



RESEARCH PAPER

Historical and Social Factors of Women's Political Representation in Western and Eastern Europe in the Post-Cold War Era

¹Shumaila Saeed, ²Dr. Bilal Bin Liaqat and ³Dr. Ghulam Mustafa

1. PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor (OPS), Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Associate Professor, Department of International Relations, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author: bilalbinliaqat@gcuf.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This article explores how historical and social dynamics have contributed to different women's political representation in Eastern and Western Europe in the post-Cold War era. The political representation of women remains an essential component of democracy in modern societies. The political environment for women's political representation changed drastically with the end of the Cold War and subsequent shifts in Europe. Despite successful efforts, women are still underrepresented in Eastern and Western Europe in politics, such as institutions, and the decision-making process due to persistent cultural, social, and institutional barriers. These factors include male-dominated party structure, gender roles, limited access to education and economic means, and prevalence of harassment and violence in the political arena. That time span can be seen as a "restart" period in which Western Europe went through an era of stabilization and institutionalized gender equality norms, while Eastern Europe saw the disintegration of previous political structures.

KEYWORDS Political Participation, Representation, Social, Historical

Introduction

In the 21st century, the representation of women in politics is a significant aspect of democratic governance, as it guarantees that the perspectives and voices of half the population are heard and considered in decision-making processes. Despite progress and commitment to gender equality, women's representation remained low in politics globally. The situation in Europe is no different; women are still under-represented and holding few numbers of seats in parliaments, ministerial positions, and many other political offices. The representation of women in politics is not about gender equality and basic human rights, but also the practical implications of democracy. The women's political representation has become more vital in attaining gender equality in all spheres of life. The post-Cold War era has been marked by essential changes in the political landscape of Eastern and Western Europe, with the growing expansion of the EU, emerging political movements, and the prominence of various international organizations. These changes have brought new challenges and opportunities for stimulating gender equality in politics. Regardless of progress in gender equality policies and initiatives, numerous barriers remain, including gender stereotypes and obstacles to access to leadership positions.

Table 1

The Timeline of Women's Political Representation in Europe from 1990 to 2025 (Main Historical, Social, and Policy Elements in Western and Eastern Europe)

Period	Western Europe	Eastern Europe (Post-Communist States)	Analytical Importance
--------	----------------	--	-----------------------

1990–1995 (Post-Cold War Evolution)	Emergence of liberal democratic and new party systems Gender mainstreaming through the EU's new agenda (Maastricht Treaty 1992) Strong women's political representation in the Nordic (30–35%).	Collapse of state-socialism and state feminism Early decline in women's parliamentary seats (Hungary and Poland, 11%-13%) Fragile civil society, end of institutional support for women.	Difference in starting points: Western steadiness Eastern disturbance.
1996–2000	Approval of national gender equality acts (Sweden and Finland). Rise of Green and Left parties endorsing gender equality.	Emergence of NGOs with limited influence Economic reform rises women's unemployment and dependence. Quota system begins (Slovenia and Poland).	Institutional merging in the West, Socio-economic adversity in the East.
2001–2005	EU Lisbon Strategy (2000) targets gender equality France initiated the "Parity Law" (2000) to balance electoral lists	EU accession forces Eastern members to align with gender standards. Civil society networks and women's groups begin	EU integration aims to shrink the East-West gap in legal provisions
2006–2010	Spain's Equality Law Nordic gender leadership set equality norms. Women's share in parliaments increase 35% in several West	EU membership initiatives quota and parity reforms in Poland/Romania Rise in female MPs (20–25%).	Outside EU weight drives policy meeting.
2011–2015	EU Gender Equality Strategy (2010–2015) and sustained quota Strong female leadership (Angela Merkel)	Backlash against "gender ideology" in Poland and Hungary Populist parties refuse EU gender strategies	Different paths re-emerge: Western progress vs. Eastern regression.
2016–2020	Sweden, France/ Nordic states exceed 40% representation. -#MeToo movement reinforces feminist discourse	Improvements in Baltic and Balkan (Serbia 39%) Growing illiberalism weakens gender parity institutions (Hungary, Poland)	Cultural norms and populist politics form the result outside legal reform
2021–2025 (Contemporary Period)	EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 extends mainstreaming and intersectionality Enlarged youth and minority women's involvement COVID-19 and women's leadership (Finland, Denmark).	Constant resistance to EU gender rules by conservative regimes Progress of digital feminist movements and grassroots (Poland's abortion protests)	Current feminism shifts from institutional to hybrid activism; the future depends on generational and policy revitalization.

Source of data: (IPU, 2024), (EIGE, 2025), (OECD, 2024)

The post-Cold War era is a picture of opposing narratives. In Western Europe, Germany, Sweden, and France continued to develop the past welfare state system and feminist advocacy of women's rights. For example, the French parity laws of gender equality were culturally embraced from the second wave of feminism (Fabian, 2021). On the other hand, in Eastern Europe, the disintegration of communist regimes dismantled the state socialism policies and gave rise to marginalization stories amid the neoliberal institutional framework in Poland, Romania, and Hungary. This cultural shift towards traditionalism constrains the role of women in politics (Einhorn, 1993). The downfall of state socialism and institutional collapse in Eastern and Central Europe have witnessed significant institutional transformation following the end of the Cold War. Numerous policies and frameworks that had initially supported women's inclusion into political life were abolished or drastically rebuilt with the fall of socialist regimes. Although they were only nominally represented in parliaments under the communist state, women frequently held a significant amount of

decision-making authority within the male-dominated party hierarchies. According to research, socialist rules about gender equality or quotas for women have made women more prominent in legislatures within institutions, but they have not actually been given actual power. The post-Cold War era was characterized by the strengthening of existing institutions and the reinforcement of gender equality in Western Europe. The established democracy became less significant and then figured out whose voice matters and how to meaningfully empower women in politics. Significant developments occurred, such as legislative and constitutional reforms that encourage gender equality for men and women. France initiated the law on gender equality in 1999, which gave equal opportunity to men and women to access the electoral system, parliament, and the legislative body.

Despite the significant progress and commitments in promoting women's participation, a significant gap exists in women's political representation in both Eastern and Western Europe. In the post-Cold War era, Western Europe has undertaken various steps to enhance women's political participation; on the other hand, Eastern Europe is far away, where women are facing different challenges and social barriers to entering politics and advancing their careers. This comparative analysis study aims to explore the differences in women's political representation in both regions, investigating the various complex factors, such as historical, social, and economic, that play a crucial role in shaping women's political paths in both regions. This research work seeks to explore the possible ways to address the continuous historical and social barriers in political representation and foster a more inclusive and effective political scenario in Europe.

Literature Review

"Women in Politics in Eastern Europe: 30 Years after the fall of the Berlin Wall" (Ekaterina R. Rashkova, 2021) describes that the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe gave rise to the gigantic transformation there towards democracy, integration of Europe, and the rise of the radical right parties which defined the role of the woman in politics. Previously the communist states were known as patriarchic where women face discrimination and underrepresentation in politics and they were supposed to have high credentials to be on superior position. The Eastern women had to face gender-blindness from Western feminist agenda and political parties were seemingly not interested in women and gender equality. The article provides a little help in carrying out this research work. The writer doesn't describe what kind of problems women were facing in Eastern Europe, so this gap will be discussed. "Women and Gender in Post War Europe" by (Joanna, 2012) describes the experiences of women in wars from the Cold War period to the present day across Europe. End of WWII marked by the shattering consequences such as declined economies, devastated infrastructure and poor human condition of livelihood included shortage of food and fuel supply. From North to South and from East to West women, children and old ones were the most effected in post-war years. She also explains the role of women in rebuilding of Europe throughout the cold-war period and the post-cold war years packed with both joys and tensions. This book provides the overview of the women role and their suffering in wars but doesn't explain the Eastern and Western Europe in brief so this gap will be discussed. "Women's Representation in Post-Communist Europe" by (Matland, 2003) works is very useful to carry out this research work. It explores the level of representations in politics in the post-communist states. It explains the legislative bodies and representation especially in Eastern Europe, women's representation in political institutions, by focusing on the party ideology, electoral system and party structures, and also gives the direction for the future development based on analyses. This works only provide the overview of Eastern Europe but research purpose is to comparatively analysis the women's political representation in Eastern and Western region, so this gap will be discussed. "Women in Eastern European Post-Socialist Countries: Social, Scientific, and Political Lives" by (Metryka, 2025). In his book, the writer explores the role of women in Central and Eastern Europe from socialism to modernist society. Also examines the social changes and hurdles women have been facing for equality in many areas such as politics, science and

reproductive rights. He navigates the fundamental zones in which women's courage and willpower is already originating changes, specifically politics and diplomacy, academia and customs follow-on from religion. Furthermore, it identifies how broken the stereotypical social patterns of society are to jump into public life, which is often perceived as a threat to their basic rights. It also discusses the feminist critics of sustainable goals and the discourse on economic themes regarding women's access to economic resources and leadership roles. "Introducing Feminism in International Relations Theory" by (Smith , 2018) argues that feminist theory has declared that the women are entirely absent from traditional theory and practice of international relations. This invisibility can be seen both in women underrepresentation from decision-making process and in the assumption that the certainty of women daily lives is not impacted by or significant to international relations. Beyond this, the deconstruction of gender as a strong organizing logic and as socially constructed identities is alternative approach to understand feminist contribution to IR. This entails identifying and then challenging the gender norms that impose expectations on men and women over what constitutes an important factor in international relations analysis and global political arena, what each gender cannot accomplish. This research works provide an overview of gender role in international politics but didn't describe it in detail, so this gap will be focused.

Material and Methods

The theory of feminism was used to examine this research work. The feminist theoretical approach explores how social and historical dynamics have impacted women's political representation in Eastern and Western Europe. The concepts and results were explained and discussed qualitatively. Qualitative data offers a technique or tool to develop theory and allows the researcher to answer the research questions by choosing various analyses. The data related to this study were collected from secondary sources like books, journal articles, research reports, dissertations, official records, and newspapers, etc.

Results and Discussion

The Fall of State-Socialism in Eastern Europe and Institutional Amalgamation and Gender Equality in Western Europe

The average ratio of women in parliaments was 33% under the socialist regime and dramatically dropped to 10% in the post-Cold War era in many post-socialist countries. Such as Poland held 13-15 % in the Sejm and 6-7% in the Senate, Hungary held 7-8% seats, while Czechoslovakia held 8-9% of MPs till the 1990s. (Moghadam, 1993). There were different interrelated factors involved in this declining ratio of women in politics. The new democratic party system was based on the elite class and male domination, and women's networking was quite vulnerable. The economic transition period reduced the financial resources of women's legitimacy and movements. Moreover, the demise of state feminism automatically ended the women's inclusion in party lists and state quotas. The new electoral majority system emerged, with party lists of fewer women and a decentralized recruitment system. The study of the Council of Europe shows that due to this system and after the fall of socialist regimes, the women's representation was suddenly dropped to 2-3% all time low in many Eastern and Central European countries (Popa, 2025). The institutional upheaval generated a significant historical rupture in the Eastern region. The transformation from socialism to liberal democratic governance unexpectedly reduced women's political participation. These transitions also eliminated established formal structures and failed to introduce an alternative mechanism immediately.

For instance, Renata, in the book "Gender and Power Towards Equality and Democratic Governance," argues that the transition began from a one-party system to a multi-party democratic system; a lack of public activities and democratic institutions created problems for the building of a new system. Countries like Poland, Hungary, where

weak institutions and gender equity lag behind in politics and social setup, impede the role of women in politics (Siemienska, 2016). On the other hand, the EU enlargement process also added a new dimension, and many Eastern countries were encouraged by the West to join the EU club to adopt their gender equality machinery. This machismo varied from country to country in Eastern Europe. Many countries designed policies for equal opportunities in the labor workforce and built special departments to monitor the framework and implementation. Whereas some countries ought to bring women into administrative positions to participate in decision-making bodies and the success of this strategy depends on the political will and changes (OSU, 2025).

The name of the EU gender equality policy is "Gender Mainstreaming," and officially incorporated into the state's structure. Where gender became the key aspect of all the activities, such as policy formation, advocacy, legislation, and projection at all levels. It has been the official EU approach to the subject of gender equality since the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997. and also derived from the Beijing Conference's documents, the Beijing Platform of Action. So, it became an official United Nations strategy for achieving gender equality. The core of "Gender Equality" is endorsed by the international agencies and the EU treaties. The EU accession in the Eastern region has emerged as an idea of gender equality as a language, a figurative relocation from East to West, that is, Europe. This process of Europeanization helped to raise women in politics again. This EU accession also brought different changes in employment mechanisms, childcare policies, and parental leave rules in the early 2000s. The IPU data on share quota seats in parliaments around the world is used as a fundamental indicator of women's political representation. Inclusive legal frameworks and stable policies can reinforce women's participation and influence in the public sphere. Sweden is one of the most progressive countries and provides various facilities to women to promote gender norms. For instance, the childcare provision, strong safety welfare net policies and gender action plan, and friendly family sitting in public life. There is no legal quota for women participants because most political parties ensure a voluntary quota. Furthermore, the women's organizations and communities have been playing their part for greater female representation. The long-standing provision and feminist movements ultimately personified the gender norms in institutions. Therefore, the women were 45% in the 2014 in Swedish Riksdag (Potter, 2014). Hence, the Western transition phase of the 1990s was not filled with political chaos, but rather stabilized and structured with descriptive representations of men and women in parliaments, and their equal participation in the decision-making process. With the gradual reforms in Western Europe and institutional disruption in Eastern Europe, the two different paths evolved in post communism era. The later progress and developments in women's political representation depend on these historical trajectories. In Eastern Europe, which previously consisted of state feminism and directive emancipation of women in all walks of life. The socialist regimes provide them equal opportunities for education, health, politics, and economics and politics (Einhorn, 1993). Later on, the communist governments adopted 30% gender quota to ensure their representation in parliaments. But the legislative system, political structure, and decision-making power were profoundly centralized and patriarchal, which impeded women's influence. The transitional period removed the old social and political mechanisms, quota lists, and the state's own feminist policies, which left women vulnerable politically. The IPU data shows that there were only 19% women in parliaments in Central and Eastern Europe back in 1989. There were only 27% women MPs in Poland's parliament, where Hungary stood at 9.6%. Such sharp underrepresentation can be compared only with Arab states, where only 18.9 MPs were women. Since 1989, there have been only three female MPs in the Polish government, namely Hanna Suchocka, Ewa Kopacz, and Beata Szydło, out of the fifteen prime ministers. In Slovakia, only one female was part of the government at the top ranking, but no women were appointed to the prime minister's office in the Czech Republic or Hungary. There have never been any women presidents in Visegrad countries, no matter what the electoral system (Niklewicz, 2017). The women's underrepresentation in politics is clearly a bad thing because meaningful democracy always seeks to achieve equal

representation on gender grounds in all political hierarchies. That is the motto of liberal democracy. The French law of gender parity helped boost equal representation. The gender mainstreaming policy of the EU and feminist movements played a role to increase women representation in Western Europe. EU enlargement had brought a diverse institutional system in many accession countries. In the early period of the 2000s, the influences from the EU and women's organizations forced several EU applicant states to initiate the gender equality laws, and the EU "equality opportunities" language pressured the countries to form the gender parity mechanism beyond the EU. Ukraine adopted the "State Program on Ensuring Gender Equality in Ukrainian Society" from 2006 to 2010, but it remained the lowest rank for women's political representation.

Whereas in the Western region, the EU gender equality policy pushed the countries for national reforms and influenced states to build a strong institutionalized system that ensures women's political mandate. For example, Spain formed a law that binds political parties to make at least 40% of women candidate list for the election. The law assisted women to increase their number in politics. On the other hand, UK in 2005, the program called "Women2Win" was introduced by the Conservative Party to campaign for women to win more nominations in party seats. Throughout this program higher number of women participated in training and monitoring sessions and got the support they required to flourish in the party. This program also helped the women of ethnic minorities to be among the "bright and best" candidates on the party list and got 10% of participation (EIGE, 2025). However, the transformation of power did not bring effectiveness in Eastern Europe. Women were more in number at administrative positions, like in Croatia, Slovenia, and the Baltic states total of 68 women were holding 80 ministries, 122 women headed 132 executive positions. Women in Bulgaria had 35% executive representation; meanwhile, Romania and Croatia stood at 25%. But the gap existed in the EU accession policy and their inclusion in the actual process because they needed access to parliamentary decision-making power (Rashkova, 2017). After the institutional transition in the 1990s, the feminist movements resurfaced around Europe in the 2000s. In Eastern Europe, women began to shift from state-owned socialist policies to the grassroots level to and public networks such as "La Strada" were the first networks that have been actively working on the serious issue of human trafficking. It brought together local governments, judges, activists, scholars, parliamentarians, and police officers to combat the severe issue of human trafficking (OSU, 2025). The systematic transformation was uncertain for women from gender-based views. The free and fair election began to provide the freedom to citizens, and new civil societies and organizations also emerged. Women started to go to the office freely, being part of organizations and political parties. Moreover, the political parties tend towards nationalism and conservatism, and radical traditionalism of gender norms. The social safety policies were also confiscated, which had earlier been provided to the women, and finally, the shift from a centralized economy to capitalism and privatizations also burdened women. Their basic rights were being marginalized and labelled as "cultural" rather than political. The fight for reproductive rights is also deemed and addressed as "divisive," and no political party was ready to deal with it. The women who raised their voices for this crisis were kicked out of formal politics.

The new feminist wave in Western Europe was the continuity of the first and second waves. The new dynamics have demanded that the rights of LGBTQ, QUEER, intersectional, and transgender rights be reflected in civil society and international media. On the other hand, various feminist groups were continuously resisting the rollback of women's rights. But the media overlooks the intersectional feminists' fights for change, and only propagates the reproductive and sexual rights (Archer, 2025). This period experienced the shift from formal legal rights, representation, and gender quotas to the inclusive voice of ethnic minorities and migrants, and cultures, too. The feminist struggles and strives in the West were far from the East. Their movements were deeply ingrained in institutional frameworks and provisions. Such as gender quotas and parity laws in every sphere of life. For instance, in 2000, France introduced the "France Parité law" to redefine the candidates' lists within

political parties. On the other hand, the “Raffarin reforms” of 2003 by PM Jean-Pierre Raffarin aimed to change the methods of conducting Senate elections (LSC, 2025). It was a zipping system for the election of the European Parliament. Previously, the candidates' lists were dominated by males due to the smaller number of districts. Later on, the number of districts was increased to give equal representation to females in the candidate lists of the parties. Moreover, this decade was doomed by the austerity measures resulting from the financial crisis of 2008. It began in the USA but left unprecedented marks on the European economy, which ultimately impacted women. The gender equality period was initiated with the “Treaty of Lisbon” in 2007, categorized as a crisis period when policy was step by step dismantled. The women were working on low wages, which undermined their social cohesion. It brought attention to the mechanism of the gender parity policy of the EU (Hubert, 2022). EU accession of gender parity in Western Europe has been successful. But somehow anti-democratic forces have been working against it for decades. They also tried to kick out many human rights activists across Europe. Women's rights activist Hovhannisyan stated that from 2007 to 2019, the US Christian right organizations have been allocated huge amounts \$98 million to fuel campaigns against LGBT, women's rights, abortion, and reproductive rights. Some of the anti-human rights organizations are not registered organizations rather work as Churches, where it's hard to disclose the financial data (Archer, 2025). But it's high time for the governments and EU institutions to demand accountability and transparency from the transnational actors to protect women's and communities' rights.

Social and Cultural Hurdles in Women's Political Representation

Despite many legal and institutional mechanisms and frameworks, the cultural norms and political culture persistently form women's political representation. In progressive Europe, the archetype models. Patriarchal leadership networks in politics still affect the candidate selection and recruitment procedure and the electoral system. Research in an EU journal explores that women in European politics are underrepresented as authors and reviewers. They are inclined to use more vigilant and modest language in their editorial office, in contrast to their male authors. They tend to use more assertive language in their cover letters and responses towards other authors. This gender gap in the EU's academic communication indicates that there is a need to readdress this imbalance. This is the reflection of traditional gender norms (Bettecken, 2022). The women in the Swedish parliament are also conditioned by gender norms. The continued mescaline practice hinders women's potential and leadership role rather than the existence of gender equality. This feminist institutional views explore that traditional behaviour reshapes the political leadership, although they are numerically equal in the Riksdag (Erikson, 2022).

Women are underrepresented across Europe, specifically in the EU Parliament and Council, due to conservative norms, stereotypes, and a male-dominated institutional structure. These kinds of barriers hamper the women's political progress and the required reforms in both national and EU parliaments. These obstacles also constrain the democratic approach of the EU's concept. The EU took almost fifteen years to appoint its first female president since its formation, showing the cultural barriers. The role of political parties is crucial to hinder women's careers in EU politics. So, there is a dire need to reform this gender-biased political culture at all political levels (Frech, 2024). The European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024 report's statistical data show the persistent gender gap in the EU parliament, regional and local assemblies, demonstrating how gender-based political culture undermines representation. The EU parliament elections results show that women MPs held 38% and men comprised 61.2 of % seats. While in the national parliaments across Europe, males collectively hold 66.9% and women hold 33.1% only. The last EU election in 2024 data shows that it was first from the 2019 elections when the female MPs number has dropped from 40.3%. The figures below show the candidates' lists for national parliaments across Europe and for the EU elections from 1979 to 2024.

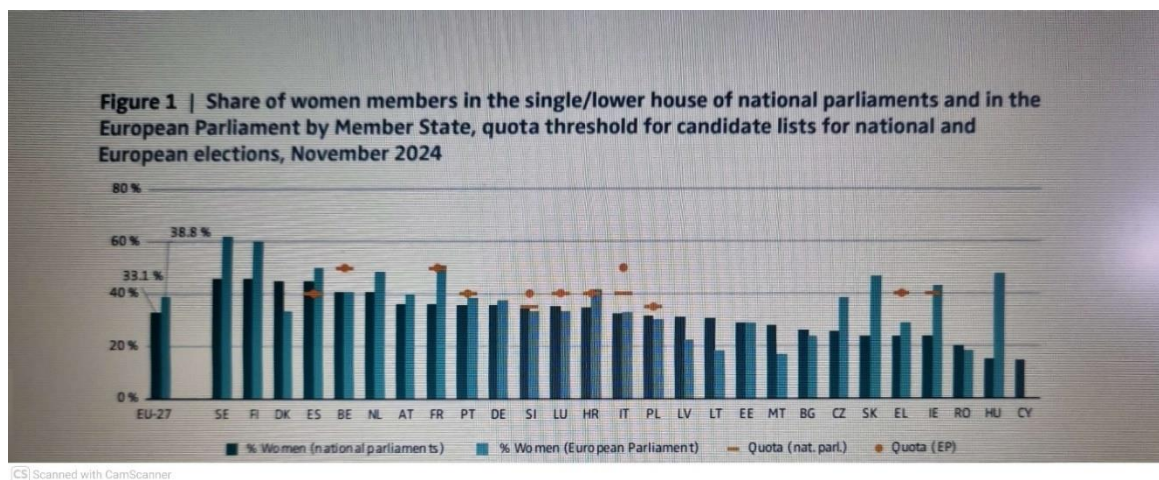


Figure 1: Share of Women Members in National and European Parliaments Sources of Data: (EIGE, 2024)

The women's participation in politics is quite different from that of men. Gender exerts influence over political behavior and leadership roles. These differences are formed by gender stereotypes and structural obstacles like conservative and orthodox norms of society. Women in politics play a crucial role by emphasizing and advocating for education, health, social welfare, and gender parity. But the increase in the number does not ensure substantive gender equality. Rwanda's example shows that representation is not the sole factor to attain gender parity in politics. There is a correlation between social stereotypes and leadership styles to increase women's political participation (Mutijima, 2025). Gender intersection is a core in polarized global politics. Most of the democracies from South and North have adopted pro gender norms in pursuing their foreign policy. Meanwhile, the populist regimes persistently resist gender parity and women's political rights. Political leaders harness pro- and anti- gender norms in power dynamics (Aggestam, 2021).

Cultural dynamic also contains traditional gender role, populism, nationalism, and religion. Like in Eastern Europe, after the decline of socialism, the resurgence of conservative religion and patriarchal discourse has been playing a significant role in hampering women's key roles in domestic affairs and influencing traditional family norms. Such as EIGE statistics highlight that women hold 32.7% seats in national parliaments in the EU, with Sweden at its highest number of 49.6% and 12.6% in Hungary. The countries like Belgium, France, Spain, Finland, and Sweden have gender-balanced parliaments with 40% female MPs (EIGE, 2025). In addition, the rise in populism in Europe emerged as a new political phenomenon that poses a menace to the democracies across the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The populist parties represent a dilemma for democracy, challenging the liberal norms, human rights in their political agendas. They also indulged the "the people" against "the elite" to demonstrate themselves as the sole representatives of a homogeneous people across the region, and conspiring against the elites as socially, morally, and economically corrupt. Many populist wings entirely negate the idea of democrats in institutions and believe in the separation of powers, the rule of law, transparency, and non-discrimination (Strohal, 2019). In recent years, populism has become a complex and exclusive feature of the political party system and has successfully gained popularity in many societies. It is rather used as an adverse phenomenon as a challenge to neoliberalism and democracies and their norms of pluralism.

Conclusion

In sum, the social and historical structural barriers that women have faced in their political representation. Despite many social and cultural barriers, the feminist movements in Europe have successfully developed different strategies, including digital activism, media outlets, and networks, which stand against the anti-gender demonstrations. These movements and outfits have been exerting influence over policy-makers and defending human rights regardless of their genders, and creating space for new leaders. The EU's Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 and different civil society projects provide institutional funds for feminist rejuvenation. The above analysis shows that the development is neither linear nor certain. Policy formation, strengthening institutions, and practical implementation of laws, social and cultural variations through media and education, strong feminist outlets with funding are crucial for women's political inclusion.

Recommendations

The cultural and social norms and barriers should be addressed at different levels. For instance, the media and public awareness campaigns, panel discussions to sustain social harmony, and educational awareness to foster women's leadership. The international and regional organizations must cooperate to monetize the cross-regional initiatives, and civil society must play its role to enhance women's and gender rights. It is suggested that the EU member states should enhance and strengthen the gender quotas and legislation. They must introduce quotas at all local levels too, to ensure women's and gender equality in decision-making bodies. They should also establish the gender quotas commission to compensate for the historical negligence. After the Russia-Ukraine conflict, many feminist organizations in Eastern Europe have shifted to humanitarian aid because they have been facing economic crisis and digital backlash from anti gender and populist actors. The EU must launch the safety task force and units to protect them from any kind of violence and respond to cyber-attacks and anti-women campaigns.

References

- Aggestam, K. (2021). Political leadership and gendered multilevel games in foreign policy . *International Affairs* .
- Archer, N. N. (2025). *EU Urged to Halt Flow of 'Dark Money' into Groups Opposing Equal Rights*. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/eu-urged-to-halt-flow-of-dark-money-into-groups-opposing-equal-rights/> (Accessed on 04-08-2025)
- Bettecken, J. (2022). Under-represented, cautious, and modest: the gender gap at European Union Politics. *European Political Science* .
- Commission, E. (2025). *The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025*. <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/just/items/682425/>
- Commission, E. (2025). *Women's political representation improves, but road to parity remains long*. Retrieved from https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/jrc-news-and-updates/womens-political-representation-improves-road-parity-remains-long-2025-03-07_en?
- EIGE. (2024). *Gender Balance in Politics*. European Institute for Gender Equality .
- EIGE. (2025). *European Institute for Gender Equality*.
- EIGE. (2025). *Gender Mainstreaming and Gender Sensitive Parliament*. Retrieved from <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-sensitive-parliaments/self-assessment/area-1-women-men> (Accessed on 01-09-2025)
- Einhorn, B. (1993). *Cinderella Goes to Market: Citizenship, Gender and Women's Movements in East Central Europe*. Verso Book.
- Ekaterina R. Rashkova, E. Z. (2021). *Women in Politics in Eastern Europe: 30 Year after the fall of the Berlin Wall*. *Konrad Adenauer Foundation*.
- Erikson, J. (2022). *Feminine Leadership Ideals and Masculine Practices: Exploring Gendered Leadership Conditions in the Swedish Parliament*. *Cambridge University Press*.
- Fabian, K. (2021). *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*. Routledge .
- Frech, E. (2024). *Gendered EUropean careers? Representation and the challenges in women's political careers*. *European Union Politics* .
- Hubert, A. (2022). *The European Union and Gender Equality* . European Political Foundation .
- IPU. (2024). *IPU Paraline*. Retrieved from <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/FR/FR-LC01/election/FR-LC01-E20240630/>
- Joanna Regulska, B. G. (2012). *Women and Gender in Post War Europe from Cold War to European Union*. Taylor and Francis Group.
- LSC. (2025). *Gender parity laws in France have been Undermined by Electoral Reforms which Work against Female Candidates*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2013/09/13/gender-parity-laws-in-france-have-been-undermined-by-electoral-reforms-which-work-against-female-candidates/>

- Matland, R. E. (2003). *Women's Representation in Post-Communist Europe*. Oxford Academia.
- Metryka, A. K. (2025). *Women in Eastern European Post-Socialist Countries Social, Scientific, and Political Lives*. Routledge.
- Moghadam, V. M. (1993). *Democratic Reform and the Position of Women in Transitional Economies*. Oxford University Press.
- Mutijima, P. (2025). Gendered Leadership and Structural Barriers: Evaluating Women's Political Participation And Representation. *Journal of Applied Sciences of Mehmet Akif Erosy University* .
- Niklewicz, K. (2017). *Women in Central European Politics. Seen but Not Heard?* Aspean Institute Central Europe
- OECD. (2024). *Social Spendings*. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/social-spending.html#:~:text=The%20size%20of%20welfare%20states,develop%20into%20comprehensive%20welfare%20states>
- OSU. (2025). *The EU's Gender Equality Machinery*. <https://u.osu.edu/womenpoliticsprotest/womens-epresentation-in-politics/the-eus-gender-equality-machinery>
- OSU. (2025). *Women, Politics, and Protest in Central and Eastern Europe*. Retrieved from <https://u.osu.edu/womenpoliticsprotest/feminisms-in-central-and-eastern-europe/>
- Popa, R. (2025). *GEC* . Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/1680646c96?> (Accessed on 04-08-2025)
- Potter, M. (2014). The Swedish General Election 2014 and the Representation of Women. *Research and Information Service*.
- Rashkova, E. R. (2017). Women in Politics in Eastern Europe: 30 Years After the Fall of the Berlin Wall. *Polish Sociological Review*.
- Siemienska, R. (2016). Gender and Power Towards Equality and Democratic Governance. In M. H. Mino Vianello, *Building Women's and Men's Political Representation in Post-Communist European Countries*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Smith, S. (2018). Introducing Feminism in International Relations Theory. *E-International Relations*.
- Strohal, C. (2019). Rising Populism and its Impact on Women's Rights: Selected Cases from the OSCE Region. *European Year Book on Human Rights* .