



**THE SCOTTISH WOMEN'S CONVENTION**

# **A BLETHER ON...**

*Women's Votes*



**March 2026**

# WOMEN'S VOTING BEHAVIOUR

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As Scotland heads to the ballot box in May, the Scottish Women's Convention (SWC) hosted an online discussion to consult with women on their relationship with politics and what it actually means to them.

Drawing from our previous work, the SWC believes that understanding women's voting behaviour requires examining not only whether women use their right to vote but why many of them choose not to engage in the political process at all.

We explored several key issues and themes through a series of pre-prepared questions including:

- How would you describe your relationship with politics at the moment?
- Do you feel that you are informed enough about current issues when elections come around?
- What issues matter most to you when deciding who to vote for?
- Do you feel that politicians represent the views and needs of women like you?
- What do you think would make you more likely to vote in future Scottish parliamentary elections?

Our conversation revealed a complex and often fraught relationship between women and politics and provided a valuable insight into their voting behaviour and the factors which shape their political disengagement. What came through strongly was that women do care about politics. They are thinking about it, talking about it, and living the impact of political decisions every day. But many feel shut out, unheard, or disconnected from how the process actually works.

## **4 Key Recommendations:**

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- Educate young women in political processes and voting systems from an early age.
- Reduce practical barriers by promoting flexible voting options for women (early voting, postal voting or convenient polling options).
- Boost political confidence by using trusted resources to highlight how voting helps shape policies affecting women's everyday lives.
- Encourage group participation, such as voting with friends and local networks.

# The Scottish Women's Convention (SWC)

The SWC is funded to engage with women across Scotland to ensure that their views are represented in policy and decision-making processes. The SWC uses the views of women to respond to a variety of parliamentary, governmental, and organisational consultation papers at Scottish, UK, and international levels.

The SWC gathers information using different methods, including roadshows, thematic conferences, surveys, and both in-person and online roundtable events. This submission presents the views of a range of women, reflecting their opinions, ideas and lived experience. Working together with many other equalities organisations and community groups, we use our broad network to ensure that women from a range of backgrounds are heard and acknowledged. We are continually reviewing innovative ways of engaging with women and developing our trauma-informed and culturally sensitive practice to support vital contributions from as many women as possible.

## Women's Views

### 1. Feeling Disillusioned with Politics

**"I think politics is a game. It's the political game... I don't think anybody represents anybody."**

A dominant theme across our Blether was women's overwhelming frustration and disillusionment with the current political system.

Some women discussed alternative political engagement through grassroots activism or community work rather than with formal systems which they had seen as much more empowering and worthwhile.

- **...the mainstream politics... is dismaying... but the grassroots stuff... that's where I feel heartened."**

Other women voiced their disappointment over past engagement with politicians which had failed to yield results. This experience subsequently led to them becoming detached from political participation, including voting.

- **"My relationship with politics at the moment is a real mixed bag. I'm excited and dismayed by it in equal measure."**
- **"That's the way I stomach politics. A kind of dog food, 90% water, and only 10% meat."**
- **"They've been so busy... arguing with each other about which party is getting into power."**

## 2. Gaps Between Lived Experience and Politics

**“Do I feel that politicians represent the views and needs of women like me?  
...Absolutely no.”**

The women at our Blether spoke about how politics often feels far removed from their everyday lives. The issues they deal with as standard such as poverty, health, caring responsibilities, and community challenges don't seem to be adequately understood by politicians on the campaign trail.

The women felt that many of the representatives who are elected, and then go on to make decisions on their behalf, have little to no idea of what life is really like 'on the ground'. This gap makes it more difficult for these women to then believe that in using their vote they can make a difference.

- **“I don't think we're getting enough from the grassroots level.”**
- **“The lowest voices have been lost.”**
- **“Politicians are too well paid, and they don't understand the reality of actual life...  
for the poor.”**

## 3. Lack of Clear Political Information and Engagement

Trust in politicians was also identified as a key factor influencing voting behaviour. Many women felt politicians were often superficial and opportunistic with no real interest for them other than their vote.

- **“You see them around this time... and then afterwards, they disappear like they're fairies.”**
- **“We need to look in their eyes to see if we trust them enough to vote.”**
- **“[I] didn't understand how those people just appeared...how MSP candidates get on the ballot paper...[I] didn't understand anything... up to the point...[I] was asked to go to the polling station.”**

Women also pointed out that political language can often be confusing and off-putting.

**“There are too many jargons being used... you have to be on the level so people can understand.”**

As well as this, the women spoke about their confusion over the different electoral systems and how they did not fully understand proportional representation – the system used in Scottish elections. This led to a strong feeling that education and engagement shouldn't just happen during elections but instead needs to be an ongoing process.

- “We used to have civics classes... which taught us how democracy works.”
- “I think [education] on this should be introduced again... it is a life skill.”

## 4. Structural Barriers and Inequality in Politics

“The way the political system is set up was set up by the patriarchy...and it's never really changed.”

Many of the women spoke about how politics still feels like a male-dominated space. They felt that despite there being some progress made, what remains are deep-rooted attitudes that make it harder for women to be taken seriously or to feel fully included.

- “The bias against women is deeply rooted in society.”
- “Women are not treated as full grown-ups.”
- “It's kind of... disproportional representation... people... are voting for some parties... and yet they end up... making changes they didn't want anyway.”

It was agreed that these barriers did not just affect women voters but also those who wished to stand for election or who were already engaged in politics.

“Politicians don't even get on the ballot unless they've won their selection... the vast majority... are men.”

## Key Findings on Why Women Don't Vote

- Disillusionment with politics reduces their motivation to vote
- Lack of representation and engagement makes women feel left out
- Male-dominated structures limit women's participation in politics
- Poor communication and inaccessible language creates barriers for women

## What Women Want

- Honest and trustworthy politicians
- Policies addressing real-life issues (poverty, healthcare, inequality)
- Proper representation of women's lived experiences
- Continuous engagement with the electorate and not just during election campaigns

Overall, our discussion highlights significant challenges in women's engagement with voting and politics. While interest in societal issues remains strong, there is widespread dissatisfaction with political systems and representation. The challenge now is not just to encourage women to vote, but to rebuild their trust in the system.

But most importantly there was hope and a strong sense that change can come from within communities themselves.

**“If nobody’s going to come and help us we’re going to have to help each other.”**

## **Thank You!**

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Thank you to the women who shared their experiences with us. We will continue to advocate for women across Scotland so that their views are included in the policy-making process.



### **SWC CONTACT DETAILS**

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