

1. Individual support

In dealing with existing barriers, however, we can support women, for example, by various training opportunities on offer. Think of training to boost self-confidence and political ambition, mentoring and coaching, and media training.

2. Intersectional research

Our research shows that little is yet known about the Dutch situation. More research is needed. And more intersectional knowledge is also needed - how do these barriers affect differently on, for example, women with a migrational background, or women with children, differently?

3. Broader membership recruitment by political parties

Parties are still the main gatekeepers in politics. They recruit members and draw up electoral lists. We see that women are relatively well represented on electoral lists, given how few women are members of political parties. There is a need for parties to also work outside campaign time in order to recruit members. Nice touch: this will result in a more diverse supply when the list has to be drawn up.

4. Tackling (online) hate and intimidation

Within the opposition we now perceive against women's breakthrough in politics, (online) hatred and intimidation play a major role. But following the report 'Towards online safety of political office holders' [2023], we can, among other things, create more contra-awareness around the subject, make clear agreements (within parties), communicate better about the desired culture, increase resilience of political office holders and provide support. For this purpose, Alliance Politica has started a working group with political parties.

Removing barriers on a large and small scale will give women's representation a big boost. That is what Alliance Politica is working on over the next five years through four change paths: government, politics, broad public, individual. The first step is to develop a training offer based on this research. To stay informed about our activities, please sign up for the newsletter. The full survey can be read [here](#).

Vertaling verzorgd door
Limwierde Taaldiensten

The Stem op een Vrouw Foundation, Dutch Women's Council, Emancipator and WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform together form the Alliance Politica. In the coming years, and with support from the Dutch Department of Education, Culture and Science (OCW), these organisations will work to encourage the political participation of women in all their diversity. The alliance does this, among other things, by collaborating with governments and political parties, the setting up of training courses and networks, conducting research and by learning from surrounding countries.



Barriers for women to become, to be and to stay politically active

Introduction

Women are still underrepresented in Dutch politics. This applies to all political levels, from municipal councils to the House of Commons in Parliament. While women have long had the right to vote, as well as the right to be elected. Then why are there, relatively spoken, so few women in politics? To paraphrase Simone de Beauvoir: women are not born politically underrepresented, but made so. To explain this, we use international research to map out the barriers women face when they want to enter politics. Or, if they are already politically active, to stay so.

What's the current situation like? Women in politics

Political body % women

European Parliament

48,3

House of Common

40

Municipal council

35

Provincial council

33

Water Authorities'
General Board

28

Governing body % women

Council of ministers

50

Aldermen

29

Provincial Council
Representative

34

Daily Governance

27

Leadership roles % women

Prime Minister

0

Mayors

31

King's Commissioners

17

Dutch Water Authorities'
Chairs

19

Why is underrepresentation a problem?

The underrepresentation of women (and overrepresentation of men) in politics has several consequences. These include both their numbers (also called: descriptive representation), as well as the effects of those numbers (also called: substantive representation). For instance, it is important for girls' and women's ambition to see themselves reflected in politics; this ensures higher confidence and involvement in politics. The underrepresentation of different groups of women ensures that their perspective is not sufficiently included.

Mapping out the barriers

What do we already know from international research? And how can we translate this to the Dutch situation? We see three major barriers:

1. Social & cultural barriers	2. Political barriers	3. Knowledge & information barriers
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Social and cultural barriers

Socio-cultural barriers involve the broader role gender plays in our society and how cultural gender norms and conceptions of women influence politics. For example, girls are generally associated with the 'private domain', such as home and household, rather than the public domain, such as politics. The characteristics that traditionally come into play are that women should be sweet and soft. These are not the traits traditionally associated with politics or leadership. Politics is also often portrayed as being all about conflict and competition. This is seen more as a man's thing, even by women. This reduces their motivation to enter politics because it would not suit them. Thus, stereotypes about women's roles in society affect how many women see politics as a possible career path.

Gender roles and socialisation	Less access to the necessary means
Emancipation and division of (care) tasks	The role of media
Modesty	Stereotypes about leadership
Difference in ambition	

Political barriers

Political barriers concern the way politics itself is organised. Mainly men are members of political parties. The membership database is also the pool from which candidates are sought for all kinds of political positions; from candidate committees to people's representatives. This results in attempts to capture part of a market in which most political parties have [far] fewer women in their ranks. Moreover, the way political parties make selections for their electoral lists is also problematic in terms of gender. Think of the importance of experience within the party, or already having [local] political experience. People who have not yet or have only recently begun to become politically active - which is true for many women - are less likely to be selected by such hierarchical criteria. But there is also still a perception among political parties that women neither want to become active in politics, nor can be found. On top of this we may add that, once women are politically active, they are often a minority and have to face a ruthless political culture. Not to mention the working conditions: Often meetings are held in the evening, and with little compensation. Violence against women in politics, both online and offline, also plays a role here.

Political barriers listed:

Political party membership	Working conditions & culture
Internal party selection mechanisms	Violence against women in politics
Politics as a men's domain	

Knowledge & information barriers

Women still lack access to the right information, role models and networks. Because what does an MP actually do? Or a general manager of the Water Authorities? Clarity is lacking about both the work itself and what procedures you have to go through to get there. Such lack of knowledge not only makes politics vague and intimidating but also complicates taking concrete steps. Where do you start, and how? Moreover, many politicians were previously active in trade unions or journalism. From here, they move on to politics. But even there, relatively few women have been active from a historic perspective; trade unions and journalism were also historically male-dominated strongholds. A gap that is yet to be made up, just like in politics. Because there are now so few women in politics, there are also fewer role models for young girls.

Knowledge & information barriers listed:

Lack of role models	Lack of information	Lack of network
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What's next? Fighting barriers

Many of these barriers could, in theory, be solved on short notice. Why has that not happened yet, then? There is lack of resoluteness. Earlier, researchers said about this that the current political elite (especially men) like to stick to the status quo, because only they have something to lose. This plays out both inside politics and beyond. Other reports recently also indicated there is a lack of regulations to counter barriers for women in the workplace in general. Practices to counter change currently operate in favour of existing barriers.

Barriers to becoming politically active play a role over a lifetime. For example, for young girls learning what politics is, and for women having to fight for more equal sharing of care tasks. What can we do? We can put the underrepresentation of women not solely down to women themselves. It is a common comment that women should simply try harder, or just 'participate' more. This research shows that many women make a logical choice not to enter politics, given the barriers they already face or expect to face in the future. Here is what we can do to remove those barriers and/or help women deal with and bypassing the barriers: