
Women's Presence in the European Parliament: A Statistical Analysis (1979-2024)

Raluca-Beatrice GEANTĂ (geantaraluca25@gmail.com)
Faculty of Business and Administration, University of Bucharest

Cătălin RAIU (catalin.raiu@faa.unibuc.ro)
Faculty of Business and Administration, University of Bucharest

Laura MINA-RAIU (laura.minraiu@amp.ase.ro - corresponding author)
Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest University of Economic Studies

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of women's political representation within democratic decision-making institutions, focusing primarily on the European Parliament. The study aims to assess the proportionality and fairness of women's representation in a core institution of European democracy, tracing its evolution from 1979 to 2024. Employing a rigorous statistical approach, the research combines demographic and electoral data analysis with a review of specialized literature and comparative frameworks to explore patterns and dynamics of gender representation.

Findings confirm a significant and continuous increase in women's presence within the European Parliament, rising from 16% in 1979 to 41% in 2019, with a slight decline to 39% in 2024. This trend reflects broader societal transformations and advances in gender equality, supported in part by the implementation of gender quotas. The study further validates the hypothesis that left-wing parties across the EU are more likely to promote and support female candidates than their right-wing counterparts.

Despite notable progress, the research identifies ongoing disparities both between member states and among European Parliament political groups, underlining the need for more effective and context-specific policy measures. The findings advocate for continued efforts to enhance women's political inclusion, emphasizing that gender-balanced representation is essential for strengthening democratic legitimacy and fostering greater social cohesion within the EU.

Keywords: political representation, European Parliament, gender equality, EU gender quotas

JEL Classification: D63, D72

INTRODUCTION

The importance of adequate female representation in political decision-making arenas stands out as a prominent topic in contemporary academic and political discourse. Analyzing women's representation in the European Parliament offers crucial insights into the stratification and direction of female political participation within a supranational context.

The statistical analysis on the evolution of female MEPs' percentage in the European Parliament from 1979 to 2019 reveals significant progress in female participation. While the initial increase was relatively gradual, with only one or two percentage points rise per electoral cycle, there has been a noticeable acceleration in the rate of growth since 1994.

In recent decades, the concept of political representation has acquired a central position within contemporary democratic theory, reflecting two fundamental developments. Firstly, there is an increasing tension between the classical models of electoral representation — historically linked to the territorial boundaries of nation-states — and the evolving political environment, characterized by growing complexity and transnational dynamics.

Secondly, this reorientation stems from within democratic theory itself, particularly through the intellectual legacy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who foregrounded the participatory dimension of democracy. However, recent debates have reconceptualized political representation in response to persistent concerns regarding the structural exclusion of marginalized groups, notably minorities and women. In this respect, Plotke's (1997) seminal argument challenges the conventional dichotomy between representation and participation, asserting that the true antithesis of representation is not participation but exclusion. Plotke thus reframes representation not as a concession in the absence of direct democracy, but as a constitutive element of democratic practice, indispensable for fostering inclusion and ensuring broad participation.

Moreover, contemporary scholarship highlights the critical role of representation in shaping public opinion, influencing policy-making processes, and constructing social norms. This recognition has led to a reassessment of electoral systems and prompted scholars to investigate new models of democratic representation that move beyond traditional voting mechanisms, aiming to better address the challenges of modern governance.

In this context, the effective functioning of democratic systems requires that elected officials authentically reflect the diversity of the populations they represent. This imperative derives from the necessity to incorporate within governance the plurality of ideals, experiences, and socio-political concerns articulated across society. A genuinely representative leadership fosters an

inclusive political environment and ensures that the governance process embodies the interests of all social groups, thereby promoting equity and legitimacy (Warren, 2008).

Within this framework, efforts to enhance women's representation in political decision-making processes have been supported by several normative and empirical arguments. The justice argument advocates for proportional representation of women, given that they constitute half of the population. The experience argument emphasizes the unique perspectives women bring to policymaking, shaped by their specific social roles and experiences. The interest argument underscores the need to articulate and defend women's distinct concerns within decision-making structures. Furthermore, the critical mass argument posits that the presence of a significant number of women in political leadership positions enhances their capacity to influence policy outcomes effectively. The symbolic argument highlights the inspirational and normative significance of female leaders, contributing to the broader societal acceptance of women in public office. Finally, the democracy argument contends that gender-balanced representation strengthens the legitimacy, accountability, and overall quality of democratic institutions.

Despite the theoretical robustness of these arguments, women continue to be significantly underrepresented within political institutions worldwide (DAW, DESA, ECA & IPU, 2005, pp. 8-9).

The structure of this paper is organized into four main sections, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of women's political representation within the European Union. The first section provides a critical literature review, focusing on the theoretical and empirical contributions related to political representation and gender equality. Special attention is given to the evolution of gender quotas in the EU, examining their role as institutional mechanisms designed to promote gender-balanced political participation. The second section outlines the methodological framework of the research. The third section presents the empirical analysis, structured on three interrelated levels: European, national, and within the political groups of the European Parliament. The final part of the paper is dedicated to discussion, conclusions, and the identification of research limitations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research hypothesis employed in this paper is framed through a liberal theoretical perspective suggesting that left-wing political parties supporting gender policies are more inclined to have female candidates than right-wing political parties. Moreover, preliminary evidence indicates that institutional constraints, such as legislative procedures and parliamentary rules, can significantly shape the extent to which descriptive representation facilitates substantive outcomes (O'Brien, 2010). To empirically assess this hypothesis, the research adopts a comparative secondary data analysis methodology, systematically collecting and examining statistical data on female representation both in the European Parliament and in the national parliaments of the EU member states. In addition, the analysis investigates the gender distribution within each political group in the European Parliament, assessing its correlation with the ideological orientation of the respective parties.

The dataset utilized in this study draws on a range of comprehensive, authoritative, and longitudinal sources. These include official data provided by the European Parliament, Eurostat, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), the national parliaments of the EU member states, and reports from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), among others. This multi-source approach ensures both the accuracy and the robustness of the empirical findings presented in this research.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER EQUALITY

The concept of political representation is widely acknowledged in contemporary democratic theory as a multidimensional and evolving construct, reflecting both the diversity and complexity of its manifestations. Fundamentally, political representation is closely intertwined with electoral processes, serving as the principal mechanism through which citizens confer mandates upon individuals to articulate and defend their interests within the public sphere.

An alternative theoretical perspective posits that the composition of legislative bodies should mirror the socio-demographic structure of society itself. This proportional vision constitutes the theoretical basis for a range of corrective measures designed to address existing disparities, including gender imbalances in parliaments (Gabor, 2023).

Within the scholarly literature, political representation is conceptualized around five core elements that delineate its nature and

function. First, there exists a representative entity, which may include an individual, an organization, a movement, or a state institution, acting on behalf of and in the interest of particular social groups. Second, there is the represented group itself, comprising citizens or social actors who seek their interests to be advocated within decision-making processes. Third, the object of representation encompasses the aggregation of opinions, perspectives, and interests that representatives endeavor to promote within political arenas.

The fourth element refers to the political context in which representation unfolds, encompassing not only formal institutions and procedures but also the broader socio-economic and cultural dynamics that shape the modalities of representative action. Finally, the fifth element concerns those interests, perspectives, or voices that are marginalized or excluded from representation due to the selective practices of representatives or the structural limitations of the system (Dovi, 2018).

To conceptualize democratic representation beyond the simple distribution of roles between elites and citizens, it is imperative to recognize the essential contribution of representation to the sustainability of democratic systems. This involves a clear differentiation between the normative principles of democracy and their institutional and practical outcomes. In contemporary theory, democracy is increasingly understood as a system of arrangements predicated on the notion that all those affected by collective decisions should possess the capacity to influence their formulation (Warren, 2008, p. 395).

In alignment with the views of Hanna Pitkin and other theorists of democracy, democratic representation requires a coherent framework for assessing the development of representative relationships. Representatives must be authorized by their constituents and held accountable to them through mechanisms such as voting, deliberation, oversight, and trust. Consequently, representatives bear the responsibility of proactively addressing their constituents' interests and fostering inclusive participation. Thus, modern democracy is envisaged as a system integrating representative relationships and mechanisms that together foster effective and accountable governance (Warren, 2008).

In the context of gender equality, the scholarly literature identifies two principal forms of representation: descriptive and substantive. Descriptive representation focuses on the numerical presence of women in political leadership positions, asserting that their adequate inclusion enhances the legitimacy of governing bodies (Gilia, 2017). Empirical research across European states indicates that such representation may contribute to mitigating gender inequalities in political participation, although its significance varies across different socio-political contexts.

In contrast, substantive representation concerns the policy outcomes generated by the increased involvement of women in political institutions. It maintains that higher levels of female participation are likely to lead to a more accurate articulation of women's specific interests and to diversify governance practices through the distinct perspectives women introduce (Zamfir, 2023b).

Nonetheless, empirical studies reveal that the correlation between women's presence in political positions (descriptive representation) and the effective advocacy of women's interests (substantive representation) is not always straightforward. In certain cases, an increase in the number of female politicians does not produce significant changes in policy outputs. This phenomenon suggests that the translation of descriptive into substantive representation is contingent upon multiple factors, including party affiliation and systemic constraints (O'Brien, 2010). Women in leadership positions are recognized for their essential role in designing and implementing coherent gender mainstreaming strategies, ensuring that gender equality is effectively integrated into all policy domains (DAW, DESA, ECA & IPU, 2005, p. 12).

Studies focusing on the substantive representation of women suggest that a higher number of women in leadership roles tends to generate increased attention to policies addressing women's rights and interests. However, the strength of this correlation depends on the institutional characteristics of the political system, which must support the interaction between increased women's representation and the prioritization of gender-specific issues (O'Brien, 2010).

THE EU CONTEXT: GENDER QUOTAS

Gender quotas are defined by the European Institute for Gender Equality as a positive policy instrument intended to expedite the achievement of balanced gender representation and participation. This objective is pursued by establishing a specific percentage or number of positions allocated to women and men, according to pre-established rules and criteria (EIGE, n.d.).

Within the European Union's political landscape, there is a balanced distribution between member states that have implemented gender quotas and those that have chosen not to adopt such measures yet. In countries that have refrained from applying gender quotas, the reasons vary from cultural considerations to potential constitutional incompatibilities. States that have attained gender equity through cultural norms and traditions exhibit reduced inclination towards the introduction of gender quotas.

For instance, Sweden, which holds one of the highest global proportions of women in its national parliament, embraces a voluntary approach, firmly

grounded in democratic principles that preserve the autonomy of political parties in selecting their candidates without state interference. In contrast, France underwent a constitutional revision in 1999 to enable the introduction of quotas, thereby setting a precedent among EU member states.

Moreover, states such as Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany have achieved notable progress in promoting gender equality within European institutions without mandating quotas. Conversely, countries like Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, and Spain have recorded significant results through the legislative implementation of gender quotas.

A comprehensive analysis of recent developments across EU member states indicates a clear conclusion in favor of mandatory quotas as an effective mechanism for accelerating gender equality in politics. Nevertheless, within political parties, various internal challenges hinder the efficient implementation of quotas, including the preponderance of men in leadership positions and concerns regarding potential electoral disadvantages (Zamfir 2023a, pp. 2-5).

Currently, eleven EU member states have legislated gender quotas: Greece, Spain, Belgium, France, Croatia, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Romania. Romania represents a particular case, as it does not impose a specific quota for women's representation but rather stipulates a general requirement for political parties to maintain gender-balanced electoral lists. Despite this, recent official documents of the European Parliament list Romania among the states implementing gender quotas (Zamfir, 2023a, pp. 6-7), which is *de jure* correct, but *de facto* wrong.

The application of gender quotas across these states reflects various models:

- In Belgium, gender quotas were introduced in 1994, initially requiring at least 25% representation of each gender, with subsequent amendments in 2002 adopting the principle of parity and the “zipper” ordering system;
- Croatia revised its Constitution in 2000 to introduce quotas, and since 2008, the legislation mandates at least 40% representation of each gender on party lists;
- Greece increased its gender quota from 30% (2014) to 40% in 2019;
- France introduced gender parity following the 1999 constitutional amendment, reinforced by legislation mandating gender equality and applying the “zipper” ordering system;
- Italy requires that neither gender exceed half of the total number of candidates, applying the zipper principle to the first two positions;
- Luxembourg enforces a 50% quota without employing the zipper system;
- Poland mandates a minimum of 35% representation for each gender,

although the zipper principle is not applied due to the preferential voting system;

- Portugal requires a 40% gender quota, forbidding more than two consecutive candidates of the same gender;
- Slovenia applies a 40% quota, ensuring at least one representative of each gender in the first half of the candidate list;
- Spain imposes a 40% quota for each gender, with a maximum of 60%, and applies this rule to every group of five candidates;
- Romania legislated in 2007 the requirement for electoral lists to include both women and men, without specifying an exact quota. Additionally, a 2002 law requires political parties to ensure gender balance in candidate nominations (Zamfir, 2023a, pp. 7-8).

In addition to states with legally mandated quotas, there are particular cases where political parties voluntarily apply internal quotas. For example, several parties in Germany, such as Die Linke, impose a 50% quota alongside the zipper principle. In Denmark, the Alternativet party requires gender parity in the first two positions of the candidate list. Similarly, in the Netherlands, the PvdA party applies a 50% quota, mandating at least three women among every six consecutive candidates (Zamfir, 2023a, p. 9).

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, the proportion of women in parliaments of states that have implemented gender quotas has increased three times faster compared to those without such measures. In states such as Ireland, Spain, Luxembourg, Poland, and Slovenia, the adoption of quotas has facilitated a considerably faster increase in women's representation. However, in Greece, the increase of the gender quota in 2019 did not yield significant changes in the proportion of women in parliament (EIGE, 2021).

THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL PARTIES ON WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

Considering the aspects discussed in the previous sections, which address the concept of political representation and the EU member states different approaches on gender quotas, in this part of the paper we further build on the political context and present specific statistical data regarding the presence of women in decision-making structures, particularly in the European Parliament and national parliaments. A detailed analysis of the influence of political party ideologies on the participation and political representation of women is both necessary and essential because political parties play a crucial role in the selection and promotion of candidates for elections to the European Parliament.

The investigation explores the extent to which our research hypothesis is confirmed, namely that left-wing parties theoretically and practically support the presence of women in politics, by contrast with the reluctance of right-wing parties, according to the traditional ideologies of these orientations. The analysis will focus on the presence of women in the European Parliament, evaluating the influence of political affiliation on women's representation in this institution.

Political parties play an essential role in the democratic landscape, acting as intermediaries between citizens and the decision-making process. They represent the diversity of opinions and perspectives of citizens and transform them into tangible proposals and public policies. Additionally, they offer a platform for both women and men to engage in political life, whether as elected officials in decision-making positions or as influential factors in policy drafting. (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014, p. 16).

Political parties play a crucial role in facilitating the rise of women in the political sphere, as they control the processes of recruitment, promotion, and allocation of support for candidates. Their importance lies in the fact that the internal structure of the party and the strategies adopted significantly influence the relationship between the party and candidates in the context of gender. (Sundström & Stockemer, 2022, p. 119)

In light of the crucial importance of political parties, the United Nations, through a resolution on women's political participation from 2012, urged member states to firmly support the removal of all obstacles that directly or indirectly impede women's involvement in politics. Additionally, it emphasized the need for political parties to develop the capacity to address issues from a gender perspective and to adopt policies that encourage the active participation of women at all levels of

the political decision-making process within these parties. (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014, p. 16).

The primary differentiation between the left and the right-wing doctrines lies in their resistance to change. From this perspective, left-wing ideology is more receptive to change, supporting it more broadly compared to right-wing ideology, which is conservative. Another important criterion of differentiation between the two is their attitude towards supporting equality and equity in society, with left-wing ideology advocating more profoundly for ensuring equality and reducing inequality among individuals (Sevincer, Galinsky, Martensen & Oettingen, 2023, pp. 832-833). Left-wing parties, with a strong emphasis on equality and social justice, tend to adopt policies that promote the presence of women in political positions. In contrast, right-wing parties, with more conservative orientations, may be more reluctant to support

rapid or significant changes regarding gender representation. Additionally, left-wing parties are inclined to implement active strategies to increase the presence of women in politics, as their egalitarian ideology justifies interventions in the recruitment process. On the other hand, right-wing parties are less likely to nominate women, as they maintain a more traditional perspective on gender roles (Kittilson, 1997).

In the context of European politics, different reasons for the promotion of women in high political positions can be identified among left-wing political parties: (1) it is anticipated that parties with a more pronounced state orientation will have a higher number of female deputies, as they place more emphasis on equality of outcomes rather than equality of opportunities; (2) parties such as traditional socialist or labor parties often have historical links with feminist movements and possess strong women's groups within their organizations, who advocate for women's issues and may support their candidacies; and (3) left-wing economic parties tend to serve as platforms for previously marginalized groups, such as women.

Thus, it is expected that parties aligned on the left-wing economic spectrum, adopting post-materialist values and demonstrating a pro-European orientation, should have a higher proportion of women among the deputies in the European Parliament compared to political formations situated at the ideological opposite end. (Sundström & Stockemer, 2022, pp. 122-123)

Given the importance of political party ideologies, they can influence women's access to political positions in various ways. Gender-based discrimination, whether direct or indirect, within the internal procedures of parties, can hinder women's participation. This becomes particularly evident when such rules affect women's chances of being nominated as candidates and elected as representatives or when they limit access to internal decision-making processes, funding, or other party resources (OSCE/ODIHR, 2014, p. 17).

ANALYSIS OF THE STATISTICAL EVOLUTION OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE

European Parliament between 1979-2024

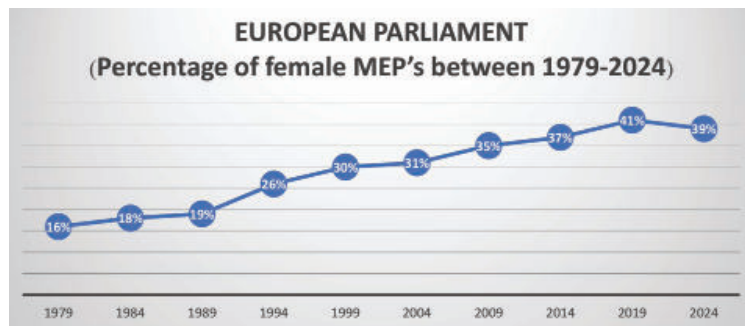
Analyzing women's representation in the European Parliament offers crucial insights into the stratification and direction of female political participation within a supranational context. The statistical analysis of the evolution of the percentage of female MEPs in the European Parliament from 1979 to 2019 reveals significant progress in female participation within this institution. While the initial increase was relatively gradual, with only one

or two percentage point rise per electoral cycle, there has been a noticeable acceleration in the rate of growth since 1994.

The detailed figures highlighting progress in the European Parliament during the reference period are as follows:

Percentage of female MEPs between 1979-2024

Figure 1



Source: Data processed by the authors from European Parliament - European Elections 2024 (European Parliament, 2024)

Between 1979 and 1984, the increase was 2 percentage points, from 16% to 18%. The growth was minimal, from 18% in 1984 to 19% in 1989, suggesting a potential stagnation or barrier to advancing female representation. However, between 1989 and 1994, there was a significant jump of 7 percentage points, reflecting a substantial change in gender dynamics, with the percentage reaching 26%.

The increase continued and accelerated in the subsequent years, with a more stable rate of approximately 4-5 percentage points per decade, reaching 30% in 1999, 31% in 2004, 35% in 2009, 37% in 2014, and 41% in 2019. The year 2024 deviates from the upward trend maintained over the years, with the percentage of women declining to 39% following the elections held that year. Another crucial aspect of the current situation and the dynamics of female political representation is the analysis of the percentages of women in the European Parliament, broken down by member state. To provide a clearer picture, data is presented for each member state, detailed according to the legislative periods in the European Parliament, starting from the first elections held in 1979 through to 2019. Table 1 represents data processed by the author, structured to allow a concrete analysis of the evolution.

Percentages of Female MEPs in the European Parliament by Member State (1979-2024)

Table 1

STATE	YEAR	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014	2019	2024
E.P.		16%	18%	19%	26%	30%	31%	35%	37%	41%	39%
BELGIUM		8%	17%	17%	32%	28%	33%	36%	29%	38%	41%
GERMANY		15%	20%	31%	35%	37%	33%	37%	36%	36%	36%
FRANCE		22%	21%	23%	30%	40%	45%	44%	42%	50%	51%
ITALY		14%	10%	12%	13%	11%	21%	21%	40%	41%	33%
LUXEMBOURG		17%	50%	50%	50%	33%	50%	17%	33%	50%	33%
NETHERLANDS		20%	28%	28%	32%	35%	48%	48%	42%	50%	48%
DENMARK		31%	38%	38%	44%	38%	43%	46%	38%	46%	33%
IRELAND		13%	13%	7%	27%	33%	38%	25%	55%	45%	43%
U.K.		14%	15%	15%	18%	24%	26%	33%	41%	47%	-
GREECE			8%	4%	16%	16%	29%	32%	24%	24%	29%
SPAIN				15%	33%	34%	26%	36%	41%	47%	50%
PORTUGAL				13%	8%	20%	25%	36%	38%	43%	38%
AUSTRIA						38%	28%	41%	44%	50%	40%
FINLAND						44%	43%	62%	54%	54%	60%
SWEDEN						41%	47%	56%	55%	55%	62%
CYPRUS							0%	33%	17%	0%	0%
CZECHIA							21%	18%	24%	33%	38%
ESTONIA							50%	50%	50%	33%	29%
UNGARIA							38%	36%	19%	38%	48%
LITHUANIA							38%	25%	9%	27%	18%
LATVIA							33%	38%	37%	50%	22%
MALTA							0%	0%	67%	50%	17%
POLAND							15%	22%	24%	35%	28%
SLOVENIA							43%	29%	37%	50%	33%
SLOVAKIA							36%	38%	31%	15%	47%
BULGARIA								41%	29%	29%	24%
ROMANIA								36%	31%	22%	18%
CROATIA									45%	36%	42%

Source: Data processed by the authors from: European Parliament - European Elections (European Parliament, 2024)

The structure of the chart allows for an analysis of the evolution of the number of women in the European Parliament for each member state. Sweden is the country with the highest level of female representation in the European Parliament. Starting in 1999 with a percentage of 41%, this figure increased in subsequent legislatures, culminating at 62% in 2024. Thus, Sweden holds the highest percentage of women in the supranational body.

Similarly, Finland has shown a high percentage of female MEPs, peaking at 62% in 2009. Following this year, a decrease can be noticed, with the percentage falling to 54% over the next two legislatures. However,

by 2024, the percentage had risen again to 60%. Estonia has maintained a steady percentage of female MEPs, recording 50% between 2004 and 2014. However, this percentage dropped to 33% in 2019 and continued its downward trend, reaching 29% in 2024. Denmark is one of the countries with notable fluctuations in the percentage of women in the European Parliament. Starting from 31% in 1979, there was an upward trend, followed by a period of stagnation at 38%. Later legislatures saw percentages exceeding 40%, but following the 2024 elections, the percentage decreased by 13%, reaching 33%.

Austria began with a percentage of 38% in 1999 and progressed in subsequent legislatures, reaching 50% in 2019. In 2024, there was a major drop of 10 percentage points, bringing the percentage down to 40%. Croatia initially had a percentage of 45% in 2014, but this decreased to 36% in 2019. By 2024, the percentage increased by 6%, reaching 42%. Slovenia had a percentage of 43% in 2004, which then fell to 29% in 2009 and rose to 37% in 2014. In 2019, it peaked at 50%, but in 2024, there was a major drop of 17%, reducing the percentage to 33%. Latvia experienced a significant increase from 33% in 2004 to 50% in 2019. This was followed by a sharp decline of 28 percentage points in 2024, resulting in a percentage of 22%.

Luxembourg is one of the countries with notable fluctuations in the percentage of women in the European Parliament. From 1984 to 1994, the percentage remained at 50%, followed by a sharp decline in the next legislature, and then a return to the 50% threshold in 2004. However, in 2009, there was another significant drop of 33 percentage points. This was followed by a rising trend in the subsequent years, continuing until 2024, when there was a dramatic decrease of 17 percentage points, resulting in a percentage of 33%. The Netherlands started with a percentage of 20% in 1979 and followed an upward trend over the years, reaching 50% in 2019. In 2024, there was a slight decrease, with the percentage standing at 48%.

France began with a percentage of 22% in 1979 and experienced small fluctuations of 1-2 percentage points between 1984 and 1994. However, in 1994, there was a significant increase of 7 percentage points, reaching 30%. The rapid growth continued in subsequent years, with a 10% increase in 1999, bringing the percentage to 40%. Between 1999 and 2019, an additional 10 percentage points were added, culminating in 51% in 2024, a 1% increase from the previous legislature. Spain started with a percentage of 15% in 1989 and fluctuated over the years, culminating in the highest value in 2024, with a percentage of 50%. Bulgaria began in 2009 with 41%, but the percentage declined to 29% in the following years and remained at this level until 2019. In 2024, it dropped further to 24%.

Hungary is one of the more stable countries, starting with 38% in 2004, followed by 36% in 2009. The only exception was in 2014, when the percentage fell to 19%, but it returned to 38% in 2019. In 2024, there was a significant increase of 10 percentage points, reaching 48%. Regarding Germany, it started with a percentage of 15% in 1979 and reached 36% in 2019, representing an overall increase of 21%. This increase was not steady, with noticeable fluctuations. For example, although the percentage of female MEPs from Germany was 37% in 1999, it dropped by 4 percentage points to 33% in 2004. Subsequently, there was another rise, reaching 37% in 2009, but the percentage then decreased to 36% during the period from 2014 to 2024.

Slovakia began with 36% in 2004, showing a slight increase to 38% in 2009. However, a downward trend ensued, dropping to 15% by 2019. In 2024, Slovakia experienced a remarkable increase of 32 percentage points, reaching 47%. Romania also shows a declining trend (Lupițu, 2024). Starting at 36% in 2009, it fell by 5 percentage points to 31% in 2014. The lowest percentage was recorded in 2024, with a decrease from 22% to 18%.

Malta demonstrates one of the most dramatic increases in female representation in the European Parliament. With 0% in both 2004 and 2009, the percentage surged to 67% in 2014. However, significant declines followed, with the percentage dropping to 50% in 2019 and further decreasing by 33 percentage points to 17% in 2024.

Belgium has shown a steady rise in female representation. From 8% in 1979, the percentage increased significantly to 38% by 2019, reflecting a 30 percentage point gain. Despite a period of stagnation between 1984 and 1994, when the percentage remained at 17%, there was a notable increase in 1994 to 32%, followed by minor fluctuations. By 2024, the percentage of female MEPs reached 41%. Portugal started with 13% in 1989, which fell to 8% in 1994. A steady upward trend followed, reaching 43% in 2019. However, in 2024, the percentage decreased to 38%. The United Kingdom experienced consistent growth, starting at 14% in 1979 and reaching 47% by 2019.

Lithuania is one of the few countries showing a decrease from the beginning to the end of the reference period. It started with 38% in 2004, dropped to a minimum of 9% in 2014, and rose to 27% in 2019. By 2024, the percentage fell again to 18%. The Czech Republic began with 21% in 2004 and reached 38% by 2024. Poland shows a consistent upward trend, starting at 15% in 2004 and reaching 35% in 2019, except 2024, when a decrease occurs, bringing the percentage down to 28%.

Italy is one of the countries that experienced a fairly long period of stagnation or even regression in the early part of the analyzed period. It starts at 14% in 1979 and decreases to 10% by 1984. In the following years, there

are no major fluctuations, with the percentage ranging between 11% and 13%. Starting in 2004, there are significant increases that reach 21% and remain constant through 2009. A major increase of 19% occurs in 2014, bringing the percentage of women to 40%. The upward trend continues until 2019, with the percentage of women at 41%. However, in 2024, it drops to 33%.

Greece is one of the countries that has experienced numerous fluctuations. Starting with 8% in 1984 and only 4% in 1989, the number of women began to increase only from 1994, reaching 16%, which remained the same in 1999. Subsequently, there is a significant increase, reaching 32% in 2009, but this is followed by a decrease to 24% in 2014, which remains stable through 2019. In 2024, the percentage rises to 29%.

Regarding Cyprus, this country had no female representatives in the European Parliament in 2004. In 2009, there is a sharp increase, with the percentage reaching 33%. However, a downward trend sets in, with the percentage dropping to 17% in 2014, and falling back to 0% in 2019, a value that remains the same in 2024.

Thus, although there is a significant overall evolution during the analyzed period, the 2024 elections show that most member states experience decreases in the number of women representing them in this legislature. In 2024, 15 member states experienced a lower percentage of women than in the previous legislature, while only 10 states revealed increases compared to 2019, and only 2 states remained constant in this regard.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS REGARDING THE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN MEPS BY POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

A thorough analysis of the evolution of women's representation within each political group in the European Parliament requires examining how the share of female MEPs has changed across political groups between 2014 and 2024. Such an approach provides valuable insights into the dynamics of women's presence in the European Parliament over time, highlighting trends and shifts in the composition of political groups at the European level.

Thus, this is the distribution of the total number of female Members of the European Parliament in the legislatures of 2014, 2019, and 2024, by political groups.

The distribution of women's percentages by political groups in the European Parliament 2014-2024

Table 2

Political Group	Year	2014	2019	2024
EPP		29%	24%	24.82%
S&D		25%	21%	20.86%
RENEW		9%	14%	12.23%
EFA		6%	10%	9.71%
ID		-	10%	-
ECR		9%	8%	6.12%
THE LEFT		7%	5%	7.55%
EFDD		6%	-	-
ESN		-	-	2.88%
PFE		-	-	12.23%
NON-ATTACHED		7%	8%	3.6%

Source: Hörst, 2022, p. 6

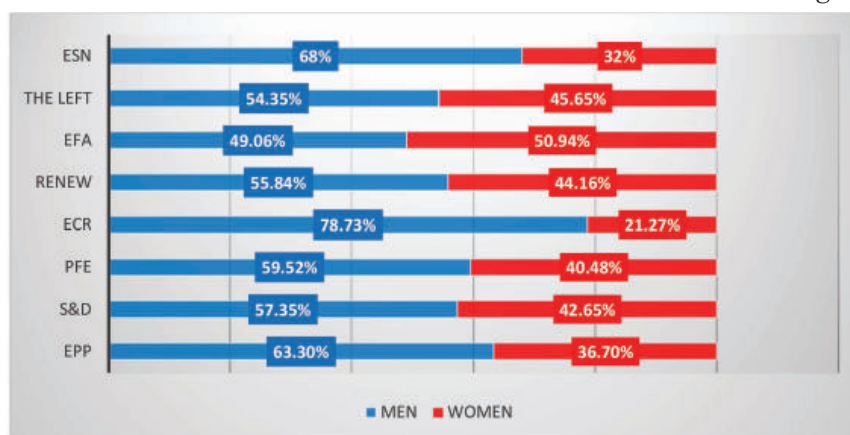
The statistical data for the year 2024 represents authors' processing of data collected from the European Parliament website, specifically from the 2024 list of Members of the European Parliament. Thus, from the total number of female MEPs in the 2014 legislature, the largest share (29%) is affiliated with the EPP group. Similarly, 25% of the women elected to the European Parliament that year were affiliated with the S&D group. Conversely, only 6% of the total number of female MEPs were found in the EFA and EFDD group. In the 2019 legislature, the largest proportion of female MEPs was divided between the EPP and S&D groups, with the majority affiliated with the EPP, specifically 24% of them, while 21% were affiliated with the S&D group. In this legislature, only 5% of female MEPs were affiliated with the Left group.

The situation remains similar in 2024, the largest proportion of women is still divided between EPP and S&D. The smallest proportion of women is found in the least numerous group in the European Parliament at present, namely the ESN group. Only 2.88% of female MEPs are affiliated with this group. Analyzing gender distribution within each political group in the European Parliament, in contrast with their political ideologies, enabled us to identify the group with the highest level of female representation and

the one with the lowest level, while simultaneously examining the ideologies associated with each group.

Gender distribution within the political groups

Figure 2



Source: authors' processing

Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of women compared to men within the political groups in the European Parliament for the year 2024. The data were collected from the official websites of each political group and subsequently processed to reflect gender distribution in percentages.

The political group with the highest level of representation of women is The Greens, which has a percentage of 50.94% women in its internal structure. The next two groups have similar percentages of women: The Left in the European Parliament with 45.65% women and Renew Europe with 44.26% women. Within the S&D group, the percentage of women in 2024 is 42.65%, while in the PFE group it is 40.48%. A notable difference can be seen in the EPP group, which has a percentage of 36.70% women, followed by ESN with 32%. The political group with the lowest level of representation of women in 2024 is ECR, with only 21.27% women.

COMPARATIVE STUDY: THE PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT VERSUS NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS

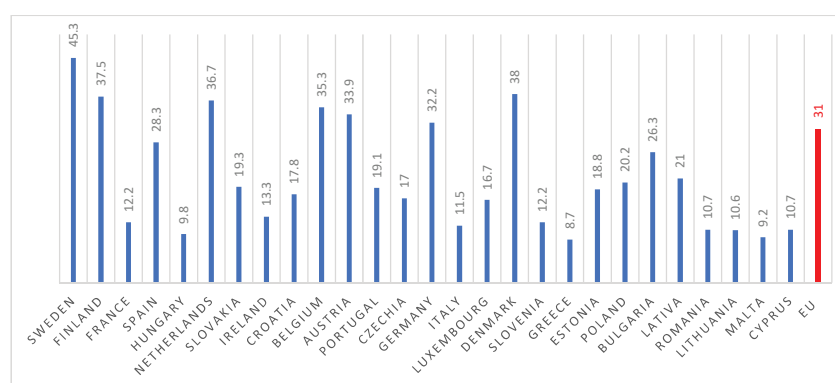
The representation of women in national parliaments is a crucial indicator of progress in gender equality and inclusive democracy. Comparative studies of women's representation provide valuable insights into how certain

states are evolving in this regard, as well as the position of the European Parliament concerning the national parliaments of member states.

The following analysis examines the number of women in the national parliaments of member states and the European Parliament, for 20 years, from 2004 until 2024. This analysis allows for both the observation of the dynamics of the analyzed indicator and a relevant comparison between the European Parliament and the national parliaments of member states.

Seats held by women in national parliaments in 2004

Figure 3



Source: authors' processing of data collected from UNECE (2024), Eurostat (2024)

The above graph presents the percentage of women members in national parliaments and the European Parliament in 2004. Analyzing the graph reveals significant discrepancies among national parliaments, with substantial variations in the proportions of female representatives. Countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, and the Netherlands stand out with higher representation of women in their parliaments, with percentages ranging between 30% and 40%. Sweden had the highest representation of women in 2004, with 45.3%. On the other hand, countries like Bulgaria, Latvia, Poland, and Spain exhibit moderate female representation compared to others, with percentages ranging between 20% and 30%.

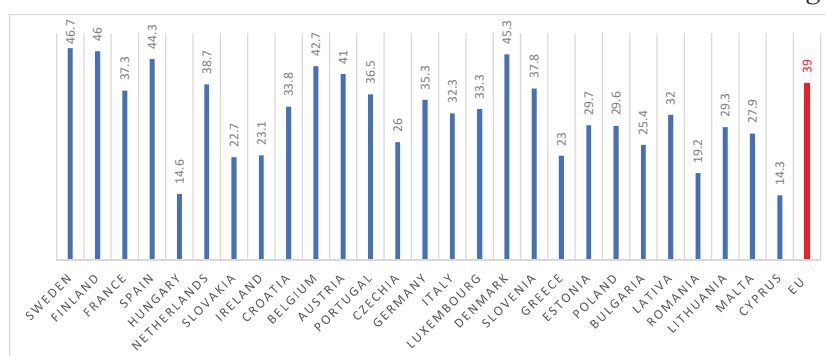
At the opposite end, countries with lower female representation in their national parliaments include Cyprus, Estonia, France, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Croatia, Portugal, Czechia, Luxembourg and Lithuania, where the percentages range from 10% to 20%, most ranging toward the lower limit of 10%. There are even states where the level of women's representation in parliament is below 10%, such as Hungary, with 9.8%, Greece, which ranks

last with 8.7%, and Malta, with 9.3%. Regarding the European Parliament, it ranks in the upper half of the list concerning the percentage of female deputies, with a representation of 31%.

Significant differences are noted among member states, with Nordic countries such as Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, and Denmark leading in promoting gender equality, having the highest percentages of women in their parliaments. By contrast, Southern and Eastern European countries such as Italy, Hungary, Slovenia, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania have much lower percentages.

Seats held by women in national parliaments in 2024

Figure 4



Source: authors' processing of data collected from UNECE (2024), Eurostat (2024)

Figure 3 illustrates the percentages of women present in the national parliaments of member states and in the European Parliament in 2024. Analyzing these data, in comparison with those from 2004, allows for an assessment of the progress made by member states and the European Parliament in ensuring fair representation of women. Thus, in 2024, twenty years later, Sweden continues to lead the ranking with 46.7% of women in its national parliament, compared to 45.3% in 2004. Most countries show increases in the level of female representation, with Bulgaria as the exception, where the percentage of women in the national parliament decreased by 0.9%, reaching 25.4% in 2024.

Among the countries with high representation of women in their national parliaments in 2024 there are also states like Finland, which saw an increase of 8.5% compared to 2004, Spain with a 16% increase, and Belgium, Austria, and Denmark, each with increases of approximately 7%. The countries that have recorded the most significant progress are Slovenia, with a 25.6%

increase, and France, with a similar increase of 25.1%. Other countries with high percentages of women in their national parliaments include Portugal, which has seen a significant increase of 17.4%, reaching 36.5%; Germany with a percentage of 35.3%; and Italy, which is also among the countries showing substantial progress, with a 20.8% increase since 2004, reaching 32.3% in 2024.

There are still countries with low female representation, where the percentage is below 25%, such as Slovakia, Ireland, Greece, Romania, and Hungary. The country with the lowest level of female representation in parliament is Cyprus, with a percentage of 14.3% in 2024. Regarding the percentage of women in the European Parliament, the 8% increase brings the percentage to 39% in 2024. Comparing the data from 2004 and 2024, it is clear that most European countries have made significant strides in female representation in their national parliaments, as has the European Parliament in enhancing gender parity. Nonetheless, there remain considerable variations between countries, with the percentage of women ranging from 14.3% to 46.7% within the European Union. Although the progress made over the past 20 years is evident, no country has achieved gender parity in its parliament.

In conclusion, while the progress made during the analyzed period is remarkable, the analysis highlights that further steps are needed to achieve complete gender parity in the European Parliament and in the national parliaments of member states. Continuing efforts to promote gender equality remain essential for ensuring a truly inclusive and representative democracy in Europe.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the complexity of women's political representation within the framework of democratic decision-making institutions, with a particular focus on the European Parliament and the national parliaments of the European Union member states. The central objective of this study is to evaluate the degree of proportionality and fairness in women's representation within a fundamental institution of European democracy, illustrating its dynamic evolution over the period 1979-2024.

From a methodological perspective, this research has employed a statistical and exhaustive approach, combining various analytical methodologies to investigate the complexity of women's political representation in the European Parliament. This includes detailed statistical analysis of relevant demographic and electoral data, a review of the specialized literature, and a meticulous interpretation of the results obtained. Such an approach allowed for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of women's participation in European

decision-making processes, providing a solid basis for the formulation of conclusions.

The literature review complements the statistical analysis by contextualizing the findings within a theoretical and comparative framework, highlighting the models and trends identified in various academic studies and reports. Consequently, the hypothesis according to which left-wing political parties in the EU member states tend to promote and support women in the European Parliament more than right-wing parties is confirmed.

The chronological analysis demonstrates a significant evolution in women's representation in the European Parliament, reflecting not only demographic and social changes within Europe but also considerable progress in the field of gender equality and women's political participation. From an initial percentage of 16% in 1979, women's representation in the European Parliament continuously increased, reaching 41% in 2019, before declining slightly to 39% in the 2024 European elections. This phenomenon not only highlights a significant numerical expansion but also reflects a profound transformation in European political dynamics, indicating a constant adaptation of decision-making structures to better reflect diversity and social inclusion (Spencer, 2024; Iftimoaei and Gabor, 2021).

An upward trend can be showcased at the level of the member states throughout the reference period, indicating the existence of a general European trend. Moreover, the analysis reveals that the implementation of gender quotas (even if not yet universally applied across all European states) has had a positive impact, accelerating the process of evolution.

In addition to the significant progress registered in the representation of women within the European Parliament and national parliaments, the analysis also identifies the persistence of substantial challenges. Consistent discrepancies between EU member states and among various political groups within the European Parliament emphasize the need for tailored policies and effective strategies (Giovanna, 2024).

Thus, although there is, overall, a growing commitment to gender equality at the EU level, the evolutionary process in this area remains ongoing in most European states, with some not yet fully aligning with this positive trend. Starting from the hypothesis that left-wing political parties offer greater support and promotion to women in politics compared to right-wing parties, future statistical analyses should exclude the extremes of the political spectrum, namely, far-left, far-right, and populist parties.

In light of these conclusions, it is imperative to attach greater importance to adopting more inclusive policies for women, providing them with increased support in their political trajectory, taking into account all the

relevant arguments and findings presented in this study. Strengthening gender equality in political representation remains not only a normative commitment but also a necessary condition for the consolidation of democratic legitimacy and social cohesion within the European Union.

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