



**Master Thesis**

*Public Governance*

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The role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the  
administrative resilience of the municipal council

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August 6, 2021

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# Preface

Before you is the master thesis titled *The role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council*. This master thesis was written in conclusion of my master's degree in Public Governance with a focus on the track Justice, Security, and the Governance of Risks.

During my four years of education at Tilburg University, I was elected as a member of the municipal council in my home municipality of Laarbeek. The synergy between this position and my education provided plenty of motivation to fulfill both tasks simultaneously. In these years, my fascination for and experience with local governance continued to grow, together with my interest in public order and security. It is from this perspective that my master thesis explores the role of the municipal clerk on the subject of administrative resilience.

First, I would like to express my gratitude to both Toine Spapens and Niels Karsten for their input, guidance and support during this research. Second, I would like to thank all involved municipal clerks for their enthusiasm and contribution to my research. In addition, I would like to extend my thanks to the Association of Clerks for their input and reflection. Finally, I would like to thank all municipal council members in the region of De Kempen that participated in the survey that was part of this research.

Ron van den Berkmortel

Aarle-Rixtel, August 6, 2021

# Abstract

A growing awareness exists among municipalities of the possibility that local administrators, council members and civil servants are vulnerable to being influenced by criminals. As a result, increasing attention is being paid to improving the administrative resilience of local governments. For example, the rise of subversive crime has led to more attention for personal integrity within public administration. In situations related to integrity, a clear role appears to exist for the municipal clerk. Contrary to the literature that exists on the role of municipal clerks on the topic of integrity, little seems to be known about the role of these same clerks in bolstering local administrative resilience. By means of interviews with clerks and a survey among council members, this study explores this role with the aim of establishing a description of the role of municipal clerks in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council and its individual members.

In general, a clear role appears to exist for the municipal clerk on the topic of administrative resilience. Where this role was initially limited to the topic of personal integrity, a shift can be identified in the past five to ten years. The increased national attention for administrative resilience also appears to be reflected in the duties of the clerk. While their experience with specific incidents related to administrative resilience was limited to matters of integrity, all interviewed clerks otherwise fulfilled a wide range of related tasks. To better explore this role, this study constructed a categorization of the various tasks related to administrative resilience. In conclusion, this study identified a total of nine different roles that municipal clerks fulfill, all aimed at bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council. Further research is necessary to establish and compare the actual effect of this contribution.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

A growing awareness exists among municipalities of the possibility that local administrators, council members and civil servants are vulnerable to being influenced by criminals (Winter, Woestenburg, Struiksma, Akerboom, & Boxum, 2017). As a result, increasing attention is being paid to improving the administrative resilience of local governments. A large part of this attention focuses on the resilience of mayors, aldermen, municipal councils and civil servants. Research by Winter et al. (2017) indicates that the municipal council appears to be a target of criminal influence relatively often. For example, criminals try to gain influence and information through the municipal council, including through the infiltration of local political parties (Lam, Kop, & van der Wal, 2018).

One municipal actor that is closely tied to the municipal council is the municipal clerk. The clerk is the first point of contact for the municipal council and provides support to this council and any council committees (Ruitenbeek, Vrolijk-Gevaert, Oostdijk, & Scherpenzeel, 2018). Together with his employees, the clerk is also referred to as the clerk's office (Nederlandse Vereniging voor Raadsleden, n.d.). In general, all clerks are engaged in a wide range of activities (van Hulst, Kruijven, Schaap, & van Ostaijen, 2016). Research into the role of the clerk has been able to distill four distinct tasks, namely: organizing council meetings and taking minutes; facilitating municipal council activities and arranging training for (new) council members; representing the municipal council in consultations; and advising council members on formal procedures, substantive developments and tackling tensions within the council (van Hulst et al., 2016).

Since the 1990s, the Dutch government has set its eyes on formulating and executing an effective approach to subversive crime. This approach includes an administrative element, namely the use of administrative law to combat subversive crime (Lam et al., 2018). There seems to exist a clear relationship between personal integrity and the approach to subversive crime. For example, the increase in crimes that since the past decade have been labeled as subversive has led to more attention being paid to the topic of integrity within public administration (Smits, Struiksma, & Schudde, 2016). A 2016 research into the current state of

affairs regarding the administrative approach to organized crime shows that 75 percent of municipalities had established work processes to safeguard acting with integrity (Smits et al., 2016). Additionally, it seems impossible to separate integrity and administrative resilience from one another. For example, at the request of the Ministry of the Interior, a learning circle was organized to exchange knowledge and experiences about vulnerable processes in municipalities. This resulted in information that municipalities can use as input to strengthen both the resilience and the integrity of their own organization (Broekhuizen, de Wildt, & Boutellier, 2020). Kolthoff et al. (2020) also point to a relationship between integrity and administrative resilience, namely by explaining resilience on the basis of integrity, craftsmanship and professionalism.

## 1.2 Problem statement, research question and aim

In situations related to matters of personal integrity, a clear role seems to exist for the municipal clerk. As the first advisor to the municipal council, the clerk can be called upon to advise or support in the promotion of the administrative integrity of the municipality (Ruitenbeek et al., 2018). Clerks also bring the subject of integrity to the attention of council members several times a year (van Hulst et al., 2016). The clerk is also the first advisor to the mayor when it comes to council matters, including possible integrity violations (Ruitenbeek et al., 2018). The guideline *De rol van de griffier bij een vermeende integriteitsschending* further clarifies the clerk's role in integrity violations and distinguishes between eight different roles for the clerk (Ruitenbeek et al., 2018).

Contrary to the limited amount of literature that exists on the role of clerks on the topic of integrity (e.g., Ruitenbeek et al., 2018), little seems to be known about the role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council and its members. In one instance, the clerk is mentioned as a possible discussion partner for council members in the case of suspected criminal influence (Jansen, 2017). This research attempts to explore this role of the municipal clerk, with the aim of providing a description of their contribution to the administrative resilience of the municipal council.

As the aim of this thesis is to provide a better understanding of the underexposed role of the municipal clerk, the research question at the heart of this research is therefore of exploratory

nature. The research question of this thesis is as follows: *What is the role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council and its members?*

When this study refers to the role of municipal clerks in bolstering the administrative resilience of council members, it concerns the role as it is implemented in practice. The clerk has no legal duties that specifically relate to matters of administrative resilience. Article 107a paragraph 1 of the Gemeentewet (2021) only prescribes that the municipal clerk supports the council and council committees in the performance of their duties. The municipal council can, however, lay down rules in a further instruction regarding the duties and powers of the clerk (Gemeentewet, 2021). In the creation of the instructions for the clerk, the employers' committee and *presidium* often make use of a template provided by the Association of Municipalities. This template, however, also contains no mention of administrative resilience (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, 2019).

One of the key concepts in this research is administrative resilience. For the purpose of this research, the decision was made to view administrative resilience as an umbrella term. As such, administrative resilience in this study refers to the ability to recognize, withstand and follow up on improper influences such as persuasion, aggression, intimidation and conflicts of personal integrity. In the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, the concept of administrative resilience is described in further detail.

In addition to exploring the role of the clerk with regard to bolstering administrative resilience, this research tries to provide insight into the experiences with this role of both council members and clerks. Bringing these two perspectives together assists in the exploration of the role as it is carried out in practice.

### 1.3 Scientific and societal relevance

The relevance of this research is twofold. On the one hand, a gap exists in scientific research regarding the role of the municipal clerk in the field of administrative resilience against subversive crime. The office of the municipal clerk is a relatively young one with an important mission (van Hulst et al., 2016). Like local democracy, the role of the municipal clerk is constantly shifting. As such, the municipal clerk poses an interesting target for further research. See, for example van Hulst et al. (2016), Ruitenbeek et al. (2018) and van der

Meulen et al. (2020). As described earlier, literature (albeit limited) exists on the role of the clerk in the specific field of personal integrity, for example in the event of an alleged violation of said integrity. On the subject of administrative resilience, no similar literature can be found, despite the increased attention that is being paid to administrative resilience and the role of the local government. By analyzing the practical implementation of this role by seven municipal clerks, this study provides a description of the role clerks have in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council and its members. In addition, this research contributes to the discussion surrounding the term administrative resilience, namely by providing data on the interpretation of this term and the familiarity with this term of both clerks and council members.

On the other hand, the findings of this study are also relevant for society. As described in the introduction, increasing attention is being paid to tackling subversive crime. According to Winter et al. (2017), the influencing of actors within local governments can have significant impact. After being influenced by criminal actors, the functioning of local public administration can be affected, for example through reputational damage, the undermining of democratic processes or citizens' feelings of insecurity (Winter et al., 2017). Research into the role of the municipal clerk with regard to administrative resilience can identify possible shortcomings and improvements, which can then be used to improve the role in an effort to further bolster the municipal council's administrative resilience. In addition, this study provides information on the experiences and wishes of council members with regard to administrative resilience. By taking these experiences and wishes into account, municipal clerks are able to further improve the activities they perform. As a result, the administrative resilience of the municipal council can be further increased.

## 2. Theoretical framework

A number of theoretical concepts exist that are relevant to this study. First, to indicate why a need for administrative resilience exists, the barrier model is described on the basis of situational crime prevention, drawing on rational choice theory. Then, administrative resilience is explored in an effort to provide a better understanding of the subject. This chapter also introduces a further operationalization of administrative resilience. Finally, a description of the concept of leadership and its role to resilience is provided.

### 2.1 Situational crime prevention

As described earlier, it is interesting for criminals and criminal networks to gain influence and information from within the (local) government. Infiltration and threats are mentioned as means by which criminal organizations try to gain access to local public administration (Winter et al., 2017). Criminals also attempt to influence decisions and decision-making processes by threatening local administrators and officials (Winter et al., 2017). In addition, a report by the Netherlands School of Public Administration (NSOB, 2016) shows that criminals have contacts within the local public administration. One of the most far-reaching forms of subversion is the normalization of the disruption of institutional authority structures (NSOB, 2016). This means that dislocated structures are seen as the new normal.

Like the previously mentioned forms of subversion, their normalization also shows clear properties of rational calculation (NSOB, 2016). Rational choice theory is based on the utilitarian belief that people make trade-offs between costs and benefits in order to arrive at a rational choice (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). This theory, further developed by Cornish and Clarke, is intended to support analyses of situational crime prevention. Where most crime prevention theories focus on the person committing the crime, situational crime prevention instead aims to reduce crime opportunity by making a particular environment less conducive to illegal activities (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). One of the assumptions of rational choice theory is that criminals make rational decisions when organizing a criminal offense, taking into account the possibilities, costs and benefits of certain scenarios (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). This also seems to apply to the influencing of local public administration. When an administrator, council member or civil servant is influenced in such a way that he chooses to act in accordance with the interests of the criminal network as opposed to the public interest,

then one can speak of criminal influence (Winter et al., 2017). According to rational choice theory, the attainable influence and knowledge in this way outweighs the associated risks (Cornish & Clarke, 1987). To further expand on situational crime prevention, Cornish and Clarke (2003) developed five strategies that build on the mechanisms of rational choice theory. These five strategies are:

1. Increasing the effort of crime;
2. Increasing the risk of crime;
3. Reducing the rewards of crime;
4. Reducing provocations that invite criminal behavior;
5. Removing excuses for criminal behavior.

In order to better assess the role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council, these five strategies were used to analyze the various activities performed by clerks. Another method of analyzing the rational considerations in criminal activities and mapping out possible obstacles is the so-called barrier model. This model, based on a logistical analysis by Sieber and Bögel, considers criminal activities as a business process and distinguishes several steps within it (Derksen & Klein, 2010). As an example, Spapens (2011) mentions a bank robber, who, for example, needs information, tools and knowledge about money laundering to complete his activity. This breakdown of steps can be used to map out which party, for example the police or mayor, can put up which barriers to frustrate the process (Spapens, 2011). Research by the Police Academy shows that representatives of the public administration are generally willing to erect barriers against criminal activities, especially when it comes to the misuse of administrative facilities or resources (Derksen & Klein, 2010). By increasing the risks and costs for criminals, for example by bolstering administrative resilience, it becomes less interesting for criminals to influence local public administration (Winter et al., 2017). It is in this light that a role can exist for the clerk of the municipal council in the local approach to subversive crime. The various tasks performed by municipal clerks that are aimed at bolstering administrative resilience can be viewed as providing such barriers against subversive crime.

## 2.2 Administrative resilience

Public administration plays an important role in tackling subversion, which at the same time creates a certain vulnerability. For example, mayors often come under great pressure when

tackling subversive crime (NSOB, 2016). The ability to regain balance following exposure to adverse events is also referred to as resilience (Southwick, Martini, Charney, & Southwick, 2017). In the Dutch approach to subversive crime, the more specific term administrative resilience (*bestuurlijke weerbaarheid*) is also used. The Central Netherlands Security Coalition defines administrative resilience as “the extent to which local government is able to counteract the subversive effects of organized crime, both preventively and reactively” (Veiligheidscoalitie Midden-Nederland, n.d.). Because more and more knowledge has been gathered on the consequences of subversive crime for municipalities, the topic of local resilience has also been placed more firmly on the agenda (Broekhuizen et al., 2020). Local resilience is concerned with the organization of the local system, the municipality, with the aim of making it more resilient. Through this process, it must become able to withstand infringements, threats, intimidation and harmful temptations (Broekhuizen et al., 2020). An organization that is resilient is more resistant to subversive activities. In this way, resilience reduces the disruptive effects of criminal activities and at the same time reduces the room for such activities (Winter et al., 2017).

As described by the Central Netherlands Security Coalition, administrative resilience includes both preventive and reactive elements (Veiligheidscoalitie Midden-Nederland, n.d.). This same classification can be used for measures intended to increase administrative resilience. According to Hartley (2018), preventive resilience refers to increasing the capacity to proactively deal with harmful situations. The report *Bedreigingen en intimidaties tegen publieke ambtsdragers* mentions the discussability of integrity, awareness of integrity, professionalism of the mayor and professionalization and training of council members as ways to preventively strengthen resilience (Kolthoff et al., 2020). In addition, the article *Raadsleden weerbaar maken tegen ondermijning* states alertness, a minimum number of years of membership, a Certificate of Good Conduct and an examination of credentials as possible preventive barriers against criminal influence when selecting potential council members (Jansen, 2017). There are also examples in the literature of reactive measures that can strengthen administrative resilience, albeit to a limited extent. If a council member feels that something is off, he is recommended to talk to the party leader, mayor, clerk or a security policy official (Jansen, 2017). In this case, a timely report can limit the effect of possible damages. Hartley (2018) also speaks of restorative resilience when resilience contributes to the normalization of a situation after harmful events. Similarly, Spee and van Hoof (2018)

state that a clerk can offer support to council members that have been confronted with aggression, threats or intimidation.

In addition to the preventive and reactive aspects of resilience, a distinction also exists between personal and institutional resilience. Personal resilience, as the term implies, is limited to an individual's capacity to deal with a harmful situation (Hartley, 2018). Institutional resilience, on the other hand, focuses on an organization's capacity to deal with external pressures and crises (Hills, 2000). For example, the Municipality of Zwolle (2020) writes in its Subversive Crime Plan that the municipal organization is resilient when it is aware of the attractiveness of government facilities for subversive crime, applies both current and appropriate policies, has barrier means available and then actively applies these.

The distinction between personal and institutional resilience is also relevant for this study, as the municipal council is a body consisting of individual council members. In this case, personal resilience relates to individual municipal council members, while institutional resilience relates to the municipal council as a body. Exemplary for this distinction is the situation that occurs when one council member was influenced, while the municipal council as a body is (still) resilient. After all, a bill within the municipal council requires a majority of votes to pass (Gemeentewet, 2021). This entails that a single persuaded council member presumably has little influence on the overall decision-making process. On the other hand, it is possible that a single council member does affect the resilience of the council, for example when said council member shares confidential information with third parties that are involved in criminal activities (Lam et al., 2018).

In the introduction, the relation between administrative resilience and integrity was briefly touched upon. In addition to being closely related, there appears to be an enveloping relationship between these two concepts that is important for this study. A definition of administrative resilience was provided in the preceding paragraphs. According to Berns (2003), there does not seem to be an unambiguous description for the concept of integrity, but it would appear in definitions of, among other things, incorruptibility, honesty and reliability. Kolthoff et al. (2020) explain the concept of resilience on the basis of integrity, craftsmanship and professionalism. In their letter of intent, the Resilient Governance Network explicitly connects the protection of the integrity of political office holders to increasing the resilience of democracy and the local administration (Netwerk Weerbaar Bestuur, 2018).

For this study, the concept of administrative resilience was operationalized as follows: Administrative resilience concerns “the extent to which local government is able to counteract the subversive effects of organized crime” (Veiligheidscoalitie Midden-Nederland, n.d.). Further distinctions can be made between preventive and reactive measures and personal and institutional resilience. This same categorization was used to organize the various activities that were identified during this study. Administrative resilience is also made concrete in the letter of intent of the Resilient Governance Network, in which the concept is split into awareness, communication, action guidelines and standard setting (Netwerk Weerbaar Bestuur, 2018). Because administrative resilience is often used as an umbrella term for matters including aggression, personal integrity and professionalism, the decision was made to regard all mentions of these various elements as practical implementations of administrative resilience. As such, when clerks spoke of improving the integrity of council members, this was counted as also bolstering their administrative resilience.

## 2.3 Leadership

In order to properly explore the role of the clerk on the subject of administrative resilience, this study also builds on theories of leadership and its relationship to resilience. In the introduction, a description was given of the office of the municipal clerk and its relation to the municipal council. As the clerk is employed by the municipal council and is responsible for providing it with support, the concept of leadership might not seem relevant at first glance. However, it appears that municipal clerks in practice do obtain a position of leadership, namely through their authority. Research shows that a large majority of municipal clerks experience significant authority within their own municipal council (van der Meulen, van Nunen, Jansen, & Karsten, 2020). Van der Meulen et al. (2020) find that municipal clerks appear to operate from a position of authority when they independently, on the basis of their expertise, support and advise their municipal council. As authority is often connected to leadership, it is with this authority that various aspects of leadership become applicable to the role of the clerk (van der Meulen et al., 2020). To better understand the role of leadership in bolstering administrative resilience, the next paragraph will first address the concept of leadership itself.

Hughes (2009) describes leadership as the ability to influence others to achieve certain goals. As the core topic of this study, namely resilience, is closely related with normative topics such as personal integrity, it is also interesting to look to ethical leadership. Brown, Treviño, and Harrison (2005) define ethical leadership as “the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making”. Mihelič, Lipičnik, and Tekavčič (2010) find that in an organization, leaders form the primary influence on ethical conduct. In addition, those same leaders are responsible for the norms and code of conduct that guide the behavior of employees. Similarly, Gellerman (1989) states that “leadership in an organization holds the responsibility for developing and sustaining conditions in which people are likely to behave themselves, and for minimizing conditions in which they may be tempted to misbehave”.

Mihelič et al. (2010) expand on the definition of ethical leadership by Brown and his colleagues by coming up with four propositions, namely that:

1. Ethical leaders’ conduct serves as role-modelling behaviour for followers as their behaviour is accepted as appropriate;
2. Ethical leaders communicate and justify their actions to followers (i.e. they make ethics salient in their social environment);
3. Ethical leaders want to continually behave according to ethics, therefore they set ethical standards in the company and reward ethical conduct on the part of employees as well as punish unethical behaviour;
4. Ethical leaders incorporate ethical dimension in the decision-making process, consider the ethical consequences of their decisions and above all try to make fair choices.

Next to ethical leadership, the leadership model of servant leadership also appears relevant to the bolstering of resilience. Servant leadership refers to a model of leadership that is an other-oriented approach to leadership, manifesting itself through one-on-one prioritizing of followers’ individual needs and interests and the outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community (Eliot, 2020). Where ethical leadership consists of transformational leadership coupled with a moral foundation, servant leadership instead refers to an attitude of serving followers through the principle of stewardship. The general role of the municipal clerk appears to fit the servant leadership model, as their tasks concern the provision of advice and support to the municipal

council, while at the same time experiencing significant authority within this same council. However, on the topic of resilience and its normative elements, the ethical leadership model also provides various points of connection due to the normative elements involved. Reddy and Kamesh (2016) find that these two models of leadership are not mutually exclusive and can instead be blended together to best fit the organizational context.

While only limited research has been done on the relationship between leadership and the resilience of followers, Eliot (2020) finds that leaders have the ability to positively impact and grow the resilience of their followers. The focus of servant leadership on service and the needs of individual followers appears to set it apart from other forms of leadership, granting the servant leader the ability to positively influence and impact the resilience of their followers (Eliot, 2020). Southwick et al. (2017) also remark the relationship between leadership and resilience, namely by stating that “understanding resilience, its determinants, and ways to enhance it are of great importance in leadership”. In a similar sense, following their authority and leadership, resilience could thus pose highly relevant to municipal clerks. This study employed these theories of leadership in an effort to better analyze the role of the municipal clerk with regards to administrative resilience. In the discussion of the results in Chapter 4, the findings of this study are analyzed and the connection to leadership is established in further detail.

## 3. Research methodology

### 3.1 Methodological approach

Because little is known about the role of the municipal clerk in strengthening the administrative resilience of the municipal council and its members, further research is required on this subject. For this study, empirical research was conducted in the form of both interviews with clerks and a survey among council members. In addition, desk research was used to construct a theoretical framework, to develop an interview framework and to complement the analysis of the collected data. Finally, in an effort to provide both reflection and a broader perspective, an interview was scheduled with a representative of the Association of Clerks. This representative is also part of the association's integrity committee and is the designated contact person for the association in the Network Resilient Governance.

When qualitative and quantitative research methods are combined, one speaks of so-called mixed methods research (Justice, 2008). By bringing together data from multiple research methods, it becomes possible to provide a more detailed and balanced picture of a certain concept (Justice, 2008). In this case, the data from various interviews and a survey were combined to better explore the role of the clerk with regard to administrative resilience.

#### **Interviews**

The interviews with municipal clerks were organized in order to collect specific information about their knowledge and experiences with regard to their role in bolstering the administrative resilience of their council (Gabrielian, Yang, & Spice, 2008). The form of semi-structured interviews was chosen in order to have the flexibility of being able to ask further questions when necessary on the one hand, while at the same time facilitating later analysis by means of a predefined structure on the other hand (Yang & Miller, 2008). In order to support the interviews, an interview framework was drawn up using available literature and the findings from a preliminary interview. This interview was organized with a municipal clerk from outside the target region. By using literature and data that was collected in this interview, a preliminary categorization of six different roles was also constructed.

#### **Survey**

In addition to the interviews, a survey was conducted among council members in an effort to collect data about their experiences and knowledge concerning the role of the clerk in bolstering their administrative resilience. A survey is deemed a suitable method to collect experiences, attitudes, behavior, preferences and information from individuals (Majumdar, 2008). For the survey, a digital questionnaire was drawn up in Google Forms. Wherever possible, the questions for the survey were formulated using available literature on municipal clerks and administrative resilience. In addition, parts of the constructed interview framework (such as the six identified roles) were used to facilitate the later comparison of collected data. In total, the survey consisted of 22 questions, the majority of which were multiple choice or Likert-scale questions. To check the clarity of the questions, the survey was first presented to three council members from outside the target population in the form of a pilot study (Majumdar, 2008). Participants of the pilot study indicated that the information and questions in the survey were generally clear. With their suggestions, the wording of specific questions was improved and further explanation was added where needed.

### 3.2 Data collection

In this section, the operationalization, data collection and sampling will be discussed. First, the scope of the research is addressed. In the integrated approach to subversive crime, several government partners work together within Regional Information and Expertise Centers (RIECs) (Provincie Noord-Brabant, Erfgoedinspectie, & Gemeente Rotterdam, 2018). The RIECs play an important role at the local level, namely by raising awareness about subversive crime, supporting and strengthening cooperation, and sharing knowledge and expertise on tackling subversive crime (Provincie Noord-Brabant et al., 2018).

In order to avoid possible influences due to differences in subversive crime policies between different regions, the decision was made to conduct the research within one RIEC district, namely the region of De Kempen. The region of De Kempen consists of eight municipalities with characteristics of relatively small, rural municipalities. As described earlier, each Dutch municipality has one clerk (sometimes with staff) who is responsible for supporting the municipal council, which itself consists of 9 to 45 council members depending on the number of inhabitants. This yielded 8 clerks as possible respondents for the interviews and a total of 150 council members for the survey. Included in their invitation to participate in the research, all participants received an information sheet in order to obtain their informed consent. This

document included a summary of the research and the privacy measures that were taken. In the respective paragraphs below, the data collection for each research method is described in further detail.

### **Interviews**

The contact details of the eight municipal clerks in the region of De Kempen were acquired through the clerk that participated in the preliminary interview. These clerks were then approached, via email, with information on the research and the request to participate through the means of a 45 to 60 minute interview. Because of the relevance of the research topic to municipal clerks, it was expected that the response rate would be relatively high. Majumdar (2008) describes this phenomenon by stating that due to the increased involvement of individuals, small sample sizes can achieve high response rates. In the end, seven out of eight clerks (87.5 percent) were able to participate in the research. One clerk indicated that the context of their municipality prevented them from participating in such an interview.

In the interviews, all clerks were asked similar questions stemming from the constructed interview framework. Three of the seven clerks were interviewed in a one-on-one meeting, while four clerks were interviewed in a group interview. In the group interview, each clerk was specifically asked to answer every question individually. Due to the Corona-virus situation, interviews were organized in the form of video calls. All interviews were recorded with the permission of each clerk. After each interview, a full transcript was produced to assist in later analysis.

### **Survey**

An important factor in survey research is sample size and selection (Majumdar, 2008). In order to limit selection bias, all 150 council members in the region of De Kempen were invited to participate in the survey. As such, the population size is 150 ( $N = 150$ ). By using the public contact details listed on the websites of all municipalities, a spreadsheet was constructed with the email addresses and phone numbers of all council members in the region. All council members were then invited to participate in the digital survey via email. As the initial response rate was relatively low, two reminder emails were sent out during the two-week period after the initial invitation. While both reminder emails increased the response rate, a higher rate was desirable to decrease the margin of error and to increase the representative value of the survey. As such, an attempt was made to remind all remaining

council members via phone. This led to a significant improvement in the response rate. At the end of the survey period, 65 out of 150 council members had answered the survey (n = 65). As such, the final response rate is 43.3 percent. In Table 1, the characteristics of both the population and the sample are shown.

**Table 1**

*Characteristics of survey population and sample*

	Population		Respondents		
	Frequency	Percentage of population	Frequency	Percentage of respondents	Percentage of council members in municipality
<b>Municipality</b>					
Bergeijk	17	11.33%	6	9.23%	35.29%
Best	21	14.00%	8	12.31%	38.10%
Bladel	19	12.67%	9	13.85%	47.37%
Eersel	17	11.33%	7	10.77%	41.18%
Oirschot	17	11.33%	10	15.38%	58.82%
Reusel-De Mierden	15	10.00%	9	13.85%	60.00%
Veldhoven	27	18.00%	5	7.69%	18.52%
Waalre	17	11.33%	11	16.92%	64.71%
<i>Total</i>	150	100.00%	65	100.00%	
<b>Response rate</b>					
Response	65	43.33%			
No response	85	56.67%			
<i>Total</i>	150	100.00%			

Using the common confidence level of 95 percent, the calculated margin of error with 65 respondents from a population size of 150 is 9.18 percent. As such, in 95 samples out of 100, the sample will differ from the population by  $\pm 9.18$  percent. In addition, the respondent sample was checked for a possible response bias. As visible in Table 1, the gender distribution of the population and the sample only differed by six percent. The largest anomaly existed in the response rates between the various municipalities. While the average

response rate is 45 percent, the municipality of Veldhoven in particular reached a response rate of only 18.5 percent. The difference in response rates can, however, be explained by the availability of council members' phone numbers. In the municipality of Veldhoven, phone numbers were only published for 2 out of 27 council members. Since the participation reminder by phone resulted in a large increase in the response rate, it is logical that a similar increase was not seen in the municipality of Veldhoven.

When looking at these statistics, it is important to keep in mind that the population of this research is relatively small. For this survey, only members of a specific professional group in one particular region were approached, namely municipal council members in the region of De Kempen. In addition, the population is relatively small at only 150 individuals. As such, traditional sampling and statistical analysis methods might not reflect the accuracy that is provided by the achieved sample of respondents (Morris, n.d.).

### 3.3 Methods of analysis

The research methods underlying this research consisted of various interviews and a survey. The data that was collected had the form of qualitative data (from interviews) and quantitative data (from the survey). As the role of the municipal clerk with regard to administrative resilience was at the center of both the interviews with the clerks and the survey among council members, various perspectives were collected on the same subject. Bringing together more than one data source is also known as triangulation (Gabrielian et al., 2008). In the synthesis, the answers provided on specific topics by clerks, council members and a representative of the Association of Clerks are combined.

#### **Interviews**

As described before, a transcript was produced of each interview. Using the interview questionnaire, a comparison table was constructed. The transcripts were then examined and the answer for each question was entered into the analysis table. The use of such a table allowed for a structured analysis and comparison of the collected interview data. In the first section of Chapter 4, the findings of the interviews are presented. Then, in the synthesis section, a comparison is made with available literature and data from the survey.

#### **Survey**

The survey data was exported to a spreadsheet using the export functionality provided by Google Forms. Using various spreadsheet functionalities, the percentages of all responses were then calculated for each question. In addition, the spreadsheet was used to create the figures that are displayed in the second section of Chapter 4.

### 3.4 Validity and reliability

As described under the methods of data collection, the decision was made to focus on the specific region of De Kempen. While this allowed for an all-encompassing analysis of the situation in said region, it also implies that only the clerks and council members of 8 of the 352 Dutch municipalities were included in the research. Thus, the external validity of the findings that are described in this study is limited. By including a reflection on the results by the Association of Clerks, a national association with over 500 members, an attempt was made to improve the generalizability of the results.

#### **Interviews**

Regarding the reliability of the research methodology, Gabrielian et al. (2008) note that there is always the possibility that interviewees are not telling the truth. Since the interviews concerned the duties of the clerk as a professional civil servant and not any personal details, the chance of this occurring was reduced. In addition, the findings from the interviews were compared with each other and, where possible, related to literature. Through this process, it became possible to spot anomalies in the provided answers, none of which were detected.

#### **Survey**

As mentioned, the survey first involved a pilot study to evaluate the questions. This process benefits the quality of the final questionnaire (Majumdar, 2008). At first, the relatively low response rate of the survey could have influenced its validity, as the sample would not have been representative of the population. However, through email and phone reminders, the response rate was increased to 43.3 percent. In order to increase the reliability of the survey, definitions of administrative resilience and subversive crime were provided at the start of the survey. In addition, instructions and further clarifications were included where necessary.

## 4. Results and analysis

This chapter presents the results found during the research. First, the qualitative data that was collected through interviews with seven municipal council clerks is discussed. Then, the quantitative results of the survey are presented. Finally, a synthesis attempts to connect these two sources of data and introduces supplementary findings from the literature, various documents and a reflection by a representative of the Association of Clerks.

### 4.1 Interviews with municipal clerks

Each clerk was asked the same questions in the same order. This order was also used in the analysis framework. As such, the interview data is now presented in a similar matter.

#### **The term administrative resilience**

First, each clerk was asked whether they were already familiar with the term administrative resilience. Four of the seven clerks indicated that they were familiar with the term administrative resilience prior to the interview. However, all clerks seemed to agree that the term is not a common one, especially in their duties as a clerk. Instead, most clerks referred to personal integrity and (the possible consequences of) subversive crime. However, all clerks recognized the broader theme that is referred to by the term administrative resilience, namely the focus on making municipal council members more resilient against improper decision-making.

In addition, clerks were also asked to provide a description of their understanding of the term administrative resilience. Despite the fact that some clerks were familiar with the term administrative resilience, most clerks indicated that they found that it is a term that is not easy to describe. In the definitions given by the clerks who were already familiar with the term, integrity and subversive crime are again often mentioned. One clerk described administrative resilience as “possible forms of influence or subversion of council members by people with wrong intentions. Administrative resilience then has to do with how resilient a council member is to such initiatives or movements”. Another clerk added that administrative resilience “is at the intersection of encountering, recognizing and doing”, which also touches on aspects of administrative resilience such as recognizing attempts to be influenced.

In order to address the relationship between administrative resilience and personal integrity, clerks were asked how they see the connection between these two concepts. Due to the intertwining of the two terms, this question had the tendency to spark a semantic discussion. All clerks seemed to agree that the two topics are closely related to one another. Various clerks indicated that integrity focuses more on the personal and moral considerations that individual council members have to make when taking decisions. Administrative resilience, on the other hand, was deemed to relate more to recognizing and resisting external influences. One clerk also referred to the shift in terminology mentioned in the theoretical framework, stating that personal integrity “is increasingly shifting to the awareness, motives and considerations of your actions and the motives and considerations of others”. Additionally, one clerk touched on the difference between personal resilience and institutional resilience. The clerk hypothesized that, perhaps, administrative resilience applies to the municipal council as a body, while integrity relates more to individual council members. As an example, the clerk described a situation in which a single council member would not act with integrity, but that the municipal council as a whole would be resilient in its response to the individual breach of integrity. In such a situation, the administrative resilience of the municipal council relates more to organizational resilience, while the integrity of an individual member reflects characteristics of personal resilience.

### **National and regional attention for the topic**

All clerks indicated that they had observed an increasing amount of national attention for themes such as administrative resilience and integrity. As a result of this increased national attention, all but two clerks noticed that the subject is also on the agenda more often, for example because the King's Commissioner has written to all mayors in the province, because there is more attention for the subject within the central government, because mayors are more aware of the subject or because it is mentioned more often in the news.

Nevertheless, the increasing attention for administrative resilience did not seem to reflect the experiences of clerks in the region of De Kempen, where the effect seemed to be limited to an increase in the provision of information and other preventive measures. All clerks indicated that they know of almost no cases in which municipal council members were approached, mistreated or influenced by people with criminal intentions. However, most clerks did have experience with situations in which the personal integrity of a council member was under pressure, for example due to a conflict of interest. The examples given by clerks closely

resemble the topic of personal integrity, rather than the broader subject of administrative resilience. Clerks did indicate that the subject became a recurring theme in their work in the past five to ten years, mainly due to the organization of information meetings and training courses on subversive crime, personal integrity and/or administrative resilience. In addition, more attention was being paid to the subject in the introductory programs and candidature of new municipal council members.

Additionally, clerks were asked whether specific national or regional attention to administrative resilience was given towards them as municipal clerks, for example through the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations or the Association of Clerks. Two of the interviewed clerks indicated that this regional and national attention was mainly limited to the topic of personal integrity. Personal integrity is said to have been actively placed on the agenda of the Association of Clerks. The association has a committee on personal integrity, consisting of a number of clerks, aimed at addressing the topic. In addition, the association organizes peer counseling, can be used as a source of information for matters of integrity, provides a confidential counselor for integrity issues and occasionally provides guidelines or other documents on the subject. Aside from personal integrity, the Association of Clerks also pays increased attention to the topic of aggression, for example in the form of aggression protocols. When it comes to administrative resilience in specific, four out of seven clerks indicated that little regional or national attention was being paid in their direction. In addition, five clerks stated that they receive few to no guidelines or other documents on this subject.

Finally, clerks were asked whether they discuss the subject of administrative resilience with colleagues in their region or elsewhere in the country. All clerks indicated that they are part of so-called regional circles of clerks. The clerks themselves are free to put topics on the agenda for these meetings. Two clerks stated that personal integrity is regularly discussed in their circles, either because the subject is on the meeting's agenda or because it is brought up when a round is made among meeting participants. Additionally, a thematic meeting on personal integrity and the role of the clerk would be organized in one of the circles. On the contrary, four other clerks indicated that administrative resilience is not specifically discussed in their circles. The attention for the subject seemed to be limited to the superficial discussion of matters of integrity that can occur in a municipality. Another clerk found that the organization of thematic meetings on personal integrity is discussed in their circle meetings, for example to exchange information on possible guest speakers. In addition, five clerks

indicated to be jointly preparing an introductory program for the new municipal council. As such, personal integrity would play a major role as one of the topics in this program.

### **Practical implementation of the role**

The main topic of this research concerns the role that municipal council clerks play in the bolstering of administrative resilience of council members. As described in the theoretical framework, clerks are the designated point of contact, advice and support for the municipal council. As such, the interviewed clerks were asked whether this focus on the municipal council also holds for their role surrounding administrative resilience. All clerks indicated that their activities in the context of strengthening administrative resilience indeed focus on the municipal council. Three clerks added that they occasionally also fulfill other, smaller roles that are related to administrative resilience. One such example is the role that the clerk plays in the dual-system dialogue with the mayor and the municipal secretary, in which matters concerning administrative resilience can be discussed. While the role of the clerk in this meeting was again focused on the council members, his or her advice could also be asked in matters pertaining to aldermen or civil servants.

All interviewed clerks were asked to aggregate their activities and tasks that can be related to administrative resilience. As a result, each clerk mentioned at least two or more activities. In order to better analyze the roles that are involved, activities were organized according to their general topic.

#### *Information meetings and training courses*

Every clerk stated that they organized information meetings and/or training courses related to administrative resilience, personal integrity or subversive crime. In most cases, such meetings are organized annually. Two clerks explicitly mention that such meetings are also organized as a response to when matters of integrity surface. Most of the information meetings and training courses that the clerks organize seem to focus on the topic of personal integrity. However, multiple clerks state that during these meetings, attention is often also paid to subversive crime, aggression and other external influences. One specific type of meeting that was mentioned are introductory meetings that are held after the election of a new municipal council every four years, which all clerks appear to organize. In this introductory program, special attention appears to be paid to the topic of personal integrity and how to best deal with external influences.

### *Conversations with individual council members*

All clerks mention that they discuss administrative resilience with their council members in individual conversations. In most cases, clerks are approached by a council member with a certain issue or question. Additionally, multiple clerks describe how they actively approach council members in cases where they suspect a possible breach of resilience or integrity. In these conversations, the clerk can provide the council member with advice or with a hypothetical mirror for personal reflection. One clerk states that he thinks that “the added value really lies in the individual conversations that you have one-on-one with council members”. In such situations, the clerks appear to act as a confidential advisor.

### *Detection*

Five out of seven interviewed clerks explicitly mentioned that they play a role in actively observing and detecting possible breaches of administrative resilience or personal integrity. One clerk describes this as “inviting council members at times when we think something is not right or when we receive a signal. You know their ancillary activities. You know what proposals are coming up”. Similarly, another clerk stated that “if you know that a council proposal is going to be discussed and that someone has a personal interest in that, even if it is very far away, then you have to be alert and you have to respond to it up front and call the person involved”. As such, when a clerk detects a possibly problematic situation, it appears that this often leads to an aforementioned individual conversation with said council member.

### *Code of conduct*

All seven clerks mention their role in the establishment of a code of conduct for the municipal council. Most clerks appear to use the template code of conduct that is provided by the Association of Dutch Municipalities. In most cases, this document is referred to as a code of integrity, pertaining mostly to personal integrity. Various clerks describe their role in this process as updating the code of conduct every few years, detecting changes in the template provided by the Association of Dutch Municipalities, providing advice to the municipal council and periodically drawing attention to the document.

### *Point of contact*

Already touched upon in the preceding paragraphs, all clerks find that they play an important role as a point of contact for council members with regard to matters of administrative

resilience. This role is also generally recognizable for the clerk, as the clerk is often approached with various legal, substantive and editorial questions in his role as advisor to the municipal council. One clerk describes this as “liking that people take their own responsibility and I assume that they are all mature enough that if they threaten to get into trouble or things like that, they will sound the alarm”. Similar to the detecting role, such contacts are often followed up with a conversation with the involved council member.

### *Miscellaneous*

One clerk stated that, in their role surrounding the subject, they approach political parties and actively offer their availability to talk about matters of personal integrity or administrative resilience. Another clerk mentioned that they consider it a basic task of the clerk to function as a watchdog for democracy and to, in that sense, insist on transparency, openness and insight. They stated that they “really think the clerk has a very important role against subversive crime, but then in the field of democracy, openness and transparency”.

Finally, clerks were asked whether they discussed activities and tasks related to administrative resilience with their employment committee and whether they included the subject and their related activities in an annual plan, if they made one. Four of the clerks indicated that they currently do not produce an annual plan. Of the three clerks that do produce an annual plan, two stated that administrative resilience is a recurring topic. One of the clerks stated that he thought that “subversive crime or integrity should actually be a standard part of it”. With regard to whether the clerks discuss their role surrounding administrative resilience with their employment committees, only one clerk indicated that the subject is part of their meetings.

### **Categorization of roles**

Each of the six roles that were identified in the preliminary interview were presented to the clerks during the interviews, after which each clerk was asked whether they recognized the role in their own activities and, if so, how they implemented it.

*Role 1: The clerk provides information about administrative resilience and subversive crime.*

All clerks agreed that providing information about administrative resilience and subversive crime is part of their activities. In practice, clerks appear to inform their council members about guidelines and articles on the subject whenever such information reaches them. As

stated before, however, the clerks themselves only receive a limited number of documents pertaining to administrative resilience. One clerk stated that “to date, I have not actively sought such guidelines myself and sent them proactively to the municipal council. But I do see that task as a part of my role”. Another clerk mentioned that a lack of time prevented them from proactively looking up relevant information for the municipal council.

*Role 2: The clerk organizes training sessions to bolster administrative resilience.*

As described in the practical implementation, all clerks indicated that they organize both information meetings and training courses on the topic of administrative resilience. As such, all clerks agreed that this role is clearly reflected in their duties as a clerk.

*Role 3: The clerk formulates a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior.*

Similar to the organization of information meetings and training sessions, all clerks mentioned the establishment of a code of conduct as part of their activities surrounding administrative resilience. In addition to the code of conduct, various clerks mention their involvement in the both formal and informal establishment of standards on resilient behavior. One clerk states that they actively “ensure that council members are regularly made aware of the fact that they have to report other ancillary positions, or to report gifts or gratuities they might receive”.

*Role 4: The clerk is a point of contact when the administrative resilience is at stake.*

All clerks unanimously agree that they are a point of contact for municipal council members when the administrative resilience might be at stake. In some municipalities, the agreement was explicitly made for council members to approach the clerk in case of possible incidents. One clerk mentioned that while they do think that they form a point of contact, the mayor may do so even more, as they believed that some council members may be more inclined to approach the mayor. Another clerk remarked that “they come regularly, but I think if something is really going on they will either keep it for themselves or go straight to the police”. Additionally, one clerk mentioned that they are sometimes approached by party chairmen for advice on particular situations involving council members from their party.

*Role 5: The clerk provides advice to individual council members in specific situations.*

Again, all clerks agreed that they fulfill this role with regard to administrative resilience. One clerk stated that they “are, of course, the advisor to municipal council members across the

board and that includes their actions, your behavior is also part of it, you also hold them accountable for that”. In most cases, council members appear to approach the clerk with questions that they have concerning matters of administrative resilience. In some cases, the clerk detects something and actively approaches the individual council members to provide them with advice for a specific situation. One clerk found that it is hard to actively approach council members with advice as you need sensitive information, which in turn often comes from the council members themselves.

*Role 6: The clerk refers council members to the right people in specific situations.*

Six out of seven clerks indicated that while it is possible to refer council members to other people or organizations, this is generally limited to cases in which a council member wishes to speak to an independent counselor. Instead, in most situations, clerks do not refer council members to others but rather involve the mayor or another third party in the conversation. Five clerks indicate that they often operate together with the mayor in these situations. One clerk describes this as “we simply act together in this. It's not that we refer to each other, it's more like we do it together”. Additionally, even in cases where the mayor is not directly involved in the situation, most clerks appear to inform the mayor in his role as chairman of the municipal council when they are approached by council members.

Finally, each clerk was asked whether they knew of any other roles that they thought were relevant. In the answers to this question, two distinct and separate roles can be identified that are not part of the aforementioned six roles. The first additional role is that as a guardian of local democracy. A clerk described this role as that “the clerk is a true guardian of that democracy and you always do that in conversation with the triangle, in the organization, to provide transparency”. This increased transparency would help to prevent undesirable situations related to administrative resilience from occurring or festering. A second role that was put forward by a clerk is the role of actively listening for and detecting possible situations that can touch on administrative resilience. This same task was mentioned by more than half of the clerks when asked what activities they performed related to administrative resilience.

### **Experience with concrete situations**

One part of the role of the clerk consists of their involvement in concrete situations in which an official investigation was started after a breach of the administrative resilience. In order to

analyze this part of their role, clerks were asked if they had any experience with such situations. All clerks responded that they only have experience with concrete situations that were related to personal integrity. A clerk summarized this as “in general, when they occur, which you can't say happens every week, then they are more like integrity dilemmas that someone has to deal with”. In these cases, the situation often concerns the regular job or ancillary activities of a council member, resulting in a situation that is more akin to a matter of traditional, personal integrity rather than one concerning administrative resilience.

### **Personal reflections on their role**

To end each interview, clerks were asked whether they personally believed that the clerk plays an important role with regard to the administrative resilience of the municipal council. In addition, clerks were asked whether this role is currently sufficient, or whether they would like to see an increase in the size of their role on this subject. In short, all clerks agreed they play a role related to administrative resilience, especially towards his or her municipal council. Clerks generally seem to agree with each other that their current activities are sufficient in addressing the subject. One clerk remarked that “of course, we have our eyes and ears fully open, because it is an important theme, so we are certainly alert, but I can't say that I have experienced in recent years that things really went wrong”. Other clerks seem to agree with this statement, stating that a bigger role for the clerk would only be needed if signs existed that the situation in a municipality was truly amiss. All clerks agreed that they currently had sufficient room and resources to properly address the topic of administrative resilience.

## **4.2 Survey among council members**

In the following paragraphs, the data collected through the survey will be presented.

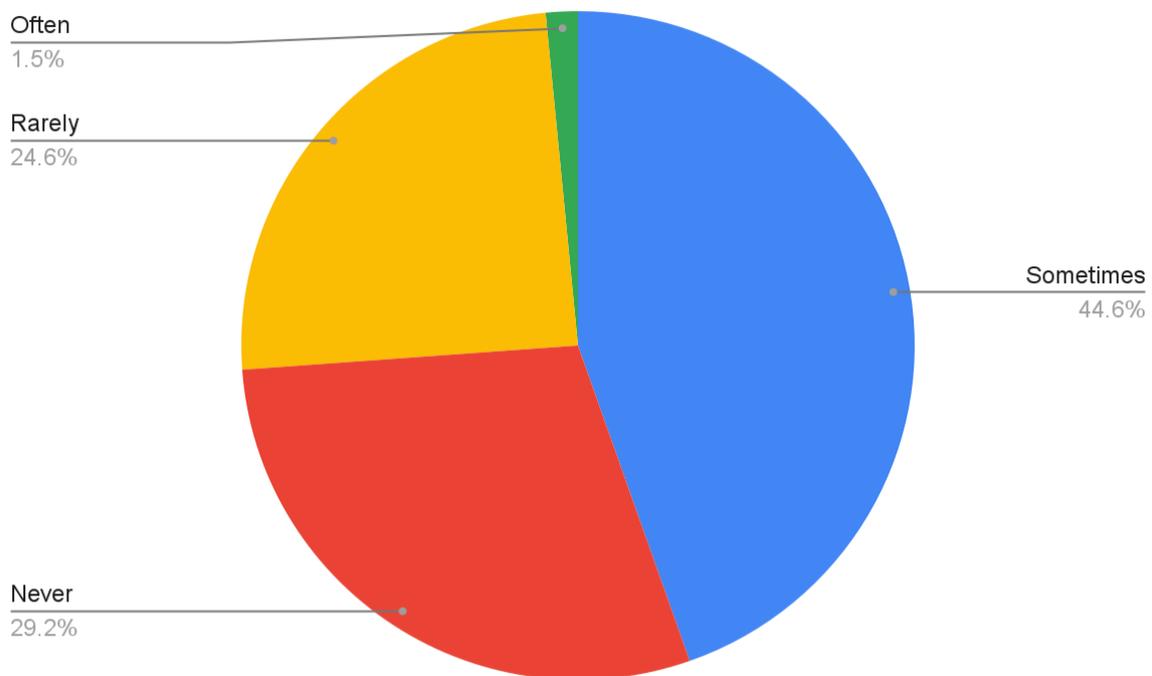
### **Familiarity with administrative resilience**

The first group of questions was designed to uncover the familiarity of the council member with the topic of administrative resilience. As such, the first question of the survey was whether the council member was already familiar with the term administrative resilience, prior to taking part in the survey. To this question, 80 percent of the respondents replied that they were already familiar with the term, while 20 percent said not to be familiar.

Another indication of both their familiarity with the subject and the perceived importance of the subject is the frequency with which council members discuss administrative resilience with their fellow party members. As shown in Figure 1, around 70 percent of the respondents discuss the subject with other members of their political party. In 25 percent of all cases, this only occurs rarely. Around 45 percent of the respondents discuss the topic sometimes, with only 1.5 percent of respondents discussing the topic often.

**Figure 1**

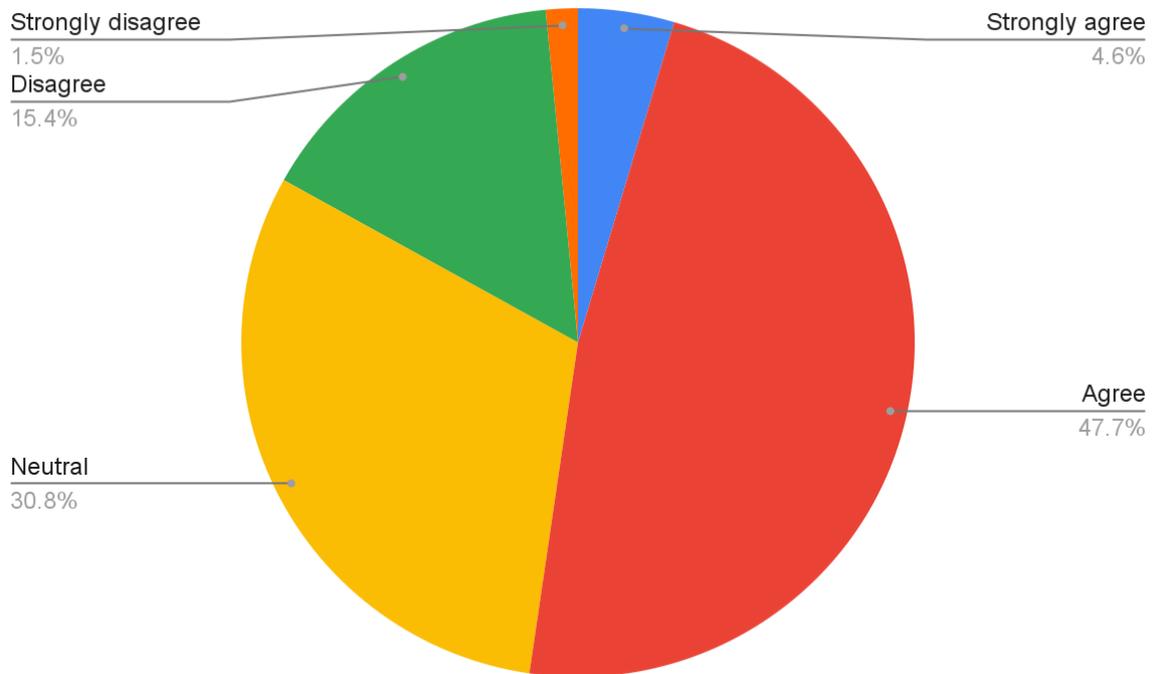
*Frequency with which respondents discuss the subject of administrative resilience with other members of their political party*



Additionally, respondents were presented with a statement, namely that council members of Dutch municipalities are vulnerable to being influenced by citizens or companies that are involved in subversive activities. As shown in Figure 2, almost half of the respondents tend to agree with this statement, with another five percent that strongly agrees. Another 30 percent of the respondents were neutral and only 17 percent of respondents (strongly) disagreed with the statement.

**Figure 2**

*Agreement of respondents with the statement that council members of Dutch municipalities are vulnerable to being influenced by citizens or companies that are involved in subversive activities*



### **The role of the clerk**

After discussing the subject of administrative resilience, respondents were presented with questions that concerned the role of the clerk in this matter. First, respondents were asked whether they were familiar with the possibility of approaching their clerk for matters related to administrative resilience. To this question, 63 percent of respondents said to be familiar with this possibility, while 37 percent said not to be familiar. While not completely identical, the distribution of answers appears to resemble the familiarity of respondents with the term administrative resilience.

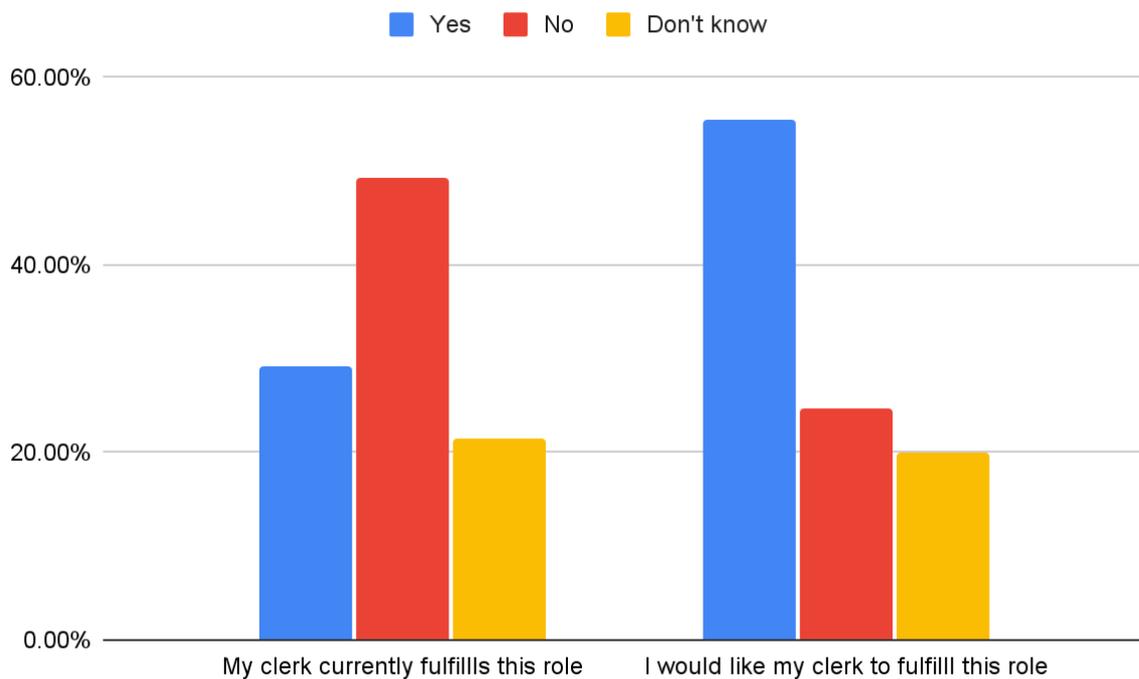
Then, consistent with the interviews with the clerks, respondents were presented with six roles that were preliminarily identified. For each of these roles, respondents were asked whether their clerk currently fulfilled the role and whether they would like their clerk to fulfill said role.

The first role concerns the provision of information about administrative resilience and subversive crime by the clerk. As indicated in Figure 3, almost 50 percent of respondents said

that their clerk did not provide such information. Approximately 30 percent said their clerk did, while 21.5 percent said they did not know. In contrast, when asked whether they would like their clerk to provide information on administrative resilience and subversive crime, 55 percent of respondents said they would, while 25 percent replied they had no such request and 20 percent did not know.

**Figure 3**

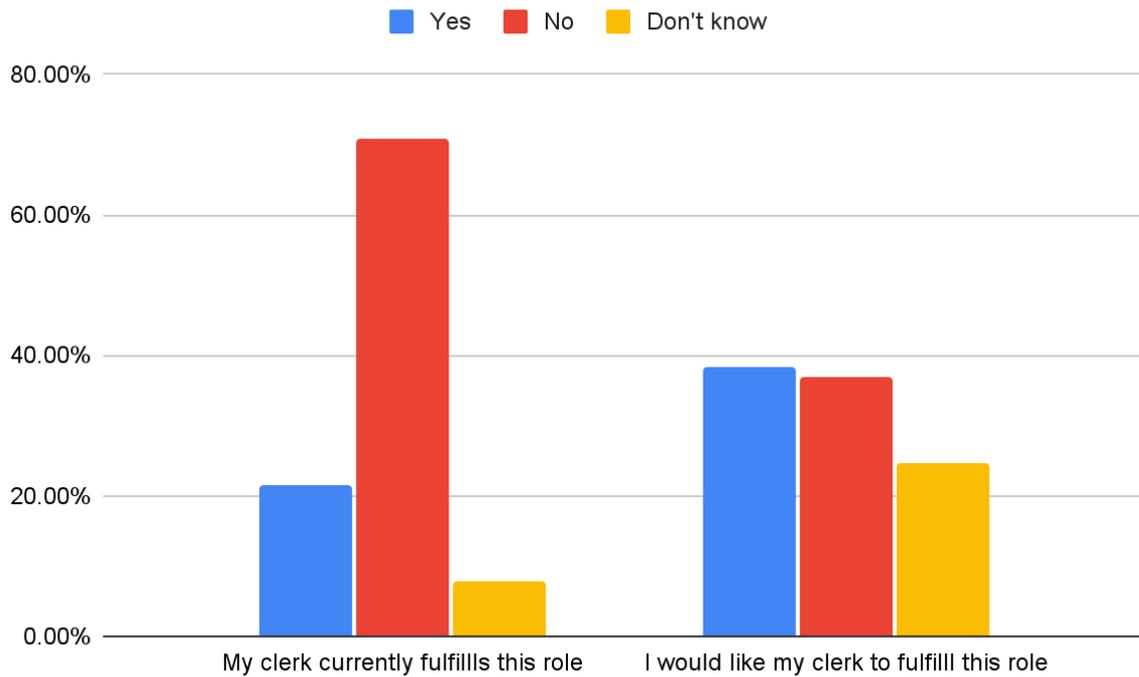
*Role 1: The clerk provides information about administrative resilience and subversive crime*



The second role concerns the organization of training sessions in an effort to bolster administrative resilience. As shown in Figure 4, 70 percent of respondents said their clerk did not organize such training sessions, while 21.5 percent said their clerk did. Only 7.7 percent of respondents did not know the answers to this question. When looking at demand, the distribution of answers is a lot closer to each other. Now, 38 percent of respondents said they would like their clerk to organize training sessions, 37 percent said they would not and 25 percent did not know.

**Figure 4**

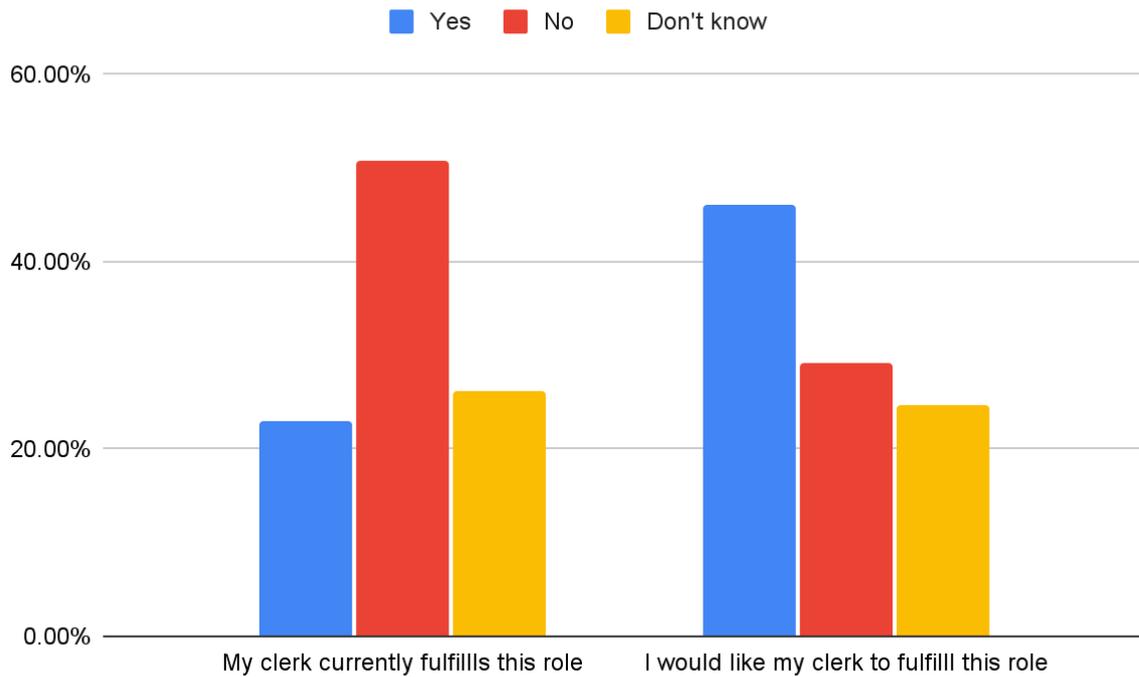
*Role 2: The clerk organizes training sessions to bolster administrative resilience*



The third role that was put forward to respondents related to the formulation of a code of conduct and other standards on resilient behavior. As displayed in Figure 5, 50 percent of respondents expressed that their clerk did not formulate such standards. In 26 percent of cases, the respondent did not know, while only 23 percent of respondents said their clerk did have this role. When asked whether they would like their clerk to fulfill this role, 46 percent of respondents said they would. In addition, 29 percent of respondents said they would not want their clerk to formulate a code of conduct and standards on resilient behavior, while another 25 percent did not know.

**Figure 5**

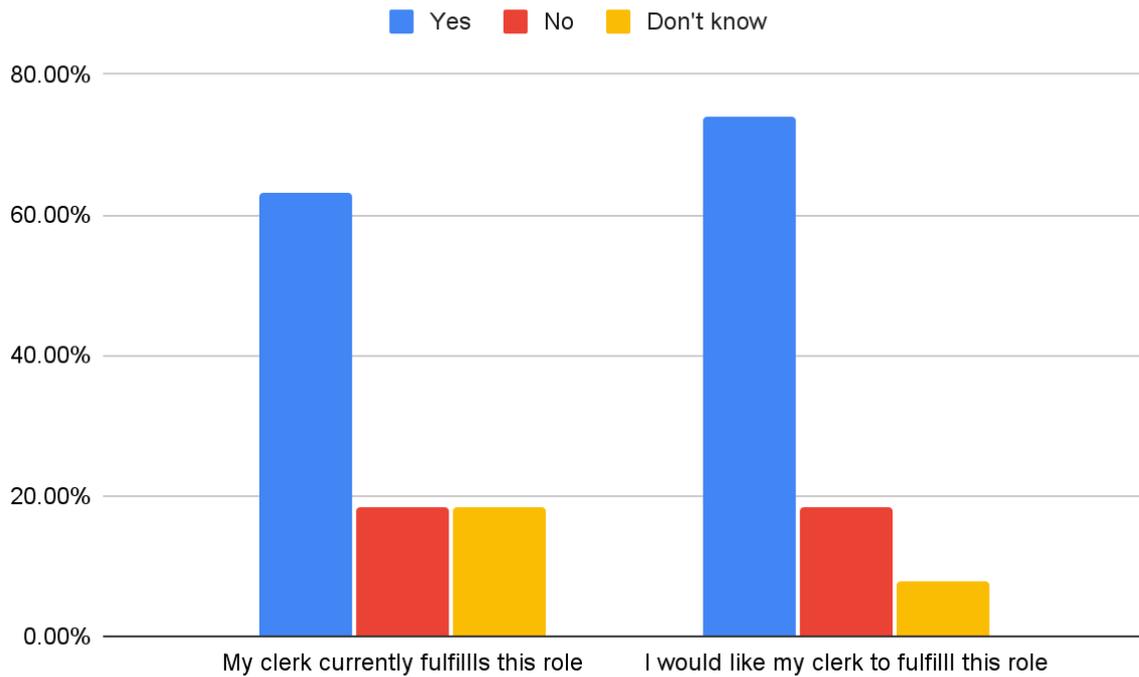
*Role 3: The clerk formulates a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior*



For the fourth role, respondents were asked whether their clerk formed a point of contact in situations where the administrative resilience was at stake. As visible from Figure 6, over 60 percent of respondents said their clerk fulfilled this role, while less than 20 percent said their clerk did not and a similar share did not know. When asked whether they would like their clerk to form such a point of contact, an even larger percentage of 74 percent of respondents agreed. While the share of negative responses remained the same, fewer respondents indicated that they did not know the answer.

**Figure 6**

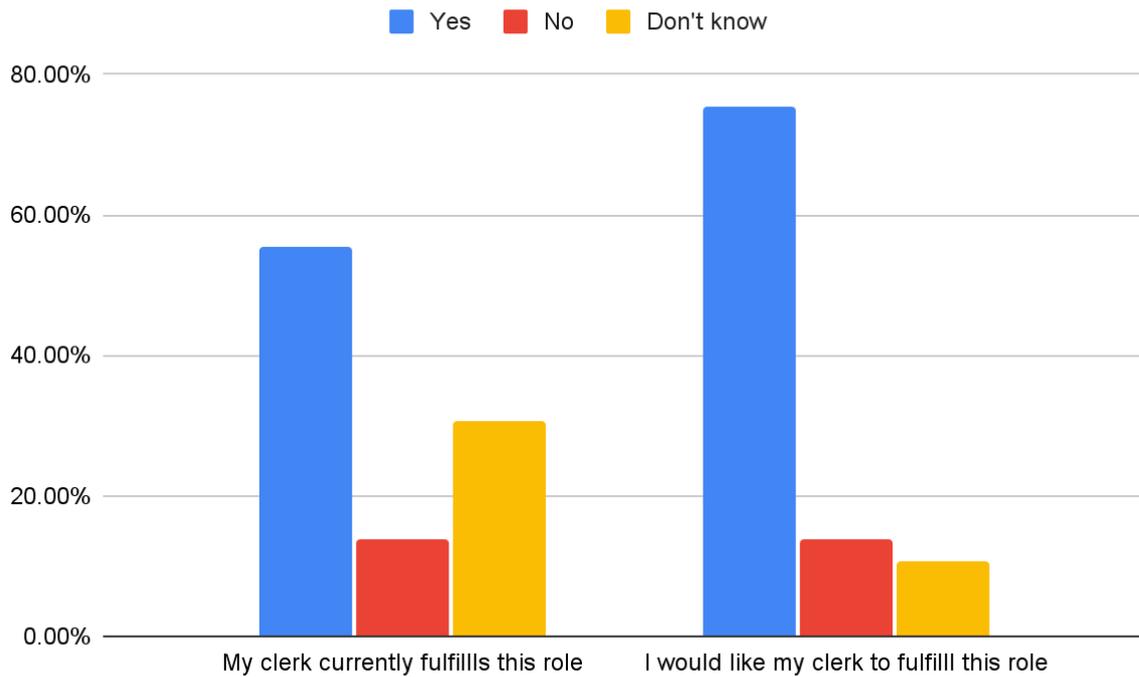
*Role 4: The clerk is a point of contact when the administrative resilience is at stake*



The fifth role that was presented to respondents related to the provision of advice to individual council members in situations where such advice was warranted. As shown in Figure 7, a majority of 55 percent of respondents said their clerk provided individual advice. Whereas only 14 percent of respondents said their clerk did not fulfill this role, over 30 percent of respondents said they did not know. When respondents were asked whether they would like their clerk to provide individual advice, the share of positive responses increased to an even larger share of 75 percent, in a development similar to the one that was seen in Figure 6. Here, the share of do-not-know answers also drops significantly to less than 11 percent. Again, the share of negative responses remained the same.

**Figure 7**

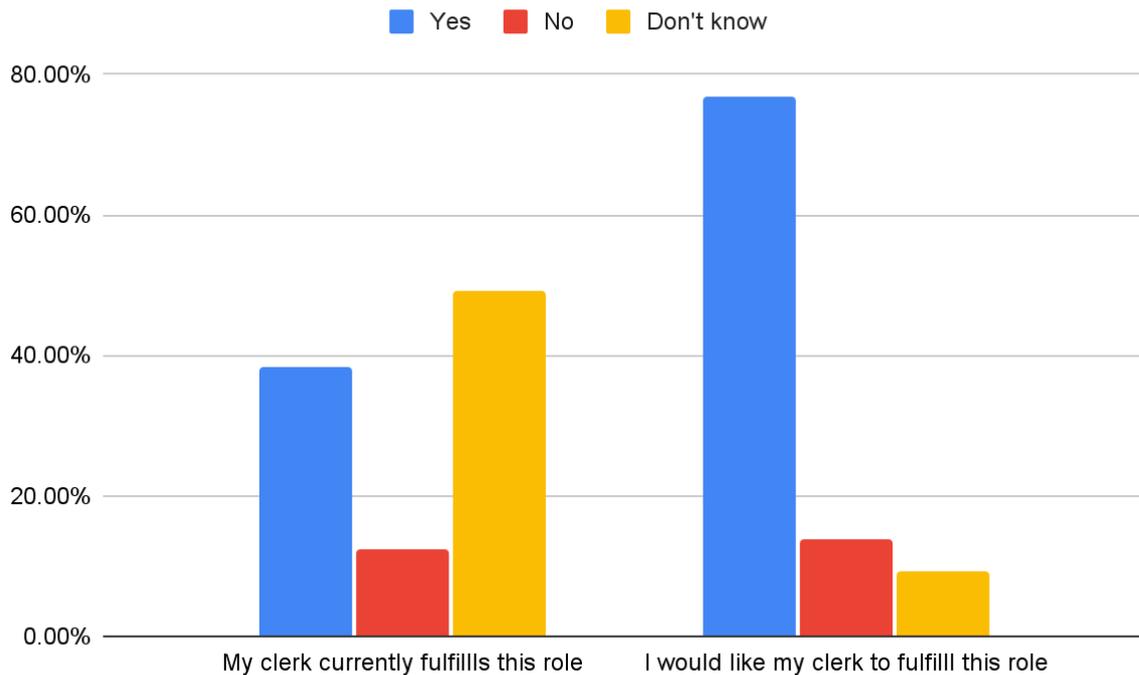
*Role 5: The clerk provides advice to individual council members in specific situations*



Finally, the sixth role that was presented to respondents concerned the referring of council members to the right people in specific situations, such as referring a council member to a confidant. As indicated in Figure 8, almost half of respondents did not know the answer to this question, while 38 percent said their clerk did and 14 percent said they did not. When asked whether they would like their clerk to refer council members to other people in specific situations, a dramatic shift can be seen. This results in almost 77 percent of respondents indicating that they would like their clerk to fulfill such a role, while 14 percent would not. As a result, the share of did-not-know responses dropped to only 9 percent.

**Figure 8**

*Role 6: The clerk refers council members to the right people in specific situations*



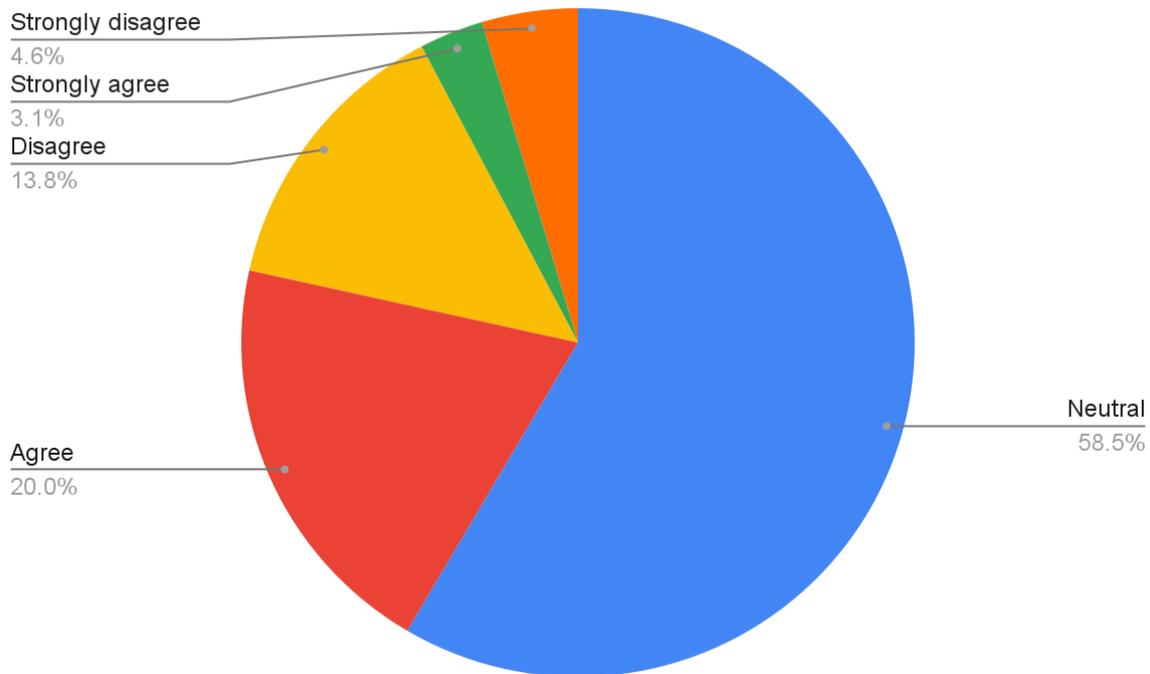
In order to address any roles that might be missing, respondents were asked whether any additional roles related to administrative resilience existed that their clerk currently fulfilled. Of the 33 responses, all but 2 indicated that no additional roles existed or that the respondent did not know the answer. One respondent answered that their clerk organized information meetings. Another respondent answered ‘integrity’, which is deemed to be a general goal rather than a specific role.

Additionally, respondents were asked whether any additional roles existed related to administrative resilience that they would like your clerk to fulfill. Of the 30 responses, all but 3 responses consisted of variations of ‘no’ or ‘i do not know’. In 2 cases, respondents answered ‘yes’ but did not specify a specific role that they would like their clerk to fulfill. One respondent mentioned that they would like their clerk to be a confidant when situations arise.

Then, respondents were asked whether their clerk currently devoted sufficient attention to the subject of administrative resilience. As visible in Figure 9, almost 60 percent of respondents responded neutrally. Another 20 percent of respondents agreed, while almost 14 percent of respondents disagreed. Only 8 percent of respondents strongly agreed or disagreed.

### Figure 9

*Agreement of respondents with whether their clerk currently devotes sufficient time to administrative resilience*



### Personal experiences

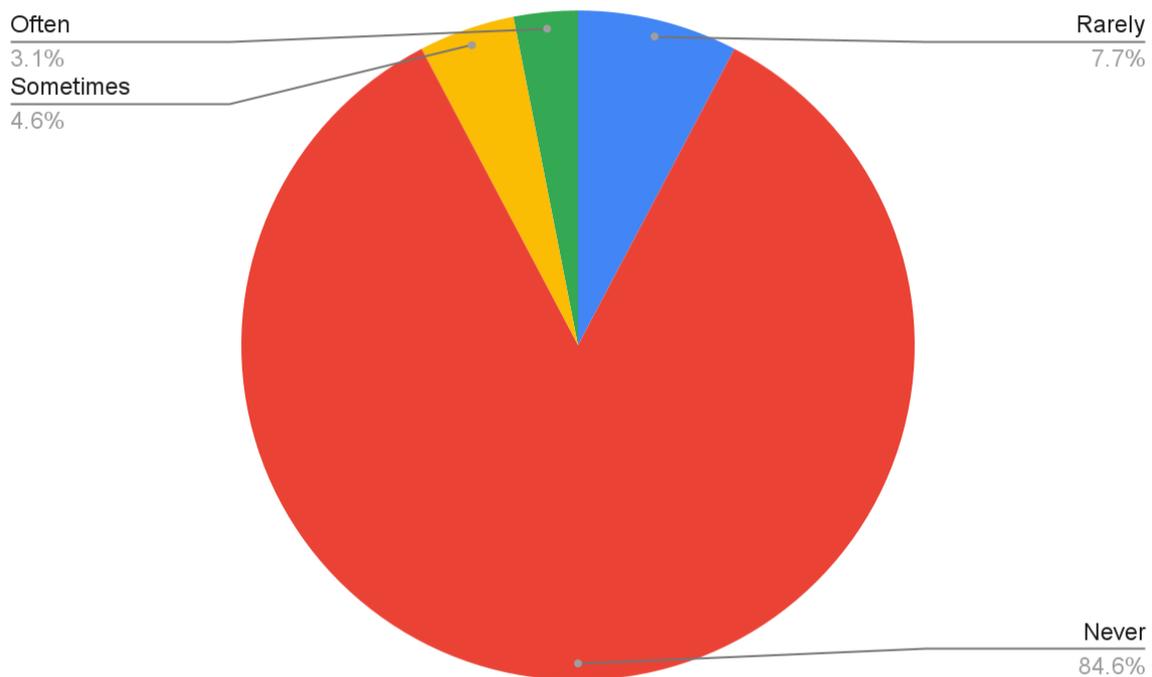
In addition to questions concerning general knowledge and the role of their clerk, respondents were also asked a number of questions that related to their personal experiences with the subject of administrative resilience. In order to examine the prevalence of situations in which the administrative resilience may have been at stake, council members were asked if they had ever been approached by the mayor, clerk or another representative of the municipality because it was suspected that their contacts were possibly involved in subversive activities. Almost 97 percent of respondents replied that they had never been approached in such a manner. Only 3 percent of respondents replied that they had sometimes been addressed, while no respondents replied with a higher frequency.

In addition to being approached by the mayor, clerk or other representatives of the municipality, it is also possible that a municipal council member was personally suspicious or aware of any attempts to be influenced by contacts who were possibly involved in subversive activities. As such, respondents were asked whether they had experience with such attempts. As visible in Figure 10, the distribution of answers is broadly similar to that of the previous

question. Where almost 85 percent of respondents had no experience with such situations, 7.7 percent of respondents replied that they rarely did. Additionally, 4.6 percent indicated that it sometimes occurred and 3.1 percent replied that they often experienced attempts to be influenced by people who they suspected were involved in subversive activities.

**Figure 10**

*Frequency of respondents experiencing attempts to be influenced by people who they suspected might be involved in subversive activities*

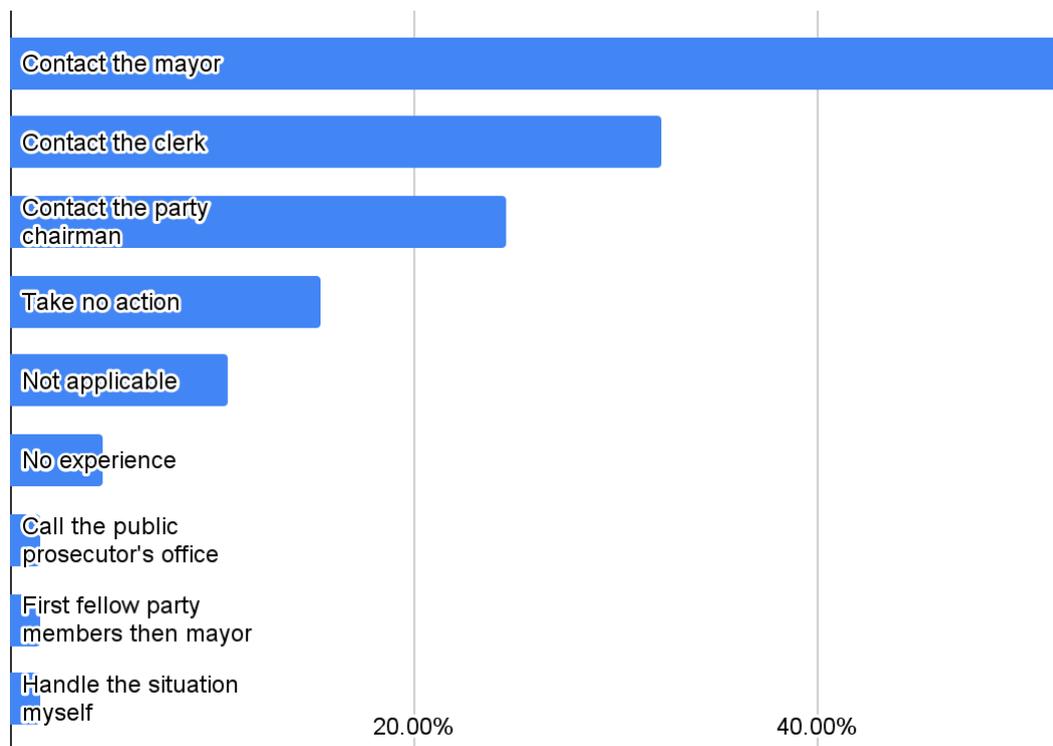


As a follow-up to the previous question, respondents were asked how they dealt with these situations or how they would hypothetically deal with such a situation. Respondents were provided with the options ‘Contact the mayor’, ‘Contact the clerk’, ‘Contact the party chairman’ and ‘Take no action’. It was possible for respondents to select multiple options. In addition, respondents were able to enter a custom answer. As shown in Figure 11, 52 percent of respondents said they would contact the mayor in situations where the suspicion existed of subversive influencing. Additionally, 32 percent of respondents would contact the clerk, while almost 25 percent of respondents would approach the party chairman. Slightly more than 15 percent of respondents said they would take no action, while almost 11 percent of respondents said that the question was not applicable. Furthermore, 5 percent of respondents replied that they had no experience with such situations, 1 respondent would call the public

prosecutor’s office and 1 respondent would first contact fellow party members before approaching the mayor and the clerk. Lastly, one respondent said they would handle the situation themselves.

**Figure 11**

*How respondents dealt with this situation or how they would deal with such a situation*

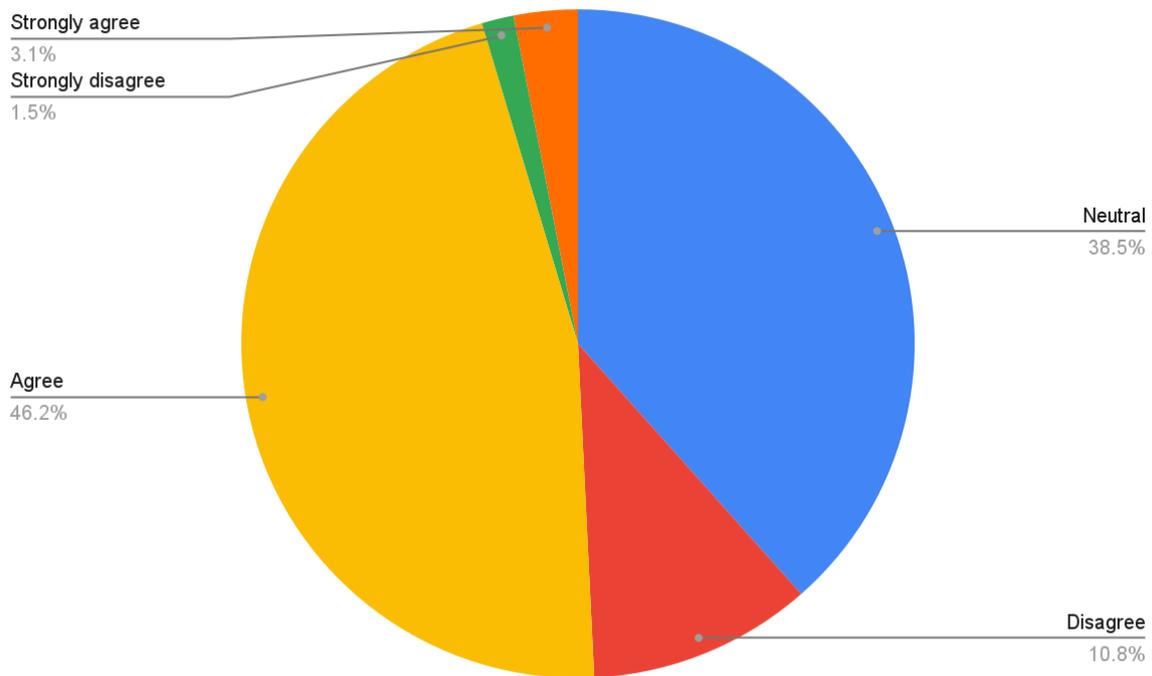


Respondents were then asked whether they, in their role as a council member, had received any information, training, courses or the like with regard to the subject of administrative resilience. Of the respondents, 54 percent indicated that they had not received this. On the contrary, 46 percent of respondents said they had received such forms of assistance.

Finally, respondents were asked how they personally felt about their resilience against possible attempts to influence them. First, respondents were first asked whether they considered themselves well equipped to recognize such attempts. As visualized in Figure 12, 46.2 percent of respondents agreed with this question. This was followed by 38.5 percent of respondents, who replied with a neutral answer. In much smaller shares, respondents either disagreed (10.8 percent), strongly agreed (3.1 percent) or strongly disagreed (1.5 percent).

**Figure 12**

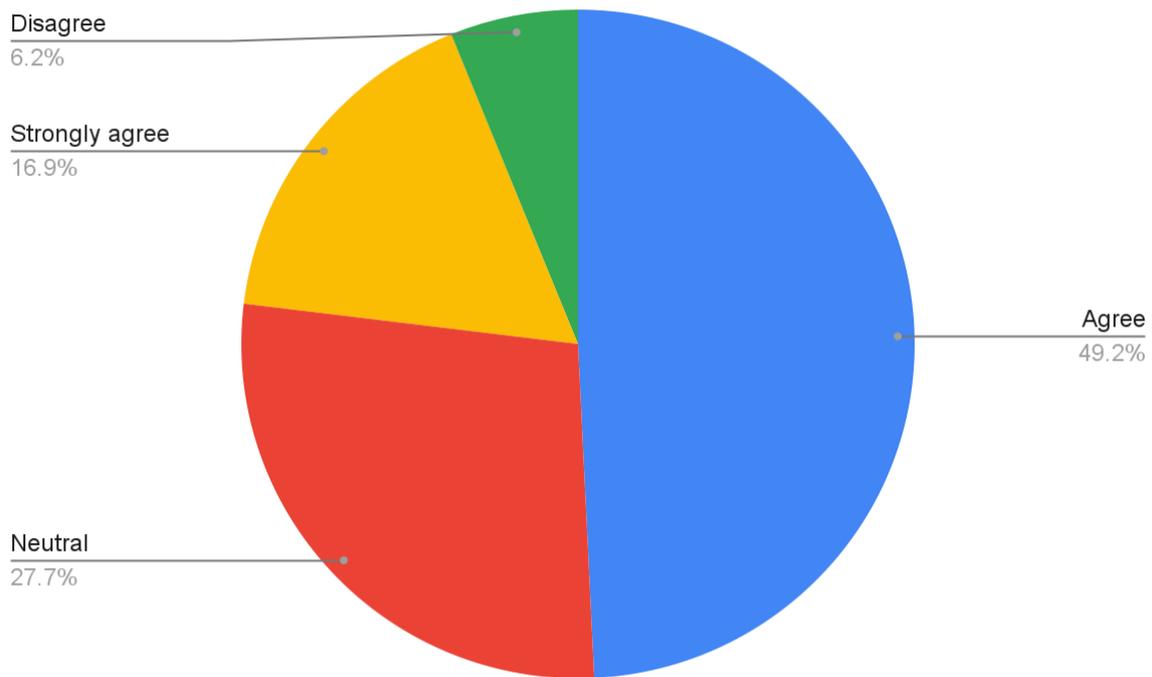
*Agreement of respondents whether they consider themselves well equipped to recognize attempts to be influenced*



Then, respondents were asked whether they considered themselves well equipped to resist attempts to be influenced. As shown in Figure 13, almost half of all respondents considered themselves well equipped to resist attempts to be influenced. Another 28 percent of respondents were neutral, while 16.9 percent even strongly agreed. Only 6.2 percent of respondents disagreed with the question, while no respondents said to strongly disagree.

**Figure 13**

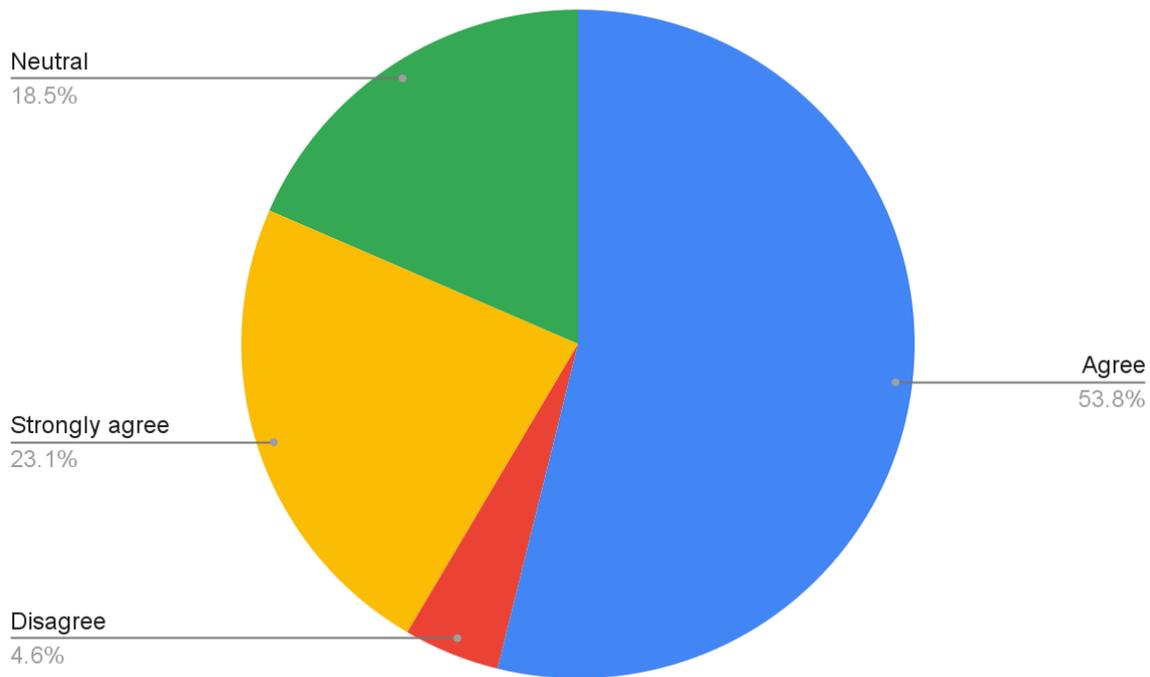
*Agreement of respondents whether they consider themselves well equipped resist attempts to be influenced*



For the third question, respondents were asked whether they considered themselves well equipped to follow up on attempts to influence them. In order to clarify the question, the example was given of approaching the mayor or clerk in such a situation. As visible in Figure 14, almost 54 percent of respondents agreed that they were well equipped to follow up on attempts to influence them. In addition, 23.1 percent of respondents even strongly agreed with the question, while 18.5 percent of respondents remained neutral and 4.6 percent said to disagree. Again, no respondents strongly disagreed with the question.

**Figure 14**

*Agreement of respondents whether they consider themselves well equipped to follow up on attempts to be influenced*



Finally, respondents were asked if they had any additional questions or comments they would like to place. In total, seven respondents left such a comment. In two cases, this concerned the wording of a question. Of the five remaining comments, the first respondent stated that it would be desirable to receive more information on how to recognize attempts to influence them. The second respondent replied that they did not know whether the subject had their attention. The third respondent said that they would only be able assess the existing measures after a situation had taken place. The fourth respondent said that integrity is the focus, adding that subversive crime might not occur often within their municipality. The final respondent commented that their clerk had only been in their position for one year. Because of the Corona-virus measures, they had only had few possibilities to meet in person.

### 4.3 Synthesis of findings

As described at the start of this chapter, this synthesis attempts to connect the two previously presented sources of data and introduces supplementary findings from the literature, available documents, the preliminary interview and a reflection by the Association of Clerks.

#### **The term administrative resilience**

As became apparent from both the interviews and the survey, not all clerks and council members were familiar with the term administrative resilience. One interesting finding is that surveyed council members appeared to be already familiar with the term at a higher rate (80 percent) than interviewed clerks (57 percent). While not all clerks were aware of the term administrative resilience, it became clear that they were familiar with its underlying concepts, such as professionalism, personal integrity and the relation to subversive crime. It is important to mention that unlike clerks, surveyed council members were not asked about their interpretation of the term administrative resilience.

According to the Association of Clerks, the term has been in use for around four years. This coincides with the creation of the Network Resilient Governance in 2018 (Netwerk Weerbaar Bestuur, 2018). Prior communication by the association mostly seemed to focus on personal integrity. This topic was later joined by attention for aggression, violence and subversive crime. One clerk also described this development by stating that “when we started with integrity a few years ago, it was mainly about your own actions. ... But it is increasingly shifting to your awareness of your actions, motives, considerations and those of others”. In an effort to bring these various topics together, the decision was made by the association and network to move towards the umbrella term of administrative resilience. This corresponds to the concept of administrative resilience as it was described in the theoretical framework of this research. When asked for a definition of administrative resilience, the representative of the Association of Clerks described the term as “being able to withstand improper influences”. These improper influences could include anything from the threat of physical violence or the possible influencing by suspected criminals to the effects of personal interests.

### **The role of the municipal clerk**

Through the interviews and the results from the survey, it became clear that there appears to exist a clear role for the municipal clerk on the subject of administrative resilience. For example, all clerks indicated that their duties include activities aimed at bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council. In addition, 63 percent of survey respondents said to be familiar with the possibility of approaching their clerk for matters related to administrative resilience.

In order to best describe the role of the municipal clerk with regard to administrative resilience, a total of six unique roles were identified in the preliminary interview. These roles

were discussed with the clerks in the interviews and were presented to council members in the survey. In addition, these roles were reviewed by the Association of Clerks in order to provide reflection from their point of view. To best analyze the preliminary roles, each role is first discussed separately in further detail below.

*Role 1: The clerk provides information about administrative resilience and subversive crime*

All interviewed clerks indicated that the provision of information about administrative resilience and subversive crime is part of their duties. Conversely, when municipal council members were asked about this role, almost 50 percent of respondents said that their clerk did not provide such information. This discrepancy could be caused by the general lack of documents that appear to exist on the subject of administrative resilience. Various clerks find that they do not receive many documents that they can forward to council members. The Association of Clerks stated that various documents do exist, but that the communication about administrative resilience towards clerks could perhaps be improved.

*Role 2: The clerk organizes training sessions to bolster administrative resilience*

All clerks indicated that they organize both information meetings and training courses on the topic of administrative resilience, including thematic sessions on subversive crime and introductory meetings for newly elected council members. Meetings related to administrative resilience were often a combination of plenary information provision and training exercises. Ruitenbeek et al. (2018) also find that many clerks support their councils by organizing precautionary training sessions on the topic of integrity. In the survey, 70 percent of respondents said their clerk did not organize training sessions. While it is difficult to explain this difference, it is possible that survey respondents did not consider meetings on integrity to be part of the question. One respondent also provided the organization of information meetings by their clerk as an additional role. In order to better incorporate both types of meetings, this role was renamed to *Role 2: The clerk organizes information meetings and training sessions to bolster administrative resilience*.

*Role 3: The clerk formulates a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior*

Again, all clerks mentioned the establishment of a code of conduct and their involvement in the establishment of both formal and informal standards on resilient behavior as part of their activities. In the survey, 50 percent of respondents answered that their clerk did not formulate a code of conduct or such standards. This discrepancy could perhaps, again, be attributed to

respondents not considering an integrity code as a code of conduct about resilient behavior, while clerks appeared to do so. In fact, each municipal council in the Netherlands is obligated by law to enact a code of conduct for itself and for the mayor and aldermen (Gemeentewet, 2021). In addition to the code of conduct, clerks mentioned their involvement in the establishment of action protocols and informal agreements related to administrative resilience.

*Role 4: The clerk is a point of contact when the administrative resilience is at stake*

The role as a point of contact for incidents regarding administrative resilience was also recognized by all interviewed clerks. In order to report a suspicious situation or ask for confidential consultation regarding integrity, the clerk is also mentioned as the designated contact person by Ruitenbeek et al. (2018). While the previously mentioned roles were not found to be applicable to their clerk by a majority of survey respondents, over 60 percent of council members indicated that their clerk did form a point of contact in case an incident related to administrative resilience occurred.

*Role 5: The clerk provides advice to individual council members in specific situations*

All clerks agreed that the provision of advice to individual council members was part of their efforts related to administrative resilience. This included both the active and passive provision of advice. In most cases, council members would approach the clerk with questions themselves. Survey respondents also recognized this role, as a majority of 55 percent of respondents said their clerk provided individual advice on administrative resilience.

*Role 6: The clerk refers council members to the right people in specific situations*

The sixth role concerned the task of referring individual council members to other individuals or organizations. Clerks indicated that instead of referring council members to others, in most situations they rather involve the mayor or another third party in the situation. The main example provided by clerks was getting the mayor involved. Almost half of respondents did not know whether their clerk currently fulfilled this role, presumably because they had no experience with this role. The representative of the Association of Clerks found that this is one of the most powerful roles that the clerk has with regard to administrative resilience, stating that “we have to actively make sure we have a preventive network, that if situations like this occur, they [municipal clerks] know who to call”. With the remarks of the clerks in

mind, this role was renamed to *Role 6: The clerk involves other individuals or organizations when necessary.*

#### *Additional roles*

As described earlier, interviewed clerks and surveyed council members were asked whether they recognized any additional roles. One clerk put forward an additional role of actively listening for and detecting possible situations that are related to administrative resilience. This role was also mentioned as a task that was performed by various clerks. In addition, the role was mentioned as one of the primary tasks of the clerk in the preliminary interview. Furthermore, the representative of the Association of Clerks agreed that the role of actively detecting possible situations should be acknowledged. Thus, it was incorporated as *Role 7: The clerk attempts to detect situations where the administrative resilience is at stake.*

Another clerk described an additional role as a guardian of local democracy. By insisting on transparency, the clerk could help to prevent undesirable situations related to administrative resilience from occurring or festering. The clerk stated that they “actually believe when there is transparency and openness, then that is the best weapon against subversive crime”. While no other clerks or council members clearly mentioned this role, the Association of Clerks affirmed that they are in unison with this clerk by stating that “if we don't organize this with the clerk, then nobody will do it”. In addition, van Hulst et al. (2016) find that clerks generally want to ensure a transparent operation of the municipal council. The Association of Dutch Municipalities states that transparency and resilience at a local level are crucial for a successful approach to subversive crime (Vereniging van Nederlandse Gemeenten, n.d.). As such, the decision was made to include this role as *Role 8: The clerk promotes transparency within the local government.*

One role that was not mentioned or described by any of the clerks or municipal council members, but one that does appear to be applicable, is the role of providing aftercare and support to council members that were involved in adverse situations. The Association of Clerks described this role as being incredibly essential, stating that “if it concerns a council member, no one else is going to do it. Together with the mayor, those are the only two officials who can provide aftercare”. In a report titled *Ondersteuning en nazorg van bedreigde raadsleden*, The Institute for Psychotrauma and ARQ Knowledge Centre Impact, together with the Dutch Association of Council Members, finds that “the clerk is a supporter

of the council and is preeminently able to perform a coordinating function when it comes to organized support. The clerk can also monitor how things are going with someone in the long run” (Spee & van Hoof, 2018). The lack of mention of this role in the interviews and survey could be related to the absence of experience with such incidents, outside of traditional integrity-related matters. To encompass these responsibilities of the clerk, this role has been included as *Role 9: The clerk provides aftercare and support to individual council members.*

### *Theoretical interpretation*

Each of the nine roles is unique through its own aim or method. To best interpret the individual roles and the overall contribution of the clerk to administrative resilience, this section provides a concise review of the identified roles in relation to the theories of situational crime prevention, resilience and leadership.

It is clear that most roles feature aspects of situational crime prevention. This aligns with the general aim of bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council. According to rational choice theory, municipal council members are influenced when they choose to act in accordance with interests other than those of the public. To prevent such activities, the associated risks have to outweigh the attainable influence or knowledge. Of the nine roles that were identified, all but one (providing aftercare and support) seem to be aimed at increasing the costs or reducing the benefits of improper influences. Looking at the five strategies of situational crime prevention as developed by Cornish and Clarke (2003), most roles build on the strategies of increasing the required effort of wrongdoing or increasing the risk of being detected. Additionally, some roles have elements of reducing the rewards, reducing provocations or removing the excuses for subversion. One example is the formulation of a code of conduct and standards, which removes excuses for crime by setting clear rules and alerting council members of their conscience. Similarly, the promotion of transparency within the local government also builds on the removal of such excuses. In short, most roles are forms of preventative measures, building on the barrier model to make it less interesting for criminals to influence the local democracy.

With regards to administrative resilience, it is clear that these roles are aimed at counteracting the subversive effects of organized crime. As described in the theoretical framework, it is unlikely that the municipal council as a whole is the target of subversion. When looking at personal and institutional resilience, most roles seem to build on increasing the capacity of

individual council members to deal with harmful situations. By providing council members with information, training sessions and advice, it becomes more likely that said council members will be able to identify, resist or follow-up on attempts to be improperly influenced. Nevertheless, it is clear that a strong relationship exists between the resilience of individual council members and the resilience of the municipal council as a body. By making individual council members more resilient to improper influences, the resilience of the municipal council as a whole improves simultaneously. The roles most closely aligned with the specific improvement of institutional resilience are the promotion of transparency within the local government, attempting to detect situations where the administrative resilience is at stake, and the formulation of a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior. With these measures in place, the municipal council as a body increases its ability to deal with external pressures and crises.

In addition to the distinction between personal and institutional resilience, the identified roles also feature both preventative and reactive elements. As described in the previous paragraphs, most roles appear to focus on prevention and thus build on preventive resilience. By informing and training council members, increasing transparency, providing advice, and formulating a code of conduct and other standards, municipal clerks increase the capacity of council members to proactively deal with harmful situations. While fewer roles concern reactive resilience, the clerk forms a point of contact in situations where the resilience is at stake, actively attempts to detect wrongdoing, and involves other individuals or organizations when needed. Another reactive role, which closely resembles the concept of restorative resilience, is the provision of aftercare and support to affected council members, as it contributes to the normalization of the situation after a harmful event has occurred.

As stated in the theoretical framework, van der Meulen et al. (2020) find that municipal clerks operate from a position of authority when they independently, on the basis of their expertise, support and advise their municipal council. As such, elements of leadership models become applicable to the role of the municipal clerk. In the nine roles that were identified, various elements can be found that match the propositions of ethical leadership. For example, all clerks indicated to set ethical standards through a code of conduct, matching one of the aspects of ethical leadership. While the demonstration of ethical conduct by the clerks themselves was less apparent from the identified roles, it is clear that municipal clerks promoted such conduct to council members through a variety of means. In addition to ethical

leadership, it appears that the interviewed municipal clerks use their position of authority to grow the resilience of their council members, namely through the nine aforementioned roles. On the topic of administrative resilience, municipal clerks appear to closely fit the model of servant leadership. All of the identified roles build on the principle of stewardship as the municipal clerk provides information, advice and support to their council members, in a similar sense to their overall duties as a clerk.

### **Experience with concrete situations**

All interviewed clerks stated that they only have experience with incidents that were related to personal integrity. As quoted before, a clerk described this as “in general, when they occur, which you can't say happens every week, then they are more like integrity dilemmas that someone has to deal with”. In the survey, only 15 percent of council members indicated that they had ever experienced an attempt to be influenced by people who they suspected were involved in subversive activities. In addition, only 3 percent of respondents indicated to have ever been approached by a municipal representative because it was suspected that their contacts were possibly involved in subversive activities. The representative of the Association of Clerks stated that it is probably a coincidence that no serious incidents related to administrative resilience had yet occurred or were detected in the region. When looking at the Netherlands as a whole, the Monitor Integrity and Safety shows a steady increase in the amount of aggression, threats and intimidation towards decentralized political office-holders. In 2020, 35 percent of politicians indicated that they had experienced such incidents in the past year (Klein Kranenburg, Bouwmeester, van Noort, Ypma, & de Jong, 2020). The representative adds that “before an incident has really taken place in your municipality, it remains a bit of an important topic, but no measures are taken”.

### **Reflections on their role**

All clerks agreed that they play a significant role related to the administrative resilience of the municipal council. Clerks generally seem to agree with each other that their current activities are sufficient in addressing the subject. A larger role for the clerk would only be required if the amount of incidents related to administrative resilience were to increase. Survey respondents were overwhelmingly neutral (58.5 percent) when asked whether their clerk devoted sufficient time to administrative resilience. Another 23.1 percent (strongly) agreed that their clerk spent a sufficient amount of time on the subject and 15.4 percent (strongly) disagreed. The representative of the Association of Clerks found that bolstering

administrative resilience “is preeminently suited to the role of clerk and is important because, as we said earlier, it affects the rule of law with respect to citizen representation”.

## 5. Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council. Based on an analysis of data that was collected in the region of De Kempen through interviews with clerks and a survey among council members, various aspects of this role were identified. In addition, a reflection by a representative of the Association of Clerks was included in the synthesis in order to better substantiate the findings of the research and its generalizability outside of the examined region. The research question at the heart of this study was: *What is the role of the municipal clerk in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council and its members?*

In general, a clear role seems to exist for the municipal clerk when it comes to the topic of administrative resilience. Where this role was initially limited to the topic of personal integrity, a shift can be identified in the past five to ten years. The increased national attention for administrative resilience also appears to be reflected in the duties of the clerk. While their experience with incidents related to administrative resilience was limited to matters of integrity, all clerks fulfilled a wide range of related tasks. Through the implementation of these tasks aimed at increasing the resilience of their council members, elements of both ethical and servant leadership can be identified in the role of municipal clerks.

To better explore this role, this study constructed a categorization of the various tasks of the clerk related to administrative resilience. In total, nine different roles were identified, six of which originated in the preliminary interview. Through a combination of literature and additions from various interviews, three additional roles were formulated. The nine roles are:

1. The clerk provides information about administrative resilience and subversive crime;
2. The clerk organizes information meetings and training sessions to bolster administrative resilience;
3. The clerk formulates a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior;
4. The clerk is a point of contact when the administrative resilience is at stake;
5. The clerk provides advice to individual council members in specific situations;
6. The clerk involves other individuals or organizations when necessary;
7. The clerk attempts to detect situations where the administrative resilience is at stake;
8. The clerk promotes transparency within the local government;
9. The clerk provides aftercare and support to individual council members.

Furthermore, all interviewed clerks agreed that the clerk plays a significant role related to the administrative resilience of the municipal council. While current activities appear to suffice in addressing the subject, a larger role for clerks would exist if the number of incidents related to administrative resilience were to increase. While surveyed council members did not recognize every role their clerk fulfilled, it is clear that a majority of council members wants their clerk to bolster their administrative resilience through a variety of activities.

In conclusion, this study identified a total of nine different roles aimed at bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council that municipal clerks fulfill. Further research is necessary to establish and compare the actual effect of this contribution. To reach this conclusion, this study explored the practical implementation of the clerks' role and provided a categorization of the various tasks that are involved. In agreement with the position of the Association of Clerks, this study finds that the role of bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council appears to be preeminently suited to the municipal clerk and is also an important one, as it is key in safeguarding local democracy.

## 6. Discussion

### **Personal interpretation of results**

As described in the conclusion, a significant role appears to exist for the clerk with regard to administrative resilience. One particularly interesting finding is the variation in answers provided by clerks, council members and the representative of the Association of Clerks. All clerks agreed to varying degrees with their involvement in administrative resilience and the six roles that were presented. In contrast, a majority of surveyed council members only found that their clerk fulfilled three out of six roles. Both clerks and council members do seem to agree that administrative resilience is an important topic and that it requires a sufficient amount of attention.

The representative of the Association of Clerks even went as far as stating that if this subject was not organized with the clerk, no one would do it. Looking at the breadth of tasks involved in bolstering the administrative resilience of the municipal council, I have to agree with the representative. No other representative of the municipality appears to be positioned in a way that would allow them to support the council in such a manner. In addition, also mentioned by the representative of the Association of Clerks, bolstering the administrative resilience is in synergy with the role of the municipal clerk as a guardian of local democracy.

The results of this study also seem to confirm the large association between administrative resilience and personal integrity. In fact, various clerks use the two terms interchangeably. As described in the theoretical framework, however, the limited amount of available literature suggests that integrity is rather a factor of administrative resilience. What I personally found interesting is that various municipal clerks were not familiar with the term administrative resilience, even though they appeared to fulfill various tasks related to the subject. The representative of the Association of Clerks also made this remark, stating that perhaps the communication about administrative resilience towards their members could be expanded.

### **Constraints and limitations of the research**

The reader should bear in mind that this study was conducted with clerks and council members from the region of De Kempen. This means that the total population is limited to 8 municipal clerks and 150 council members. By focusing on one specific region, possible variance between municipalities was kept at a minimum and in-depth research became

possible. The decision to focus on a single RIEC region is also discussed in the research methodology. As a result of this decision, all findings gathered through interviews and the survey should be viewed in the context of the region of De Kempen. As such, the external validity of this study is limited when attempting to generalize its findings to municipal clerks across The Netherlands. However, by analyzing the (limited) amount of available literature and synthesizing the findings with an interview with a representative of the Association of Clerks, an attempt was made to increase the external validity of the findings of this study.

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, various interpretations of the term administrative resilience exist. As a result of these interpretations, it is possible that interview questions and survey questions were subject to interpretation. To limit the effects of personal interpretation, interviews started with a discussion of the term administrative resilience. In this discussion, clerks were also provided with a definition from the literature. In addition, the relationship between integrity and administrative resilience was discussed with clerks. At the start of the survey, council members were also provided with definitions of both subversive crime and administrative resilience.

This research initially set out to use the eight integrity-related roles of the clerk that were found by Ruitenbeek et al. (2018) in the guideline *De rol van de griffier bij een vermeende integriteitsschending* as its foundation. As visible in Appendix 1, these roles were also included in the interview framework. However, these roles are only applicable to the clerk in concrete situations or incidents where the integrity is at stake. As described in the research results, no interviewed clerks had experience with incidents where, aside from matters related to personal integrity, the administrative resilience was affected. As such, the decision was made to exclude these roles from the research results. For research on the role of the clerk in an alleged breach of integrity, this study refers to *De rol van de griffier bij een vermeende integriteitsschending* (Ruitenbeek et al., 2018).

### **Suggestions for further research**

Throughout the research process, various suggestions for further research were identified. The first two suggestions relate to the scope of this study. Where this research opted for an in-depth analysis in one specific region, future research could expand on its findings by organizing a study involving all municipal clerks in The Netherlands. Such a study could, for example, take the form of a nation-wide survey among municipal clerks. It would then also

be interesting to compare the findings of both studies. In this way, it can be verified whether the findings of this study hold for the municipal clerks of other municipalities.

A second suggestion for further research would be to conduct a similar in-depth study in a different RIEC region. By interviewing clerks and surveying council members in a different region, it becomes possible to compare the findings of both studies. Any identified similarities or differences could then be used to further develop literature on the role of the municipal clerk with regard to administrative resilience, for example by expanding on the categorization of roles that is provided by this study.

The third and final suggestion for further research concerns the term administrative resilience and its relation to topics such as integrity, intimidation and aggression. This study found that the familiarity with and interpretation of administrative resilience varied across municipal clerks. The representative of the Association of Clerks also described the increasing prominence of administrative resilience as an umbrella term that connects integrity, aggression, violence and subversive crime. Further research could focus on the perception of and familiarity with the term administrative resilience. The results of such a study could help fill the research gap on the relationship between resilience and integrity. In addition, the findings could be used to improve communications regarding this subject, as the interpretation by researched clerks or council members could then be taken into account.

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## Appendix A - Interview questions

**Are you familiar with the term administrative resilience?**

*Bent u bekend met de term bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

**Can you provide a description of the term administrative resilience?**

*Wat verstaat u onder de term bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

**There seems to be increasing attention for this topic at the national level. Do you also recognize this development within your work as a municipal clerk?**

*Er lijkt op landelijk niveau in toenemende mate aandacht te zijn voor dit onderwerp. Herkent u deze ontwikkeling ook binnen uw werkzaamheden als raadsgriffier?*

**Is there regional or national attention to this subject for you as a clerk, for example from the Association of Clerks?**

*Is er regionaal of landelijk aandacht voor dit onderwerp richting u als griffier, bijvoorbeeld vanuit de Vereniging van Griffiers?*

**Do you discuss this topic with colleagues in the region or elsewhere in the country?**

*Bespreekt u dit onderwerp met collega's in de regio of elders te lande?*

**Is the focus of your role as a clerk in strengthening administrative resilience mainly on the municipal council (from the role of the clerk as a point of contact and support for the municipal council)?**

*Ligt de focus van uw rol als griffier bij het versterken van de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid voornamelijk op de gemeenteraad (vanuit de rol van de griffier als aanspreekpunt en ondersteuning van de gemeenteraad)?*

**How do you see the administrative resilience of the municipal council in relation to integrity?**

*Hoe ziet u bestuurlijke weerbaarheid van de gemeenteraad in verhouding tot integriteit?*

**How do you currently implement the theme of administrative resilience?**

*Hoe geeft u op dit moment invulling aan het thema bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

**Is administrative resilience a topic in discussions with your employers' committee or in your annual plan?**

*Vormt bestuurlijke weerbaarheid in onderwerp in gesprekken met uw werkgeverscommissie of in uw jaarplan?*

**A number of additional roles can be identified for clerks in the area of the administrative resilience of the municipal council. Which of these roles do you recognize in your own performance and how do you interpret them?**

*Er zijn een aantal aanvullende rollen te herkennen voor griffiers op het gebied van de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid van de gemeenteraad. Welke van deze rollen herkent u in uw eigen functioneren en op welke manier geeft u daar invulling aan?*

1. The clerk provides information about administrative resilience and subversive crime  
*Deze verstrekt informatie over bestuurlijke weerbaarheid en ondermijning*
2. The clerk organizes training sessions to bolster administrative resilience  
*Deze organiseert trainingen om de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid te versterken*
3. The clerk formulates a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior  
*Deze formuleert handelingsafspraken en normen over weerbaar handelen*
4. The clerk is a point of contact when the administrative resilience is at stake  
*Deze vormt een aanspreekpunt wanneer de weerbaarheid in het geding is*
5. The clerk provides advice to individual council members in specific situations  
*Deze geeft advies aan individuele raadsleden in specifieke situaties*
6. The clerk refers council members to the right people in specific situations  
*Deze verwijst raadsleden door naar de juiste personen in specifieke situaties*

**Are there any additional roles that are relevant in your view?**

*Bestaan er nog aanvullende rollen die in uw ogen relevant zijn?*

**Do you have experience with concrete situations in which administrative resilience may have been at stake, such as a council member who was approached by persons with criminal intentions?**

*Heeft u ervaring met concrete situaties waarin de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid mogelijk in het geding was, zoals bijvoorbeeld een raadslid die werd benaderd door personen met criminele intenties?*

**The guideline *De rol van de griffier bij een vermeende integriteitsschending* has further clarified the clerk's role in integrity violations and distinguishes between eight roles (Ruitenbeek et al., 2018). Which of these roles do you recognize in your own performance in situations where administrative resilience may be at stake and how do you interpret this?**

*De handreiking *De rol van de griffier bij een vermeende integriteitsschending* heeft de rol van de griffier bij integriteitsschendingen verder inzichtelijk gemaakt en maakt onderscheid tussen een achttal rollen (Ruitenbeek et al., 2018). Welke van deze rollen herkent u in uw eigen functioneren bij situaties waar de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid mogelijk in het geding is en hoe geeft u daar invulling aan?*

1. advisor to the reporter;  
*adviseur van de melder;*
2. advisor to the mayor as researcher;  
*adviseur van de burgemeester als onderzoeker;*
3. advisor to the mayor as council chairman;  
*adviseur van de burgemeester als raadsvoorzitter;*
4. providing information available at the clerk's office for the purpose of the investigation;  
*verstrekker van bij de griffie aanwezige informatie ten behoeve van het onderzoek;*
5. informant regarding an event mentioned in the report (because you were present);  
*informant met betrekking tot een gebeurtenis die in de melding wordt genoemd (omdat je erbij aanwezig was);*
6. advisor to the presidency or members of the presidency;  
*adviseur van het presidium of leden van het presidium;*
7. advisor to civil servants conducting the investigation;  
*adviseur van ambtenaren die het onderzoek uitvoeren;*
8. informant about the scope and objective of the step-by-step plan (if the step-by-step plan has been drawn up by the clerk's office).  
*informant over de strekking en doelstelling van het stappenplan (indien het stappenplan door de griffie is opgesteld).*

**Are there any additional roles that you consider to be relevant in situations where administrative resilience may be at stake?**

*Bestaan er nog aanvullende rollen die in uw ogen relevant zijn bij situaties waar de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid mogelijk in het geding is?*

**Do you see a (larger) role for the clerk when it comes to administrative resilience?**

*Ziet u een (grotere) rol weggelegd voor de griffier wanneer het gaat over bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

**Are there any additional questions or comments you would like to post?**

*Zijn er nog aanvullende vragen of opmerkingen die u graag zou willen plaatsen?*

## Appendix B - Survey questions

**Were you already familiar with the term administrative resilience?**

*Was u reeds bekend met de term bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

Yes / No

**Do you ever discuss the subject of administrative resilience with other members of your political party?**

*Bespreekt u het thema bestuurlijke weerbaarheid ooit met andere (fractie)leden van uw politieke partij?*

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Very often

**Proposition: Council members of Dutch municipalities are vulnerable to influence by citizens or companies involved in subversive activities.**

*Stelling: Raadsleden van Nederlandse gemeenten zijn kwetsbaar voor beïnvloeding door burgers of bedrijven die betrokken zijn bij ondermijnende activiteiten.*

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

**Are you familiar with the possible support that a clerk can offer you as a council member when it comes to administrative resilience?**

*Bent u bekend met de mogelijke ondersteuning die een griffier aan u als raadslid kan bieden wanneer het gaat over bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

Yes / No

The following questions refer to a specific role that your clerk may fulfill with regard to administrative resilience. For each individual role, you will be asked whether it currently applies to your clerk and whether you wish for your clerk to fulfill the relevant role.

*Bij de volgende vragen wordt steeds een specifieke rol genoemd die uw griffier mogelijk vervult rond het thema bestuurlijke weerbaarheid. Per individuele rol wordt gevraagd of deze op dit moment van toepassing is bij uw griffier en of u er behoefte aan heeft dat uw griffier de desbetreffende rol vervult.*

**Role 1: The clerk provides information about administrative resilience and subversive crime**

*Rol 1: Mijn griffier verstrekt informatie over bestuurlijke weerbaarheid en ondermijning*

My clerk currently fulfills this role: Yes / No / Don't know

I would like my clerk to fulfill this role: Yes / No / Don't know

**Role 2: The clerk organizes training sessions to bolster administrative resilience**

*Rol 2: Mijn griffier organiseert trainingen om de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid te versterken*

My clerk currently fulfills this role: Yes / No / Don't know

I would like my clerk to fulfill this role: Yes / No / Don't know

**Role 3: The clerk formulates a code of conduct and standards about resilient behavior**

*Rol 3: Mijn griffier formuleert handelingsafspraken, een handelingskader en/of normen over weerbaar handelen*

My clerk currently fulfills this role: Yes / No / Don't know

I would like my clerk to fulfill this role: Yes / No / Don't know

**Role 4: The clerk is a point of contact when the administrative resilience is at stake**

*Rol 4: Mijn griffier vormt een aanspreekpunt wanneer de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid mogelijk in het geding is*

My clerk currently fulfills this role: Yes / No / Don't know

I would like my clerk to fulfill this role: Yes / No / Don't know

**Role 5: The clerk provides advice to individual council members in specific situations**

*Rol 5: Mijn griffier geeft advies aan individuele raadsleden in situaties waar de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid mogelijk in het geding is*

My clerk currently fulfills this role: Yes / No / Don't know

I would like my clerk to fulfill this role: Yes / No / Don't know

**Role 6: The clerk refers council members to the right people in specific situations**

*Rol 6: Mijn griffier verwijst mensen door naar de juiste personen in situaties waar de bestuurlijke weerbaarheid mogelijk in het geding is*

My clerk currently fulfills this role: Yes / No / Don't know

I would like my clerk to fulfill this role: Yes / No / Don't know

**Are there additional roles related to administrative resilience that you would like your clerk to fulfill?**

*Bestaan er aanvullende rollen rond het thema bestuurlijke weerbaarheid die uw griffier op dit moment vervult?*

[Text answer]

**Does your clerk currently devote sufficient attention to the subject of administrative resilience?**

*Besteedt uw griffier op dit moment voldoende aandacht aan het thema bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

**As a council member, have you ever been approached by the mayor, clerk or another representative of the municipality about your contacts because it was suspected that they were possibly involved in subversive activities?**

*Bent u als raadslid ooit aangesproken door de burgemeester, griffier of een andere vertegenwoordiger van de gemeente op uw contacten omdat men het vermoeden had dat zij mogelijk betrokken waren bij ondermijnende activiteiten?*

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Very often

**As a council member, do you have experience with attempts to influence you by people you yourself suspected might be involved in subversive activities?**

*Heeft u als raadslid ervaring met pogingen tot beïnvloeding door personen waarvan u zelf het vermoeden had dat zij mogelijk betrokken waren bij ondermijnende activiteiten?*

Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Very often

**How did you deal with this situation or how would you deal with such a situation? In other words, what actions did you take?**

*Hoe bent u omgegaan met deze situatie(s) of hoe zou u omgaan met een dergelijke situatie? In andere woorden, welke acties heeft u daarna ondernomen?*

Contact the mayor / Contact the clerk / Contact the party chairman / Take no action / [Text answer]

**As a council member, have you received information, training, courses or the like with regard to the subject of administrative resilience?**

*Heeft u als raadslid informatie, trainingen, cursussen of dergelijke ontvangen met betrekking tot het thema bestuurlijke weerbaarheid?*

Yes / No

**As a council member, do you consider yourself well equipped to recognize attempts to influence you?**

*Vindt u zich als gemeenteraadslid goed toegerust om pogingen tot beïnvloeding te herkennen?*

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

**As a council member, do you consider yourself well equipped to resist attempts to influence you?**

*Vindt u zich als gemeenteraadslid goed toegerust om pogingen tot beïnvloeding te weerstaan?*

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

**As a council member, do you consider yourself well equipped to follow up on attempts to influence you?**

*Vindt u zich als gemeenteraadslid goed toegerust om opvolging te geven aan pogingen tot beïnvloeding?*

Strongly disagree / Disagree / Neutral / Agree / Strongly agree

**Are there any additional questions or comments you would like to post?**

*Zijn er nog aanvullende vragen of opmerkingen die u graag zou willen plaatsen?*

[Text answer]