
SUCCESS AND SETBACK

A book on five political female leaders in Western and Northern Europe, from the start of the twentieth century to the present.



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Alva Myrdal (Sweden), Marga Klompé (Netherlands), Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom), Gro Harlem Brundtland (Norway) and Angela Merkel (Germany): what do they have in common? They were all pioneers in their specific political fields.

In their successive careers, the five women spanned the period from the 1930s to the present, in a part of the world with Western parliamentary democracies where female political leadership was rare. At the end of the twentieth century, fewer than thirty percent of all ministerial posts in ten important Southern, Western and Northern European countries were held by a woman .

The basic question of my research is how and why the female political leaders mentioned came to the fore in a period when this phenomenon was rare and in what way they maintained themselves. I investigate a combination of three factors: their personality and achievements, their personal circumstances and the specific historical and political context. As pioneers in their field, these women had to overcome many obstacles and suffer setbacks.

Female politicians especially had and still have to deal with the prejudice that women cannot be good politicians.

In the portraits of these women I focus on their competence. My thesis is that these women broke through the glass ceiling because they were exceptionally competent and thereby paved the way for other female politicians.

Biography:

Anneke Ribberink was an assistant professor of political and gender history at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. She has been a guest researcher there since 2015. She obtained her PhD in 1998 with a dissertation on the initial phase of the Dutch Second Feminist Wave. Since 2015 she has been working on a book about five famous female political leaders in Western and Northern Europe. <https://research.vu.nl/en/persons/anneke-ribberink>