selective exposure is measured.

Secondly, the measurement of political tolerance is a limitation of this research. As can be seen in table 4 it depends if a respondent is left-wing or right-wing on political tolerance for left-wing extremists and right-wing extremists. Therefore, the measurement for political tolerance has limitations because left-wing respondents are more positive towards left-wing extremists and right-wing for right-wing extremists.

Thirdly, the survey was conducted in the city of Enschede. This has positive aspects, such as that the respondents are not collected inside the researcher's own sphere. Nonetheless, the data collection method has downsides like that the researcher was physically present when respondents were approached and sometimes during the time that the respondent filled in the survey. The presence of the researcher could affect the outcomes of the survey in the form of socially desirable answers. Additionally, the survey was not a simple random sample, and only respondents participated who wanted to fill in the survey and who had time. This could have affected the results in this thesis. Furthermore, almost all respondents are collected in Enschede, which makes the results difficult to generalize because it is only applicable to the situation of

Enschede. Moreover, the respondents are collected within a specific time period which means that not all people could participate in this study.

Fourthly, the effect that education has an effect on political tolerance only when the respondent is left-winged could be explained by that in the Netherlands students are more likely to be left-winged. The survey was conducted at the University of Twente this could influence the results. When looked at the data of the survey no difference between education level and political orientation is found. Under the higher educated people, there are almost as many right-winged (30%) as left-winged (32%) respondents. Next to this, the of the lower educated respondents 31% is right-winged and 28% is left-winged. Therefore, the assumption that higher educated people are more likely to be left-winged does not hold in this research because the percentages are close together. Consequently, there is no limitation that left-winged youth is higher educated than right-winged youth.

5.3. Recommendations for Future Research

This research did find a relation between self-selective exposure and political tolerance. Finding only a result of blocking or unfriending someone and lower political tolerance towards right-winged extremists does not mean that the other forms of self-selection do not influence political tolerance. Future research to study the effects of self-selective exposure should research this. This could be done via different methods than a survey for instance, by collecting the data via a plugin on a computer of a respondent to see if the respondent is self-selective in online exposure, in the research this is sometimes called web-tracking (Trilling et al 2016). Additionally, via eye-tracking data that can be collected if the respondent is more extendedly looks at information that confirms pre-existing beliefs the respondent could be more self-selective in exposure. These measurement methods are possibly better to measure self-selective exposure than asking the respondent themselves because of socially desirable answers. Nonetheless, these items also have downsides themselves. It takes more time, there are privacy issues and it costs more money to use these methods.

Additionally, how the variable self-selective exposure could be measured in the Netherlands can be further researched because no scientific measurement sources could be found to measure this variable via a survey in the Netherlands.

Furthermore, it will be interesting to see if the results differ in the future. Therefore, for future research, this study can be done again to see if there are different outcomes.

Finally, because much research is done on this topic in the United States and almost no research in a country with a multi-party political system, it will be interesting to see if the conclusions drawn from this study will be the same in other countries with similar political systems as the Netherlands.

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Appendix A: Survey (In Dutch)

Introductie

Beste deelnemer,

Bedankt voor uw deelname aan deze enquête.

Dit onderzoek richt zich op deelnemers in de leeftijd tussen **18 en 35 jaar**. Deze vragenlijst gaat over politieke en maatschappelijke thema's. Het doel van dit onderzoek is om meer kennis te krijgen over jongeren en politiek.

De antwoorden die u geeft zijn volledig anoniem en zullen alleen voor dit onderzoek worden gebruikt. Het is mogelijk om het onderzoek op elk moment te stoppen. De vragenlijst duurt ongeveer 5 minuten. Als beloning kunt u kans maken op een van de twee VVV-cadeaubonnen die worden verloot (ter waarde van 15 euro). Als u deze cadeaubon wilt winnen kunt u uw e-mailadres aan het einde van deze enquête invullen. Wilt u meer weten over dit onderzoek, dan kunt u dit aangeven aan het eind van deze vragenlijst.

Wanneer u doorgaat met dit onderzoek bevestigt u uw deelname.

Voor vragen kunt u mij benaderen via:

r.s.vanmaurik@student.utwente.nl

Q1 Wat is uw leeftijd?

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1Demo3 > 35

Skip To: End of Survey If Q1Demo3 < 18

Q2 Waar heeft u voor het eerst gehoord van deze enquête?

- Online (1)
- Centraal Station Enschede (2)
- Universiteit Twente (3)
- Winkelcentrum Enschede Zuid (4)
- Centrum Enschede (5)

Q3 Als er nu Tweede Kamerverkiezingen zouden zijn, op welke politieke partij zou u dan stemmen?

- de VVD (1)
- de PVV (2)
- het CDA (3)
- D66 (4)
- GroenLinks (5)
- de SP (6)
- de PvdA (7)
- de ChristenUnie (8)
- de Partij voor de Dieren (9)
- 50PLUS (10)
- de SGP (11)
- DENK (12)
- Forum voor Democratie (13)
- Anders namelijk (14) _____
- Ik zou blanco stemmen (15)
- Ik weet niet op welke partij ik zou stemmen (16)
- Ik zou niet gaan stemmen (17)

Skip To: Q3a If Q3Polideo1 = 15

Skip To: Q3a If Q3Polideo1 = 16

Skip To: Q3a If Q3Polideo1 = 17

Display This Question:

If Q3Polideo1 = 15

Or Q3Polideo1 = 16

Or Q3Polideo1 = 17

Q3a Tot welke politieke partij voelt u zich het sterkst aangetrokken?

- de VVD (1)
- de PVV (2)
- het CDA (3)
- D66 (4)
- GroenLinks (5)
- de SP (6)
- de PvdA (7)
- de ChristenUnie (8)
- de Partij voor de Dieren (9)
- 50PLUS (10)
- de SGP (11)
- DENK (12)
- Forum voor Democratie (13)
- Anders namelijk (14) _____
- Ik voel mij tot geen enkele partij aangetrokken (15)
- Ik weet niet tot welke partij ik mij het sterkst aangetrokken voel (16)

Skip To: Q5Polideo2 If Q3a = 15

Skip To: Q5Polideo2 If Q3a = 16

Display This Question:

If Q3Polideo1 = 1

Or Q3Polideo1 = 2

Or Q3Polideo1 = 3

Or Q3Polideo1 = 4

Or Q3Polideo1 = 5

Or Q3Polideo1 = 6

Or Q3Polideo1 = 7

Or Q3Polideo1 = 8

Or Q3Polideo1 = 9

Or Q3Polideo1 = 10

Or Q3Polideo1 = 11

Or Q3Polideo1 = 12

Or Q3Polideo1 = 13

Or Q3Polideo1 = 14

Q4Polpar In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen?

	Nooit (1)	Soms (2)	Vaak (3)	Altijd (4)
Wanneer ik het over \${Q3Polideo1/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} heb, zeg ik "mijn partij". (1)	0	0	0	0
Het voelt als een belediging als mensen kritiek hebben op \${Q3Polideo1/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry}. (2)	0	0	0	0
Ik voel mij verbonden met mensen die \${Q3Polideo1/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} ondersteunen. (3)	0	0	0	0
Wanneer mensen positief zijn over \${Q3Polideo1/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} voelt dit goed. (4)	0	0	0	0

Display This Question:

- If Q3a = 14
- Or Q3a = 13
- Or Q3a = 12
- Or Q3a = 11
- Or Q3a = 10
- Or Q3a = 9
- Or Q3a = 8
- Or Q3a = 7
- Or Q3a = 6
- Or Q3a = 5
- Or Q3a = 4
- Or Q3a = 3
- Or Q3a = 2
- Or Q3a = 1

Q4a polpar In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen?

	Nooit (1)	Soms (2)	Vaak (3)	Altijd (4)
Wanneer ik het over \${Q3a/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} heb, zeg ik "mijn partij". (1)	0	0	0	0
Het voelt als een belediging als mensen kritiek hebben op \${Q3a/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} . (2)	0	0	0	0
Ik voel mij verbonden met mensen die \${Q3a/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} ondersteunen. (3)	0	0	0	0
Wanneer mensen positief zijn over \${Q3a/ChoiceGroup/SelectedChoicesTextEntry} voelt dit goed. (4)	0	0	0	0

Q5Polideo2 In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen? Van 1 (helemaal mee oneens) tot 7 (helemaal mee eens).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Weet ik niet (8)
Politici in de Tweede Kamer moeten zich laten leiden door de mening van het volk. (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
De belangrijkste politieke beslissingen zouden genomen moeten worden door het volk en niet door politici. (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
De politieke tegenstellingen zijn groter tussen de elite en gewone burgers dan tussen burgers onderling. (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ik word liever vertegenwoordigd door een gewone burger dan door een beroepspoliticus (4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Politici praten te veel en doen te weinig. (5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
In de politiek is het sluiten van compromissen vaak een ander woord voor het verraden van je principes. (6)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ik ben geïnteresseerd in politiek. (7)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Q6Polideo3 In de politiek wordt soms gesproken over links en rechts. Wanneer u denkt aan uw eigen politieke opvattingen, waar zou u zichzelf dan plaatsen op een lijn van 0 tot en met 10, waarbij 0 staat voor links en 10 voor rechts?

- Links 0** (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)
- (5)
- (6)
- (7)
- (8)
- (9)
- (10)
- Rechts 10** (11)

Q7Selective Welke websites heeft u de afgelopen 3 maanden bezocht? (Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk)

- Telegraaf.nl (1)
- Volkskrant.nl (2)
- Nos.nl (3)
- NRC Handelsblad (nrc.nl) (4)
- Nu.nl (5)
- The post online (tpo.nl) (6)
- Geenstijl.nl (7)
- Algemeen Dagblad (ad.nl) (8)
- Geen (9)
- Weet ik niet (10)

Q8selfse In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stelling?

	Helemaal mee oneens (1)	Mee oneens (2)	Enigszins mee oneens (3)	Niet mee en niet mee oneens (4)	Enigszins mee eens (5)	Mee eens (6)	Helemaal mee eens (7)	Weet ik niet (8)
Wanneer ik zoek naar politieke informatie bekijk ik eerder informatie die overeenkomt met mijn overtuigingen. (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Q9socfre Hoe vaak gebruikt u de volgende sociale media websites?

	Nooit (1)	Bijna nooit (2)	Maandelijks (3)	Een paar keer per maand (4)	Wekelijks (5)	Een paar keer per week (6)	Dagelijks (7)
Facebook (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q10Selective Heeft u wel eens iemand ontvriend of volgt u sommige mensen niet meer op sociale media zoals Facebook, Instagram, Twitter en YouTube vanwege politieke opmerkingen of berichten?

- Nee, nooit (1)
- Ja, één keer (2)
- Ja, meer dan eens (3)

Q11socself Heeft u wel eens iemand geblokkeerd op sociale media zoals Facebook, Instagram, Twitter en YouTube vanwege politieke opmerkingen of berichten?

- Nee, nooit (1)
- Ja, één keer (2)
- Ja, meer dan eens (3)

Q12Selective Welke politieke partijen volgt u op sociale media zoals Facebook, Instagram, Twitter en YouTube? **Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk.**

- de VVD (1)
- de PVV (2)
- het CDA (3)
- D66 (4)
- GroenLinks (5)
- de SP (6)
- de PvdA (7)
- de ChristenUnie (8)
- de Partij voor de Dieren (9)
- 50PLUS (10)
- DENK (11)
- de SGP (12)
- Forum voor Democratie (13)
- Geen (14)

Q13Selective Welke leiders van politieke partijen volgt u op sociale media zoals Facebook, Instagram, Twitter en YouTube? **Meerdere antwoorden mogelijk.**

- Markt Rutte (VVD) (1)
- Geert Wilders (PVV) (2)
- Pieter Heerma (CDA) (3)
- Rob Jetten (D66) (4)
- Jesse Klaver (GroenLinks) (5)
- Lilian Marijnissen (SP) (6)
- Lodewijk Asscher (PvdA) (7)
- Gert-Jan Segers (ChristenUnie) (8)
- Marianne Thieme (Partij voor de Dieren) (9)
- Henk Krol (50PLUS) (10)
- Tunahan Kuzu (DENK) (11)
- Kees van der Staaij (SGP) (12)
- Thierry Baudet (Forum voor Democratie) (13)
- Geen (14)

TEXT Mensen kijken verschillend tegen politieke extremen aan. Sommige mensen vinden dat leden van extreme politieke groepering evenveel rechten zouden moeten hebben als andere mensen. Anderen vinden dat zij minder rechten zouden moeten hebben. Natuurlijk zijn er ook mensen met een mening die hier tussenin ligt. In de volgende twee vragen wordt uw mening gevraagd over hoe u aankijkt tegen personen met extreemlinkse en extreemrechtse denkbeelden.

Q14polTol In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen over extreemlinkse politieke groepen en personen?

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Weet ik niet (8)
Een extreemlinks persoon mag zich verkiesbaar stellen. (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Een extreemlinks persoon mag lesgeven aan een universiteit. (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Een extreemlinks persoon moet vervolgd worden. (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
extreemlinkse groepen mogen openbare bijeenkomsten houden in de stad. (4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ik zou van streek zijn als een extreemlinks persoon naast mij komt wonen. (5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Q15poltol In hoeverre bent u het eens met de volgende stellingen over extreemrechtse politieke groepen en personen? Van 1 (helemaal mee oneens) tot 7 (helemaal mee eens).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	Weet ik niet (8)
Een extreemrechts persoon mag zich verkiesbaar stellen. (1)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Een extreemrechts persoon mag lesgeven aan een universiteit. (2)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Een extreemrechts persoon moet vervolgd worden. (3)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Extreemrechtse groepen mogen openbare bijeenkomsten houden in de stad. (4)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ik zou van streek zijn als een extreemrechts persoon naast mij komt wonen. (5)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Q16polkn Welke politieke partijen vormen de huidige regering? **Meerdere partijen kunnen worden geselecteerd.**

- de VVD (1)
- de PVV (2)
- het CDA (3)
- D66 (4)
- GroenLinks (5)
- de SP (6)
- de PvdA (7)
- de ChristenUnie (8)
- de Partij voor de Dieren (9)
- 50PLUS (10)
- DENK (11)
- de SGP (12)
- Forum voor Democratie (13)
- Weet ik niet (14)

Q17polkno De leden van de Eerste Kamer worden gekozen door?

- Leden van de Tweede Kamer (1)
- De kiesgerechtigde bevolking (2)
- Leden van de Provinciale Staten (3)
- Leden van de gemeenteraad (4)
- Weet ik niet (5)

Q18Demo Wat is uw geslacht?

- Vrouw (1)
- Man (2)
- Anders (3)

Q19Demo Wat is uw hoogst genoten opleiding?

- Geen (1)
- Basisschool (2)
- Vmbo (3)
- Havo (4)
- Vwo(5)
- Mbo (6)
- Hbo (7)
- Wo (8)
- Hoger dan Wo (9)

Q20Demo Wat omschrijft uw woonsituatie het beste?

- Ik woon in een stad (1)
- Ik woon in een dorp (2)

Q21Bedankt voor het meedoen in dit onderzoek. Als u kans wilt maken op een cadeaubon van 15 euro kunt u hieronder uw e-mailadres invullen.

Q22Als u meer wilt weten over de uitkomsten van dit onderzoek kun u hieronder uw e-mailadres invullen. **KLIK OP DE PIJL OM DE VRAGENLIJST AF TE RONDEN.**
