

Expression of Interest to Join a Horizon Europe Consortium

Call:

HORIZON-CL2-2027-01-DEMOCRACY-01: Advisory support and network for countering and preventing radicalisation, extremism, hate speech and polarization

Research Partner Expression of Interest

Dr. Loes Aaldering

Associate Professor in Political Science, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU)

Expertise: gendered politics, political leadership, voter attitudes and behavior, political communication, political representation, political psychology, polarization

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Google Scholar profile [Loes Aaldering](#)

General Expertise of Loes Aaldering

Loes Aaldering is a political scientist whose expertise lies at the intersection of gender and politics, political psychology, political communication, electoral behavior and political leadership. Her research focuses on the functioning and resilience of representative democracies, with particular attention to political inequality, gender bias, and the role of media and political communication in shaping democratic attitudes and behavior. Her main areas of expertise include:

- Gender and politics — including sexism in politics, the underrepresentation of women, gendered political stereotypes, and gender bias in political media coverage and voter's candidate evaluations.
- Political communication and media effects — especially how media portray politicians and how this shapes voter perceptions, leadership evaluations, political attitudes and electoral behavior.
- Political leadership and candidate popularity — including the role of leadership traits, personality characteristics, stereotypes, partisanship, and “dark” personality traits in politics.
- Political socialization — particularly how children and adolescents develop political attitudes related to gender, representation, and democracy.
- Democratic representation and inequality — with a broader focus on strengthening representative democracy and improving the political inclusion of marginalized groups.

Methodologically, Loes Aaldering specializes in advanced quantitative methods, including survey research, experiments, meta-analysis, and textual and visual content analysis. Her current research focuses on gendered political socialization and the influence of the online manosphere on adolescents' political attitudes, including the development and testing of interventions to counter political sexism among youth.

Possible Contribution to the Consortium

Loes Aaldering's expertise aligns closely with the objectives of the Horizon Europe call on countering and preventing radicalisation, extremism, hate speech, and polarization. Her research focuses on the psychological and communicative mechanisms underlying political attitudes, polarization, prejudice, and democratic resilience, with particular attention to sexism, hostile political communication, media effects, and political socialization. A key contribution of her work is understanding how exclusionary and anti-democratic attitudes develop and become normalized through political and media discourse. Her research on sexist attitudes, gendered political stereotypes, and hostile political communication provides broader insights into the dynamics of identity-based hostility, affective polarization, and distrust — processes closely linked to radicalization and extremist worldviews.

In particular, her recent project on gendered political socialization and the online manosphere directly addresses contemporary pathways through which adolescents and young adults are exposed to extremist and anti-democratic ideologies online. This research examines the normalization of anti-gender ideology, hate speech, political distrust, and radicalized political identities, as well as which interventions may effectively mitigate these developments.

Loes Aaldering's expertise in political communication and media effects is highly relevant for understanding how political actors, digital platforms, and media framing shape polarization and amplify hostile discourse. In addition, her work on prejudice confrontation and intervention strategies can contribute to the development of effective approaches to reduce hostility and counter hate speech.

In addition to her substantive expertise, Loes Aaldering has extensive experience translating academic knowledge into societal impact through collaborations with media organizations, societal stakeholders, and public institutions. Moreover, she brings a strong international and societal network that would benefit the consortium. This includes collaborations with scholars working on gendered politics, democratic resilience, political communication, political psychology and political violence, as well as connections with societal organizations focused on democracy, inclusion, and political participation, which could support stakeholder engagement and dissemination activities within the consortium.

Loes Aaldering could contribute to and/or lead work packages and tasks related to:

- Understanding the psychological and communicative drivers of polarization, hate speech, sexism, and extremist attitudes
- Examining the role of media and online environments in the normalization of anti-democratic and exclusionary ideologies

- Studying youth political socialization and susceptibility to online radicalization pathways
- Designing and evaluating interventions aimed at reducing prejudice, hostility, and polarization
- Developing evidence-based strategies to strengthen democratic resilience and inclusive political participation
- Conducting quantitative empirical research, including surveys, experiments, content analyses, and intervention studies

Institutional Profile: Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Loes Aaldering is affiliated with the Department of Political Science and Public Administration at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, which is part of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities. The faculty is one of the largest social science faculties in Europe, is internationally oriented and has a strong reputation for high-quality research and societal engagement.

The department has extensive expertise in comparative politics, political communication, democratic governance, and political behavior, and has ample experience in international research collaborations and externally funded projects. It also maintains strong connections with governmental institutions and societal organizations, supporting impactful interdisciplinary research and knowledge exchange relevant to Horizon Europe priorities.

Contact

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