



Contemporary Gender Attitudes &  
Women's Political Representation:  
Netherlands Post-election Survey  
November 2023

## SUMMARY

Contemporary gender attitudes play a crucial role in elections, not only by influencing voters' preferences for candidates based on perceived gender roles but also by shaping the political discourse around gender equality and related policies. These modern perspectives on gender can significantly affect the electoral success of candidates and the emphasis placed on gender issues in the political arena. After the general election on 22 November, we conducted a survey study for our European Commission funded project on women's political leadership. Our objective was to gather the attitudes, opinions, and party preferences of individuals in the Netherlands in the aftermath of the historic election which saw the far-right populist party led by Geert Wilders win almost 24% of the vote. This report summarises some of the questions respondents answered about gender equality and women's representation. We are grateful to our respondents from the Flycatcher online panel as through their engagement we can better understand how gender attitudes can influence campaigns and elections.

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## **Contemporary Gender Attitudes & Women's Political Representation: Netherlands Post-election Survey November 2023**

The main research theme of the TWICEASGOOD research project is to understand women candidates' experiences of navigating sexism in election campaigns. Because understanding the role of sexism in women's electoral success necessitates looking at both voter and candidate experiences, methodologically, the research team draws on data and observations from the electorate (surveys and experiments), candidates (in-depth interviews, ethnographies, and surveys) and the media (traditional and social). After the general elections on 22 November 2023, we conducted a survey to assess views on gender equality, women's representation, and party preferences. Modern gender attitudes can significantly affect the electoral success of candidates and the emphasis placed on gender issues in the political arena.

The Dutch General Election of November 2023 delivered a surprising outcome, with Geert Wilders' Party for Freedom (PVV) winning the most seats, a total of 37 out of 150, which was a significant victory for the far-right populist party. This result was unexpected for many, as it marked a substantial shift in the political landscape of the Netherlands, propelling a party with strong anti-immigration and anti-Islam stances to the forefront of Dutch politics. The PVV's success stands out particularly because it highlights a stark divergence from previous election outcomes and reflects a notable rise in populist sentiment within the country. The magnitude of the PVV's victory, positioning it far ahead of traditional parties such as the Green-Left/Labour Party (GroenLinks/PvdA) and the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), underscored the extent to which political dynamics in the Netherlands have evolved, catching many observers and political analysts off guard.

Below we summarise the study participants' responses to questions on gender attitudes and women's representation. These may be particularly salient given the swing to the far right and the support for PVV. The PVV positions itself as a protector of liberal values, including gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights, but these rights are juxtaposed against the perceived cultural or religious practices of minority groups, especially Muslims (de Lange and Mügge 2015). Gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights are a tool to highlight the differences between the native population and the Muslim immigrant communities. This framing allows them to promote anti-immigration and anti-Islam policies under the guise of protecting the rights of women and LGBTQ+.

We asked Flycatcher to undertake the survey fieldwork for us using their online panel of respondents with first invites sent after the election on 24 November 2023 and the survey closing on 5 December 2023 to inhabitants of the Netherlands aged 18 and over. Flycatcher sent 4,043 invites and 2071 completed the survey (response rate 51%). Stratified sampling was applied for the following background characteristics: gender, age, education and province. While the sample was representative of education and province the sample was not representative by age and gender so the results presented here are weighted by age and gender using the weight provided by Flycatcher.

## 1. Women's Political Representation

A core principle of democracy is that the governing bodies should reflect the demographics of the population they serve. Prior to the last general election, women made up 40% of the elected representatives (60 women out of 150 seats). After the election, this number dropped slightly to 39% (58 women out of the 150 seats). Women representation is higher here than in other countries – it ranks 31<sup>st</sup> on this measure out of 184 countries according to data provided by the Inter-parliamentary Union. We asked our respondents whether they want to see more or fewer women election. Understanding public opinion on representation helps ensure that the political system is responsive and accurately reflects the society's diversity, including gender, ethnicity, age, religion, and sexual orientation. Diverse representation ensures a wider range of perspectives in policymaking, which can lead to more comprehensive and inclusive policies. This diversity within decision-making bodies helps in addressing the needs and concerns of all segments of society, leading to more equitable outcomes. Some argue that an overemphasis on diversity might compromise meritocracy, where positions should be filled based on qualifications and abilities rather than demographic characteristics.

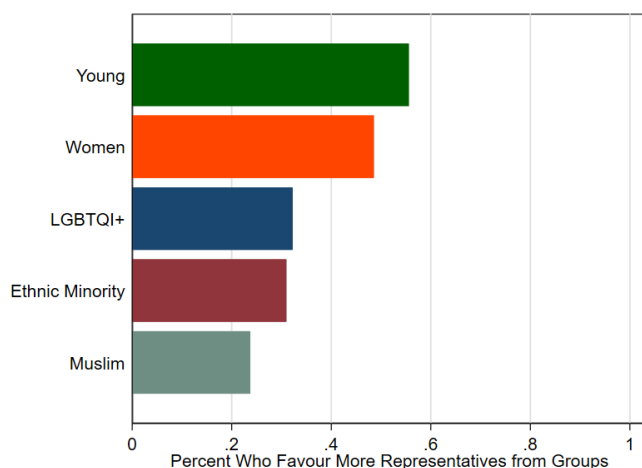


Figure 1: Percentage of Respondents Who Favour A lot More/A Bit More Representatives from Groups in Society

In addition to asking about electing more women, we also asked about other groups in the Netherlands. Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents who favour a lot more or a bit more elected representatives from each group. About 31% of respondents believe there should be "a lot more" or "a bit more" representatives from ethnic minority backgrounds. This

indicates a moderate level of public support for enhancing ethnic diversity among political representatives. Nearly half of the respondents, at 49%, are in favour of increasing the number of female representatives. This suggests a substantial portion of the population advocates for improved gender balance in political representation. Support for more Muslim representatives is at approximately 24%, the lowest among the groups surveyed. This reflects relatively lower public enthusiasm for increasing Muslim representation in the parliament. A majority, with 56% of respondents, supports "a lot more" or "a bit more" representation of young people. This highlights a significant desire for younger perspectives and interests to be better represented in political decision-making processes. Around 32% of respondents are in favor of increasing representation for the LGBTQ community. This indicates a moderate level of support for ensuring more diverse sexual orientations and gender identities among political representatives.

These percentages provide insights into the public's preferences for diversity and inclusion within the Tweede Kamer. While there's a clear desire for more youthful representation, reflecting a push for generational diversity in politics, the relatively lower support for increasing Muslim representation suggests complexities and varying attitudes towards religious diversity. The data also emphasizes ongoing discussions about gender equality and the importance of representing diverse sexual orientations and gender identities in the political sphere.

## 2. Gender Attitudes

We asked several questions aimed at capturing gender attitudes, one question was about anti-sexist behaviour. This survey question asked respondents to agree or disagree with the statement that it is necessary to confront someone making sexist jokes or using negative gender stereotypes. The results reveal most respondents support confronting individuals who express sexist remarks or stereotypes to some extent. The largest portion of respondents, 57%, “Agree” or ‘Somewhat Agree’ with the statement suggesting a large

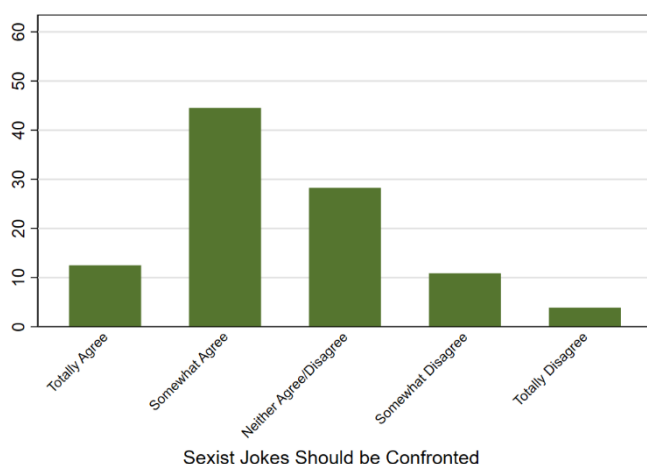


Figure 2 Agree/Disagree That Sexist Jokes Should be Confronted

share of respondents hold views that are consistent with anti-sexist attitudes. A notable proportion of respondents, 28%, selected 'Neither Agree/Disagree,' suggesting ambivalence or neutrality towards the idea of confrontation and 14% disagreed with taking direct action in response to sexist behaviour.

Cumulatively, these results suggest a significant leaning towards the support of confronting sexist jokes or negative gender stereotypes, with more than half of the respondents endorsing such action. However, a substantial fraction of the population remains neutral, and a smaller yet significant minority opposes confrontation, highlighting a diversity of opinions on how to address sexism in social interactions.

## 3. Generations and Attitudes Toward Gender Equality

The recent debate over the gender gap in attitudes about gender equality is sometimes highlighted through the lens of the "Andrew Tate effect" – the hypothesised impact that this controversial internet personality known for his polarizing views on gender roles and

masculinity has had on social discourse, particularly among young men. This debate underscores a broader societal concern: that despite decades of progress towards gender equality, there is a growing backlash among some segments of the younger male population. In addition to the influence of polarizing figures on social media who propagate anti-feminist and misogynistic views, others argue that a backlash against gender equality is fuelled by a combination of factors, including perceived threats to traditional gender roles, and a broader cultural shift that questions the gains of the gender equality movement.

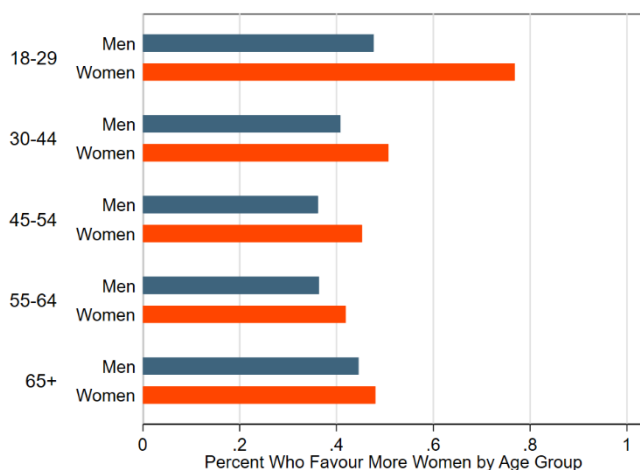


Figure 3 Favour More Women Representatives by Age Group & Gender

In light of these debate about generational shifts in how men and women perceive gender equality, we examined gender attitudes vary by gender and age group. Figure 3 shows that the largest gender gap in attitudes about women’s representation is among the youngest group – those aged 18-29. This gap is mostly driven by young women having such a high level of support for increasing the number of women in parliament. Young men are not so far out of step with other

men or women in other age groups. Indeed, young men are fairly supportive relative to other groups in their support of increasing women’s political representation.

In terms of anti-sexist attitudes, the results in Figure 4 suggest that women between the ages of 18-29 are most supportive of confronting sexism and gender stereotypes. We also see that there is a sizeable gender gap with men in the age group much less likely to agree that sexism should be confronted. However, contrary the any Andrew Tate effect, this gender gap in not largest among this youngest cohort

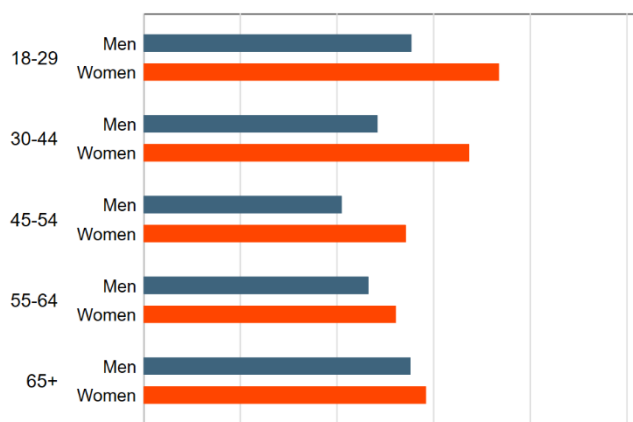


Figure 4 Percentage who Agree that Sexist Jokes Should be Confronted by Age and Gender of Respondent

nor are young men in this age group the least likely to value gender equality. The gender gap among 30–44-year-olds is similar in size to the youngest group. Furthermore, mean in the 45–54-year-old age group are the least likely to agree that sexist jokes should be confronted.

#### **4. Political Parties and Support for Gender Equality**

We also asked our respondents how much they thought political parties support gender equality policies. Rather than focusing on a specific policy, the survey question is designed to gauge public perception of Dutch political parties' support for gender equality in general. This is important because it reflects not only the parties' stances but also how effectively they communicate their policies to the public. The question was worded as follows: "There's a lot of talk about gender equality. This means that women and men have equal rights, opportunities, freedoms and responsibilities. Some parties are very concerned with gender equality, while others are not in favour of implementing policies that support gender equality. Where would you place the next parties in terms of gender equality?" The question utilizes a 0 to 10 scale response scale, allowing respondents to express a range of opinions, from no support (0) to full support (10) for gender equality policies.

The mean rating for each political party is reported in Figure 5. The political parties rated as having the highest levels of support for gender equality are GL/PvdA (GroenLinks/Partij van de Arbeid) and D66. scores higher with a mean of 7.66, signalling stronger perceived support for gender equality. This is based on 1,539 observations. D66 is similarly perceived as supportive of gender equality with a mean score of 7.52 from 1,510 observations, underscoring its alignment with progressive policies on this issue. At the other end of the scale is the PVV, CU and DENK. The PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid) is seen as significantly less supportive, with a low mean score of 3.51, suggesting a widespread perception of the party's opposition to gender equality policies. This is particularly noteworthy given the large number of observations (1,503), which provides a robust basis for this perception. Other parties perceived as least supportive of gender equality include the CU (ChristenUnie) and DENK, with mean scores of 3.48 and 3.17, respectively. These scores, derived from over 1,200 observations each, suggest a significant portion of the population views these parties as less aligned with gender equality policies.

Other parties are perceived to have moderate levels of support for gender equality. The VVD (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie) has a relatively moderate mean score of 5.93, indicating a perception of moderate support for gender equality. With 1,503 observations, this suggests a wide perception range among the respondents. Other parties like the SP (Socialistische Partij), PvdD (Partij voor de Dieren), and CDA (Christen-

Democratisch Appèl) have mean scores that suggest varying degrees of support for gender equality, from moderate to relatively supportive.

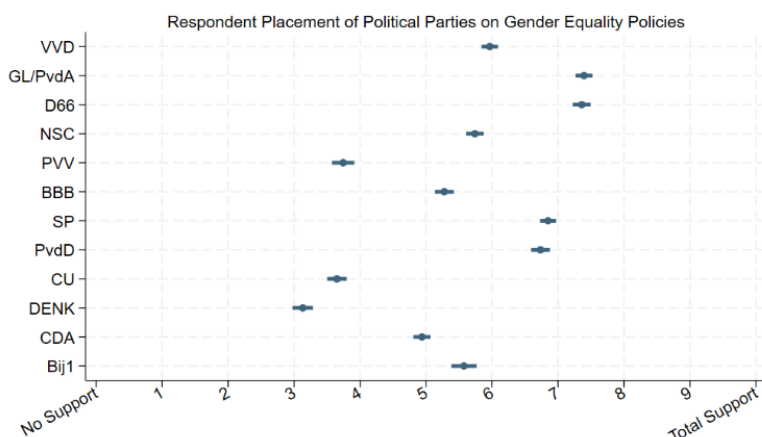


Figure 5 Political Parties and Support for Gender Equality: Respondent Perceptions

We note that we are measuring individual’s perceptions of the party’s stance on gender equality and this may be out of step with what the political party claims. For example,

we noted that the PVV espouses gender equality as one of its liberal values yet this is not reflected in our respondents’ perceptions of the party’s stance. Also, we note that the differences in case numbers (observations) across parties could be attributed to several factors, including the variability of respondents’ familiarity with or opinion on specific parties, or the sampling method used. For instance, parties with fewer observations might reflect less public awareness or interest, which could impact the reliability of their mean scores to some extent. Conversely, parties with more observations likely provide a more accurate representation of public opinion.

#### 4. Concluding Thoughts

Our findings, particularly in the context of the November 2023 Dutch General Election and the subsequent public opinions on gender equality, women’s representation, and party preferences, highlight the nuanced perspectives held by the electorate. The varied levels of support for increased representation across different societal groups underscore the ongoing debates and the importance of gender equality in contemporary politics. We extend our sincere gratitude to all respondents who participated in this survey. Their contributions have not only enriched our understanding but also pave the way for further analysis on these critical issues. Future research might delve deeper into the underlying factors driving the generational and gender-based differences in attitudes toward gender equality, as well as explore the impact of political rhetoric and media representation on public opinion.

**References:** de Lange, S. L., & Mügge, L. M. (2015). Gender and right-wing populism in the Low Countries: Ideological variations across parties and time. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 49(1–2), 61–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1014199>