

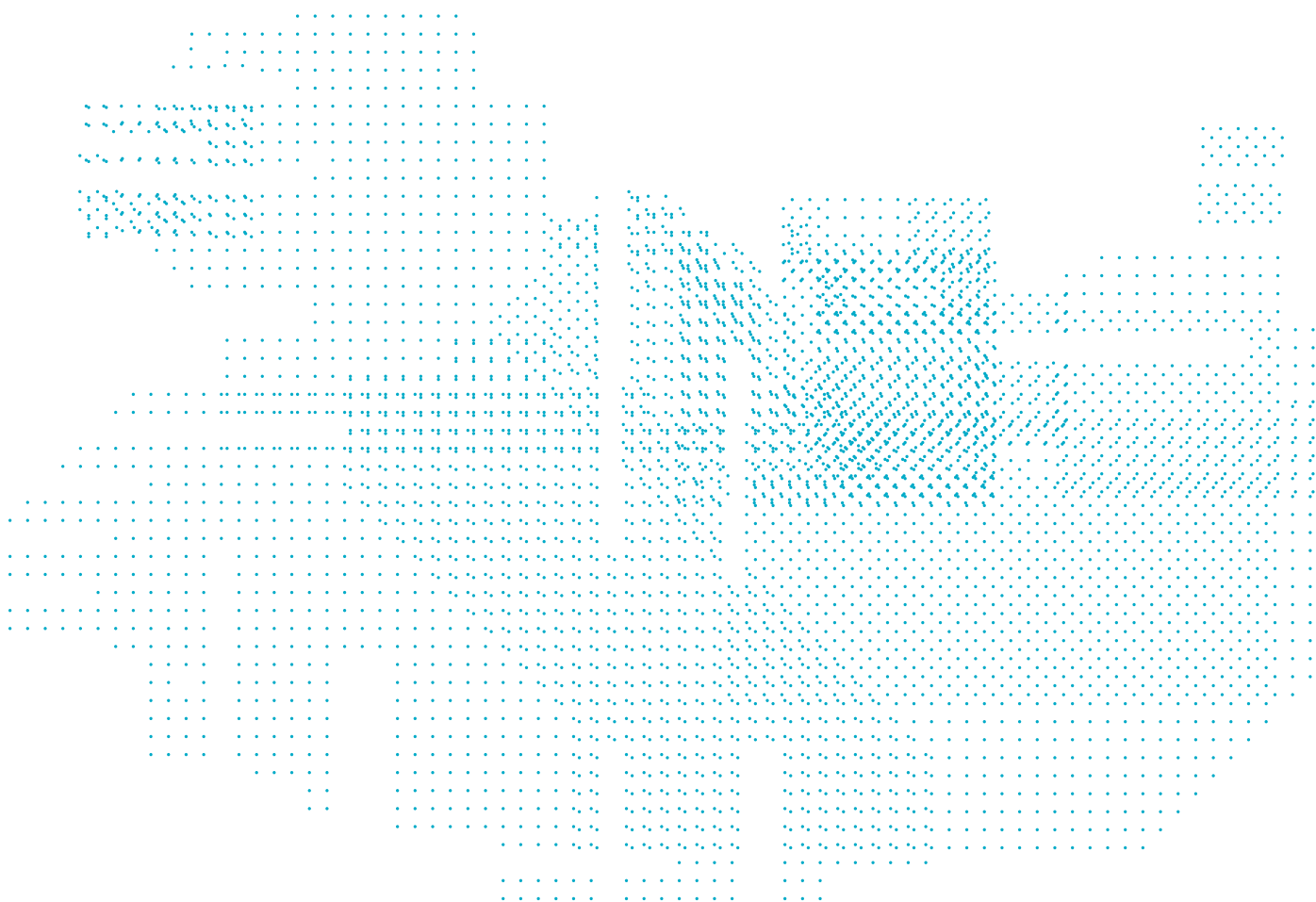
RESEARCH

REPORTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

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MAURICE DUNAISKI

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS



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Introduction

Why should we care about gender equality in the European Parliament? After all, the European Parliament is not known to be a particularly important player in the fight for equality between women and men. In fact, the average European citizen thinks that EU parliamentarians mostly spend their time passing laws on the size of vegetables, the quality of swimming water or the cost of mobile phone calls abroad¹. Surely, there is some truth in every cliché. However, it would be a mistake to think that the promotion of gender equality at the European level therefore simply does not matter.

Firstly, the equal representation of women and men in the European Parliament matters because it touches upon a foundational principle of modern democracy. In representative democracies, parliaments are supposed to reflect, to the largest extent possible, the composition of society at large. Hence, given that women constitute roughly 51% of the European population, they should be represented to the same extent as men². However, female representatives currently make up only 37% of the European Parliament.

Secondly, the European Parliament does indeed legislate on matters that are of importance to women and those who want to advance gender equality. For example, it is behind several important pieces of legislation pertaining to issues like equal treatment of women and men at the workplace or when applying for a job, the protection of pregnant employees and breastfeeding mothers, as well as the right to maternity leave and parental leave³. However, these positive developments notwithstanding, there is still ample room for improvement in terms of gender equality legislation at the EU level. For example, significant challenges remain in areas such as violence against women, the reconciliation of work and family-life or the representation of women in collective decision-making bodies and executive offices⁴.

In sum, gender equality in the European Parliament matters. Not only because gender equality ensures the representativeness of the only directly elected body at the EU-level, but also because of the gendered implications of EU laws. The European Parliament has passed legislation that has directly impacted the lives of women across the whole continent, and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future⁵.

From the 22nd to the 25th of May this year, the citizens of Europe were asked to elect their representatives in the European Parliament for the next five years. There were the two main themes that dominated the public discourse around the 2014 EU elections: The rise of right-wing parties and the fallout from the Eurozone-crisis⁶. Gender equality was, for the most part, not an issue during and after the EU electoral campaign⁷. For example, the

¹ see Eurobarometer (2008). Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/eurobarometre/EB68/EB68_presentation_en.pdf [accessed 09.07.14].

² see Eurostat (2013). Available at: <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tps00011> [accessed 09.07.14].

³ see European Commission. 2014. *The EU and Irish Women*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/ireland_in_the_eu/impact_of_eu_on_irish_women/index_en.htm [accessed 15.07.14].

⁴ *ibid.*; see also EurActive. 2014. *EU foot-dragging on women's rights, 15.05.14*. Available at: <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/eu-elections-2014/eu-foot-dragging-womens-rights-302159> [accessed 15.07.14].

⁵ We expand upon the connection between the 'descriptive' and the 'substantive' aspects of women's representation in the section on 'Theoretical Issues'.

⁶ see e.g. Piedrafita, S. & Lauenroth, A. 2014. *Between apathy and anger. EPIN Paper, No.39, May 2014*. Available at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/51021/> [accessed 09.07.14]; or Washington Post, 28.05.14. Available at: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2014/05/28/hey-media-central-and-east-european-countries-voted-in-the-european-parliamentary-elections-too/> [accessed 09.07.14].

⁷ Most of our interviewees suggested that there was little scope for addressing 'women's issues' during the EU electoral campaign.

surprising fact that the European Parliament now has its first member representing a feminist party⁸ went largely unnoticed by the mainstream media.

In our paper we aim to counterbalance this lack of attention paid to the issue of gender equality at the EU-level. We provide the reader with up-to-date information on women's representation in the European Parliament and offer a timely assessment of gender equality in the EU's electoral process. In this respect, our main research objective was to identify the key gender-specific barriers that continue to prevent women from achieving equal representation in the European Parliament. Besides systemic factors such as the electoral system or gender quotas, the literature on women's representation in parliaments often highlights the party-internal candidate selection process as a key determinant of how well women do in elections⁹. In order to shed some light on this "secret garden of politics"¹⁰, we conducted in-depth interviews with successful and unsuccessful female Polish candidates in the recent EU elections¹¹. These interviews allowed us to identify the main gender-specific challenges faced by female Polish candidates during the electoral process leading up to the May 2014 elections. Importantly, we have to acknowledge that the qualitative, interview-based approach adopted in this case study of the Polish electoral process does not allow us to draw conclusions that can be readily generalized and applied to different countries or contexts. Nevertheless, we believe that our case study can provide valuable insights to female politicians from across the European continent, who are looking for ways to overcome gender-specific barriers to participation in politics.

This report is structured as follows: In Section 1 we discuss theoretical issues pertaining to the concept of 'women's representation' and we provide a brief review of the relevant academic literature. In Section 2 we then examine overall trends in the representation of women at the European level. Furthermore we look into differences between EU member-states in the proportion of elected female Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and discuss possible explanations for these divergent trends. In Section 3 we turn to our case study of the Polish electoral process and lay out the key gender-specific barriers to participation that we identified during our interviews with female candidates in the recent EU elections. Lastly, in Section 4 we provide some recommendations on how to overcome the previously identified barriers to women's participation in politics.

Theoretical Issues

The literature on women's representation usually makes a distinction between women's 'descriptive representation' and women's 'substantive representation'. Whereas the former refers to the percentage of female politicians in state institutions, the latter refers to the policy outcomes of women's presence in these institutions. Our paper focuses on the 'descriptive' aspect of women's representation in the European Parliament (EP) and does not look at how female MEPs legislate. It is however important to note that the connection between the two types of women's representation is not always straightforward. In other words, it would be misleading to suggest that an increase in the number of women in elected offices *automatically* translates into more gender-equitable outcomes in the collective decision-making process. Nevertheless, there is now substantial empirical

⁸ see The Telegraph, 27.05.14. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-politics/10857720/Forget-Ukip-why-the-hell-has-Europe-voted-in-a-feminist-party.html> [accessed 09.07.14].

⁹ see e.g. Wängnerud, L. 2009. Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 12: 51-70.

¹⁰ Gallagher, M. & Marsh, M. 1988. *Candidate selection in comparative perspective: the secret garden of politics*. London: Sage Publications.

¹¹ We conducted a total of 13 interviews with successful and unsuccessful female candidates from Gdańsk, Katowice, Kraków, Poznań, Warsaw and Wrocław. Our sample covers female candidates from all major Polish political parties (Civic Platform, Law and Justice, Your Movement, Polish People's Party and Democratic Left Alliance) as well as some candidates from smaller parties (Green Party & Women's Party). Even though we tried to obtain a sample that would be as representative as possible of the current political landscape in Poland, our sample exhibits a slight bias towards left-leaning candidates.

evidence to suggest that the descriptive representation of women does indeed translate into substantive representation *under certain conditions*.

At the micro-level, scholars have established that female and male parliamentarians on average have distinct policy priorities¹² and that female parliamentarians often feel an obligation to represent ‘women’s interests’¹³. Research has also shown that female parliamentarians share many of the same opinions as female voters¹⁴. Concerning their behavior in parliaments, scholars have found that female representatives tend to differ most from their male counterparts when it comes to proposing new bills that pertain to issues that are of particular interest to women, such as child-care, equal pay or domestic violence¹⁵. In addition, women’s increased presence in parliament has been shown to lead to changes in political rhetoric as well as gender-sensitive reforms of parliamentary practices and working hours¹⁶. In sum, having more women in parliament makes a difference.

At the macro-level, there is evidence to suggest that societies that elect a large number of women to parliament tend to be more gender-equal in other respects, such as access to education or income¹⁷. However, the causal arrow can run both ways and scholars have noted that a mere increase in the numbers of women elected does not always translate automatically into material benefits for women on the ground. They attribute this shortcoming to a number of constraining factors such as party ideology, legislative inexperience, or the external political environment¹⁸. Along similar lines, Bratton and Ray suggest that a key precondition for the translation of women’s descriptive representation into gender-equitable policy outcomes is the presence of women in the executive¹⁹.

“It’s not enough to talk only in terms of numbers. Especially party ideologies and party programmes are crucial in determining what women will do in parliament.” Interviewee from Warsaw

Some scholars have also criticized the fact that most findings about the apparent link between women’s ‘descriptive’ and ‘substantive’ representation stem from studies conducted in established Western democracies²⁰. They point to the case of Rwanda, which highlights the problem of assuming a direct relationship between an increase in the number of women in parliament and an improvement in the lives of ordinary women. Even though women now make up 56% of the Rwandan Parliament, this has so far had little

¹² Thomas, S. & Welch, S. 1991. The impact of gender on activities and priorities of state legislators. *Western Political Quarterly* 44(x): 445–456; Swers, M. 1998. Are women more likely to vote for women’s issue bills than their male colleagues? *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 23(3): 435–448.

¹³ Reingold, B. 2000. *Representing Women: Sex, Gender and Legislative Behavior in Arizona and California*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

¹⁴ Mateo Diaz, M. 2005. *Representing Women? Female Legislators in West European Parliaments*. Oxford: University of Oxford; Lovenduski, J. 1997. Gender politics: a breakthrough for women? *Parliamentary Affairs* 50(4): 708–719.

¹⁵ Bratton, K. & Ray, L. 2002. Descriptive representation, policy outcomes, and municipal day-care coverage in Norway. *American Journal of Political Science* 46(2): 428–437; Childs, S. 2004. *Women Representing Women, New Labour’s Women MPs*. London: Routledge.

¹⁶ Grey, S. 2002. Does size matter? Critical mass and New Zealand’s women MPs. *Parliamentary Affairs* 55(1): 19–29; Skjeie, H. 1991. The rhetoric of difference: On women’s inclusion into political elites. *Politics and Society* 19(2): 233–263.

¹⁷ see e.g. Ingelhart R & Norris P. 2003. *Rising Tide. Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

¹⁸ Childs, S. 2004. *Women Representing Women, New Labour’s Women MPs*. London: Routledge; Beckwith, K. & Cowell-Meyers, K. 2007. Sheer numbers: Critical representation thresholds and women’s political representation. *Perspectives on Politics* 5(3): 553–565; Celis, K. 2008. Representation. In *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*, edited by Gary Goertz and Amy Mazur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁹ Bratton, K. & Ray, L. 2002. Descriptive representation, policy outcomes, and municipal day-care coverage in Norway. *American Journal of Political Science* 46(2): 428–437.

²⁰ Wängnerud, L. & Samanni, M. (2009). Driving forces behind gender equality: A cross-country comparison. QoG Working Paper Series, 2009:28. Available at: http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1350/1350698_2009_28_wangnerud_samanni.pdf [accessed 10.07.14].

effect on policy outcomes and the situation of women on the ground²¹. Unfortunately, the closer we get to measuring improvements in women's everyday lives, the fewer robust empirical findings we have about the link between women's 'descriptive' and 'substantive' representation²². Further complicating matters, there is also little agreement among academics on how to actually measure 'substantive representation'²³. Nevertheless, there seems to be a broad consensus in the literature that women's increased presence in parliament does indeed translate into more gender-equitable policy outcomes *under certain conditions*. It has therefore been suggested that the link between women's 'descriptive' and 'substantive' representation is probabilistic rather than deterministic²⁴.

There are three additional factors that need to be kept in mind when analysing the descriptive representation of women in parliaments. Firstly, this approach tends to overlook male parliamentarians as potential advocates for gender equality²⁵. Secondly, the focus on members of parliament essentially limits the question of equal representation to one single site of political contestation and disregards other potential sites, such as the state bureaucracy or the private sector²⁶. Lastly, this approach necessarily involves making assumptions about the nature of women as a group and their 'interests'. In other words, it essentializes women and ignores the possibility that women's interests will vary along societal cleavages such as class, ideology, age, ethnicity or sexual orientation²⁷. For example, Jeydel and Taylor²⁸ highlight the importance of age as a mediating factor in gendered politics.

“In general, if you're a male politician and you get grey hair, you will be treated as a wise man. But as a woman with grey hair, you're either ugly or you just don't know how to colour your hair properly.” Interviewee from Gdańsk

They show that when factors such as seniority and institutional experience are taken into account, there is no significant difference between the ability of female and male politicians in the US House of Representatives to gain federal funds for their home districts.

In light of the above discussion, we believe that our focus on the 'descriptive' aspect of women's representation at the EU-level is justified. The equal representation of women and men in the EP is important, not only as a matter of principle, but also because a large body of empirical research suggests that women's presence in parliaments does indeed translate into more gender-equitable policy outcomes. However, our focus on the 'descriptive' side of women's representation does by no means imply that we treat women's equal representation in parliaments as a panacea for solving the problem of gender inequality in all its other manifestations. In fact we have highlighted several factors that *problematize* the causal link between women's 'descriptive' and 'substantive' representation. With these theoretical issues in mind, we can now turn to our analysis of how the May 2014 elections impacted women's representation in the European Parliament.

²¹ Devlin C, Elgie R. 2008. The Effect of Increased Women's Representation in Parliament. The Case of Rwanda. *Parliamentary Affairs* 61(2):237-54.

²² Wängnerud, L. 2009. Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 12: 51-70.

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Dodson, D. 2006. *The Impact of Women in Congress*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

²⁵ Childs, S. & Krook, M. 2006. Should feminists give up on critical mass? A contingent 'yes'. *Politics and Gender* 2(4): 522-530.

²⁶ Celis, K. et al. 2008. Rethinking women's substantive representation. *Representation*. 44 (2): 99-110.

²⁷ Celis, K. 2008. Representation. In *Politics, Gender, and Concepts: Theory and Methodology*, edited by Gary Goertz and Amy Mazur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

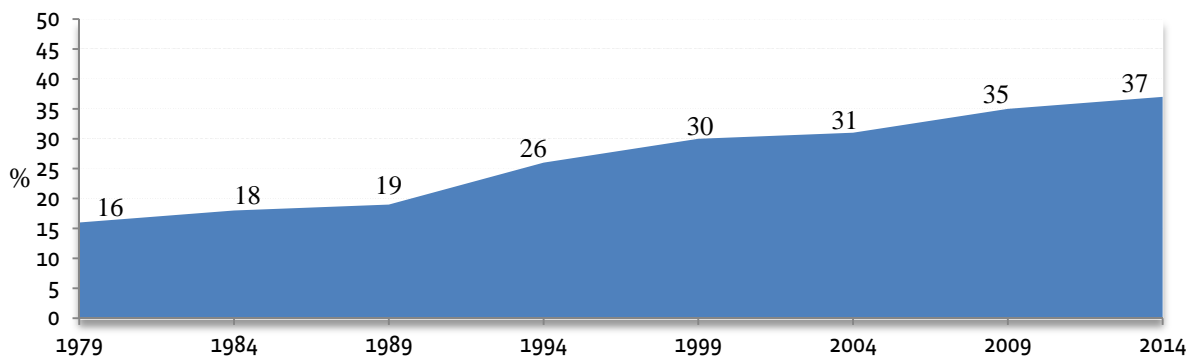
²⁸ Jeydel, A. & Taylor A. 2003. Are women legislators less effective? Evidence from the U.S. House in the 103rd-105th Congress. *Political Research Quarterly*, 56(1):19-27.

Women's Representation at the European Level

What are the key trends?

The recent EU elections have resulted in a slight improvement of the gender balance in the EP. Female parliamentarians now make up 37% of the legislature in Brussels, compared to 35% during the previous term (2009-2014). This slight improvement in women's representation reflects a more general trend of 'incrementalism'²⁹ at the EU level, which has been evident since the first elections to the EP. With the only exception of the 1994 elections, all EU elections since 1979 resulted in an increase of female MEPs that was *below* 5 percentage points (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: How has the percentage of women in the European Parliament changed over time?



Source: European Parliament

This relatively slow progress notwithstanding, we should however also note that on average women's representation in the EP has been consistently better than in the national legislatures of the EU's member states³⁰. The current EU-wide average in national assemblies is roughly 27%³¹. The worldwide average for national parliaments is even lower and currently stands at 22%³². It is therefore not very surprising that currently only five European countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania and Poland) have a larger percentage of female representatives in their respective national legislatures than they have in the EP³³. Furthermore, in the majority of these cases (i.e. except for Lithuania and Belgium) the difference between national parliaments and the EP is smaller than one percentage point and hence negligible. This shows that, generally speaking, the EP is a more hospitable environment for female politicians than the national parliaments of the EU's member-states. In other words, women tend to do better in Brussels.

However, we would be ill advised to look only at EU-wide trends. The relatively positive state of women's representation at the EU-level hides dramatic differences between member-states in terms of the number of female MEPs they send to Brussels. While some Northern European countries (e.g. Finland, Ireland or Sweden) actually send *more* women than men to Brussels, some Eastern and Southern European countries (e.g. Cyprus, Hungary or Lithuania) still have less than 20% female representatives in the EP (see Figure 2).

²⁹ For the use of this term, see Dahlerup, D. & Freidenvall, L. 2005. Quotas as a 'fast track' to equal representation for women. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. 7 (1): 26-48.

³⁰ European Parliamentary Research Service. 2014. *Women in EP and UE national parliaments*. Available at: http://epthinktank.eu/2014/03/04/women-in-parliaments/women_ep_national/ [accessed 14.07.14].

³¹ European Parliamentary Research Service. 2014. *European and National Parliaments: % of women Members*. Available at: http://epthinktank.eu/2014/02/28/women-in-politics-business-and-public-administration-in-the-eu/women_parliaments/ [accessed 14.07.14].

³² Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2014. *Women in national parliaments. Situation as of 1st June 2014*. Available at: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> [accessed 22.07.14].

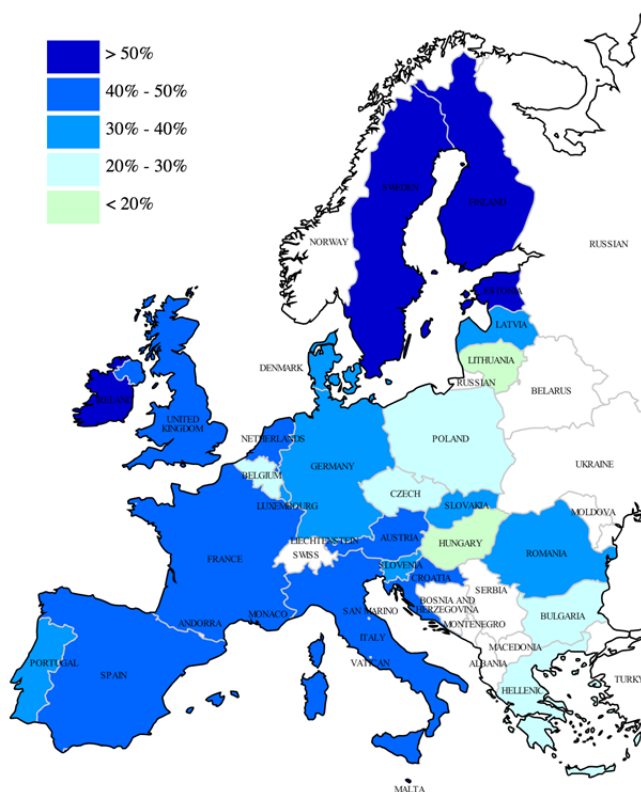
³³ *ibid*; cf. European Parliament. 2014. *Men and women distribution*. Available at: <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/gender-balance.html> [accessed 22.07.14].

The slight improvement in women’s representation following the May 2014 elections also hides important *divergent* developments among EU-member states, with some countries experiencing a drastic decline in the number of elected female MEPs, and other countries seeing the gender balance among their MEPs improve significantly compared to 2009 (see Figure 3). Generally speaking - and with important exceptions - one can say that the situation in the new South Eastern member-states of the EU has deteriorated, whereas some old EU-member states were able to substantially improve their gender balance in 2014.

It is likely that the significant increase in the number of female representatives from Italy (which sends 73 MEPs, of which 29 are women) and Ireland (which sends 11 MEPs, of which 6 are women) was able to offset to some extent the drastic decline in the number of female representatives from Eastern European countries such as Hungary, Bulgaria and Lithuania. Similarly, the moderate increase in the number of female MEPs from the United Kingdom and Spain - two large member-states - was able to compensate for the slight decline in the number of female MEPs coming from Western European countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands and Belgium (see Figure 4).

These divergent trends across Europe mean that on average the percentage of female parliamentarians at the European level did not change very much in May 2014. In fact, it only increased by two percentage points to 37%. This percentage is however still a far cry from being representative of European society at large, where women constitute around 51% of the population³⁴.

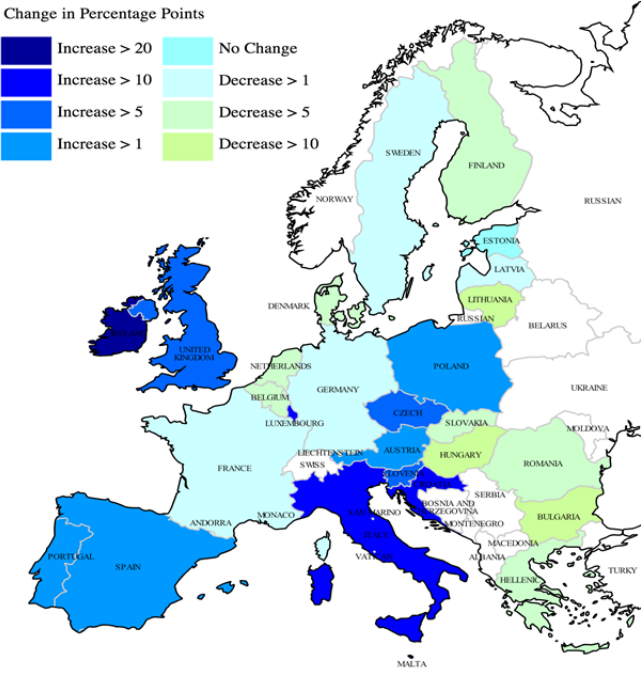
Figure 2: The percentage of female MEPs from each EU member-state



Source: European Parliament

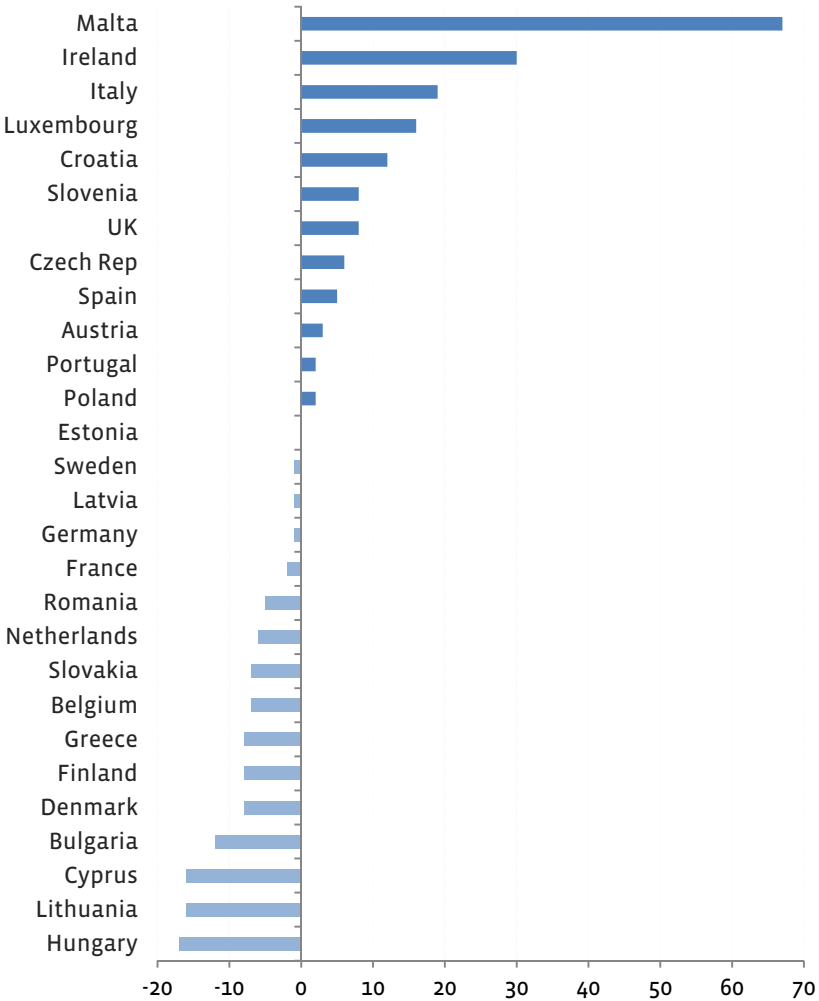
³⁴ see Footnote 2.

Figure 3: The change in women’s representation between 2009 and 2014



Source: European Parliament

Figure 4: The change in women’s representation between 2009 and 2014 (in percentage points)



Source: European Parliament

How can we explain these trends?

How can we explain the fact that some countries have done astonishingly well in terms of increasing the number of female MEPs, whilst others have experienced a serious deterioration? In the case of the EU elections, one of the key system-level determinants of women's representation in parliament established by empirical research³⁵ – the electoral system – cannot serve as an adequate explanatory factor for these divergent developments. This is because the EU's electoral laws require that all member-states elect their MEPs in accordance with some variant of the Proportional Representation (PR) system³⁶.

In contrast, quotas are an important system-level factor that we need to take into account when analysing the May 2014 results from a gender perspective. Electoral gender quotas require a fixed percentage or a specific number for the nomination or the actual representation of women in elected bodies. Gender quotas generally take one of the following two forms: Either they are *hard* quotas that are enshrined in the electoral laws and are compulsory for all national parties, or they are *soft* quotas that are adopted voluntarily by some parties. Hard quotas have been adopted in seven EU member-states, namely Belgium, Greece, France, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain. Furthermore, 13 additional EU member-states have at least one political party that has adopted a soft gender quota. Only eight member-states have implemented neither hard quotas nor soft quotas. These countries are Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Latvia, Malta and Slovakia³⁷.

Interestingly, the average percentage of female MEPs from countries *without* gender quotas is currently higher (45%) than the average percentage of female MEPs from countries with hard quotas (33,5%) or soft quotas (33,5%). However, these results say nothing about how well female candidates would have done *without* gender quotas in those countries that currently have quotas in place. In fact it is quite likely that women would have done even worse in these countries in the absence of quotas. In this respect it is important to keep in mind that gender quotas are currently not in place in countries such as Finland or Denmark precisely *because* female candidates have historically performed well in elections³⁸. In contrast, relatively conservative countries such as Poland or Spain have adopted gender quotas in order to counterbalance the systematic exclusion of women from the public sphere³⁹. In other words, the lower average of female MEPs from countries with gender quotas says much more about the entrenched gender inequalities in those countries than about the effectiveness of the quota mechanism.

The academic literature generally agrees that quotas can have a significant impact on the percentage of women represented in parliament⁴⁰. However, there are three factors that have a mediating influence on the effectiveness of gender quotas. Firstly the quota needs to be compatible with the electoral system. For example, in majority or plurality electoral

³⁵ see Roberts, A. et al. 2013. Do Electoral Laws Affect Women's Representation? *Comparative Political Studies*. 46 (12): 1555-1581.

³⁶ However, the electoral system can vary between member-states in terms of whether it requires open, semi-open or closed party lists, the exact method for allocating seats, and the minimum threshold percentage required. See Brodolini, F. et al. 2014. *Electoral lists ahead of the elections to the European Parliament from a gender perspective*. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, policy department C. Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/femm/studies.html> [accessed 24.07.14].

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ see Hoodfar, H. & Tajali, M. 2011. *Electoral politics: making quotas work for women*. London, WLUML. p.87ff.

³⁹ see Druciarek, M. & Nizyńska, A. 2014. *(No) women in politics. Is a common strategy for East-Central Europe possible?* Warsaw, Institute of Public Affairs; Verge, T. 2012. Institutionalising Gender Equality in Spain: From Party Quotas to Electoral Gender Quotas". *West European Politics*. 35 (2): 395-414.

⁴⁰ Dahlerup, D. (ed.). 2006. *Women, Quotas and Politics*. New York and London: Routledge; or Wängnerud, L. 2009. Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 12: 51-70.

systems (such as the First-Past-the-Post system), where voters vote for individual candidates rather than party-lists, gender quotas applied during the nomination process tend to become ineffective⁴¹. Since there can only be one candidate per party in each electoral district, majority systems are not compatible with quota regulations for party lists. In fact, the only way to enforce gender quotas in such systems is by requiring that women will be fielded in a specific number of districts. However, this rule might lead parties that are not eager to nominate women to only nominate them in 'unwinnable' districts, where the seat is likely to be won by a competing party⁴². In the case of the European elections, these considerations should not be relevant given the EU-wide application of the PR-system.

Secondly, the effectiveness of gender quotas depends on sanctions for non-compliance. If parties lose their right to participate in elections as the result of non-compliance, they are more likely to stick to the rules than when they only receive a financial penalty for non-compliance⁴³. At first sight, this factor also seems not to have played a very big role in the May 2014 elections, given that the two EU-countries that only apply *financial* sanctions for non-compliance (France and Portugal) have had similar or better results in terms of women's representation compared to countries with the same gender quotas enforced by *legal* sanctions (Belgium, Greece, Poland and Slovenia)⁴⁴.

However, the different ways in which political parties respond to the sanctions can indeed help to explain why France, despite having a legislated gender quota of 50% with strict alternation of men and women on party lists, has only 42% female representatives in the EP. Murray explains this shortcoming as follows:

"French parties receive state funding in two portions: the first pertains to how many votes they receive, and the second to how many seats they win. Seats attract significantly more funding than votes. Small parties who win few or no seats have no choice but to implement [the gender quota], whereas the larger parties will be more concerned with winning seats. If they feel that replacing a popular male incumbent with a lesser-known female candidate might cost them the seat, they will consider it more costly to implement [the gender quota] than to suffer the financial penalty for failing to do so."⁴⁵

In other words, those French parties that are most likely to be represented in parliament are at the same time also the most likely to ignore the requirements of the 50% gender quota and to accept the financial penalties for non-compliance. We can therefore say that the way in which gender quotas are enforced in France has a significant impact on the number of French women elected to the EP. If non-compliance with the French quota regulations were to result in the disqualification of the electoral-list in question, then the above-mentioned gendered dynamic would certainly not be able to develop.

Lastly, the rank-order for the candidates on the party-lists matters, especially for small parties that send only a couple of representatives to Parliament. Additional measures, such as the 'zipper-system'⁴⁶ can help to address the common problem that female candidates

⁴¹ Larserud, S. & Taphorn, R. 2007. *Designing for equality: best-fit, medium-fit and non-favourable combinations of electoral systems and gender quotas*. Stockholm: International IDEA.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Brodolini, F. et al. 2014. *Electoral lists ahead of the elections to the European Parliament from a gender perspective*. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, policy department C.

⁴⁴ Belgium has a 50% gender quota and can therefore be compared to France (50%). Greece (33%), Poland (35%) and Slovenia (35%) can in turn be compared to Portugal (33%). Spain has a quota of 40%, so it is not comparable to either France or Portugal.

⁴⁵ Murray, R. 2013. No Longer the Laggard: How France Leapfrogged the UK for Women's Representation. *Renewal*, Vol. 20(4): 48-56, p. 49.

⁴⁶ The 'zipper system' requires that male and female candidates strictly alternate on the party-list.

are relegated to the bottom of the list and hence have no chances of getting elected⁴⁷. In this respect it is telling that Poland, which has adopted a 35% gender quota, sends only 24% female representatives to the EP. This discrepancy of more than 10 percentage points highlights the importance of rank-ordering regulations in countries where politics is still very male-dominated. In contrast to Poland, female representatives from Portugal make up 38% of its MEPs, even though the country adopted a comparable (in fact, slightly *lower*) gender quota (33%). The crucial difference between Portugal and Poland is that Portuguese political parties cannot have more than two consecutive candidates of the same sex on their list. In other words, country-specific measures like the ‘zipper system’ are likely to have had a significant impact on the success rate of female candidates in the European elections.

Importantly, quotas cannot explain the whole story. After all, countries like Ireland or Finland, which have no gender quotas whatsoever, did extremely well in terms of electing female representatives to the EP. The non-existence of gender quotas or the ‘zipper-system’ also does not necessarily mean that the proportion and position of female candidates on party lists will be low. For example, in Bulgaria, female candidates made up 50% of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms’ party-list and a woman occupied the first position. In Finland, all parties that ran for the EU elections had a share of women that was above 35%, and in Slovakia, the Direction Social Democracy party-list had a 57% share of female candidates⁴⁸. These figures highlight the fact that quotas are not always a necessary condition for women’s success in electoral politics.

Empirical research has identified additional macro-level determinants of women’s descriptive representation in parliaments such as the level of religiosity in society, the type of welfare state, the level of corruption or the years since female suffrage was introduced⁴⁹. All these factors are likely to explain at least some of the divergence in the number of female MEPs elected from the various EU member-states. However, it would go beyond the scope of this paper to establish their relative importance through cross-country regression analysis. In any case, this approach would not allow us to identify the country-specific causes of the dramatic short-term changes in women’s representation that occurred between 2009 and 2014 in member-states such as Ireland, Italy, Hungary or Lithuania.

There are certainly a number of country-specific and non-systemic factors that can help to explain the exceptional results in these ‘outlier’ countries. For example, the remarkable increase in the percentage of female MEPs from Ireland (from 25% in 2009 to 55% in 2014) can to some extent be attributed to the mobilization of the national women’s movement. In particular, efforts were made to address a key individual-level barrier to women’s participation in politics: the perception that they do not possess the skills and experience required for elected office⁵⁰. In this respect it is telling that two of the three newly elected female MPs have participated in training and mentoring programs run by the non-profit Women for Election Ireland, which sought to improve their self-confidence and campaigning skills⁵¹.

As in the Irish case, the significant increase in the percentage of female MEPs from Italy (from 21% in 2009 to 40% in 2014) can also be attributed to a country-specific and non-systemic factor. The excellent performance of the left-wing Democratic Party (DP), which

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Brodolini, F. et al. 2014. *Electoral lists ahead of the elections to the European Parliament from a gender perspective*. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, policy department C.

⁴⁹ see Wängnerud, L. 2009. Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 12: 51-70.

⁵⁰ We will return to this key individual-level barrier to women’s participation in our case study of the Polish electoral process (see Section 3).

⁵¹ see <http://www.womenforelection.ie/> [accessed 10.07.14].

received roughly 40% of the Italian votes in the May 2014 elections, meant that its 50% soft gender quota had a big impact on the overall representation of women among MEPs from Italy. Importantly, the effect of the DP's soft gender quota was amplified during the May 2014 elections due to the fact that party-leader Matteo Renzi consciously decided to select only female candidates to head the party-lists in all of Italy's five electoral constituencies⁵². In sum, we can thus say that it was the interplay of party performance, soft quotas and gender-sensitive leadership that resulted in the significant increase in the number of Italian women elected to the EP in 2014.

A further country-specific factor worth considering is the impact of the rise of right-wing parties on women's representation at the EU-level. In this respect it is interesting to note that the exceptional performance of the far-right UK Independence Party, which is now the strongest British party in the EP, actually coincided with an *increase* in the number of female MEPs from the United Kingdom. This result runs counter to the received wisdom that a right-wing political climate is less hospitable towards female politicians⁵³.

However, we should also note that the rise of far-right parties in countries such as Denmark, Hungary or Lithuania has indeed coincided with a significant *decrease* in the number of elected female MEPs. Here the connection between party-ideology and soft quotas is likely to have resulted in negative outcomes in terms of women's representation at the EU-level. The literature on gender quotas highlights the fact that right-wing parties are much less likely than left-wing parties to have soft quotas in their party-lists, and if they do, they tend to be lower than in left-wing parties and usually do not include rank-ordering regulations⁵⁴. In Hungary, for example, this connection between quotas and party ideology can help to explain why the rise of the right-wing Fidesz party (51% of votes) and the ultra-right-wing Jobbik party (15% of votes) has led to a drastic deterioration in the number of female Hungarian MEPs from 38% in 2004 to only 19% in 2014. Both Fidesz and Jobbik do not have soft gender quotas and women are severely underrepresented in their ranks. For example, of a total of 12 currently sitting MEPs from the Fidesz party, only three are women. Thus, in the case of Hungary, we can confidently state that the rise of the right has had a negative impact on women's representation in the EP. As a result, Hungary now has the third-worst gender balance in the EP. Only Cyprus and Lithuania do even worse in this regard.

In conclusion, we can say that the above-mentioned divergent trends in women's representations across the EU are the result of a combination of systemic factors and non-systemic factors. We have seen that country-specific systemic factors such as gender quotas and sanctions regimes interact with non-systemic factors such as the respective performance of left-wing and right-wing parties or the mobilization of the national women's movement. The interplay of these two types of factors is likely to explain a large part of the divergent developments in women's representation that we have witnessed in the May 2014 elections to the EP.

However, we argue that any analysis of women's participation in electoral politics needs to go beyond a focus on macro-level factors such as quota rules, party performance or civil society mobilization. For example, if we truly want to understand how quota rules operate *in practice*, we need to study the micro-level party-internal candidate selection process and its gendered dynamics⁵⁵. After all, it is the political parties that select who will

⁵² Armellini, A. 2014. Italy PM chooses women MEP candidates to combat 'grey' list. *EU-Observer*, 11.04.14. Available at: <http://euobserver.com/eu-elections/123834> [accessed 30.07.14].

⁵³ see e.g. Kittilson, M. 2006. *Challenging Parties, Changing Parliaments. Women and Elected Office in Contemporary Western Europe*. Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press.

⁵⁴ Brodolini, F. et al. 2014. *Electoral lists ahead of the elections to the European Parliament from a gender perspective*. Directorate-General for Internal Policies, policy department C. Available at:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/committees/en/femm/studies.html> [accessed 24.07.14].

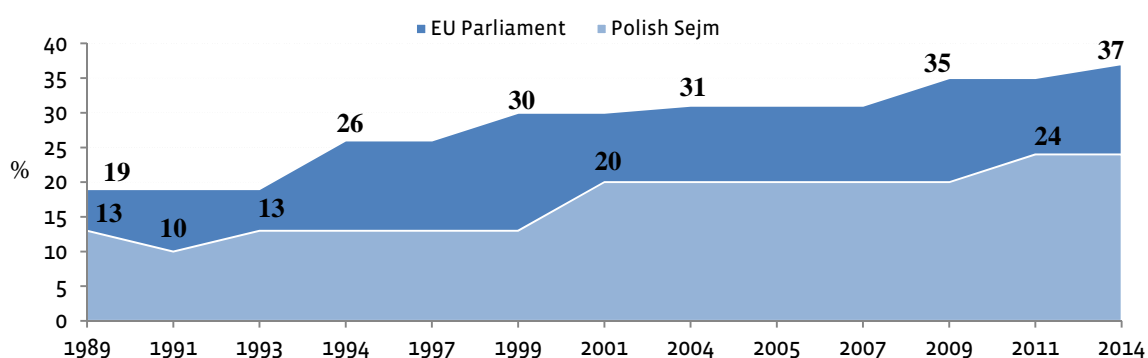
⁵⁵ Ibid.

represent them in parliament and who will get ‘winnable’ positions on their electoral lists. In other words, internal party politics play a key role in determining the degree to which women can be successful in elections. For this reason political parties are often referred to as the main “gatekeepers” of women’s political participation in general and of aspiring young female politicians in particular⁵⁶. Unfortunately, these party-internal candidate selection processes mostly take place behind closed doors and generalizable findings about party-internal gender discrimination are hard to come by⁵⁷. This is why we conducted in-depth interviews with successful and unsuccessful female Polish candidates in the recent EU elections in order to shed some light on the “the secret garden of politics”⁵⁸. Drawing on the material gathered through these extensive interviews, the next section will highlight the key gender-specific barriers to participation faced by female Polish politicians during the electoral process leading up to the May 2014 elections.

Gender Inequality in the Electoral Process: The Case of Poland

Why did we decide to focus on Poland? The main reason – besides time and resource constraints – is that women’s participation in Polish politics is in a relatively dire state. In other words, Poland is an ‘outlier’ country within the EU in terms of women’s representation and therefore of particular interest to those studying gender-specific barrier to participation in politics. Since Poland joined the EU in 2004, the percentage of female Polish MEPs has been consistently lower than the EU-wide average (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: The percentage of female MEPs from Poland vs the EU-wide average



Source: European Parliament

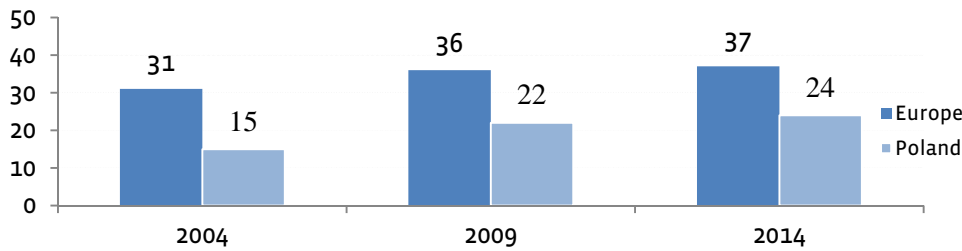
With only 24% female MEPs, Poland is one of the worst-performing countries in Europe in terms of women’s representation at the EU-level. In fact only three countries (i.e. Cyprus, Hungary and Lithuania) have an even worse gender balance among their MEPs. Furthermore, ever since Poland’s first semi-democratic elections in 1998, the percentage of women elected to the lower house of the Polish parliament (the Sejm) has been consistently lower than the average percentage of women in the EP (see Figure 6).

⁵⁶ see e.g. ODIHR. 2014. *Handbook on promoting women’s participation in political parties*. Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. p.46.

⁵⁷ For methodological problems faced by ODIHR in its recent effort to identify common barriers to women’s participation in political parties in OSCE member-states, see ODIHR. 2014. *Handbook on promoting women’s participation in political parties*. Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. p.18ff.

⁵⁸ see Footnote 10.

Figure 6: Women's Representation in the EU vs Poland



Source: European Parliament / Inter-Parliamentary Union

Polish women are thus significantly underrepresented, not only at the EU level, but also at the national level. In this respect it is interesting to note that Poland is one of only five EU member-states that currently send a *smaller* percentage of women to the EP than to their respective national parliaments. This situation stands in contrast to the EU-wide trend identified earlier, which suggested that women tend to do better at the European level than at the national level. It seems that for Polish women, it is even more difficult to get into the EP than into the national parliament. In light of these figures it is plausible to suggest that Polish women face relatively high barriers to successful participation in EU elections. We therefore believe that our case study of gender inequality in the Polish electoral process is particularly relevant to understanding barriers to women's participation in EU politics.

Candidate selection

An important micro-level determinant of how well women do in elections is the party-internal candidate selection process and the extent to which it discriminates against potential female candidates. Our interviewees repeatedly suggested that this party-internal selection process is the main “battleground” on which women have to fight for political success. For example, one interviewee from Poznań said that female candidates “have to fight for a good place on the electoral list or otherwise they will quickly become politically irrelevant”. With reference to the recent EU elections, one interviewee from Gdańsk even went so far as to suggest that, “issues don't matter for success; it's all about your position on the list”. Another interviewee argued that obtaining the first position on the electoral list is especially important for candidates from small parties. In these parties “it is typically a battle for the first place on the list, because if you don't get this place, then you don't have *any* chances of getting elected”. This dynamic is particularly pronounced during EU elections, given the fact that there are fewer parliamentary seats to win compared to national or regional elections – even though the threshold percentage for winning a mandate is generally lower⁵⁹.

Every political party has its own methods of establishing who will be where on the electoral lists. While some parties have clearly regulated and transparent candidate selection procedures, others rely mostly on informal and ad-hoc methods in order to establish their electoral lists. When asked about who exactly decided on the composition of the electoral lists for the recent EU elections, most of our interviewees gave relatively vague and general answers. For example, one interviewee from a right-wing party simply said that, “the party leaders decided who was going to be where on the list.” In the same vein, one interviewee from Gdańsk stated that the composition of the electoral list was decided by the “the party structures”, while another interviewee from Warsaw said that it was drawn up by the “party chairman, together with the party board”. However, most of the time it is not very clear to outsiders (and even some candidates themselves) how

⁵⁹ European Parliamentary Research Service. 2014. *2014 European Elections: National Rules*. Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/eplibrary/InfoGraphic-2014-European-elections-national-rules.pdf> [accessed 18.08.14]

decision-making power is distributed within the selection boards and who exactly is calling the shots when it comes to drawing up the electoral lists.

As a general rule, the more regulated and transparent the party-internal candidate selection is, the less prone it will be to gender-based discrimination⁶⁰. One interviewee from Gdańsk highlighted the importance of clearly defined candidate selection procedures by referring to an incident that took place during the last Polish national elections. Due to the ad-hoc nature of her party's candidate selection procedures, a rich male entrepreneur from her region was able to "kick out" a female candidate from the first position by "buying himself into the party list" just a few weeks before the national elections. This incident shows that a transparent candidate selection process is crucial for the advancement of female candidates, especially in political environments that are still dominated by "old boys' networks"⁶¹.

Most of our interviewees agreed that *party ideology* has a big impact on the way in which female candidates are selected for electoral lists. The reason for this is that party ideology often determines the extent to which political parties implement gender-sensitive candidate selection rules such as quotas or the 'zipper system'. Generally speaking, Polish left-wing parties have higher voluntary gender quotas than their right-wing competitors. In addition, they are also more likely to have adopted the 'zipper system' in order to ensure the effectiveness of their gender quotas. In other words, most left-wing parties 'mainstream' gender into their candidate selection process, and thus provide clear rules by which female candidates can obtain 'winnable' positions on the electoral lists. In line with this general assessment, one interviewee from a Polish left-wing party thought that women actually have a "very comfortable position in her party because of its gender quotas, the zipper system as well as the generally very open atmosphere". One female candidate even suggested that being a woman "helped" her in the selection process for the 2014 EU elections because her party had adopted a very ambitious gender quota and had reserved the first list positions in a number of constituencies for female candidates.

An interviewee from another left-wing party also stressed the importance of party-internal quotas and ranking regulations for overcoming a *systematic bias* against female candidates in the selection process. She argued that without these two regulations the selection process would "always be to the disadvantage of women" due to the fact that candidate selectors "favour incumbents and these incumbents tend to be men". Indeed, the academic literature highlights a number of reasons why selection committees favour (male) incumbents over (female) newcomers⁶². These include the advantages of greater name recognition, higher levels of media attention as well as better access to resources for campaigning. Given that Polish politics are still very male-dominated, this "incumbency bias" has negative implications for women. One interviewee from Warsaw confirmed the gendered nature of the "incumbency bias" and suggested that there is a "vicious circle" at play in the electoral process, in which incumbency, name recognition and media attention reinforce each other to the detriment of women. She said that during the EU electoral campaign "my party often decided to send men to the media because the reporters wanted to talk to well-known candidates, who were of course mostly male incumbents. The media attention, in turn, ensures that these men will get more votes and hence receive better list positions than women in the next elections. It's a vicious circle."

⁶⁰ see ODIHR. 2014. *Handbook on promoting women's participation in political parties*. Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

⁶¹ For a quantitative analysis of this issue, see Sundström, A. & Wägnerud, L. 2013. Women's Political Representation in the European Regions: The impact from Corruption and Bad Governance. *QoG Working Paper Series 2013:9*. Available at: http://www.qog.pol.gu.se/digitalAssets/1451/1451763_2013_9_sundstr-m_w-gnerud.pdf [accessed 18.08.14]

⁶² Fox, R & Lawless, J. 2010. If Only They'd Ask: Gender, Recruitment and Political Ambition. *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 310–326.

Female candidates from Polish right-wing parties, which generally have lower gender quotas and no ranking regulations, cannot rely on such formal rules to obtain ‘winnable’ positions on their party lists. When asked whether they thought that being a woman impacted their positioning on the electoral list, female candidates from right-wing parties tended to argue that their “personal abilities” and “support bases” were the decisive factors. In fact, some of our right-leaning interviewees stated that being a woman did not matter *at all* in this process. For example, one interviewee from Warsaw said that, “she doesn’t see any gender-specific barriers for herself as a politician and that she positioned herself where she is today by hard work alone.” Nevertheless, our interviewees from right-wing parties also often mentioned a good relationship with a (male) party leader as a decisive factor in the candidate selection process. Indeed, through our interviews with these right-wing candidates we found out that the existence of a male “mentor” or “patron” in the party leadership is often an important determinant of how well female candidates will be positioned on the party list. For example, one interviewee from Gdańsk admitted that it sometimes comes down to one single person making all the decisions regarding the candidates’ selection and positioning on her party’s electoral lists. Another interviewee from a right-wing party said, “I obtained a good position on the list because [the party leader] appreciates me and wanted me to win. I’m sure I was not just a decorative women candidate”. These remarks suggest that having a high-ranking benefactor in the party is a decisive factor enabling female candidates from the right to obtain a good position on the electoral lists. An additional factor that seems to impact the position of female candidates from right-wing parties is the wish of the party leadership to appear inclusive towards women. For example, an interviewee from Katowice said that the party leadership offered her a good position on the list because they decided that it would be good to have at least one “attractive” woman on the list. However, she was only allowed to run from the third list position because the first and second positions were already reserved for two well-known male politicians.

Campaign financing

A second important barrier to women’s participation in electoral politics is campaign financing. Most of our interviewees agreed that securing sufficient financial support for the election campaign is a crucial ingredient for electoral success. However, campaign financing – like the candidate selection process – typically exhibits a strong “incumbency bias”. For example, one interviewee observed that, “as a candidate you have to invest a lot of time and money in your political career. This is a big obstacle for new politicians, since incumbents can use their working hours and administrative staff for campaigning activities.” With reference to campaign financing in her own party, an interviewee from Warsaw said that, “if you don’t have the first or second position, you will need to self-finance most of your campaigning.” She also observed that in some Polish parties there are unofficial rules requiring new candidates to “buy” their positions on the electoral list. She added that, “if you are a new politician you often have to ‘invest’ in the party by bringing a certain amount of money or safe votes to the table; only then will you get a ‘winnable’ position on the party list”. Another interviewee from Gdańsk admitted that for her politics was an “expensive hobby”, given that her party typically only pays a small part of the electoral campaigns. One interviewee from Warsaw indicated that in her party around 80% of campaign financing comes from the candidates themselves, or from their relatives and friends.

Access to campaign finance can thus be a big barrier for women who want to enter into politics. Indeed, the gendered effect of the “incumbency bias” is worsened by the fact that, on average, women have less access to financial resources than men. One interviewee from Warsaw highlighted this problem by saying that, “in every country in the European Union there is a gender pay gap and a gender wealth gap. This gap is especially big for women of

older generations because of the shorter time spent in the labour market. These women generally have much lower pensions than men and are hence particularly disadvantaged in terms of participating in politics.”

In conservative societies such as Poland, the dominance of traditional gender roles also exacerbates women’s lack of resources available for their engagement in politics. For example, one interviewee from Warsaw said that, “in Poland women tend to enter into politics later than men. First they have kids and only then can they turn to politics”. Similarly, an interviewee from Wrocław argued that, “it is generally harder for women than men to reconcile work and family life”. She also suggested that one of the main financial barriers for female politicians is the lack of nurseries and kindergartens in Poland. Even our interviewees from right-wing parties acknowledged that female candidates tend to have less time than their male competitors as the result of greater responsibilities in the family. For example, one interviewee from Kraków said that, “the traditional division of roles between men and women in the family makes it more difficult for Polish women to participate in politics. The role of the mother is very time intensive. Only after women have taken care of their children, can they enter into politics.” One interviewee also suggested that, “women need to pay more for campaigning than men because they need to ‘look good’, buy dresses and make-up”.

In sum we can say that the dominance of traditional gender roles in Poland means that women generally have less time and money to invest in their political careers than men. This disadvantage is compounded by the fact that female candidates typically do not receive sufficient financial support from their political parties as the result of “incumbency bias”.

Attitudes and self-confidence

A third important micro-level barrier to women’s participation in elections is related to the self-confidence of potential female candidates and their attitudes towards engaging in the “battle” for a good list position. For example, one experienced politician from Gdańsk observed that many of her younger colleagues “do not have enough courage and trust in their own abilities to fight for a winnable list position”. She also suggested that “fear of failure” prevents many female candidates from “speaking up” within the party. In the same vein, another interviewee from Poznań argued that women politicians need to overcome their own ingrained “mental barriers” if they want to be successful. With reference to her positioning on the electoral list, she said that, “a man would have had higher expectations and demanded more for himself. We limit ourselves.”

In addition to the lack of self-confidence, some of our interviewees also identified “fear of smear campaigning” as an important factor that prevents many potential female candidates from running for office. For example, one interviewee from Gdańsk observed that, “the fear of negative campaigns is one big barrier for women, because their families might be targeted”. She never experienced any smear campaigning directly, but she could always sense a “latent threat”. Another interviewee from Poznań said that during her campaign for the EU elections someone was spreading rumours about her marriage; “that it's over and she's getting a divorce”. For her it was clear that the message was: “Politics is a game for men, we don't need more women here. And if you think about getting involved in politics, it will ruin your family.” She also suggested that her family would not have been targeted in this way if she had been a male politician. For her it was clear that “as the result of such personal attacks, many women would think twice before running for office”.

The unwillingness of many Polish women to engage in the “dirty business” of politics means that political parties are sometimes at pains to fulfil the requirements of the their

own gender quotas. For example, one interviewee from Warsaw said that, “for progressive parties [such as hers] it can become difficult to find enough willing female candidates from within the party to meet the requirements of the high quota and the ‘zipper system’”. She suggested that the reason for this is that progressive political parties have generally failed to train and recruit enough new female politicians. As a result, her party had to turn to civil society activists, particularly from the Polish women's movement, in order to fill the gap. Similarly, an interviewee from Kraków admitted that her party had to “find, court and convince women” to run in the EU elections so that her party would meet the legislated quota requirement of 35%.

Recommendations

The above statements suggest that deeply ingrained societal norms, which convey to prospective female candidates that the political sphere is better left to men, can discourage women from exhibiting or acting on their political ambitions. One way to overcome women's lack of self-confidence is to provide them with the necessary support and training to run for office. In this respect, one interviewee from Warsaw said that, “entering politics is the most difficult step, and support mechanisms within the party are crucial in helping aspiring female politicians to overcome this barrier”. She also observed that in most Polish parties women are in competition with one another and that the more experienced female politicians are often reluctant to share their knowledge with younger colleagues. She suggested that party-internal women's caucuses or women's platforms could serve as important forums for female politicians to support one another. One interviewee from Poznań also suggested that the recently created Polish Congress of Women⁶³ provides a useful extra-party network through which women can share their experiences in campaigning and fundraising.

These recommendations are in line with recent scholarship on barriers to women's participation in electoral politics, which proposes mentorship and training programmes as mechanisms to overcome women's lack of confidence in their own abilities⁶⁴. Highlighting the significance of peer-to-peer learning, one of our interviewees from Poznań argued that, “it is impossible to overcome women's lack of knowledge about campaigning by simply learning from a handbook”. She therefore suggested that workshops on how to run a political campaign are the best way to tackle the problem of lacking confidence amongst aspiring female candidates. The EU election results in Ireland have recently shown just how significant such tailored workshops can be for increasing the number of elected women in politics. As mentioned earlier, the remarkable increase in the percentage of female MEPs from Ireland (from 25% in 2009 to 55% in 2014) can to some extent be attributed to the efforts of the non-profit organization Women for Election Ireland, which ran training and mentoring workshops for new female candidates.

Our analysis has shown that female candidates not only have to overcome their own “mental barriers”, but that they are also confronted with significant gender-specific obstacles when it comes to campaign financing and the candidate selection process. One way to tackle the problem of gender-based discrimination in campaign financing is the establishment of fund-raising bodies that are dedicated to supporting aspiring female candidates. The best-known example of such a mechanism is EMILY's List in the USA, which was founded in order to channel “early money” to pro-choice female candidates from the Democratic Party. The academic literature on gender and campaign finance generally agrees that it was the creation of funding bodies such as EMILY's List that led to the

⁶³ For more information see <http://www.kongreskobiet.pl/en-EN/> [accessed 20.08.14]

⁶⁴ see e.g. ODIHR. 2014. *Handbook on promoting women's participation in political parties*. Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. p.123ff.

substantial increase of female representatives in the US Congress in the early 1990s⁶⁵. This example shows that the creation of dedicated fund-raising bodies can to some extent mitigate the gender-specific disadvantages that result from “incumbency bias” in campaign financing and address the problem that women generally have less financial resources at their disposal than men.

With regard to gender inequality in the candidate selection process, we suggest that transparency and formalization are the two main factors that will allow women to overcome this key barrier to successful participation in politics. Party-internal regulations such as quotas or the ‘zipper system’ can go a long way in overcoming the gender-specific barriers faced by women during the candidate selection process⁶⁶. Without clear selection rules, female candidates risk being sidelined by “old boys’ networks”. Alternatively, they need to rely on male “mentors” or “patrons” in the party leadership in order to obtain ‘winnable’ positions on their party’s electoral lists.

Concluding Remarks

Despite the fact that the May 2014 elections resulted in a slight improvement of the gender balance in the EU Parliament, it is still a long way from being representative of women’s share of European society as a whole. In this report we uncovered some of the key macro- and micro-level barriers to participation that can help to explain why women continue to be underrepresented at the EU level. We hope that the insights and recommendations provided in this report will allow policy-makers to address these gender-specific barriers and enable them to work towards a future where women and men have equal opportunities to become involved in politics.

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⁶⁵ see e.g. Ballington, J. 2003. Gender equality in political party funding. *International IDEA*. Available at: http://www.idea.int/publications/funding_parties/funding_of_pp.pdf [accessed 20.08.14].

⁶⁶ see ODIHR. 2014. *Handbook on promoting women’s participation in political parties*. Warsaw, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.