

# Gender equality and political representation in Finland and Europe in populist times

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# Research and background



# EUGenDem

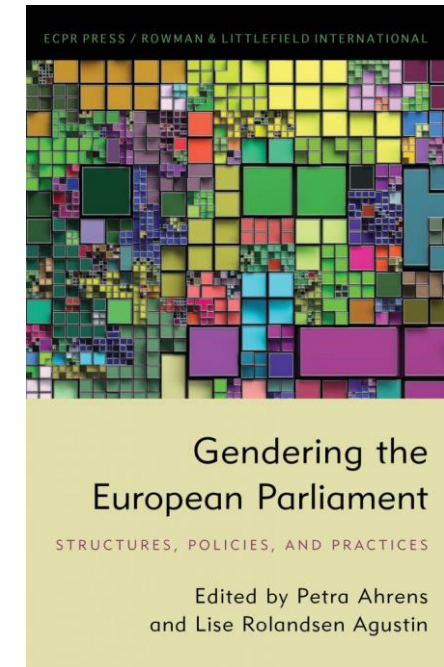
- European Research Council Consolidator Grant (2018-2023), team of 6 researchers, based at Tampere University, Finland
- Provides systematic gender analysis of European Parliament's party groups gendered practices and policies
- Homepage: <https://research.uta.fi/gepoco/>
- Twitter: @EUGenDem

# Key questions for today

1. What are the trends and development in women's political representation in parliaments? In Europe and Finland
2. Why are there some positive developments now?
3. What are the remaining challenges?

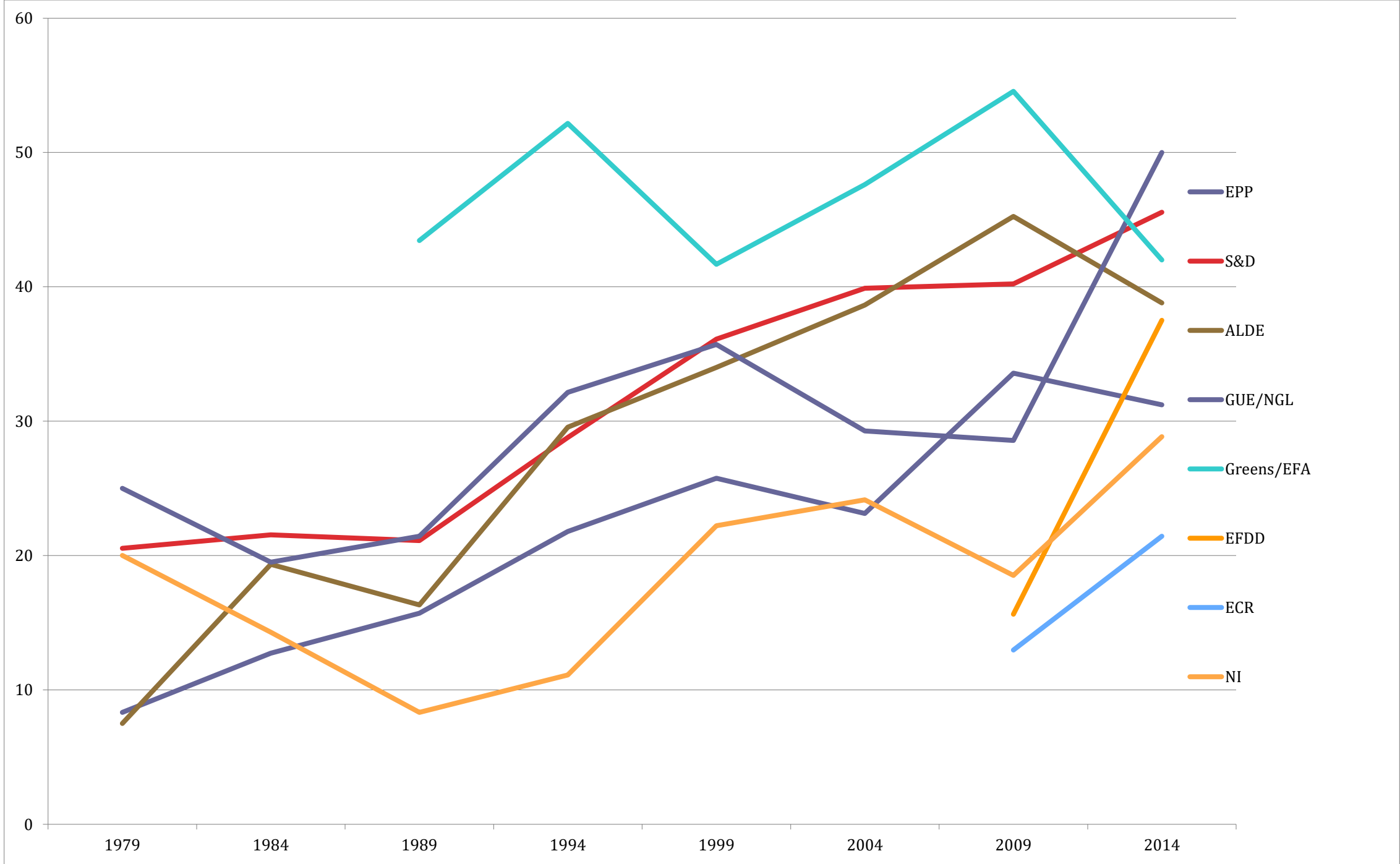
# Broader context

- Transformations in gender equality policies in the EU in the 2010s and in Finland 2015 -
- Economic crisis, populism, conservatism – masculinisation of politics
- Iron triangles for feminists
- New opportunities? Activation of counter movements and politics, new policy openings



# Women in the European Parliament

- Women MEPs
  - 1989: **19.90%**; 1994: **27,4%**; 1999; **27.5%** 2004: **29.9%** 2009: **35.5%**
  - 2014: **36.4%** 2019: **40,4%**
- Percentage of women by member state (examples) (2019-2024):
  - More women: Finland: 7/13, Sweden: 11/20, Irlanti 6/11, Kroatia 6/11
  - Parity: The Netherlands 13/36; Denmark 6/13; France 37/74, Portugal 9/21, Slovenia 4/8
  - Over 30%: Estonia 2/6, Germany 35/91; Italy 30/74; Croatia 4/11; Unkari 8/21
  - More men: Greece 5/21; Cyprus 0/6, Romania 7/32; Slovakia 2/13



# Women in top positions of the parliament – comparison between 2014 and 2019

## Political leadership

- President a man. 2014: Barroso. 2019: Sassoli
- Vice-Presidents: 2014: 5/14 women (35,7%), 2019: 8/14 (57%)
- Women chairs of political groups: from 21% to 33% (2014 to 2019), yet only 2 women chairs served as absolute chairs on their own



# Other key positions in the EP

## **Policy leadership:**

- Committee Chairs 2014: 11 (48%), 2019: 12 (54,54%)
- Committee Co-ordinators 56% men and 44% women (2014 and 2019)
- Women's and men's committees

## **Administrative leadership:**

- Secretary Generals of the Political Groups: 3 women in 2014, 2 in 2019
- Secretary General of the Parliament

# Diversity

- European Parliament is a very white institution
  - E.g. 2019 prior to election 17/753 non-white MEPs
- This is likely to be worsened by Brexit



Your face when you've just had someone ask if you're lost & then you're told to leave, on your first day at work. 🧑

I know I'm visibly different. I don't have the privilege to hide my identity. I'm BLACK & my name is Magid. I don't intend to try fit in. Get used to it!



[Käännä twiitti](#)



# Women in Finnish politics

- **Parliamentary elections:** Women candidates 39,4 % in 2015 and 42% in 2019, women MPs 41.5 % in 2015 (2011: 42.5%), **47%** in 2019 (Finland 8th in IPU ranking) → **incremental track** (no gender quotas)
- Stark differences between **political parties**. Examples of percentages of women MPs by some political parties (2019)
  - Centre Party 31%, The Finns Party 32%, National Coalition Party 42%
  - SDP 55%, Left Alliance 56 %, Greens 85%
- The contrast between the 2015-2019 Sipilä and Marin **governments:**
  - 2015-2019: 36 % women at its highest (2015), 29 % at its lowest (2017)
  - 2019-: 63%

# Positive trend within the parliament

- Chairs of the parliamentary groups: 2015: 3/9 women, 2019: 2/9
- Committee chairs: 2015: 37,5% women, 2019: 52%
- A new record in gender balanced committees 10/17 (five men dominated and two women dominated committees) → gendered segregation in topics persists

# A positive moment in 2019

- President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen, most gender balanced commission ever 11/26 (42,3%)
  - First ever Commissioner for Gender Equality Helena Dali (Malta) with strong track record in promoting gender equality
- Finland: increase in women MPs, Sanna Marin's Government
  - Context: the politics of the previous government
  - The Finns Party on top of the polls

# Why?

- Usual reasons (electoral systems, candidates, societal equality, welfare state provision in care services)
- Long term work for gender balance in politics, competent politicians

## NOW:

- Outspoken political commitment on top level
- Polarisation around gender equality
- Fragility of the gains – not self-evident or linear

# Gendered structures and practices

- Sexism prevails
  - Looks and appearances
  - Expertise (e.g. Economy, foreign and security policy)
  - Care, children, families. Practices to combine a career and care
  - Position of young women politicians in a seemingly gender equality political context (cf. Sweden and the European Parliament), need to appear tough and fearless

- Sexual harassment (#MeTooEP)
- Hate speech (online)
- Differences between regions and political parties



# Populist times: not numbers but talk

A study of radical right strategies against gender equality in European Parliament (with Emanuela Lombardo, Complutense University, Madrid)

All plenary debates 2014-2019, about 94. Important to populists: 34

## **Direct opposition strategies:**

- (i) Rejection (e.g. quotas, LHBTI rights, misogynist speech)
- (ii) Gender ideology: gender nonsense, minority problem and waste of time

# Indirect opposition strategies

- (i) *Euroscepticism and subsidiarity* : “gender equality not a matter for EU”
- (ii) *Bending*: for opposing Islam or immigration
- (iii) *Self-victimisation*: men and boys as victims (Kate Manne: himpathy), blaming double standards
- (iv) *Depoliticisation*: biological and binary gender; “intersex rights fake rights”, science used selectively

# Impact of opposition strategies

- Rhetoric vs policies → policy impact limited
- Hostile (affective) atmosphere towards gender equality and LGBTQI issues and rights
- Old arguments against gender equality in new populist parcel

# Conclusions

- Increases in the numbers of women in political and policy leadership in Finland and in the European Parliament
- After years of downturn in gender equality policies
- Populist times: gender equality a responsibility and a concern for some parties, not all
- Radical right populist parties oppose gender equality; have already a harder climate for women and minority politicians. Rhetorical impact turns into policy impact across Europe too

**Thank you!**

For more:

<https://research.uta.fi/eugendem/>

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