

Ambitious Women: Hidden within the Party?

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of women can be partly attributed to political parties: when selecting candidates, parties recruit fewer women than men. A common justification is that there are not enough ambitious women in the party. In this article, we test this claim by answering (i) whether women express less political ambition than men; (ii) whether this has changed over time; and (iii) whether and how internal political efficacy influences political ambition. Based on three survey waves among Dutch party members, we conclude that women are to the same extent as men attracted by a political function when becoming a party member. Moreover, there has been no change in political ambition over time. Lastly, we find that internal political efficacy mediates the effect of gender on political ambition. This article thus shows that there is only a small gender gap in ambition and that there are ambitious women in Dutch political parties.

Keywords: political ambition, political party, candidate selection, internal political efficacy, underrepresentation of women.

1 Introduction

In all representative bodies in the Netherlands, women are underrepresented. Despite a steady increase of women in the national parliament, it seems that the representation of women remains on a plateau where the percentage of women does not yet reach 50% (IPU, 2023). This makes the Dutch case an interesting case to study the representation of women in politics since it allows us to study the last hurdles that need to be overcome to achieve equal representation.

To explain the underrepresentation of women in politics, scholars shifted from studying the electoral market to the recruitment market within political parties. In studying the electoral market, the focus was on which electoral institutions would be beneficial for women and whether voters potentially discriminate against women candidates. In the Dutch case, the electoral market does not seem to be the problem; in fact, the electoral system is quite beneficial for women: the large multi-member district, the opportunity to cast preference votes and its proportional system are advantageous for women candidates (Diaz, 2005; Golder et al., 2017; Matland, 2005). Moreover, Dutch voters also do not seem to discriminate against women: they evaluate them more positively and women receive more preference

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votes than men (Van Dijk & Van Holsteyn, 2022). Is it then within the political party where the hurdles to equal representation are to be sought?

To answer that question, one can study the supply and demand side of the recruitment market. On the demand side, the focus is on what political parties look for in candidates and how their demands are shaped by the interplay of formal and informal institutions (Bjarnegård, 2013; Kenny & Verge, 2016; Van Dijk, 2023). On the other side, the supply side, the focus is on the people who want to run for political office. The main question then is, do women want to run for office? Research studying the latter is mainly focused on the United States (for European studies, see, for example, Ammassari et al., 2023; Coffé et al., 2022; Devroe et al., 2023; Kjaer & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019), where it is found that women have less political ambition than men (Fox & Lawless, 2004; Lawless & Fox, 2010). However, in candidate-centred cases, such as the United States, the incentives to participate in politics differ from party-centred cases (Beauregard, 2014; Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Therefore, it is crucial to study the question of political ambition in other cases too. Besides studying a different context, it is important to study different populations on the recruitment ladder, such as party members. Especially since political parties mainly recruit from their party members. Given the fact that the number of party members is small (Van Biezen et al., 2012) and that they are predominantly men (Heidar & Wauters, 2019), a gender gap in ambition among party members could have severe consequences for the representation of women.

This article therefore investigates whether men and women party members of Dutch political parties differ concerning their level of political ambition. Moreover, I study whether the level of political ambition is affected by time and internal political efficacy. I find that there is indeed a gender gap in political ambition among Dutch party members but that this is substantially very small. Moreover, I also find that time does not impact the level of political ambition: the level and the gender difference in ambition did not substantially change from 1998 to 2017. Lastly, the analysis shows that the effect of gender is both mediated and (slightly) moderated by internal political efficacy. These results show that, even though there is a small gender gap, there are ambitious women in each political party.

The contribution of this article to the literature on women and politics is threefold. First of all, contrary to the majority of studies, in this article political ambition is studied in a party-centred case. Party-centred cases may provide different incentives to become politically active and may even generate different gender(ed) effects. Therefore, we are not able to simply generalise the findings from candidate-centred cases such as the United States. Secondly, this article contributes by studying political ambition among party members, a population that is not often studied in light of political ambition (but see Kjaer & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019). This population is, however, of the utmost importance since party members are the main and small recruitment pool for parties. Lastly, this study contributes to the literature because the longitudinal nature of the Leiden Party Member Survey allows us to discover whether time has affected the level of political ambition of women.

2 Why Focus on the Party?

The puzzle of the underrepresentation of women in parliaments has been extensively studied but has not been solved yet. One of the first approaches scholars have taken is to study the macro level of institutions: which electoral systems benefit women, and which do not? It is found that proportional systems are advantageous for women (Diaz, 2005; Paxton & Hughes, 2007; Rule, 1987). Another beneficial institutional feature is the possibility to express a preference vote, which allows voters to surpass a potential bias of their party against women (Golder et al., 2017; Kunovich, 2012). In addition, district magnitude can be advantageous for women: a large district is better for the success of woman politicians than a single-member district (Matland, 2005; Matland & Brown, 1992; Paxton & Hughes, 2007). The Dutch system, the focus of this study, ticks all the boxes of these institutional benefits: it has been classified as being extremely proportional (Lijphart, 1999); it has one 150-member district;¹ and it has the opportunity to cast preference votes. This advantageous institutional system makes the puzzle of underrepresentation even more complicated.

Within each institutional system, there is an electoral market: parties supply (lists of) candidates and voters express their demand by voting for a certain type of candidate. To see whether the underrepresentation of women occurs in this market, one can study whether voters are biased against women candidates in elections. It has been found that Dutch voters do have gender stereotypes about men and women; however, they do not seem to use these beliefs in their evaluation of politicians. In fact, women candidates are evaluated similarly or even more positively than men ((Van Dijk & Van Holsteyn, 2022). This concurs with findings about women candidates (Teele et al., 2018; for an extensive meta-analysis, see Schwarz & Coppock, 2022) as well as women party leaders (Bridgewater & Nagel, 2020; Dassonneville et al., 2021). However, findings from the Dutch case show there are notable party differences: it appears that right-wing voters prefer men, while green-left voters prefer women (van der Pas et al., 2022).

Besides researching prejudice against women and its impact on vote choice in experimental settings, one can also study the actual voting behaviour. If there are relatively more women elected than there were women candidates, this would be a sign that voters do not shy away from electing women politicians. In the Netherlands, the proportion of elected women politicians exceeds the proportion of candidates in the last four national elections. This concurs with the increasing number of preference votes for women in the Netherlands (Van Holsteyn & Andeweg, 2012). In short, (Dutch) voters thus express a clear demand for women politicians. The question is whether parties can meet this demand by increasing the number of women candidates on the party lists.

The supply of candidates on the electoral market is the outcome of the recruitment market within a party. Recruiting and nominating candidates for office is a classic and key function of the political party (Hazan & Rahat, 2005; Norris, 2006; Sartori, 1976). The institutional rules that determine candidate selection can affect the fortunes of women candidates (Ruf, 2021). For example, the presence of (voluntary) gender quotas influences the number of women

candidates (Meier, 2004; Schwindt-Bayer, 2009). Another institutional factor is the inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the selectorate, that is, the number of people who can decide. Some studies indicate that an inclusive selectorate leads to fewer or worse chances for women candidates (e.g. Gauja & Cross, 2015; Indriðason & Kristinsson, 2015; Rahat et al., 2008), while others find evidence for the positive effect of inclusive selectorates (Fortin-Rittberger & Rittberger, 2015; Regalia & Valbruzzi, 2016; Vandeleene, 2014). Despite these conflicting findings, there is consensus that attention to the intraparty dynamics is pivotal to better understand the effects it has on both the supply and demand of women candidates.

Research on Dutch parties indicates that most parties in their statutes aim to achieve gender parity on their candidate lists (Mügge & Damstra, 2013). Two exceptions were the Christian parties, but these are small: they only have 8 out of 150 seats (5.3%) in the 2021 elections. Expressing the aim of gender parity, however, does not always equal conscious action. For example, some parties have had a gender quota (PvdA) or have implemented other conscious strategies to increase the number of women candidates in their recruitment procedures, while other parties are more passive in this regard (Van Dijk, 2023).

These institutional rules highly affect the supply and demand within political parties. When studying the demand perspective, scholars look, for example, at the composition of the selectorate: when parties apply gender quotas for their selectorates, it is found that more women make it to the ballot (Vandeleene, 2014). Moreover, the presence of women as gatekeepers signals to eligible candidates that women are welcome in politics (Cheng & Tavits, 2011). This literature also shows what selectors are looking for, such as active party members, political experience or incumbents (Calca & Ruel, 2023; Van Dijk, 2023; Verge & Claveria, 2018). These criteria can produce gendered effects: if one looks, for example, for active party members, it is not strange that there is a higher probability of selecting men since the majority of party members are still men (Van Dijk, 2023).

In short, the Dutch electoral institutions are beneficial for women; in the electoral market, voters express their demand for women candidates by casting preference votes and evaluating them at least as or even more positively than men. And lastly, in the recruitment market, political parties state that they have a demand for gender parity. There thus seems to be a demand for women in politics; is it then a problem of supply?

3 Explaining the Political Ambition Gap

When we focus on this supply side, the attention shifts to the people who want to run for office. How do they climb on the recruitment ladder, or so-called recruitment chain (Lovenduski, 2016; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995)? By studying each step of the recruitment ladder from voters to MPs, it is possible to detect where the underrepresentation starts to occur and where women drop out (Mügge et al., 2019). It is important to note that each step on this ladder is highly influenced by the party and the demand side as well (Krook, 2010). One of the first steps on the

ladder is whether eligible citizens have an interest in politics or aspirations to become politically active; do they have the ambition to hold a political function?

This idea of emerging ambition is what Fox and Lawless coin ‘nascent ambition’. Ever since Fox and Lawless’ seminal work about nascent ambition (2005), an increasing number of studies concern the initial decision to run for office and whether there is a gender gap (e.g. Blais et al., 2019; Coffé et al., 2022; Dynes et al., 2019). Previous research among American, Canadian and British citizens suggests that women consider running for office at a significantly smaller rate than men (Allen & Cutts, 2018; Fox & Lawless, 2004; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Preece & Stoddard, 2015; Pruyssers & Blais, 2017). However, the fact that these countries have single-member districts can make the system very competitive, which may influence political ambition. The nature of majoritarian systems can influence the incentives people feel to become politically active (Beauregard, 2014; Kittilson & Schwindt-Bayer, 2012). Lawless and Fox also acknowledge that due to these electoral systems, it is harder for women to come forward and that they are more likely to be discouraged from running for office. To account for the interplay between political ambition and the electoral system, it is necessary to study political ambition in countries where the incentives to participate are different in order to see if the findings from earlier studies are applicable there as well.

Another important aspect of studying political ambition is to decide *whom* in the recruitment ladder one studies. One can start at the bottom of the ladder; for example, the gender gap in political ambition is already visible in the British general population (Allen & Cutts, 2018). This gap can also be found in subsamples of the populations such as students (Coffé et al., 2022), young people (Devroe et al., 2023) or people with political-oriented careers² (Fox & Lawless, 2005). Studies of these populations, however, have one pitfall since political parties do not directly recruit from the population. Being a party member is an essential step to becoming a candidate (Ashe & Stewart, 2012). In some countries, it is even formally required to be a party member when you want to run for office (e.g. Canada, see Ashe & Stewart, 2012). Given the fact that the number of political party members is rather low in most countries (Van Biezen et al., 2012) and that there are more men than women among party members (Heidar & Wauters, 2019), the consequences of a potential gender gap among party members for the recruitment of women might be substantial. If there are gender differences in ambition present among this small and men-dominated pool, this might make it difficult for parties to recruit and select women.

Research from Canada and the United States suggests that among party activists and party members, there is indeed a gender gap in ambition (Cross, 2019; van Assendelft & O’Connor, 1994). However, as previously argued, the institutional context might influence the ambition formation among party activists or members too. We know little about ambition levels among party members in party-centred systems. Only in Denmark party members were asked to report whether they were interested in running for office if they were encouraged by the party (Kjaer & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2019). It was found that women members showed less political ambition. Based on these findings and the findings in candidate-centred literature, one would expect the same for the Dutch party members:

Hypothesis 1: Women party members report lower levels of political ambition than men party members.

Because of the increasing number of women in politics and changing gender norms in society, this gender gap might decrease over time. Research shows that the increasing presence of women in politics and of women politicians in the news increases the willingness of young adolescent girls to become politically active (Campbell & Wolbrecht, 2006; Wolbrecht & Campbell, 2007). Moreover, women in high-profile functions positively influence the number of women running for political office (Ladam et al., 2018). By observing women participating in politics, women get the feeling that they too can participate in this domain.

If we look at the Dutch case, more women became politically active in the period under study (1998-2017). Although in the national parliament the number of women remained relatively stable (34% in 1998 and 35% in 2017 [Parlement.com, n.d.]), in local and regional politics the number of active women was on the rise. In local councils in 1998, as much as 23% of the politicians were women, while in 2016 this increased to 28%. At the provincial level, this was 28% in 2005 and 35% in 2016 (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties, 2014, 2017).

Besides changes in the descriptive representation of women in politics, society and its gender roles are subject to change as well, which might influence the consideration of running for office. The process of gender socialisation means that one internalises gender stereotypes by observing how men and women behave. For example, the classic gender roles entail that men are more suited for leadership roles and women are better caretakers (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Stockard, 2006). If men and women become more equal, this might directly positively affect how women perceive their own role in society but also, indirectly, affect how women are perceived by society.

A longitudinal study on the emancipation of women In the Netherlands showed that the participation of women in the labour force increased: not only did women participate more in the labour force, but the number of women in executive functions increased as well. Besides changes in the labour force, the ideas about the correct gender roles are subject to change over time: although the majority of people still think women are better at taking care of children, this has decreased ever since the 1980s (Portegijs & van den Brakel, 2018).

Because of these changes in society and politics, we expect that the gender gap in political ambition will decrease over time. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 2: Women have less political ambition than men, but this will decrease over time.

Besides explanations on the societal level, another crucial question that emerged is as follows: to what extent do individual predictors explain political ambition and to what extent are these gendered? Not only objective resources – such as education, experience or money – play a role in ambition formation, subjective perceptions play a significant role in ambition formation too. Fox and Lawless name these

‘strategic considerations’: assuming that individuals are strategic when it comes to political participation, it makes sense that before one considers running for office, one at least needs to perceive oneself as qualified to do so (2005). This belief one has in their own capabilities to participate in politics is called ‘internal political efficacy’ (Craig et al., 1990; Morrell, 2003). Having internal political efficacy is an important predictor for all sorts of political participation (Grasso & Smith, 2022). Therefore, the third hypothesis concerns the general effect of internal political efficacy on political ambition:

Hypothesis 3a: When party members have more internal political efficacy, their political ambition will increase.

Scholarly consensus exists around the fact that there is a gender gap in internal political efficacy (Fraile & de Miguel Moyer, 2022; Matthieu, 2023). Women are, for example, less confident in their ability to understand politics compared to men (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010; Gidengil et al., 2008). This points to the mediating role internal political efficacy plays in the relation between gender and ambition. Besides this mediation effect, it could also be the case that the effect of internal efficacy on political ambition works differently for men and women. Previous research indicates that the influence of internal political efficacy might be gendered. Preece (2016), for example, found that the effect of internal political efficacy on political interest was different for men and women: when women received positive encouragement, it increased their political interest, while this was not the case for men.

Therefore, besides the mediation effect of internal political efficacy on ambition, it can be argued that the positive effect of internal political efficacy might also be less strong for women because of internalised gender roles or the so-called gendered psyche (Lawless & Fox, 2010). It can, for example, be that women have higher standards for themselves compared to men: even when they have the same level of internal political efficacy, this can have a weaker effect on their political ambition than it does for men. Therefore, the expectation is that internal political efficacy increases political ambition, but that this effect is less strong for women:

Hypothesis 3b: The positive effect of internal political efficacy will be less strong for women than for men.

4 Methodology

4.1 Data Collection

The data about Dutch party members come from the Leiden Party Member Survey (LMPS) that was held in 1998/1999, 2008 and 2017 (Den Ridder, 2014; Den Ridder et al., 2020; Koole et al., 2000).³ As Table 1 shows, in 1998/1999, only four parties participated (CDA, D66, PvdA and VVD); in 2008, the number of parties increased to seven (CU, GL, SGP); and in 2017, eight parties participated (50PLUS). In

1998/1999 and 2008, the survey was sent via post, while in 2017 the survey was predominantly distributed via email. Only when parties had less than 80% of their members’ online addresses, the surveys were sent via postal services and online (50/50). More information on the survey mode, sample size and response can be found in Table A1 in the Appendix. The data from the separate cross-sectional waves are combined into one dataset.

Table 1 *Number of political parties and respondents participating in LPMS*

	1998/1999 (N = 2,892)	2008 (N = 4,244)	2017 (N = 5,527)	Overall (N = 12,663)
50PLUS			884 (16.0%)	884 (7.0%)
CDA	606 (21.0%)	469 (11.1%)	552 (10.0%)	1,627 (12.8%)
CU		523 (12.3%)	590 (10.7%)	1,113 (8.8%)
D66	907 (31.4%)	921 (21.7%)	603 (10.9%)	2,431 (19.2%)
GL		674 (15.9%)	778 (14.1%)	1,452 (11.5%)
PvdA	739 (25.6%)	554 (13.1%)	682 (12.3%)	1,975 (15.6%)
SGP		552 (13.0%)	879 (15.9%)	1,431 (11.3%)
VVD	640 (22.1%)	551 (13.0%)	559 (10.1%)	1,750 (13.8%)

4.2 Variables

Political ambition: Political ambition is measured by a question that taps into the incentives members had to join the party. One of the questions asks whether party members joined the party because they “aspire to have a political function”. Answers ranged on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means that this incentive was ‘really unimportant’ and 4 ‘really important’. See the Appendix for the original Dutch question-wording.⁴

Year: To measure whether political ambition increased over time and whether the effect of gender diminished over time, the variable ‘year’ is used. This indicates in which year the survey was held: 1998/1999, 2008 or 2017. This allows us to see a potential change in political ambition over 19 years. The years are added as dummy variables to the model.

Internal political efficacy: Internal political efficacy is often measured with the four items, namely, perceiving yourself to be qualified; understanding the main problems in society; having the feeling that one would be good in public office; and having the feeling that you are informed (Craig et al., 1990). However, unfortunately, in this survey only two of these items were asked: whether respondents felt that they were able to play an active role in politics (self-qualified) and whether respondents had a good understanding of the most important problems in the country (understanding). Answers ranged on a scale from 1 (*totally disagree*) to 4 (*completely agree*). The use of only two out of four items measuring internal political efficacy is, however, not uncommon (Fraile & de Miguel Moyer, 2022; Grasso & Smith, 2022). Since not all four items of the concept were included, we add these items separately in the model.⁵ It is often debated whether the item about

complexity (“sometimes politics is so complicated that a person like me can’t really understand what’s going on”) is part of internal political efficacy. Previous research showed that this item did not load on the internal political efficacy construct, since it falls in between internal and external political efficacy (Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991). For the sake of completeness, the item is included as well.

Control variables: The age of the respondent was chosen as an individual-level control variable. The variable age is added to the model as a categorical variable indicating several life stages (<30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, >61). This way it is possible to detect potential lifecycle effects on political ambition.

5 Results

Before discussing the models testing the hypotheses, it is important to first describe the respondents in our survey. As Table 2 and the more extensive descriptive Table A2 in the Appendix show, most party members are men. In our sample, 71.2% of the respondents are men, while 28.8% of the members are women. Women are thus a numerical minority among party members. If we look at the differences between parties (results not shown), the largest gender gap can be found at the SGP (95.3% men – 4.7% women) and 50PLUS (85.5% men – 14.5% women). GroenLinks (58.5% men – 41.5% women) and D66 (61.9% men – 38.1% women) have the smallest gender gap. Moreover, we see that party members are increasingly getting old: in 1999, the party members’ average age was 54.1, which increased to 60.3 in 2017. The oldest party members can be found at 50PLUS (M = 68.4) and CDA (M = 66), while GroenLinks (M = 52.9) and D66 (M = 53.9) have the youngest party members.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics – political ambition, gender and age.

	1999 (N = 2,836)	2008 (N = 4,192)	2017 (N = 4,421)	Overall (N = 11,449)
How important is a political office as an incentive to join a political party				
Really unimportant	1,399 (49.3%)	2,311 (55.1%)	2,460 (55.6%)	6,170 (53.9%)
Unimportant	726 (25.6%)	1,056 (25.2%)	1,070 (24.4%)	2,852 (24.9%)
Important	359 (12.7%)	439 (10.5%)	478 (10.8%)	1,276 (11.1%)
Really Important	119 (4.2%)	141 (3.4%)	190 (4.3%)	450 (3.9%)
Missing	233 (8.2%)	245 (5.8%)	223 (5.0%)	701 (6.1%)
Gender				
Man	1,805 (63.6%)	2,952 (70.4%)	3,392 (76.7%)	8,149 (71.2%)
Woman	1,031 (36.4%)	1,240 (29.6%)	1,029 (23.2%)	3,300 (28.2%)

Table 2 (Continued)

	1999 (N = 2,836)	2008 (N = 4,192)	2017 (N = 4,421)	Overall (N = 11,449)
Age				
Mean (SD)	54.1 (15.2)	56.9 (15.2)	60.3 (16.1)	57.5 (15.7)

In general, party members do not express a lot of political ambition: only 15% of the members name “having a political function” as a (really) important incentive to join the party. Without controlling for other factors, we see that women party members state that a political function has been an important reason to join the party at a similar rate as men ($\%_{\text{women}} = 14.8, \%_{\text{men}} = 15.2; \chi^2 = 3.159, df = 3, p = .368$). The chi-square is not significant, signalling that there is no association between gender and political ambition.

However, when we include fixed effects for political parties in the ordinal logistic regression model, gender does have a significant negative – small – effect (see Model 1, Table 3). As Figure 1 shows, in some parties, the overall level of political ambition is somewhat higher (VVD and D66) and, in some parties, the difference in ambition between men and women seems absent (VVD) or reversed (CDA). This shows that it is indeed necessary to control for party differences. Based on these analyses we cannot reject our first hypothesis, indicating that there is indeed a gender difference in political ambition. As can be seen in Figure 2 displaying the predicted probabilities, the effect of gender is substantially rather small.

Figure 1 Proportions of political ambition levels divided per party and per gender

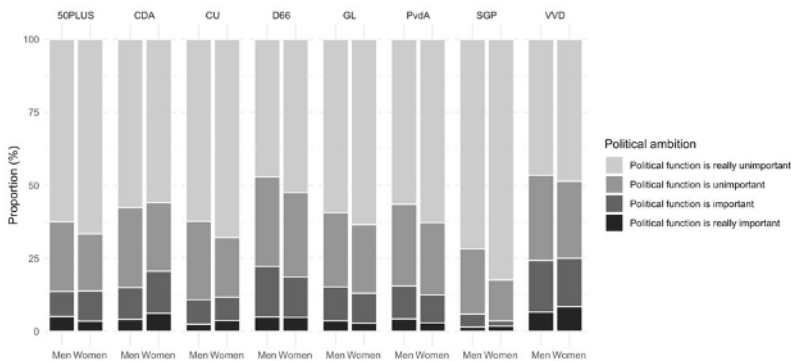
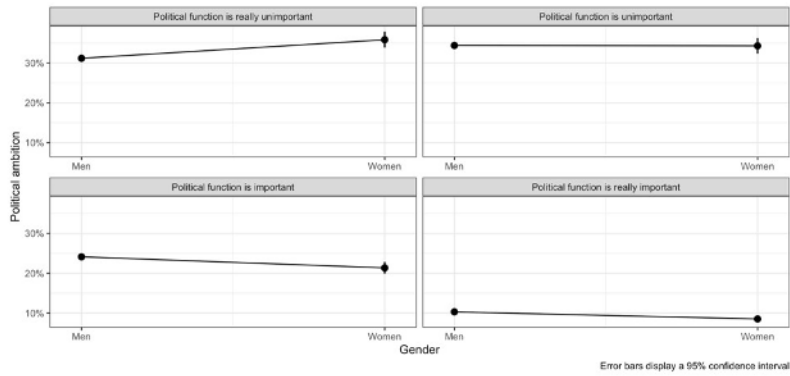


Figure 2 Predicted probabilities of the effect of gender (based on Model 1)



To test our second hypothesis – the effect of time – year is added to the model as an interaction variable with gender. If our hypothesis is true, we should observe a significant interaction effect indicating that the effect of gender diminishes over time. As visible in Model 2, ‘year’ on its own has a significant positive, but small, effect on political ambition: over time party members are increasingly getting more ambitious. In Model 3, we include the interaction effect with gender, but the interaction effect is close to zero and not significant (predicted probabilities are shown in Figure A1 in the Appendix). Moreover, the model is not an improved fit (based on an ANOVA test, $p = 0.15$). In sum, we need to reject our second hypothesis: the effect of gender on political ambition does not change over time.

The third hypothesis predicts that internal political efficacy positively impacts political ambition: if party members score high on internal political efficacy, this will result in more political ambition (see Table A3 in the Appendix for mean scores per gender on each item). If we add all the internal efficacy items separately in one model (see Model 4 in Table 4), we see that only one of the three items has a positive effect on political ambition (perceiving yourself as qualified). The effect of the second item (understanding the main problems of politics) is borderline significant ($p < 0.1$), but the effect size is negligible. These data provide partial evidence for our third hypothesis that internal political efficacy is indeed a positive predictor of political ambition.

Table 3 Ordinal logistic regression models explaining political ambition (Hypotheses 1 and 2)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Woman (ref. = man)	-0.21 ^{***} (0.04)	-0.19 ^{***} (0.04)	-0.08 (0.08)
Party (ref. = 50PLUS)			

Table 3 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
CDA	0.08 (0.10)	0.27* (0.10)	0.27** (0.10)
CU	-0.48*** (0.11)	-0.42*** (0.11)	-0.42*** (0.11)
D66	0.17* (0.10)	0.36*** (0.10)	0.36*** (0.10)
GL	-0.33** (0.10)	-0.27* (0.11)	-0.27* (0.11)
PvdA	-0.10 (0.10)	0.07 (0.10)	0.07 (0.10)
SGP	-0.96*** (0.11)	-0.92*** (0.11)	-0.93*** (0.11)
VVD	0.30** (0.10)	0.47*** (0.10)	0.47*** (0.10)
Age groups (ref. = <30)			
Age 31-40	-0.40*** (0.09)	-0.38*** (0.09)	-0.38*** (0.09)
Age 41-50	-0.63*** (0.08)	-0.60*** (0.08)	-0.61*** (0.08)
Age 51-60	-0.85*** (0.08)	-0.85*** (0.08)	-0.85*** (0.08)
Age 61+	-1.36*** (0.08)	-1.41*** (0.08)	-1.42*** (0.08)
Year 2008 (ref. 1999)		0.20** (0.05)	0.27*** (0.06)
Year 2017 (ref. 1999)		0.39*** (0.06)	0.43*** (0.07)
Woman * Year 2008			-0.21* (0.11)
Woman * Year 2017			-0.11 (0.11)

Table 3 (Continued)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Intercepts			
1 2	-0.79*** (0.11)	-0.45*** (0.12)	-0.41** (0.13)
2 3	0.64*** (0.11)	1.00*** (0.12)	1.03*** (0.13)
3 4	2.16*** (0.12)	2.52*** (0.13)	2.55*** (0.13)
AIC	21,790.67	21,746.70	21,746.99
Number of observations	10,673	10,673	10,673

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$.

It is important to note that the effect of gender becomes insignificant (see Model 4). This suggests that the effect of gender is indeed mediated by the effect of internal political efficacy. Concretely, this means that being a woman negatively influences internal political efficacy, which in turn positively influences political ambition. So, if a party member is a woman, there is a negative effect on the perceived self-qualification. However, if one perceives oneself as more qualified, this results in more political ambition.

Since our Hypothesis 3b predicted a moderation effect, and because the presence of a mediation effect does not rule out the presence of an interaction effect, interaction terms for all three internal political efficacy items are added to the model (Models 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 in Table 4). All items significantly interact with gender. This means that the effects of internal political efficacy are not the same for men and women. However, the direction is the opposite of what was expected: the effect of internal political efficacy is stronger for women. This means that when women do have confidence in their own political abilities, they are more likely to have more political ambition than men. However, if we plot the predicted probabilities for these interaction effects (see Figure A2 in the Appendix), the confidence intervals widely overlap, and the effects are rather small. Although the overlapping confidence intervals do not mean that the effect is non-significant, it shows that it is substantially difficult to distinguish the different effects of internal political efficacy for men and women. The safe conclusion to make based on these data is that internal political efficacy is mainly a mediator for the effect of gender on political ambition.

Table 4 *Ordinal logistic regression models explaining political ambition
(Hypothesis 3)*

	Model 4	Model 5.1	Model 5.2	Model 5.3
Woman (ref. = man)	0.01 (0.05)	−0.40 ⁺ (0.19)	−0.86 ^{**} (0.27)	0.30 ⁺ (0.14)
Self-qualified	1.01 ^{***} (0.03)	0.97 ^{***} (0.04)	1.01 ^{***} (0.03)	1.01 ^{***} (0.03)
Understanding	0.08 ⁺ (0.04)	0.07 ⁺ (0.04)	−0.00 (0.05)	0.07 ⁺ (0.04)
Too complex	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)	0.04 (0.04)
Woman * Self-qualified		0.14 ⁺ (0.06)		
Woman * Understanding			0.29 ^{**} (0.09)	
Woman * Too complex				−0.14 ⁺ (0.07)
Party (ref. = 50PLUS)				
CDA	0.37 ^{***} (0.11)	0.36 ^{***} (0.11)	0.36 ^{**} (0.11)	0.37 ^{***} (0.11)
CU	−0.24 ⁺ (0.12)	−0.24 ⁺ (0.12)	−0.25 ⁺ (0.12)	−0.24 ⁺ (0.12)
D66	0.17 (0.11)	0.17 (0.11)	0.17 (0.11)	0.17 (0.11)
GL	−0.39 ^{***} (0.11)	−0.38 ^{***} (0.11)	−0.39 ^{***} (0.11)	−0.38 ^{***} (0.11)
PvdA	−0.03 (0.11)	−0.02 (0.11)	−0.03 (0.11)	−0.02 (0.11)
SGP	−0.32 ^{**} (0.12)	−0.34 ^{**} (0.12)	−0.34 ^{**} (0.12)	−0.33 ^{**} (0.12)
VVD	0.32 ^{**} (0.11)	0.32 ^{**} (0.11)	0.31 ^{**} (0.11)	0.32 ^{**} (0.11)
Age groups (ref. = <30)				

Table 4 (Continued)

	Model 4	Model 5.1	Model 5.2	Model 5.3
Age 31-40	-0.33*** (0.09)	-0.33*** (0.09)	-0.32*** (0.09)	-0.32*** (0.09)
Age 41-50	-0.58*** (0.09)	-0.58*** (0.09)	-0.58*** (0.09)	-0.57*** (0.09)
Age 51-60	-0.72*** (0.08)	-0.72*** (0.08)	-0.72*** (0.08)	-0.71*** (0.08)
Age 61+	-0.97*** (0.08)	-0.97*** (0.08)	-0.96*** (0.08)	-0.96*** (0.08)
Year 2008 (ref. 1999)	0.14* (0.06)	0.15* (0.06)	0.14* (0.06)	0.15* (0.06)
Year 2017 (ref. 1999)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.06)	0.21*** (0.06)	0.22*** (0.06)
Intercepts				
1 2	2.73*** (0.21)	2.60*** (0.22)	2.47*** (0.23)	2.80*** (0.22)
2 3	4.31*** (0.22)	4.18*** (0.22)	4.05*** (0.23)	4.38*** (0.22)
3 4	5.92*** (0.22)	5.80*** (0.23)	5.67*** (0.23)	6.00*** (0.22)
AIC	19,559.79	19,556.39	19,550.84	19,557.38
Number of observations	10,234	10,234	10,234	10,234

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$; $p < 0.1$.

6 Conclusion and Discussion

This article investigates the level of political ambition among Dutch party members and whether there is a gender gap in ambition. At first glance, there is no significant gender gap in political ambition; however, when controlling for political parties, gender does have a negative effect on the level of ambition. It must be emphasised here that the negative effect of gender on political ambition is substantively small. Secondly, it is found that, despite the increase of women in politics in the last two decades and the changing gender roles, the gender gap in political ambition did not become smaller over time. Lastly, it is found that internal political efficacy – the belief in one's capacity to participate in politics – positively explains political ambition. In fact, the effect of gender is strongly mediated by political efficacy. This

article thus confirms previous research highlighting the gendered relation between efficacy and political engagement (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010).

These findings also imply that when the gender gap in political internal efficacy is minimised, the political ambition gap might also decrease. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen internal political efficacy among women in general, but women party members especially. Parties could, for example, encourage more women to become active in politics since encouragement is very important for people to become politically active (Fulton et al., 2006; Lawless & Fox, 2010; Wille, 1994). Strengthening internal political efficacy, however, must not only be done within political parties but must also start earlier in the recruitment ladder. Especially since already among youngsters there is a gender gap in internal political efficacy (Matthieu, 2023; Thijs et al., 2019).

The contribution of this article is threefold. This article studied political ambition in a party-centred case, while previous studies predominantly focused on candidate-centred cases. Since different electoral systems provide different incentives to become politically active, it is important to see whether the gender gap in political ambition is similar in party-centred cases. It shows that in the Dutch party-centred system the gender gap in ambition among party members is not substantively large. The differences in findings emphasise the need for caution when applying results from a candidate-centred context to a party-centred one.

The second contribution is the focus on party members; a crucial pool of eligible candidates, especially given the small number of party members (Van Biezen et al., 2012) and the fact that most members are men (Heidar & Wauters, 2019). By demonstrating that the gender gap in ambition among party members is not substantial, this article highlights that parties can no longer use the lack of ambitious women as an excuse. In fact, ambitious women do exist in their own ranks at a comparable rate to men. Consequently, parties may need to revise their strategies for recruiting these women. Moreover, another task is to strengthen the efforts to attract more women to join as members initially.

Lastly, it was possible to see whether the ambition gap changed over time. It turned out that, despite the growing presence of women in politics and decision-making positions, this did not visibly affect the ambition of party members. This could, for example, be explained by the fact that the positive role-model effect can fade over time when women are more established in politics (Gilardi, 2015).

The use of cross-sectional survey data can, however, also be seen as a weakness since it does not allow us to test the causal relationship between internal political efficacy and political ambition. Moreover, the operationalisation of internal political efficacy is somewhat suboptimal: not only did we have two of the four items necessary to study internal political efficacy, but the two items together were also not a reliable scale. However, by adding the items measuring internal political efficacy separately to the model, it was possible to detect subtle differences in their relation with gender and political ambition. Lastly, the operationalisation of political ambition – asking members whether they joined a political party because they wanted a political function – is a rather indirect way of measuring political ambition. However, it does relate to the concept of nascent ambition since it asks

about considering a political function. The broad framing of a political function could have influenced the findings, especially since previous research indicates that the framing of a political career impacts the gender gap: when politics is framed as conflict and competition and not as cooperation and policy, women are less interested (Schneider et al., 2016). Considering these findings, it is in fact even more interesting that in this study we do not observe a gender gap with a broader measure.

In sum, this article shows that also in the Dutch case, there is a minor gender gap in political ambition among party members, which is mediated by internal political efficacy. However, this is substantially very small. This is thus good news for parties looking for women candidates: there are ambitious women in each party at nearly the same rate as men. It is their task to first actively recruit this potential and, second, to attract more women as party members.

Notes

- 1 Officially, there are 20 districts ('kieskringen'), but most parties compete with the same lists in each district.
- 2 In their Citizen Political Ambition Study, Lawless and Fox sampled "successful women and men who occupy the four professions that most often precede a career in politics" (2005, p. 4). These professions were law, business, education and political activism.
- 3 For more information about the LPMS, see Den Ridder (2014).
- 4 Since this measure asks about an incentive in the past, it could be subject to hindsight bias. Fortunately, there was a way to test whether past incentives correlated with current incentives to remain a member. In the 1999 party member survey, the same 21 items from the General Incentive Model were asked to the respondents to grasp their motivations to stay a member. This question allows us to test the association between the motivations to become a member and to stay a member. Based on a chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 2508$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.578$), one sees that there is a significant association between the motivation to become a member to get a political function and to stay a member to get a political function. To check whether the same association holds for both men and women, I also split the sample based on gender and ran the chi-square tests again. Both for men ($\chi^2 = 1772$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.600$) and women ($\chi^2 = 748.93$, $df = 9$, $p < 0.001$, Cramer's $V = 0.538$), the association between the motivation to become a member and stay a member to get a political function is significant.
- 5 Since internal political efficacy is often measured as one construct, a principal component analysis (PCA) was performed on the three items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis is KMO = 0.64, which is 'mediocre' (Kaiser, 1974). All values had a KMO value at 0.62, which surpasses the minimum of 0.5. Bartlett's test indicated that the correlation between the items was significantly large to conduct a PCA. One item was extracted based on the eigenvalue above 1. However, the reliability of the scale was low, at Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.61$. Even when the item 'politics is too complex' was excluded, the reliability remained low: Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.57$. Therefore, all the items measuring internal political efficacy are used separately in the

main analysis. However, in the Appendix a model (Table A4) is provided with the items combined in 1 scale.

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