

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

School of Global Studies



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The Paradox of Women's Electoral Participation

What Brazilian women can tell us about democracy

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Abstract

Globally, women and men participate in politics to different degrees and in different ways, although women tend to be less engaged, interested and knowledgeable about politics. Yet, they still vote to a greater extent than men in modern democracies. This phenomenon is known as the paradox of women's electoral participation and the reason for it eludes scholars till this day. In trying to understand the paradox, scholars have mostly looked to western or European democracies for answers and in doing so, a sense of civic duty has been suggested as an explanation. Brazil is a country with a surplus of women casting their votes, even though it possesses many characteristics that are usually associated with low participation generally, and low participation of women in particular. Because of this, Brazil is expected to be an especially intriguing context in which to investigate what gendered aspects might drive women to vote. Through doing qualitative semi structured interviews, this thesis investigates how civic duty might motivate women in Brazil to vote. The thesis finds that although this explanation partly resonates with women in Brazil, it becomes evident that the role of civic duty is far more complex than estimated by previous research. The thesis concludes that the women in Brazil for most part have political motives when voting – indicating that rather than being apolitical, as previously thought, they are political in a different way and, most importantly, motivated to vote by other factors than civic duty towards the state.

Keywords: women's electoral participation, paradox, civic duty, Brazil

Resumo

Globalmente, mulheres e homens participam da política em graus e formas diferentes, embora as mulheres tendam a ser menos engajadas, interessadas e conhecedoras da política. No entanto, elas ainda votam mais do que os homens nas democracias modernas. Este fenômeno é conhecido como o paradoxo da participação eleitoral das mulheres e a razão para isso escapa aos estudiosos até hoje. Ao tentar entender o paradoxo, os estudiosos têm buscado respostas principalmente nas democracias ocidentais ou europeias e, ao fazê-lo, um senso de dever cívico foi sugerido como explicação. O Brasil é um país com superávit de votos femininos, embora possua muitas características que costumam estar associadas à baixa participação em geral e à baixa participação das mulheres em particular. Por causa disso, espera-se que o Brasil seja um contexto especialmente intrigante para investigar quais aspectos de gênero podem levar as mulheres ao voto. Por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas qualitativas, esta tese investiga como o dever cívico pode motivar as mulheres brasileiras a votar. A tese conclui que, embora essa explicação ressoe em parte com as mulheres no Brasil, fica evidente que o papel do dever cívico é muito mais complexo do que o estimado por pesquisas anteriores. A tese conclui que as mulheres no Brasil, em sua maioria, têm motivações políticas ao votar – indicando que, ao invés de serem apolíticas, como se pensava, elas são políticas de uma forma diferente e, mais importante, motivadas a votar por outros fatores que não o dever cívico para com o Estado.

Palavras-chave: participação eleitoral feminina, paradoxo, dever cívico, Brasil

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Table of Content

Abstracts (in English and Portuguese)

Acknowledgments

Table of Content

List of Graph

1. Introduction	8
2. Background	10
2.1. The Brazilian context	10
2.2. Voting in Brazil	12
2.3. Nuancing compulsory voting in Brazil	14
3. Aim and Research Questions	16
4. Relevance to Global Studies	18
5. Limitations	20
6. Previous Research	22
6.1. Voting and the particular Latin American context	22
6.2. Is voting gendered?	25
7. Theoretical Framework	27
7.1. The Paradox of Women’s Electoral Participation	27
7.2. Civic Duty – the Social Contract towards the State	29
8. Method	32
8.1. Methodological strengths and design	32
8.2. Reflections on the use of an interpreter	33
8.3. Ethical considerations and positionality	33
8.4. Implementation and setting	35
8.4.1. Collection and overview of data	35
8.4.2. Operationalisation of civic duty	37
8.5. Choice of method and structure of the analysis	38
9. Results and analysis	41
9.1. Choice	41
9.2. Country and community	44

9.3. Opinion	46
9.4. Guilt	48
9.5. Other insights found in the material on why women vote	51
10. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research	55
10.1. Conclusion	55
10.2. Suggestions for future research	57
11. References	59
Appendices	
Appendix 1. Interview Guide	68
Appendix 2. Information to Participants (in English and Portuguese)	70

List of Graph

Graph 1. Summarised information on interviews and respondents 36

1. Introduction

Voting is one of the most basic and instrumental parts of democracy. In picking the word ‘democracy’ apart from its Greek origin, it refers to *demos*, the people, and *kratos*, governing. Basically, governing by the people. This principle can be traced back to Ancient Athens, where the idea of democracy was born (Dahl, 1989). However, the practice of democracy in Ancient Athens does not resemble what we see as democracy today. For example, considering participation through suffrage, only a very limited part of the *demos* could actually participate (Dahlerup, 2017). The matter of unequal suffrage, either by decision and law, or by circumstance, is an issue that has haunted democracy as a practice throughout the ages. Basically, the whole idea of communal governing by the people (democracy), falls short if the *demos* are not participating (Lijphart, 1997). Voting in itself has not been an unproblematic phenomenon for scholars. Fundamentally, voting as a practise, is not yet fully understood (Galais & Blais, 2019). In adding to the discussion on electoral participation, this thesis will not only inform our fundamental understanding of democracy, but also specifically shed light on women’s political activity.

In spite of potential shortcomings in execution, democracy in itself has become one of the most defining strands of thought of our time, but there is no consensus on exactly what democracy entails.¹ Further, although democracy has been popular and an accepted way of governance, a true or accurate form of democracy does not stand to be found in the world – rather the idea of democracy is merely recreated, to various degrees of accuracy, in relation to democracy in its ideal form (Dahl, 1989: ch 8). Thus, this important and pivotal way of governing societies is yet to be fully defined, as well as understood. In addition to this, in later years, democracy in the world has lost its strong foothold, and some are even warning for a crisis of democracy (IDEA, 2022). Democracy is declining, democratic space is shrinking, and democratic engagement is fading (Freedom House, 2022; IDEA 2022). Globally, democracy as a concept is challenged from different angles.

¹ See for example different ways of measuring democracy at: V-Dem Institute (<https://v-dem.net/>), Polity IV (<https://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>) or Freedom House (<https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>).

One of the more dramatic and violent ways in which democracy has been challenged is, for example, the questioning of the legitimacy of the electoral process in Brazil following the most recent election (Gorokhovskaia, 2023). A questioning that fundamentally ended up in the riot and insurrection in Brazil's capital, Brasília, in January 2023 – one of the most serious threats to democracy in Brazil in decades (Boadle, Funakoshi & Wolfe, 2023; Gorokhovskaia, 2023). There are indeed threats directed towards democracy, and a suggested solution to these threats is to look even closer at the social contracts that democracy entails (IDEA, 2022). In partaking in the discussion on how to deal with the threats made to democracy, this thesis also concerns the importance of understanding participation.

Within the study of gendered electoral participation, scholars have noticed a contradiction, namely, the paradox of women's electoral participation. This paradox will be discussed in further detail below, but basically, it concerns the assumption that women are less knowledgeable and interested in politics, and the fact that they, despite of this, vote to a greater extent than men (for example Carreras, 2018). A country that possesses many factors that would discourage women to vote is Brazil. There are fewer women than men in politics, fewer women than men have access to the labour market and women's rights are challenged (UNDP, 2020; UNDP, 2022). In spite of this, women vote more than men in Brazil (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022a).

The high rate of women's electoral participation, in comparison to men, in Brazil is interesting because it deviates from what, according to existing literature on electoral participation, should be true. That is, it seems that women vote to a surprisingly great extent, compared to men. Because of this, Brazil is a compelling case for investigating what mechanisms stimulate women's electoral participation and is thus the case of this thesis. In trying to understand what gendered mechanisms are at play in the case of Brazil, this thesis will rely on the concept of "civic duty" (also suggested by previous research) and how it, in a gendered way is a determinant for electoral participation. Civic duty will be explained and situated more extensively in the chapter "7. Theoretical Framework".

2. Background

This chapter will start by giving an overview of the Brazilian context and its particularities in relation to Latin America as a whole. It will also give some context to exactly where the research was conducted, that is, Rio Grande do Sul. After this, it will give an overview on voting in Brazil and subsequently nuance the phenomenon of compulsory voting in Brazil, which doesn't operate as intuitively unproblematic as one might think.

2. 1. The Brazilian context

Latin America is often referred to as a unified entity. Of course, this is a truth with modification. Although there are some similarities across the continent, such as language, culture and religion, there are also significant differences that are sometimes overlooked in the literature. For example, Brazil is the biggest country in Latin America, and the only Portuguese speaking country on the continent. Brazil also has a particular history with both slavery, racism and dictatorship. A lot of people were brought to Brazil from the African continent. Because of this, a large portion of the Brazilian population is black. Additionally, the country is significantly divided where, generally speaking, the poor black people live in the north, and the wealthy white people live in the south (NE, 2023a; Benvindo, 2022: ch 2). Indeed, the regional inequalities are prevalent, where much of the wealth is concentrated to the south and the south east (Benvindo, 2022: ch 2). Remarkably, even though the general living conditions in Brazil have improved in later years, the regional inequalities have simultaneously increased (Benvindo, 2022: ch 2). Further, Brazil has often, incorrectly, been described as a 'racial democracy' – where the general narrative has been that Brazil is an equal, democratic state, where racism is not an issue and any potential inequality is due to economic circumstances (Benvindo, 2022: ch 2; Lovell, 2000). This is not true, and evidence of racial discrimination can be found in every part of modern society – ranging from access to education, health care to overrepresentation regarding being victims of state violence and in prisons (Benvindo, 2022: ch 2).

Although there indeed are a lot of similarities, and that there is a point in actually talking about Latin America, there are also reasons to regard the particularities of the Brazilian context. The shift from democracy to dictatorship in Brazil was, in comparison to the 'clean

cuts' in other Latin American countries, more of a slow shift where the military kept much of their influence within government (Benvindo, 2022). Brazil thus has a history of military dictatorship, only turning democratic (again) in the 1980's. Before this, Brazil was one of the earliest countries in the world to employ suffrage for women (Burns et. al., 2001). After a military coup of the democratically elected government in 1964, the reign of the military lasted until the 1980's (Power, 2016). The military dictatorship in Brazil was different in relation to its regional counter parts. Power (2016) states in his own words: "If we are to make relative judgments about Brazilian military rule – putting the regime in appropriate regional context, and without any intent to make pointless normative assertions about 'good' or 'bad' dictatorships – we would have to conclude that the Brazilian dictatorship was more economically successful and less physically repressive than its counterparts in the Southern Cone." (Power, 2016: 15). Further, the religious demographic has changed significantly in Brazil, from being mostly catholic to Evangelical in the last couple of years (Benvindo, 2022).

The research done in relation to this thesis was performed in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. It is the southernmost state of Brazil, sharing a border with Uruguay and Argentina to the north and west, and the South Atlantic Ocean to the east. Specifically, the interviews took place in Porto Alegre as well as Caxias do Sul. Porto Alegre is the biggest city in the south of Brazil, and the 4th biggest city area in Brazil (NE, 2023b). Caxias do Sul is smaller, the centre for wine production in the region, and primarily an Italian settlement (NE, 2023c). In 2016, Porto Alegre had a population of 1,5 million people, while Caxias do Sul had a population of 479 200 (NE, 2023b; NE, 2023c).

Rio Grande do Sul is well known for its agriculture primarily through breeding livestock and growing grapes. Most of its inhabitants are of white European descent, with only a minority being black. There are for example both Italian and German settlements in the region (Britannica, 2012). The European presence and settlements in the south of Brazil was a deliberate political goal for the Brazilian state during the 1800's as a part of modernizing the country and agriculture (Álvarez López & Olsson, 2023).

2. 2. Voting in Brazil

Brazil is a democratic republic which employs presidentialism. There are different levels of governance that demand voting – municipal, state, and national level. The elections for the different levels are done at different times. Presidential elections are held on the first Sunday of October every 4th year (last election was 2022). Voting for the presidential elections are done in two rounds if one of the candidates fails to secure more than 50 % of the votes in the first round. If there is a second round, it is held at the end of October and is a run-off between the two candidates with the most votes from the first round (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, no date a). The ballots in Brazil are completely electronic (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, no date b).

Voting in Brazil is compulsory for people between 18 and 70 years old. It is optional from the ages 16–17 and 70 and above as well as for people who are illiterate (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022b). Although compulsory voting finds support in the general literature and research on voting (which will be discussed in further detail below), situating compulsory voting and its prospects and influence on the electorate in the Brazilian context is crucial (Cepaluni & Hidalgo, 2016). Indeed, although compulsory voting is designed to counter inequality, it seems that it does not fulfil this purpose in Brazil because of the way the incentives and rules are designed. In Brazil, the punishment for not voting is, on top of a (minimal) fee, a loss of access to certain state services, such as the possibility to renew a passport or acquire a professional position within the state. These are incentives that to a much greater extent affect and influence a more educated and wealthy population, who are already prone to cast their vote. The poor, however, are not affected by these punishments and incentives to the same extent (Cepaluni & Hidalgo, 2016). Additionally, research on the Brazilian context shows that there is weak evidence for compulsory voting as being habit forming, which is often said to be one of its most important functions (Dunaiski, 2021). Thus, compulsory voting and its rationale has been important in research on trying to understand voting as such. Seeing, though, that compulsory voting doesn't always operate as expected (and sometimes even counter intuitively), it makes sense to try to untangle the motives for electoral participation, even in a context with compulsory voting. Because of this, it is relevant to investigate why women vote in Brazil, even though compulsory voting is enforced.

In Brazil, women vote to a greater extent than men (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022a). To be exact, out of all women, 80 % voted in 2022, while only 78 % of all men did so (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022a). In looking at this over a couple of elections, women have voted more than men in Brazil for at least the last 3 presidential elections (2022, 2018, 2012) (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022a)². Further, in looking closer at the data from the Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, in the 2022 election, ‘only’ 2 %-points more women than men voted, which might seem like an insignificant number. However, in a country with such a large population as Brazil, this actually entails many people. To be precise, the fact that 80 % of the women voted and only 78 % of the men meant that 8 166 235 more women than men voted in the 2022 elections.³ That is a number worthy of attention. Further, the matter of a surplus of women is consistent when looking at regional statistics for the 2022 election in the south of Brazil.⁴ 81 % of the women in the south voted, and 80 % of the men, which means that 968 847 more women than men voted (Tribunal Superior Eleitoral, 2022a)⁵.

2. 3. Nuancing compulsory voting in Brazil

Brazil, like many other Latin American countries, deploys compulsory voting (IDEA, nd). Intuitively, one might think that a particular sense of civic duty becomes irrelevant in a country that applies compulsory voting. Of course, civic duty would have the potential of being an even greater explanatory factor if there were no legal incentives to vote. However, I want to nuance compulsory voting in Brazil in relation to why people vote. For example, recent studies on Brazil have shown that the potential positive effects of compulsory voting on turnout are more limited than was previously thought (Dunaiski, 2021). Interestingly, in actually scrutinising the effects of compulsory voting, no evidence is found for compulsory voting being habit forming, an aspect which is often brought forward as one of the strongest arguments for the practise of compulsory voting (Dunaiski, 2021). Further, looking at the practicalities of the fee that abstainers face, in most cases it is very small, and would not

² The data at Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (2022a) can be filtered. Data on women and men’s electoral participation (under “GÊNERO”, gender, in Portuguese) in different years can be filtered under the section called “ANO”, year, in Portuguese.

³ The data provided at Tribunal Superior Eleitoral (2022) is very elaborate and tells exactly how many women and men voted (an abstained). Thus, seeing how many women voted (65 932 392) subtracted by how many men voted (57 766 157) gives the exact number for how many more women than men voted in the 2022 presidential elections in Brazil.

⁴ Although, in the 2018 elections, men and women voted to the exact same extent in the presidential elections in the south. However, in the 2014 elections, there was a surplus of women.

⁵ Filtered under “ANO” (year) 2022 and “região” (region) south.

incentivise poor people enough to make a difference – which of course undermines its purpose (Cepaluni & Hidalgo, 2016). For example, in Porto Alegre the capitol city of the state Rio Grande do Sul, a bus ticket is 4,80 BRL, (Prefeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre, 2022) which approximately amounts to 0,96 USD. The fee for not voting is about 3–10 % of the minimum wage which amounts to approximately 3,50 BRL, or 1,60 USD (Cepaluni & Hidalgo, 2016). That is, the fee for abstaining is cheaper than a bus ticket, which usually have to be used to travel to the ballots.

3. Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the understanding of democracy in view of the current global democratic setback by focusing on women's electoral participation. Through investigating participation specifically, this thesis will add knowledge concerning what drives women to engage in the particular political activity of voting. Women's political participation has been a matter of interest in different societies in different times. Women suffrage has been a particularly unifying issue for feminists, both across geography and political stance (Dahlerup, 2017). Further, there have been arguments on women's political presence – pushing that it is different from men's and that women indeed have particular interests (Bourque & Grossholtz, 1998). Surely, if people in general could care for and safeguard women's interests, there would be no particular need for women's specific electoral participation. To this debate, Phillips (1998) brings an important point: “The argument from interest does not depend on establishing a unified interest of all women: it depends, rather, on establishing a difference between the interests of women and men.” (Phillips, 1998: 68). In the light of this way of rationalising interests and primarily *differences* of interests, this thesis will depart from acknowledging binary gender categories as well as the fact that these matter for democracy, and most fundamentally, participation. Quite frankly, this is why we should care about women's electoral participation.

Fundamentally, if we are relying on existing knowledge and theorising about women's electoral participation, women have low incentives to vote in Brazil. Further, being a country in the Global South with issues regarding gender equality, for example, concerning women's presence in the work force and positions in parliament as well as maternal mortality (UNDP, 2020; UNDP, 2022), high electoral participation amongst women is not expected. Brazil is also a country that adopts electoral rules in accordance with presidentialism, which usually discourages electoral participation (Mueller, 2003). However, the voter turnout statistics from the general election in Brazil 2018 showed that 52% of the people that voted were women (Wilson Center, 2018). The high rate of women's electoral participation, in comparison to men, in Brazil is interesting since it deviates from what, according to the existing literature should be true (see for example Carreras, 2018 on the paradox of women's electoral participation). That is, it seems that women vote to a surprisingly great extent compared to men. Therefore, the research questions for this thesis are:

RQ1: How does civic duty affect women's electoral participation in Brazil?

RQ2: What drives women to vote in Brazil?

The research questions are formulated in relation to each other, with their starting point in theory and previous research. First, this thesis sets out to understand how civic duty (suggested by previous research) affects women's electoral participation in Brazil. This concept is key and will be developed in chapter 7. Second, in addition to investigating civic duty as an influence as such, this thesis also wants to understand more broadly (thus, question 2) what it is that drives women to vote in Brazil.

Further, the observant reader might note that first research question refers to electoral participation, while the other refers to voting ('vote'). In this thesis, these two will be used interchangeably, as they refer to the same act. However, in order to be as grammatically clear as possible, electoral participation is used in the first research question and voting in the second.

4. Relevance to Global Studies

This thesis is relevant to the research field of Global Studies for three particular reasons. These will be presented and discussed in the following chapter starting with a greater discussion of democracy as a global concept, then on nuancing the previously western-centred research done on electoral participation and lastly by connecting these two points of relevance and making a claim of the intrinsic importance of globally (*and* not only in the West) understanding women's electoral participation in relation to a greater feminist quest.

Firstly, democracy, as a principle and a system, on a global level, is important and relevant for a study of globalisation and global matters as such (Carter, 2001: ch 7). Because of this, and the fact that democracy is not yet fully understood, it is pivotal that we know more about it. This thesis adds to the knowledge on one of the most basic principles of democracy – electoral participation. Also, approaching the mechanisms of electoral participation in general, and women's electoral participation in particular, is essential in a greater quest for promoting democracy as a global phenomenon on all levels of governance. Indeed, ranging from local democracy, to national, and also global levels of democratic governance, the matter of equal participation is pivotal (Scholte, 2005: ch 11; Bray & Slaughter, 2015). Learning more about the mechanisms of participation (and what encourages it) will inform both policy development, strengthen democracy, and provide crucial insights on democracy as a concept within the field of Global Studies.

Secondly, most of the research on electoral participation and voting has been quantitative and mostly done in the West or specifically western Europe (see for example Blais, 2006; Burns et. al., 2001; Burrell, 2005). In addition, when studies have been done with a more global or general ambition, it has been recognised that Latin America often differs from the general results or can be expected to be different (Blais, 2006). Evidently, Latin America stands out in the examples of a surplus of voting women (which in itself can be found in many democracies, globally). The exact reason for the particularities of Latin America is not spelled out in the literature but is expected to concern its differences to the West in regard to culture and history, for example through experiences with colonialism and different social conditions. By more thoroughly investigating the Latin American context, this thesis contributes to an epistemological decentralisation from the currently western-centred discussion on electoral participation, thereby adding a more global perspective.

Lastly, to understand a) women's electoral participation and b) to understand it in other parts of the world than the global north/west is a feminist quest in itself alluding to a global struggle for gender equality. Indeed, there are differences between women in different parts of the world. For example, women in Sweden and Brazil face very different challenges in access to health care such as abortion rights – fairly accessible in Sweden (RFSU, 2020), and illegal in most cases in Brazil (Human Rights Watch, 2020). However, this does not cancel out the fact that women all over the world experience the effects of the structural injustices brought on by the patriarchy. Although there also are other global and very pressing structures of oppression, for example, racism, colonialism and capitalism that are entangled with patriarchy, as well as each other (Eisenstein, 1998), it does not make the global structure of oppression directed particularly to women (that is, the patriarchy) less relevant to investigate and address. Thus, this thesis takes on the issue of women's electoral participation as a global feminist issue that needs to be further understood by using Brazil (and not a western/European country) as a case.

5. Limitations

Beside the aim, research questions and theory framing this thesis there are some potentially relevant aspects of women's electoral participation in Brazil, and what drives it, that will not be addressed within the scope of this study. Intersectionality, including primarily discussions of race and class as well as discussions of voting as a right are important aspects to consider, however, not the centre of attention here. In addition to this, the riots in Brasília were not at all mentioned in the data and will therefore not be further discussed. In this chapter, the limitations of the thesis will be presented and explained.

The fundamental idea from which this thesis derives is that there are differences between women and men in political engagement and that these need to be understood in order to ensure gender equality. In not regarding gender as a complete binary, these particular differences would fade and be harder to grasp and conceptualise. Of course, there might be other interesting differences in electoral participation amongst other groups, and these are indeed worthy of investigation as well. But we can see that there are differences between men and women in electoral participation. Keeping in mind the structural injustices that women have faced, throughout cultures and centuries, the women/men *binary* aspect deserves thorough investigation and is indeed complicated and complex in itself to be the object of study within a research project of this (relatively small) size.

In direct relation to this, the theoretical stance and framework of this thesis exclude experiences that do not fit into the binary way of rationalising gender. This makes sense, because the research question concerns women specifically. Thus, the theoretical framework does not refer to any intersectional perspectives or experiences. However, the matter of different social roles and conditions such as race and class (in itself and in combination with being a woman) surfaced as significant dynamics during the interviews. These are recognised as important aspects and will be mentioned, but not developed, in the results and analysis. The reason for this is, again, that these particular dynamics (essentially all other than gender) are not strictly relevant to my theoretical framework, nor research questions. Nevertheless, it will be noted as a suggestion for future research. In the data, some respondents underlined the importance of voting as a right, and specifically their own right. This is an intriguing

observation in relation to greater discussions on rights and also broader conceptualisations of democracy. However, due to its weak relevance to the research questions, this part of the material will not be investigated further.

Considering methodological limits, the research has been performed through qualitative methods, which indeed have some limits. For example, the selection of respondents in this thesis is small compared to a quantitative study. Further, this thesis is limited to a certain part of Brazil, that is, the south. As previously mentioned, the south of Brazil is different from the rest of the country in that it is wealthier, and that the majority of the population is of European descent. By only investigating this part of the country, the results found do not necessarily represent the stance of women all over Brazil. Thus, because of the research design, the thesis is limited in its potential to claim *general* insights or knowledges. What it can do, however, is to give deepened and nuanced insights on what drives women in Brazil to vote, and function as a build-on to previous research.

6. Previous research

Voting is a complicated phenomenon. It has been of scholarly interest for most of the 20th century (Galais & Blais, 2019), and has indeed become increasingly relevant in contemporary debates on (potentially) declining democracy (Blais et. al., 2004). Fundamentally, the most basic principle of democracy, the vote, is not fully understood. This chapter will start by describing the important literature on voting more generally, and on voting in Latin America. This includes different explanations or theories about why people vote at all. After this, this chapter proceeds to investigate whether voting is a gendered phenomenon and why.

6. 1. Voting and the particular Latin American context

There are different classical approaches to explaining voter turnout, which can be divided into institutional and socioeconomic factors. For example, Jackman (1987) makes an important contribution to the debate with his piece arguing for the importance of voting as political action, and the fact that institutions form and affect this behaviour. In a similar way, Lijphart (1997) argues for the importance of institutional factors, in his case, compulsory voting, as crucial in the aspiration for complete suffrage. Other scholars emphasise other factors for understanding electoral participation. Blais (2006), for example, discusses both individual as well as institutional factors. In his analysis of different factors, he recognises that compulsory voting is effective, as is close competition elections, for high turnout, and that turnout generally is lower in poorer as well as bigger countries (Blais, 2006). The exact reason for this is not elaborated, and Blais (2006) determines that further research is needed to establish the exact dynamics that these aspects (poverty and scale) might have on turnout.

Noteworthy, Blais (2006: 123) circles back to the ways in which Latin America seems to differ from patterns of voter turnout in other parts of the world. For example, in other parts of the world, the more eligible parties in elections, the lesser the turnout. However, in Latin America there is no relation between these factors (Blais, 2006: 118). Further, Blais (2006: 123) remarks that there is a need for further studies being done in a “new” context to further understand voter turnout, giving Latin America as an example as a new (that is, not previously studied) context. This indicates that there are different factors at play in the case of voter turnout in Latin America, in comparison to other parts of the world.

As has already been stated, Brazil, as many other Latin American democracies, employs compulsory voting (IDEA, nd). Compulsory voting is considered one of the most concrete ways of trying to resolve the issue of unequal electoral participation. Lijphart (1997) presents an analysis with arguments for and against compulsory voting. On the one hand, compulsory voting comes, in addition to raising the electoral participation, with secondary benefits, according to Lijphart (1997). First, a higher turnout can stimulate an increased interest and participation in politics. Second, it could decrease the importance of sponsoring and financial resources in politics and thus level the political playing field. If everyone has to vote, there is no need for huge election campaigns. Last, compulsory voting could decrease the need for political slander in debates up until elections. This in itself could also decrease political polarisation (Lijphart, 1997). On the other hand, Lijphart (1997) also underlines two points of critique. First, in order to force total participation, a lot of resources must be put on educating the electorate. Second, high voter turnout can also intensify political conflict. Although, both of these critiques do indeed strengthen the legitimacy of democracy (Lijphart, 1997). Fundamentally, Lijphart (1997) reaches the conclusion that compulsory voting compromises one democratic freedom (to choose whether to vote or not) in order to secure two others; freedom to participate and the freedom of equality. This makes compulsory voting a morally relevant institutional measure in the quest for not only universal, but also fully utilized suffrage (Lijphart, 1997).

Taking on the debate on compulsory voting from another perspective, Dassonneville et. al. (2017) underline the importance of nuancing the effect that compulsory voting has on the electorate. They raise the question whether forcing the electorate to the ballot might not actually increase representation, since they could vote blank or randomly (Dassonneville et. al., 2017). Interestingly, Dassonneville et. al. (2017) argue that the reasons for voting can be rationalised in two ways. Either through holding politicians and governments accountable for their actions by assessing their performance retrospectively, or by assessing their future objectives and one's own agreement with those objectives. Compulsory voting could interfere with both, if a considerable part of the electorate lacks sufficient knowledge to judge the performance or objectives of politicians (Dassonneville et. al., 2017). In their analysis of the effects on these two rationales during compulsory voting, however, Dassonneville et. al.

(2017) find that the electorate does not struggle with keeping politicians accountable. Although, they vote to a lesser extent in relation to agreement with objectives. It appears, according to Dassonneville et. al.'s (2017), that this is a somewhat more complex assessment that could require more skills and knowledge to be done in an adequate way. That's is, the electorate is better at judging past political performance, than assessing future political objectives. Fundamentally, Dassonneville et. al.'s (2017) reasoning bring an important aspect of compulsory voting to the debate, namely that it also requires an educated electorate in order to operate with high validity. That is, compulsory voting and higher participation might not necessarily mean better, or more accurate, representation.

As seen above, compulsory voting as a concept is often rationalised as a way of forcing the electorate to vote, which it does. Interestingly, Birch & Lodge (2015) turn the rationale around. Employing compulsory voting does not only force the electorate to vote, it also forces the politicians in power to regard everyone's potential vote (Birch & Lodge, 2015). Through relying on such a system, not only are the electorate kept accountable towards the democratic system, the politicians are also kept accountable towards the total *demos*. Although compulsory voting has been noted as an efficient tool to increase turnout, the specific mechanisms of compulsory voting and exactly when and how it works, thus is still somewhat elusive (Blais, 2006: 113).

Although socioeconomic factors are important for turnout, Blais (2006) raises an intriguing criticism of this aspect. Blais (2006: 117) argues that if turnout was closely interlinked with socioeconomic conditions, there ought to be noticeable differences in turnout during economic recession. However, one could also argue that recession in itself would increase political motive to influence politics (through voting). Thus, the reasoning behind the socioeconomic factor is rather ambiguous, and it does not present a clear explanation for turnout (Blais, 2006: 117). Verba et. al. (1995), departing from asking why people do *not* vote, have found that it can be described through a lack of a) capacity, that is a lack of time or knowledge b) motivation, some kind of political or internal (or other) driving force and/or c) insufficient mobilisation, put in simple terms; nobody asked them. Further, studies of voting in Latin America specifically have found that socioeconomic factors, such as age, employment, but also gender (although only as a part of the socioeconomic factors-

explanation), are important determinants for participation (Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2014).

Thus, it seems that the 'Latin American context' differs from the Western/western European – at least concerning research on electoral studies. First, the fact that a principal part of the research that has been made on voting, elections, and voter turnout has been done in the Global North/West/western Europe. For example, in comparison to other transitional democracies, such as Eastern Europe/post-Soviet, institutional factors are especially important for turnout in Latin America (Kostadinova & Power, 2007). Further, it seems that the level of democracy increases turnout in Latin America, but not in Eastern Europe (Kostadinova & Power, 2007). Thus, the Latin American context seems to be differing. Second, the Latin American context is something new and different and is expected to be different to the Western/European context (Blais, 2006).

6. 2. Is voting gendered?

When investigating the reasons for different levels of *political* participation for men and women, Burns et. al. (2001) notes that the following aspects are important: a) early experiences at home and in school, b) adult institutions: work, organisations, churches, c) available time, d) income, e) experiences with discrimination. Interestingly, the matter of experienced discrimination seems to increase political participation amongst women while not at all do it amongst men (Burns et. al. 2001: 259-260). Burns et. al. (2001: 260) do not, in relation to this statement, consider *why* this phenomenon is. This is an interesting and important finding since it is *gendered*. Fundamentally, gender is considered a socioeconomic factor in itself, seeing as it is such a fundamental divider considering access to, as well as being shut off from, resources in addition to its effect on lived experiences (Burns et. al., 2001: 359). Moreover, when looking closer at women's political participation research shows that a feeling of conscientiousness matters for participation (Burns et. al., 2001: 269-272). It seems that a particular feeling of togetherness, and joint responsibilities, in a gendered way, is important for women's political participation. The gendered aspect of this is the fact that it seems to be of importance for political participation for women, but not for men. This speaks for the fact that there are structural gendered differences in men and women's political participation.

Voting women matter for many reasons. Some of these are more intuitive than others. One of the most obvious arguments for the importance for securing that women cast their votes at the ballots is that they often represent more than half of the electorate (Burrell, 2005). Of course, this is of strategic importance, especially if total suffrage was achieved. Indeed, this is true both when thinking about civil mobilisation, but also from an accountability point of view towards a particular demographic of the *demos*. Naturally, in relation to this, questions about whether there exists particular ‘women’s issues’ will arise. In approaching this, Phillips (1998) notes that the concern is not in understanding what or if there is a unified ‘women’s issue’, but rather, that there indeed are matters that are of different interest for women and for men. In her own words: “Women have no monopoly on generosity of spirit, and even in these more conflictual situations they can expect to find a few powerful allies among the men. What they cannot really expect is the degree of vigorous advocacy that people bring to their own concerns.” (Phillips, 1998: 69). In drawing on and understanding that there indeed are different issues of concern for men and women, the socially constructed aspect women’s electoral participation becomes especially visible. This will be developed as a part of the theoretical framework for this thesis.

Scholars in the field of electoral participation have not yet reached a conclusion on whether women are more likely to vote than men, and especially why this is. It seems to be partly depending on different contexts, where societal differences and opportunities matter. In addition, there also seem to be differences between various parts of the world, where most of the research has been directed towards Western/Western European societies, and not in Latin America. Randall (1987) notes for example that the gender gap in electoral participation is diminishing generally, but that this doesn’t seem to be the case in a few particular countries, primarily in Latin America (and Brazil, in particular, is mentioned as an example). Further, there is no inconclusive answer to *why* women and men vote to a different extent. Although, according to research on women and men’s electoral participation, Coffé & Bolzendahl (2010), finds that a prevalent political interest affects women more than it does men. That is, women who are very interested in politics are more likely than men to vote than men equally interested in politics. All in all, voting does indeed seem to be gendered, although how this fact operates exactly is yet to be fully understood.

7. Theoretical framework

This thesis adheres to a feminist ontology, assuming that realities (in this case, for example, differences between men and women) are created and subjective. Because of this, I will depart from a hermeneutic epistemology, focusing on understanding and nuancing women's experiences of, and reasoning around electoral participation (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). This study departs from the idea that a) women and men are different, b) that this difference is socially constructed and learned and c) that they, because of this, behave differently. A concrete example of this is the participation paradox of women's high turnout at the ballots, which deviates from the level of political engagement of women in other areas of politics. This chapter will begin by declaring the theoretical standpoint on the paradox and how it might function. After this, it will continue to explore the key concept of the thesis: civic duty.

7. 1. The Paradox of Women's Electoral Participation

As previously discussed, women vote more than men even though they are, supposedly, less knowledgeable, engaged and interested in politics. This is referred to as the paradox of women's electoral participation and scholars are unsure as to why this is. What has been established, though, is that women vote to a greater extent in Latin America than their male counterparts. The fact that women vote more than men is surprising in relation to previous research (Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2014). Further, in their extensive analysis of turnout in Latin America between 2008-2010, Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita (2014) find that the following factors are important: age (the older, the more probability of voting, because of experience), and education (the more/higher, the more probable to vote). In relation to this, one could also speculate whether the particular experience of being a woman might be a factor that affects electoral participation.

Exactly what being a woman entails is of course different in different contexts, as well as an individual matter. On a theoretical level, though, this thesis departs from recognising the existence of the patriarchy, everywhere. The patriarchy is an idea conceptualised and used in different ways. Millett (1971) rationalises the patriarchy as a structure of male domination that stretches beyond relations within families. Rather, the male domination is present at all levels of society and affects every aspect of peoples' social being (Millett, 1971). Evidence

for the presence of the patriarchy are also to be found in Brazil, where women systematically have, for example, less access to the labour market and salary rates due to the fact that they are women, and not men (Lovell, 2000). Noteworthy, though, is the fact that much of the feminist discussion in Brazil, since the 1990's, has developed to centre around racial experiences (in relation to gender and other social conditions and structures) (Lovell, 2000). Of course, this is an important intersection of perspectives. Indulging in these specific dynamics is an important task for future research. Indeed, in further situating feminism in relation to proactive politics in Brazil, there have been issues in mobilising a unified front (Bohn & Levy, 2019). All in all, future research would benefit from further investigating the complex and dynamic intersections of 'being a woman' in Brazil, and what this entails. However, fundamentally in this thesis, the most important take away in relation to the existence of a patriarchy in Brazil is that women and men are different and that this affects the way they act.

In relation to electoral participation, the matter of gender, and how it influences voting, has been noted by scholars. Looking at women's political participation in Brazil, Arvate et. al. (2021) have studied how women's success in elections affect adolescent girl's electoral participation. Even though voting is compulsory in Brazil, the penalties for not voting affect different groups in different ways (Arvate et. al. 2021). However, although voting is compulsory, it seems that there are other external factors that affect electoral participation. Arvate et. al. (2021) find that adolescent girls who have experienced successful women politicians are more likely to vote than during conditions when men win (Arvate et. al., 2021). Interestingly, in relation to other explanations for turnout, that are not institutional, this approach regards external factors which do not directly affect the individual (such as socioeconomic situation or education would). Rather, this focuses on how the broader concept of "woman" affects behaviour in the electorate, that is, socialisation (learning particular social behaviours such as being conscientious and caring). Notably, there is something gendered (learned) at play in what incentivises women to vote.

Further, in trying to explain and find reasons for unequal, gendered turnout, the scholarly discussion often centres around women and men's different senses of duty (for example, Burns et. al., 2001; Galais & Blais, 2019). Although this has been lifted as a prominent and

probable explanation for gendered unequal turnout, some scholars have found that, rather, the explanation can be found in political interest and early socialisation (Galais & Blais, 2019). The importance of socialisation, that is, learning how to act and behave within a particular social context (as a woman), for women's electoral and political participation is also noted by other scholars in the field and more recent research (Galais & Blais, 2019; Arvate et. al., 2021).

The argument about socialisation is interesting, since it most definitely can be connected to structural gender experiences and inequalities. Women learn how to behave in relation in society as well as in relation to political behaviour. This supports the approach taken in this thesis, understanding gender as something produced in society. As argued by feminist theorist icon Simone de Beauvoir, a woman is not born, rather she is created (Beauvoir, 2002 [1949]). This is important to the whole approach and understanding of gendered electoral participation. Instead of being something fundamentally differing between men and women, these divergences that we can observe within social science, such as the paradox of women's electoral participation, is a symptom of structural gender inequalities and *learned* behavioural patterns as well as ways of experiencing the world. Fundamentally, this thesis will regard the social construction of gender and gender experience and how this affects the particular political behaviour of voting.

7. 2. Civic Duty – the Social Contract towards the State

Civic duty can be rationalised in different ways in relation to what the duty actually entails. On the one hand, it could be interpreted as more of a *legal* obligation, for example through compulsory voting or serving on a jury. For the observant reader, this might come off as an argument against testing this in Brazil, that employs compulsory voting. However, as argued in previous parts in this thesis, since there a) are people that *do* abstain from voting in Brazil, even though it is compulsory, and b) seems to be something gendered at play (since women vote more than men). Thus, there appears to be other aspects apart from legal duty influencing women's electoral participation in Brazil. On the other hand, civic duty as a concept could also be understood as having its core in a *moral* obligation, rather than anything else. The aspect of morality in relation to civic duty indicates that it is something internal, something felt and experienced, rather than physically imposed from the outside (in

the form of, for example, a fee). In both cases, however, the concept of civic duty is related to an obligation towards the state (in return for performed services by the state, such as security), that is, a social contract (IDEA, 2022). Through experiencing civic duty, either as a legal or moral force, a social contract between the citizen and the state is reinforced and, through this, upheld.

In historically contextualising this, the idea of civic duty can be traced as far back as to Rousseau and his ideas about social contracts and the citizen's higher duty to the collective (Rousseau, 1994 [1762]). In relating the concept of civic duty to voting specifically, Blais & Galais (2016) use the following definition: "The civic duty to vote is the belief that a citizen has a moral obligation to vote in elections." (Blais & Galais, 2016: 61). Fundamentally, this way of understanding civic duty and political engagement separates the act of voting from a purely expressive act of political opinion but rather centres it around the moral aspect of participation. This is a central point of departure for this thesis.

There has been some criticism brought forward against the idea of civic duty as important for a gendered understanding of electoral participation. For example, Galais & Blais (2019), refuse the idea that civic duty would have a particularly gendered presence in the voter's decision making on whether to vote or not. By analysing different western European countries, and the presence of dutiful and moral citizens, they found that men in all cases were more dutiful and moral – however, they note through their compiling of results from quantitative survey studies, that these results are primarily relevant in Western countries (Galais & Blais, 2019). This does of course not include Latin America. Additionally, other scholars have been underlining the importance of civic duty in relation to the rationalisation of voting. In essence, voting, as a political phenomenon in itself does not make sense – for anyone. Taking one step back and trying to understand voting generally, the logic of voting has to be explained by external factors rather than rational choice. Mueller (2003), for example, in assuming that people are rational, explains that voting is fundamentally illogical. It is more likely that the voter gets hit by a car on their way to the ballot, than that their own vote actually makes a difference in a presidential election (Mueller, 2003). However, this does not seem to stop most voters. The explanation for this must be found in other ways of

rationalising voting. One example of this could be a feeling of civic duty (Mueller, 2003; Goldfarb & Sigelman, 2010).

Morality is thus the key word in the civic duty informed (and through this, social contract to the state) theoretical framework of this thesis. The aspect of a sense of civic duty and morality is interesting in relation to the overarching research questions of this thesis – namely, what aspects drive women to vote. This study finds that the matter of civic duty, and its potential of being an explanation of why women vote more than men, is particularly compelling. In trying to rationalise women’s particular voting behaviour, previous research shows that a feeling of conscientiousness matters for participation (Burns et. al., 2001). It seems that a particular feeling of togetherness, and joint responsibilities, in a gendered way, is important for women’s political participation. In a similar manner, women’s conscientiousness is also an important aspect in relation to morality and voting (Carreras, 2018). Thus, the civic duty explanation goes well with the classic view of the woman as superiorly conscientious, rather than political (Carreras, 2018). Because of this, the civic duty explanation for women’s high electoral participation is appropriate to test, because it is probable, but also because it has yet (to my knowledge) to be investigated with qualitative methods. This would give more nuance and depth in understanding what drives women to vote. Within the scope of this thesis, the concept of civic duty will be operationalised through four particular factors identified in previous research (Carreras, 2018; Blais & Galais, 2016). These are: choice, guilt, opinion and country, and will be transformed from theory into practise, in the following chapter.

8. Methods and ethical considerations

In this chapter, the methods used, and practical research done in relation to this thesis, is presented and discussed. The chapter starts by explaining the choice of Brazil as a case, as well as why qualitative methods are consulted. It then proceeds to reflect on the use of an interpreter and subsequently discusses ethical considerations, as well as my own positionality in relation to the research. After this, the implementation, that is, the practical research done to obtain the data for this thesis, is explained. This includes a visual overview of the data. This chapter concludes with an explanation of how the analysis has been conducted.

8. 1. Methodological strengths and design

This thesis is a qualitative study, using semi structured interviews as its method of gathering data. Further, the interpretation of the interviews is done through a qualitative content analysis, which will be motivated and discussed in section “8. 5. Choice of method and structure of analysis”, page 38. This research is designed as a case study. As argued earlier, the case of women’s electoral participation in Brazil is deviating from what is known about women’s electoral participation in general. Because of this, it is particularly interesting to study, being a significant case in its context (Teorell & Svensson, 2007). Through this kind of case study (assuming that this particular case is especially important in its context which make the results particularly informative) the results developed through this design can add to new insights on women’s electoral participation generally (Gerring, 2004).

Previous research investigating electoral participation has, generally, been done with the means of quantitative methods (Blais, 2006; Burns et. al., 2001; Burrell, 2005; Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2014; Cordova & Rangel 2017; Fornos et. al., 2004, to give just a few examples). In an effort to take on the phenomenon of women’s electoral participation from a new angle by investigating more nuanced, individual reasoning behind this, this thesis strives to unravel new insights on women’s electoral participation. Conducting qualitative semi structured interviews, will be pivotal in this quest. It is a suitable method for understanding people’s lived experiences, reasoning and thoughts, in their own words (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992: ch. 2; Bryman, 2012: ch. 20). Indeed, interviewing is a particularly powerful and potentially subversive tool in consideration of the many centuries in which

women's stories have been systematically erased and ignored (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992: ch. 2). In using this kind of method with the potential of expanding and deepening, this thesis creates a space for these women to expand on their electoral participation.

8. 2. Reflections on the use of an interpreter

As previously said, Brazil is a Portuguese speaking country. Although I do speak some Portuguese, my knowledge is not profound enough to conduct interviews. Because of this, I relied on interpreters. Using interpreters involves some issues, things can, quite literally, get lost in translation, both ways. However, the use of interpreters can also be a valuable tool – in this case, it enabled me to access the Brazilian context. In the case of my research eight out of the ten interviews were done with live interpretation. Seven of these were done with one interpreter (interpreter 1) and the eighth was done with two other interpreters (interpreter 2 & 3). With interpreter 1, I spent time talking through my research in order to make sure that we had a shared understanding of my idea and vision for the interviews. The interpreter was also knowledgeable about the topic and understood my field of research. This is important to ensure research validity (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002). With interpreter 2 & 3 there was less time to go through my research in detail because they were unable to meet beforehand. The change of interpreter in this case was beyond my control. But, seeing as this was only the case for one of eight interviews (two were done in English and thus by myself, without an interpreter) this is not considered a significant problem for the overall results of the research.

8. 3. Ethical considerations & positionality

Interviewing is accompanied by ethical considerations keeping the Swedish Research Council's ethical stand points in mind (VR, 2017). All of the respondents were informed about the terms of participating and agreed to this in the beginning of the interview. All of the respondents were women over the age of 18, meaning, they were adults.⁶ I did not gather written consent from the respondents, since this would potentially in itself pose a risk of their identity being revealed. Further, since I, at the design stage of the research, wasn't sure about the literacy rate of the respondents I chose to design and approach this matter departing from the fact that respondents could potentially be illiterate (which one of them was). From an

⁶ The matter of gender identification will be elaborated in the section on collection of data, see from page 35.

ethical point of view, I find it less appropriate encouraging an illiterate person to sign something they obviously could not read. Therefore, I didn't ask them for written consent of participation, however, I did ask them to confirm that they had received a document covering information to participants on tape (see the document with information to participants in its full extent in Appendix 2). The document was provided to every participant in English and Portuguese (front and back of a physical piece of paper, or as a PDF through WhatsApp) and read out to the respondent that could not read.

Although the questions asked in the interviews were not particularly sensitive, I wanted to take all necessary precautions in order to create a situation where the respondents could speak freely and authentically. In interviewing, there is a thin line between co-creation and amplifying the voices of the subaltern/oppressed on the one hand and stealing their spotlight, misinterpreting their stories or violating their privacy on the other (Kvale, 2006). As a part of making sure that the interviews would be respectful and beneficial for everyone involved, I made sure that the interviewing took place with only women present and in a location of their choice. I am a woman, and I made sure that my interpreters were all women as well. Further, I made sure to tell the respondents that they did not have to tell me about their personal specific political preferences and opinions.

Being a Swedish, white, middle-class student, interpreting and drawing conclusions based on what the ten women from Brazil tell me influences my study. My own positionality matters for the questions I ask and the conclusions I draw and can therefore not be 'objective', but rather an observation through my own gaze (Haraway, 1988). This is something that has been kept in mind throughout the research process. A method, also employed, to deal with this is to, to as much detail as possible, be transparent with the material and methods consulted during the research process. This is also in line with good research ethics and transparency over all (VR, 2017). By being transparent and having an open and honest presentation of both my questions and the results, the potential influence of my positionality will not disappear. However, there is a possibility for other researchers to re-ask (or reformulate and reconceptualise) my questions and maybe discover further aspects of women's electoral participation in Brazil through their positionality.

8. 4. Implementation and setting

The research was done through a field visit to Brazil with the sole purpose of gathering data for the thesis. I was there for three weeks during March of 2023. The interviews were conducted on site in Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) with ten women. A majority of the interviews were done in Porto Alegre (the capitol of Rio Grande do Sul) in poorer areas and the rest in Caxias do Sul, which generally lacks areas with extreme poverty. The reason why the interviews were done in different cities was the location of the recruited respondents, that is, I travelled to where they were located. The fact that the respondents came from different cities, and more importantly, different socioeconomic backgrounds, is considered a strength since it has the potential of producing more firm results. Seeing consistent trends in the data is traceable to the fact that they are women, rather than differences in their socioeconomic background. This is because the respondents are from different backgrounds but are all women. This was the case, and it is therefore considered to be a methodological strength in the design, as well as the recruitment of respondents. In the following sections, the collection of data as well as operationalisation of the theoretical framework will be discussed.

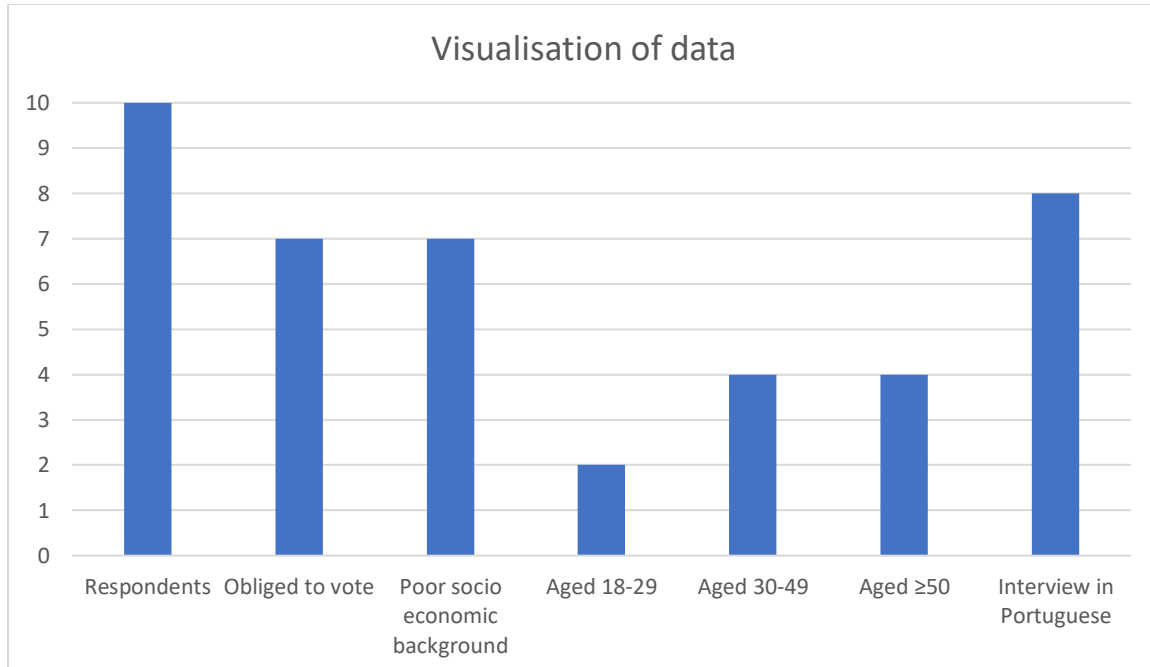
8. 4. 1. Collection and overview of data

The respondents were recruited through a snowballing process of getting in touch with people on site in Brazil. One of my most important contacts was a professor of Social Anthropology at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, the state in which the research was conducted. I made contact with this person with the help of my supervisor. Additionally, I reached out to my own acquaintances in Brazil in order to, through them, recruit potential additional respondents. I did not know, nor had any personal relationship, with any of the respondents before conducting the interviews. The selection of respondents was a result of available contacts and who was willing to talk to me. Also, it was important to make sure to make contact with women from different backgrounds (in order to be able to see differences on account of them as women). In addition, an important aspect was my access to get to them safely, as well as my interpreter's availability to be present with me for the interviews (although not all of the interviews were conducted in Portuguese).

All respondents identified themselves as women. The snowballing technique for recruiting respondent was used by asking my contacts to recommend other women I could talk to. Whether these were cis-women or not was not discussed, since I didn't explicitly ask for the respondents' gender identity. This was because, including an estranged and potentially stigmatised discussion on gender identity, presented the risk of distancing myself in an unnecessary way from the respondents. In addition, I made the decision that it was more important to stay close to my research question, which is regarding women. Fundamentally, I wanted to be context-friendly and respectful. Thus, I assumed, from the criterion I gave my contacts and through asking for further respondents in accordance with the snowballing technique, that the respondents indeed were women.

Finally, in order to give the reader an overview of the respondents I have included a graph with information about the respondents and the interviews below.

Graph 1. Summarised information on interviews and respondents



8. 4. 2. Operationalisation of civic duty

There are different ways of measuring civic duty, which of course has the potential of being a very complicated concept (François & Gergaud, 2019). In this thesis, civic duty is centred around four central questions that together incorporate the essence of the concept: a) choice, b) guilt, c) opinion, and d) country (Blais & Galais, 2016). These aspects of civic duty are also fundamental in Carreras (2018) conceptualisation of civic duty, when making the case for the concept as explaining women's higher electoral participation. Fundamentally, the matter of *choice* functions as a direct measure of whether the respondent considers voting a duty or not. Relating to this, the issue of experienced *guilt* is closely connected, but more centred on the 'self' than the more generally moral choice-aspect. The *opinion* aspect reflects the idea of voting as a function of expressing political opinions, and whether you could be excused from voting if you do not care about politics. Finally, the matter of *country* refers to the degree of importance ascribed to something greater than the self (Blais & Galais, 2016). In the context of this thesis, these aspects were formulated as questions in the interview guide as follows:

- *Choice*: What do you personally think about voting, is it rather a choice or a duty? Why?
- *Guilt*: How guilty would you feel if you did not vote? Or; Have you ever wished you voted when you have abstained? Why/why not?
- *Opinion*: What do you think about the fact that people who are not literate do not have to vote (in Brazil)? Should the same go for people who are not informed of, or interested in, politics?
- *Country/community*: What would you say are the most important aspects of voting in relation to democracy and (Brazilian) society?

Blais & Galais (2016) as well as Carreras (2018) research is quantitative and based on surveys. My research, on the other hand, is qualitative and the material is gathered through interviews. This means that the questions had to be adjusted to fit a qualitative format. This was done through three aspects. First of all, they were formulated in a way that is supposed to encourage reflective and more nuanced answers, rather than gradings. Secondly, the guilt-question (one which could be loaded and difficult for a person to answer face-to-face with a researcher) was adjusted if the respondent had not voted, as to avoid shaming. Thirdly, I chose to nuance the country-issue to revolve around country *and* community. Blais & Galais (2016) notes that this aspect had been ranked as particularly significant by respondents in

previous research as it was “...tapping a widespread justification for civic duty...” (Blais & Galais, 2016: 65). In doing so, I wanted to rather refer to it as country *and* community and thereby not necessarily relying on a nationalist centred rationale.⁷

8. 5. Choice of method and structure of the analysis

The analysis of the transcriptions of the interviews is based on a qualitative data analysis methods-approach (see for example Akinyode & Khan, 2018; Bryman, 2012: ch 24). The interviews were based on a pre-decided structure of an interview guide but did to some degree change depending on the conversation that took place in the moment between me and the respondent. This means that the order and exact formulation of the questions in some cases were altered to better enable the conversation, the essence, of the interview.

Qualitative data analysis as a method of reading the data was chosen due to its strength in presenting opportunities for interpretation and through connecting aspects in the data to more general themes in a clear and systematic way. However, in not only counting words, a qualitative data analysis rather looks for the *meaning* in the data (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). By viewing the data, having the pre-identified theoretical framework in mind, this way of analysing the data presents possibilities to group segments of data together. In doing so, the data is structured in a way that can reveal new connections and relations between different phenomena in the data (Akinyode & Khan, 2018; Bryman, 2012: ch 24). This is something that occurred in the analysis of the data collected for this research (see the connection found between choice, and country and community, elaborated in the next chapter).

Other potentially relevant methods of analysis in the case of my research, striving to unravel deepened, nuanced insights in an issue that has previously been investigated with quantitative methods, is to do a discourse analysis on the interviews. Fundamentally, a discourse analysis is much more interested in not only what is said, but how and why as well as in what context, that is, discourse (Gee, 2010). This would not serve the purpose of this particular thesis (although this might be something for future research to investigate, also in relation to

⁷ However, in the interviews, the respondents often connected their political interests towards an idea of improving Brazil. This will be discussed further in the analysis.

intersectional perspectives). The focus of this thesis is on trying to understand what effect civic duty has on women's electoral participation in Brazil, as well as why women vote in Brazil. This thesis has a hermeneutic epistemology; thus, interpretation of actions and behaviour is pivotal. However, by trying to unravel this, the research questions are asked in a focused way centred around voting, rather than entire discourses. Thus, based on the way in which the research questions of this thesis are asked, the most productive method of analysis of the data is a qualitative content analysis, and not a discourse analysis.

Because one of the research questions of this thesis is concerned with the matter of how civic duty (specifically) affects women's electoral participation in Brazil, the analysis is centred around the questions concerning experiences of civic duty. The reason for this structure of the analysis is to ensure a focused interpretation and to maintain a red thread throughout the analysis. Additionally, it is the main theoretical framework used to gain further understanding of what might drive women in Brazil to vote. The first step in the analysis was to go through field notes and to write the transcription of the interviews. This was done just after the interviews (not more than a week after the interview had been conducted). After this, main themes and ideas were identified. In order to structure the results in a more comprehensive way (the transcriptions from each interview are about six pages that is, 60 pages in total), I used the questions in the interview guide as a "skeleton" for structuring and getting an overview of the results. However, when the answers were structured according to this format, it became evident that there were some overlapping themes and aspects in relation to the civic duty concept. The results and analysis then were structured and presented according to that logic (see discussion on this in next chapter). The quotes presented in the analysis are examples of patterns found in the entire set of data. The quotes were specifically chosen because they were well formulated by the respondent and representative for general insights. If there were direct contradictions to some of the presented answers, these are also presented in order to ensure transparency.

In order to not lose sight of any important information not captured by the questions in the interview guide, I also relied on the main themes and ideas that I got during transcribing (mainly concerning political motives in relation to electoral participation). Additionally, I also, as I was going through the transcriptions again, noted important quotations and insights

that could be noted in the results-chapter, but developed in the conclusion and future research-chapter since it is not strictly related to my research questions.

9. Results and analysis

The account of the results from the interviews will be done jointly with the analysis. I will, based on the operationalisation of civic duty, go through the four different aspects, identified by Carreras (2018) and Blais & Galais (2016), in the following order: 1) choice, 2) country & community, 3) opinion, and 4) guilt. The reason for discussing the aspects in this particular order (that is different from how they were presented in the thesis until now) is that the results indicate particular overlapping and connections between the aspects. The connections will be explored and explained below. Because of this, it makes sense to discuss them in this relation to each other. After the different aspects of civic duty have been discussed, other prevalent insights that are important for women's electoral participation in Brazil will be discussed.

9. 1. Choice

The matter of duty in relation to voting, and whether it is a moral duty or a legal duty, could of course become complicated in a country with compulsory voting (as discussed previously in this thesis). In rationalising voting as a duty or a choice, some of the respondents asked about the “duty” aspect, perceiving it as if I was inquiring about their legal duty. The fact that I was primarily interested in the moral aspects of civic duty (in accordance with the definition of civic duty in relation to voting, presented by Blais & Galais, 2016), was discussed and explained during the interviews. In reflecting about this, the answers were often related to the right of voting and its potential. For example, respondent 3 elaborated:

Respondent 3: “I don't think that it is a duty to do that [vote]. It is a right. It is very important because it can help me, my children and my community. All of them. It can help everybody.”

She underlines here the political and subversive potential of voting. It is important because it can improve, help, her situation – that is, politics. In contrast, respondent 4's reasoning could be interpreted as more closely interlinked to the idea of a stricter “rules of the game” relationship to voting in regard to ‘choice or duty’. That is, by rationalising that voting is a

duty as a part of a relationship of accountability – she acknowledges the strictly functional relationship to the state that voting upholds, rather than voting with particular political goals.

Respondent 4: *“You have the right, and the duty to vote.”*

Interviewer: *“Right and duty?”*

Respondent 4: *“So, you have to do that [vote]. If you have the right and the duty to do that, you have to vote for someone that is caring for you, that is interested in your interest. We were 6 children, and I was the only one that had an interest in politics. And they vote for anyone, and they vote wrong. I admit that I sometimes vote wrong. But if you have the duty to vote you have the right to demand some kind of accountability.”*

Fundamentally, it is the last few words of this quote that makes it distinguished. The right to accountability – this does indeed relate to the idea that voting as a particular practice is a part of a social contract between the state and the citizen. Its primary purpose is not to achieve political gains, but rather to uphold an agreement between the state and the citizen. This aspect goes well in hand with the civic duty to vote-idea, and thus also with the ideas of Carreras (2018). But even more so, it resonates well with the expected importance of voting as a social contract that has been presented by policy actors such as IDEA (2022). In situating it in relation to compulsory voting, it also supports previous researches’ stance. In particular, the rationale presented by Birch & Lodge (2015), who argue for the importance of regarding the matter of increased accountability towards the government in a system with compulsory voting. In this case, in the last sentence of the quote above, respondent 4 reasons along the exact same line as Birch & Lodge (2015), although Birch & Lodge’s (2015) emphasis is on the strength of compulsory voting.

Although the observation concerning the importance of duty in relation to voting as a choice is interesting it was not particularly well represented in the material. For example, respondent 7 pushed that voting was a moral obligation because of her political beliefs and the things that she deemed important. She argued, when asked whether voting was rather a choice or a duty that:

Respondent 7: *“It is a moral duty.”*

Interviewer: *“Why?”*

Respondent 7: *“A majority of the population are suffering. The structure of Brazil after the end of slavery is violent. Because of that, it is necessary to vote.”*

Respondent 7's answer to the question indicates that she deems voting to be an appropriate way to respond to people suffering in Brazil. She recognises the structures of violence in Brazil and uses that as a motive to vote. In contrast to the presumptions of Carreras (2018) as well as Burns et. al. (2001), on women's particular conscientiousness in relation to fulfilling a duty towards the state, respondent 7 is not driven by a social contract, a duty, with the state. Rather she is motivated by her own opposition to the current political state. Further, other respondents also argued for the idea that voting is a *political* duty rather than something else. For example, respondent 2 argued:

Respondent 2: *“It's a moral obligation. Like, my conscience tells me that I have to vote, because I want to help Brazil getting better. Brazil, and my community. I am not physically forced to do it and its important. So, you kind of have a choice, because you are not physically imposing me to do that, but I have a moral obligation.”*

What is particularly interesting here is the use of the word 'moral'. Respondent 2 recognises that voting is a moral obligation. However, rather than connecting this moral obligation to a contract with the state, and therefore also with the idea that civic duty is the primary motivator for electoral participation, as argued by Carreras (2018), she connects it to greater political purposes of improving Brazil. Interestingly, respondent 7 as well as 2, do not just see their personal politics in the act of voting. Rather they recognise the importance of their vote for the whole of Brazil and for their communities. This way of understanding the duty to vote and relating it to the political improvement of the country does indeed go very well in hand with the idea of civic duty and it being measured through a responsibility to country and community, underlined as an aspect of civic duty by Carreras (2018) as well as Blais &

Galais (2016). Further, one could also connect this way of reasoning about the importance and function of voting to the idea of conscientiousness, and that this particular feeling is important for women's electoral participation (Burns, et. al., 2001). During the interviews, many respondents connected their reasoning around choice and duty to their country. Because of this, I will discuss this aspect next.

9. 2. Country and community

The aspect of civic duty in relation to country and community, and its positive relation to women's electoral participation, is the aspect of civic duty with most support in the data. This is also noted by Blais & Galais (2016). As seen above, respondent 7 and 2 relate their thoughts about voting, and it being a moral duty, to a sense of responsibility to improve their community as a whole as well as the country. This is a marginal difference to the proposed civic duty explanation. It seems that the women do have a duty towards their country. This is something that goes in line with the way in which civic duty is measured by Blais & Galais (2016), as well as how it is suggested as relevant for women (Carreras, 2018). However, taking the argument one step further, the women interviewed in my material recognise a duty to vote to improve their country. Through this, the reasoning becomes political. Essentially, the reasoning by the women does not merely concern the citizens relationship with the state and vice versa. This has been suggested by the conceptualisation of civic duty in relation to women, made by Carreras, 2018 as well as Burns et. al. (2001) when suggesting that conscientiousness matters significantly. Rather, the reasoning of the women in this study focuses on voting as a political act to achieve particular political goals (making the country better). Fundamentally, what is of interest in this research is what motivates women in Brazil to partake in the particular practice of voting. A specific sense of civic duty is suggested as an explanation (by Carreras, 2018). Thus, in the scope of this particular quest, it is not interesting what they are voting for (the particular political preferences might be influenced by conscientiousness etc.), but rather what makes them vote *at all*. To add another example, when being asked what the most important aspect of voting is, respondent 5 answered:

Respondent 5: *"It is a good way to improve the country. To help things get better."*

For respondent 5, the most important function of voting, is not to fulfil a duty towards the state (social contract), but rather to pursue political goals. However, to contrast this, one respondent recognised voting in relation to citizenship, and the relationship to the state very clearly, thus in line with the conceptualisation of civic duty as an explanation for women's electoral participation suggested by Carreras (2018) and underlined by the suggestion of the importance of conscientiousness by Burns et. al. (2001). Upon being asked if she would vote even if it wasn't compulsory, she answered yes and explained it by the following comment:

Respondent 10: *“Because it is my right. It is my choices, my opinions. In a way, I think it's my obligation as a person of society to vote.”*

The quote above can be divided into two parts. The first two sentences go more in line with the idea of a personal political agenda that is actualised through the act of voting (which also would align with the reasoning of respondent 7, 2, and 5 above). It is the woman's own choices and opinions that make the act of voting something worth to do. The last sentence, however, is much more related to an idea of a social contract with, and a duty towards, the state – as suggested by Carreras (2018), and Blais & Galais (2016) in relation to voting. Interestingly, it seems that these two aspects can coexist in the reasoning about the act of voting. In a similar way, respondent 8 also emphasised the importance of a fulfilment of a social contract through electoral participation. Upon being asked about the most important aspects of voting, she answered:

Respondent 8: *“You can ask for accountability. What did you do for the people?”*

This comment again underlines the importance of the social contract between the state and the citizen, and how voting enables it. Again, this does also go hand in hand with Birch & Lodge's (2015) way of rationalising compulsory voting. In participating (and for Birch & Lodge (2015) in getting a big part of the electorate to participate) citizens can claim accountability. Interestingly, in relation to country and community, the material indicates that there indeed are political motives – rather than strictly moral in relation to civic duty and

upholding a social contract – (for example, respondent 7 & 2 on page 43), but that they also relate to a feeling of a moral obligation to the country (for example, respondent 5, 10 & 8).

9. 3. Opinion

When asked about whether people who don't know or care about politics should still be obliged to vote, some respondents circled back to the fact that the general public in Brazil is ill equipped to fully understand and comprehend politics. They are thus also ill equipped to make a wise choice while casting the ballot. Most women argued that many votes lose their importance because they are cast by people who are compelled to vote, rather than by people who have, in a well thought through way, cast their ballot. Respondent 6, who said that she finds it important to talk about politics herself, answered the question whether people who are not interested in politics should not have to vote, with the following comment:

*Respondent 6: "They should not be obliged to vote. Seriously, how are they going to vote? Their choice will be unthoughtful."*⁸

The firm statement that they should not be obliged to vote from respondent 6 contradicts the idea of voting as a civic duty. Essentially, the idea presented by Blais & Galais (2016) and Carreras (2018) suggests the civic duty to vote as a pure social contract between the state/electoral system and the citizen, where political outcome is unimportant. Respondent 6, on the other hand, demonstrates a frustration with others in the electorate not thinking through something carefully. This indicates that she perceives political outcome and political choice as important. She even questions people who are not interested in politics' ability to vote. This concern can also be found in previous research on compulsory voting. Particularly, Dassonneville et. al. (2017) has found that compulsory voting risks creating election results with poor validity. That is, with compulsory voting, considerable parts of the electorate might not be educated or knowledgeable enough to make informed electoral decisions. Respondent 6's approach concerning whether voting should be perceived as a choice or not, indicates her

⁸ In this quote, I presume, from the context in which it is said, that the respondent means "not well thought through", rather than inconsiderate or unkind towards other people, as unthoughtful might mean. This interview was done with an interpreter and I presume that this was a simple mistake in the translation.

understanding of voting as something that includes political thinking and afterthought. This in itself is different from the presumption of women's disinterest in politics, presumed in the conceptualisation of the importance of civic duty (instead of politics) suggested by Carreras (2018). Fundamentally, the presumption of women's political disinterest is the core of the idea of a paradox of women's electoral participation. Further, in a similar way as respondent 6, and in answering the same question, respondent 9 fills in:

Respondent 9: *“Oh, gosh. Probably yes, because those people just vote, they don't do research. They just vote for whatever. It doesn't make sense for them to be there voting. They just put their vote on someone who's not... like the vote is not going to be real in a way that you don't know that that's what they believe in. So yeah, I think, they shouldn't have to vote.”*

Interestingly, the issue of morality in relation to the answers about 'opinion' is also somewhat deviant from the overall understanding of participation that is suggested by the civic duty explanation. In essence, this way of reasoning directly contradicts the suggested separation of voting from something political to rather being a duty, suggested by Blais & Galais (2016). The women do recognise that voting is important and indeed the 'right thing to do' (as seen above). However, they are not primarily driven by a moral duty towards their role as citizens of a state (civic duty). Rather, these women are political and have a specific idea about what is right – namely their own *political* beliefs and motives. Thus, the civic duty explanation for women's over representation at the ballots might seem accurate and true at first glance – they do vote because they think that it is the right thing to do. In that way, these results go hand in hand with the observations and theorisation made by Carreras (2018) as well as the idea of conscientiousness (Burns et. al., 2001). What becomes evident, though, after letting these women expand on these issues, is that what drives them to engage in the particular act of voting is rather their political beliefs and desires to make a change for their families, country and communities, not a moral obligation to the state through civic duty. In this way, the results from this research indicate that there indeed is a need to investigate these complicated issues about morality and motives in a more in-depth way and specifically in trying to understand women's political motives more thoroughly in relation to political activity. This is an observation that will be revisited in the conclusion, as well as in the suggestions for future research.

9. 4. Guilt

What became evident during the interviews was that most women were not primarily guided by guilt in their reasoning around voting. Their reasoning around guilt was sometimes inconsistent in relation to the idea of civic duty-morale. Respondent 4 underlined the moral importance of voting, but rejected the concept of guilt in relation to abstaining from voting:

Respondent 4: *“Not to vote is to be a coward. But I wouldn’t feel guilty if I didn’t vote.”*

In trying to deep dive into this quote, the first sentence goes hand in hand with the idea of some kind of duty as an important mechanism in justifying and reasoning about voting – it is something that needs to be done and avoiding it is bad. This would speak to the suggested drivers of women’s electoral participation made by Carreras (2018) and Burns et. al. (2001). The other sentence, on the other hand, rejects the whole idea of guilt. In connecting these two sentences, respondent 4 pinpoints a very intriguing core that might entail the driving mechanisms behind women voting. She is not driven by a duty in relation to a state or anyone else. Rather, she underlines the importance of voting in itself – regardless of any exterior pressure or duty. In a way, this resonates with the idea of voting as a moral duty (Blais & Galais, 2016). At the same time, it completely rejects the idea of a pressure to fulfil this duty (since guilt would not be relevant). In recognising the singular importance of voting, respondent 8 expressed a similar sentiment when asked if she would feel guilty if she didn’t vote:

Respondent 8: *“Sad. If I didn’t have the possibility.”*

Interviewer: *“But not guilty?”*

Respondent 8: *“No.”*

The quotes from these two respondents (4 & 8) exemplify how the women valued the singular act of voting as important for them in itself, and not in relation to a duty. If they

didn't vote, they would not feel good about it – thus, they do have motives that drives them to vote. However, this drive is not avoidance of guilt. In pushing the same point, although saying that she would indeed feel guilty if she didn't vote, respondent 9 argued:

Interviewer: “Would you like to share a bit about why you would feel guilty?”

Respondent 9: “Because again I think that it is important to vote, I think that it makes a difference. It just one vote of, I don't know how many people we have in Brazil...”

Interviewer: “Many!”

Respondent 9: “Haha! But I think it's important, because it's a way to show that you are happy about something or that you are not happy about something. And it's also a way to try to make better.”

Respondent 9's answer contains aspects that do not obviously point towards civic duty. She says that it is important to vote and that it makes a difference – which would indicate an emphasis on the political aspect of voting, rather than a feeling of guilt in relation to voting as a civic duty. But she also lifts the aspect of voting as being something where the citizen “just” shows their approval or disapproval. This particular statement can be interpreted in different ways. Showing approval or disapproval is of course a political act – but also, it is just how electoral democracy works and could therefore be perceived as just fulfilling a duty as a citizen of an electoral democracy. This would go in line with the presumptions about fulfilling a duty as suggested by Carreras (2018) and specifically Blais & Galais (2016) as well as the interpretation of social contract made by policy actors such as IDEA (2022). However, the last sentence, strengthens the impression of her political perception of voting as a political act – voting is a way to make things better, and not just something done as a part of a social contract with the state.

Similarly, other women would also argue that guilt does play a part in their reasoning about voting, but not in relation to the state and their duties towards it through voting. For example, respondent 2 rejected the idea that she would owe something to the state since her own work

fully sufficed her potential duties to others. When asked if she would feel guilty if she abstained from voting, she said:

Respondent 2: *“I would not feel guilty, because I do a lot of work for the community.”*

Again, the duty and care for others (community and beyond) is significant, which is in accordance with Burns et. al. (2001) as well as Carreras (2018). However, the theory about the ‘pure’ connection between voting and civic duty, as suggested by Blais & Galais (2016) (and implemented on the specific case of women’s electoral participation by Carreras, 2018) does not seem to fully explain the motives and driving mechanism for women’s electoral participation. One of the respondents nuanced the guilt aspect. When talking about guilt in relation to voting, respondent 1 argued:

Respondent 1: *If I didn’t vote, I would not feel guilty. But how can I demand something from the person in power if I don’t do my part? If I don’t vote, I can’t complain. That’s the reason why, because now I have the right to [demand].*

Interviewer: *Would you say that that’s an important factor when you think about voting, or no?*

Respondent 1: *This right of demanding something is more important than the obligation [to vote].*

Interestingly in this case, it seems that the fulfilment of the social contract is more important than the moral obligation to vote. In addition, she also underlines, in accordance with the strengths of compulsory voting identified by Birch & Lodge (2015) in previous research, the aspect of accountability that comes with voting. Thus, in one quote, the respondent implies the civic duty approach by underlining the importance of fulfilling the social contract towards the state, which resonates with the conceptualisation of civic duty suggested by Carreras (2018) as well as Blais & Galais (2016). But at the same time respondent 1 doesn’t fully comply to this, by rejecting the concept of guilt as a relevant factor. In a way, she is more

politically strategic in the way in which she prefers her own ability to influence, rather than being motivated by any kind of duty.

The results from the interviews indicate that the issue of civic duty in relation to voting is complex. Fundamentally, it needs to be analysed in depth and through more qualitative measures. It has become evident, though, that the civic duty – morality towards the state – explanation – is not sufficient to fully understand women’s electoral participation in Brazil. In the next section, I will reflect upon additional information that emerged during the interviews that adds some interesting aspects to the gendered mechanisms of women’s electoral participation.

9. 5. Other insights found in the material on why women vote

Women vote to a greater extent than men in Brazil – that is a fact. Why this is (that is, what drives women in Brazil to vote, RQ2), however, is up for debate. In order to understand the reasoning behind women’s electoral participation even further, we need to scrutinise what is seen as politics and how it, at least according to my data, motivates women to vote. As part of trying to understand what drives women to vote, the most intuitive reason (that they care about, and want to influence politics) was investigated. As can be seen in the interview guide (Appendix 1), some of the questions concerned the women’s interest and experiences with voting, elections and politics. Fundamentally, since the basic foundation of the paradox of women’s electoral participation (that they vote, even though they are less interested in politics) stands to be found in the level of interest in politics (or lack thereof) that women possess. Thus, some of the questions in the interview guide sought to clarify this issue. In the material retrieved for this thesis, it becomes evident that politics are important for the women and that voting is a prevalent factor in their reasoning about politics. However, it is noteworthy that they don’t necessarily see voting as the best, most efficient or appropriate way to affect politics. When asked if they thought that voting was a good way to influence politics, respondent 2 and 5 said:

Respondent 2: “Voting is important, but all other political activity is as important.”

Respondent 5: *“It can help to get a little bit better. But it will not solve all things.”*

Interestingly, and in a more elaborate way, respondent 1 was sure that voting was not enough. Rather, she valued being part of a community in which she could encourage others to vote for something particular:

Respondent 1: *“I think that both things are important. Voting is important, but being part, in this case, of a community centre is really important. Because then I can influence other people: ah, voting for this person can change things, can convert into something that we are trying to change in the community centre. We fight some injustices here and if you vote for someone you can convert on this topic.”*

In this way, respondent 1 does not only claim her own political motives through her own vote but also wishes to inspire other people to vote in line with her own political interests as well. Also, she recognises collective voting and its particular potential in affecting politics.

The results from the conducted interviews indicate that there is more to explore. The civic duty explanation for the paradox of women’s electoral participation does not seem to be sufficient, or at least exactly accurate. Women in Brazil seem to be motivated by civic duty in relation to their country as a whole and their communities, but a minority of them are motivated by a civic duty in relation to their roles as citizens, upholding a contract with the state. How does this inform our understanding of what drives women in Brazil to vote? Again, we know that women vote more than men in Brazil. The question is *why*. The answers from the women that were asked in relation to this research did not fully resonate with the civic duty explanation, however, they did have some different inputs on the matter. For example, respondent 2 argued (on page 43) that her conscience guided her in her decision to vote. This resonates well with the explanation that women are more conscientious and that that is why they vote more, which is part of the foundation for the whole civic duty

explanation to the paradox of women's electoral participation (Carreras, 2018, as well as Burns et. al., 2001).

In the material, an interesting finding was that many women claimed to not be too knowledgeable about, or interested in, politics. But when asked to expand or to share their opinions, almost everyone was keen to improve certain issues through political measures. For example, one woman, who had just told me how much she likes to discuss and even called herself a "fighter" in political discussions answered my following question like this:

Interviewer: "Would you say that you are interested in politics?"

Respondent 6: "Not much, but I stay alert. I hear things."

There seemed to be an aversion towards politics and politicians amongst the women. For example, respondent 3 said:

Respondent 3: "In the church they say that you mustn't get involved in politics. It's bad and associated with the devil. You don't want to be involved with that. You cannot participate in that."

The connection to religion was not a very common theme in the data but could be relevant in Brazil as a larger context. Previous research has underlined the significance of religion in trying to understand women's electoral (and political) participation (see Burns et al. 2001, for example). Within this strand of thought, religion has been understood as a negative factor on participation. Through that perspective, this quote seems to support this conclusion. In a similar way, although not motivated by religion *per se*, respondent 4 underlined, upon being asked what her first thoughts and feelings about voting and elections are:

Respondent 4: "I get revolted by political parties. Because, political parties should think about the people and the political parties are divided, so the people are divided too. Political

parties don't think about the people, they only think about themselves. Political parties and elections should be an instrument of change."

Interestingly, respondent 4 and her engagement in her community could indeed be described as political. She is a community leader who takes a proactive role in local governance. In also nuancing the previous quote from respondent 3, she also said, earlier in the interview, that she indeed wanted to vote and to know more about politics. During the process of gathering the material for this thesis, it often became apparent that the women refused or rejected political engagement and knowledge when asked directly. However, as the conversation progressed and when they were given the space to expand on their views and standpoints and what mattered to them, it did indeed become evident that they do care about politics, and that they are engaged in politics on different levels. This finding contradicts previous research on this specific matter (for example, Carreras, 2018). Fundamentally, when consulting my material, it seems that there is a discrepancy regarding what is understood and conceptualised as politics and women's political engagement. Previous research on why women vote suggest that women are apolitical, my data suggests otherwise.

To summarize, it seems that the civic duty explanation to the paradox of participation does somewhat resonate with women in Brazil. However, when digging deeper, through qualitative methods, it becomes evident that things previously expected (for example, that women are uninterested in politics and that politics is not a motivating factor for electoral participation) seems not to be found in the case of Brazil. All in all, it does seem that the civic duty explanation is inconsistent when discussed more in-depth with women in Brazil.

10. Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

The final chapter of this thesis will begin by presenting the three conclusions drawn from the research. These entail that civic duty is complex, that the data in relation to the civic duty explanation questions the current assumptions about women and lastly, that voting is an important political act in relation to democracy as a whole. After this, some suggestions for future research will be made.

10. 1. Conclusion

This thesis set out to try to further understand one of the most fundamental mechanisms of democracy – voting. Specifically, in order to address the paradox of women’s electoral participation, this thesis was interested in understanding what drives women in Brazil to vote. By using another research method than has previously been adopted to test the theory of civic duty, this thesis suggests alternative explanations regarding what drives women to vote. Through engaging with civic duty – what it might be and how it might affect women’s actions and perceptions of the world, and in particular, political behaviour through voting – this thesis has found that women’s reasoning about electoral participation is more nuanced than previous research has suggested. The thesis draws three conclusions in relation to the research questions.

Firstly, the paradox of women’s electoral participation is complicated and complex. This is why this thesis has attempted to understand how civic duty affects women’s electoral participation in Brazil (RQ1) through conducting interviews. By not only asking questions through quantitative measures, and thereby getting less nuanced answers, this thesis has taken one step further and through this learned more about Brazilian women’s motives for their electoral participation. In investigating what drives women to vote, the thesis has found that the civic duty explanation does have some relevance regarding the sense of civic duty in relation to country and community (RQ1). However, when the women in Brazil are given the opportunity to elaborate, a much more complex reasoning emerges. It seems that these women indeed are political, even though they might not do politics in the same way as established and institutionalised politicians. The results from this research effort, thus suggests that the civic duty explanation is not enough to fully explain what drives women’s

electoral participation in Brazil (RQ1). However, future research has more information to gather concerning women's political motives and how they matter in relation to electoral participation. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Secondly, previous research has suggested civic duty as being *the* gendered explanation for women's electoral participation. This is because women are expected to be more conscientious than men. However, the results from this study questions the seemingly routine assumption that women are more dutiful than men. Fundamentally, this thesis has discovered that there are other things than civic duty that drive women to vote in Brazil (RQ2). When asked, the women in Brazil admittedly say that they are not particularly interested in politics. However, when asked to elaborate, it seems that there is more to the story. In acknowledging this, this thesis also wishes to nuance the presumptions about women's interest in politics, or rather, presumed lack thereof (Carreras, 2018). When these women are given the space and opportunity to express themselves, it turns out that they are in fact political, and have political motives through their electoral participation. Previous research might have missed this aspect when assuming that women are apolitical. This thesis thus suggests further research about what is perceived as political, for whom. Thus, the whole rationalising for the paradox of women's electoral participation is shaken to its core, but the issue itself still remains – women are less politically engaged, everywhere, except through voting. To sum up, what drives women to vote in Brazil (RQ2) is partly explained by civic duty, but there are also explicitly political motives for their electoral participation.

Thirdly, this thesis concludes that voting is important for politics and political participation. This is both underlined directly by the women in Brazil, but also a conclusion drawn from greater theoretical assumptions. Women's political behaviour is not yet fully understood, and there is much left to explore. What remains evident, though, is the fact that the whole idea of democracy fails to be fully realised if not every person; man, woman or otherwise, can fully and equally participate in politics. This is currently not the case. Through gaining more knowledge about the particular behaviour of voting, and why women do it more than men, deeper insights about democracy and full political participation for *all*, can be realised. This thesis has contributed to this knowledge. In addition to this, in order to make sure that politics remains participatory, we need to make sure that voting is enabled and something that people

engage with. Although this might not be enough to safeguard democracy all together, electoral participation is a principal institution in order to strengthen and ensure democratic rule and principles in the future.

10. 2. Suggestions for future research

The paradox of women's electoral participation remains. Although it is still not fully understood, it presents a marvellous opportunity to understand democracy even further. What is it that makes voting such a compelling political activity for women? In Brazil, it seems to be its political potential, although this needs to be explored and investigated further. But the fact remains that the paradox of women's electoral participation is still true for countries with very different conditions and settings. Brazil is a country with extreme issues in comparison to Sweden for example, with more low-level issues. Maybe voting would be perceived more as a 'rule of the game'-act in a setting with lower political stakes? This also relates to the matter of intersectionality, and how it might present further opportunities as a research subject for future academic endeavours. Fundamentally, how do experiences of class, race and age, as a woman, affect electoral participation? And how might this inform other, already existing theories about the importance of socioeconomic factors for electoral participation (for example Carreras & Castañeda-Angarita, 2014). Additionally, future research might benefit from investigating this through yet even further new methods, such as discourse analysis. This could be particularly well adapted to the inquiry of intersectional perspectives on electoral participation.

In addition, future research has the exciting opportunity to further explore electoral participation in Latin America. Blais (2006: 123) makes an accurate comment in calling Latin America a "new" context. Of course, it is not new at all, but the fact still remains that there is an intrinsic value in continuing to investigate contexts outside of the West, creating new knowledge. Principally, this is pivotal for the continuation of an epistemological decentralisation.

Lastly, an intriguing potential for future research is to completely throw the rationale around by asking: why do *men abstain* from voting in Brazil? As has been established, voting is

indeed gendered, but exactly how this operates is still unknown. A possible venture for future research could be to take the opportunity to investigate what it is that makes men abstain from the political act of voting. Ultimately, the question could also be asked; is the absence of men in some way related to what drives women to vote?

The matter of electoral participation is intriguing enough in itself and has puzzled (and will probably continue doing so) scholars within democratic theory on all levels of governance. In nuancing the enigma of electoral participation by also considering the paradox of women's electoral participation, the problem is made even more complex. By considering electoral participation through a gendered perspective, this thesis has shed light on the issue of electoral participation from a feminist standpoint. Ultimately, in understanding more about women's electoral participation, and what drives it, we do not only understand more about democracy, but also of how the patriarchy operates, and is challenged, within democracy.

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Appendix 1. Interview Guide

Warm-up questions

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? How old are you and what are you doing in life right now (working, studying, other)? Where and how do you live (apartment/house, city/outside)?
2. What are your first thoughts or feelings when you hear the words “voting” and “elections”?
3. Do you always vote in presidential elections? Why/why not?

Practicalities of voting

4. Do you know how voting works and where you could do it? Is it complicated or easy?

If they are not voting/do not want to vote:

5. Is there a particular reason for why you abstain from voting? Can you tell me more about that?

Reasoning about voting in relation to civic duty

Self

6. Do you think that politics is important? Why/why not?
7. How were discussions about voting and political participation in your surrounding when you were younger?
 - a) *Did you talk about it in school or with friends and family?*
8. In which scenarios do you talk about politics now? a) With friends/family, online?
9. Would you still vote if it wasn't compulsory? Why/why not?
10. What is important in your decision on whether to vote or abstain?
 - a) *If you vote, how do you decide who to vote for?*⁹
11. Where do you go for information about voting (or if not voting, *politics*) and why?
 - a) *Do you ever use social media? Which forums?*

⁹ During the interviews, I'm making clear that they do not have to tell me *who* they are voting for.

Choice, Guilt, Opinion & Country/community

12. What do you personally think about voting, is it rather a choice or a duty? Why?
13. How guilty would you feel if you did not vote? **OR** Have you ever wished you voted when you have abstained? Why/why not?
14. What do you think about the fact that people who are not literate do not have to vote (in Brazil)? Should the same go for people who are not informed of, or interested in, politics?
15. What would you say are the most important aspects of voting in relation to democracy and society?

General thoughts and voting in relation to others

16. What are your thoughts about the importance of voting in relation to other political activity? (For example: protesting, being active in a political party, convincing others to vote for specific candidates, writing political articles etc.).
17. What do you think about the fact that voting is compulsory for many people in Brazil?

Round up

18. Is there anything you would like to add to the conversation?
19. Do you have a question for me?
20. Can you think of anyone else that I should talk to?

Appendix 2. Information to Participants (in English and Portuguese)

As is obvious by the title of the information to participants, it says that it investigates women in Porto Alegre, this was not the cases, since some of the recruited respondents were residing in Caxias do Sul. The information to participants document was formulated before all of the respondents were recruited.

In addition, my phone number has been removed from this version (but was of course included in the version given to the participants) of the document, for integrity reasons. However, my email remains.

Information about participation in a research project on women's electoral participation in Porto Alegre, Brazil (ENG)

I, Tora Dirke Lundberg, am a Master's student at University of Gothenburg, Sweden, doing research on women's electoral participation in Brazil. The purpose of the research is to get a more nuanced understanding of women's electoral participation, and/or lack thereof, using Brazil as a case study.

All of the information gathered in relation to this research project is done with academic purposes only and will be treated with confidentiality. Participation is completely voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time until submission and publication. Participants will not receive compensation. As a participant, you will be anonymised and your personal information (such as name) and the recording & transcription of the interviews will be stored in Gothenburg University's cloud services. I might cite parts of interviews in the thesis, however, this will be anonymised. The research results will be published, upon completion, at the Gothenburg University Publications Electronic Archive (GUPEA) and can be accessed through the following link: <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/?locale-attribute=en>.

If you have any questions or inquiries regarding the research itself or your participation, you can email me at toradirke@gmail.com or reach me through Whatsapp (+46 XX XXX XX XX).

Informações sobre a participação em um projeto de pesquisa sobre a participação eleitoral feminina em Porto Alegre, Brasil (POR)

Eu, Tora Dirke Lundberg, sou uma aluna de mestrado na Universidade de Gotemburgo, Suécia, pesquisando sobre a participação eleitoral feminina no Brasil. O objetivo da pesquisa é obter uma profunda compreensão da participação eleitoral das mulheres, e/ou da falta dela, usando o Brasil como estudo de caso.

Todas as informações coletadas em relação a este projeto de pesquisa são feitas apenas para fins acadêmicos e serão tratadas com confidencialidade. A participação é totalmente voluntária e pode ser retirada a qualquer momento até a entrega e publicação da pesquisa. Os participantes não receberão remuneração. Como participante, você será anonimizado e suas informações pessoais (como nome) e a gravação e transcrição das entrevistas serão armazenadas nos serviços em nuvem da Universidade de Gotemburgo. Posso citar partes de entrevistas na tese, no entanto, isso será anonimizado. Os resultados da pesquisa serão publicados, após a conclusão, no Arquivo Eletrônico de Publicações da Universidade de Gotemburgo (GUPEA) e podem ser acessados através do seguinte link (em Inglês): <https://gupea.ub.gu.se/?locale-attribute=en>.

Se você tiver alguma dúvida ou pergunta sobre a pesquisa em si ou sobre sua participação, envie um e-mail para toradirke@gmail.com ou entre em contato comigo pelo Whatsapp (+46 XX XXX XX XX).