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# Youth representation in the European Parliament: The limited effect of political party characteristics

by Aksel Sundström and Daniel Stockemer

**A**bstract: Which party characteristics contribute to the representation of young legislators? We examine this question quantitatively, focusing on the European Parliament (EP), and gauge the influence of the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of its support, party ideology and party nomination procedures on the age of politicians, based on data of all members who have served in the EP. We find that none of these characteristics matter substantively in explaining young representatives' presence and discuss ways to further the field of research on youth representation.

**Keywords:** Young people, Parliamentary representation, Parties

## Introduction

Parties are central for candidate selection to political office: They nominate contenders on lists as well as for direct seats and determine the candidate pool that voters can choose from (Meserve et al. 2009; Scarrow 2015; Webb 2010). As such, parties should have a tremendous influence on the demographic composition not only of the candidate pool, but also on the politicians who gain election. For example, research shows that recruitment structures in parties have an influence on the gendered composition of legislatures (Caul 1999), on the regional representation of politicians in their parliamentary caucus (Deschouwer/Depauw 2014), and on the proportion of politicians from the ethnic minority group within their party caucuses as well as the whole legislature (Schönwälder 2013). In this study, we broaden the scope of previous studies by focusing on a so far under-researched group, namely young people. While young adults may have normative claims to be represented in parliaments, they are generally marginalised in terms of legislative presence across the globe (Stockemer/Sundström 2018).

We pose the following question for research: Which party characteristics contribute to the representation of young legislators? We examine this research question in a quantitative research design taking advantage of the institutional structure of the European Parliament (EP). We use data on the age of the over 6,000 Members of the EP (MEPs) ever elected, matched with information on five party characteristics that may explain variation in the presence of young parliamentarians; the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of party support, the ideology of the party, and the party's nomination procedures. We regress a parliamentarian's age on these party characteristics and find that none of these characteristics matters.

Which party characteristics contribute to the representation of young legislators?

We adopt the following structure: First, we situate this study with the literature on political representation. Next, we explain the

case, research design and methods. We then present our results. Finally, we summarise the main findings and discuss how these insights can inform future research on youth representation.

## Young people, political engagement and political representation

A characteristic of young people today is their political disengagement. This disengagement with formal politics manifests itself on two levels. First, the young generation today is the one that participates the least of all generations in elections, is the least politically interested, and the least politically represented in political offices (O'Neill 2007; Bhatti et al. 2012). To highlight this point: research focusing on Western countries (Wattenberg 2015) has found that young people lack basic knowledge about their political system, show little interest in political matters and display turnout numbers that are sometimes 30 or 40% lower than those of older generations. As an example of this increased disengagement, Blais and Loewen (2011) find that from the 1960s to the 2000s, turnout rates of newly eligible voters in Canada dropped from 70 to 40%.

Taken together, the crises of participation and representation constitute a vicious cycle of political disengagement among young adults.

In tandem with the crisis of political interest and participation, we are also experiencing a crisis of political representation of young adults.<sup>1</sup> In modern societies, young people – defined largely as individuals in between 18 and 35 years, or 18 and 40 – are generally underrepresented, making up less than 10% of the national legislators despite the fact that they constitute 20 to 30% (and sometimes even more) of the voting age population (Stockemer/Sundström 2018). For example, several countries – such as the United States and India – could possibly be characterised as gerontocracies, where rulers are significantly older than the population. Other countries, such as Japan, has been labelled a “silver democracy”, because young people are literally absent in elected assemblies system and decisions tend to favour the opinions of citizens above 65 years (Sota 2018). Existing comparative studies on young people's representation concur that the legislative presence of young is low and that this underrepresentation negatively influences the democratic attitudes and the political engagement of young cohorts of the population (Joshi 2013; IPU 2014). Taken together, the crises of participation and representation constitute a vicious cycle of political disengagement among young adults (Prainsack/Vodanovic 2013). On the one hand, young people, because they do not see themselves and their concerns represented, become more and more politically disenfranchised. On the other, there is a risk that parties cater less and less to the demands of the young generation, both substantively and representationally, because the group of young voters becomes increasingly small (Van Parijs 1998).

Belonging to the group of young is different than belonging to other politically marginalised groups, such as women or ethnic minorities, because being young is only a temporary stage in life.<sup>2</sup> Yet, this does not make the topic of youth representation less relevant. Rather contrary, the continuing representation of young people in legislatures is crucial both from a normative and a policy perspective (Henn/Foard 2012). Normatively, a democracy should provide opportunities for political participation for all citizens regardless of one's ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender or age (Phillips 1998). From a policy perspective, young people may have interests and hold views that are likely to differ significantly from that of older individuals. To illustrate, some policy areas – e.g. rules of military conscription (such as the draft in the United States) and age limits on the rights of drinking, driving, voting as well as standing for elections – affect citizens differently based on their age. This may especially be true for spending priorities of public funds. Empirical findings suggest that young adults tend to favour free secondary and tertiary education, while the middle-aged may be more averse to increased taxation (Jennings/Niemi 2014). Another aspect is differences in values. Young individuals tend to have more pluralistic and egalitarian beliefs, whereas older individuals have a tendency to hold more traditional attitudes (Abramson/Inglehart 2009). For example, McEvoy (2016) notes that young Europeans are more supportive of same-sex marriage than older ones.

If nobody represents young adults, it is unlikely that their specific priorities are taken into consideration.

These differences in priorities might directly translate into policy. If nobody represents young adults, it is unlikely that their specific priorities will be taken into consideration. For instance, our own work suggests that, as in the population, young members in the US House of Representatives tend to vote for stricter environmental legislation compared to older ones.<sup>3</sup> In general terms, the literature supports the assumption that higher descriptive representation of an outgroup leads to higher substantive representation. For example, in an experimental study, Mendelberg et al. (2014) find that a critical mass of women in decision-making bodies is needed so that women can voice and push through distinctive female concerns pertaining to the family, children, and redistributive politics. Focusing on another “outgroup” in politics – lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people – Hansen and colleagues (2015) show that LGBT legislators can positively influence symbolic (low-cost gestures and actions) and substantive representation (laws regulating the rights of the LGBT community). We believe that the same will be true for young adults.<sup>4</sup>

Hence, encouraging young people to participate in politics, and to give them the chances to do so, might not only positively influence their democratic credentials by telling them that their views are taken seriously and respected in the political arena (Giroux 2003), but may break the vicious cycle of disengagement as well. The academic literature could also do its part by raising more awareness of the underrepresentation of young adults in the political process and by elucidating the factors that contribute to young people's underrepresentation.

In fact, the existing studies – fewer than a dozen in number – il-

lustrate that for various Western countries the age group between 50 and 65 is the most overrepresented in parliaments (see Narud/Valen 2000; Murray 2008; Kissau et al. 2012). When it comes to explanatory factors, the literature is even scarcer and mainly focuses on the role of electoral systems to explain variation in young people's representation. For instance, Reynolds (2011) finds that plurality rule fosters the election of young adults. In contrast, Joshi's (2013) study of a handful of Southeast Asian countries reports the contrary; that is, proportional representation fosters the election of young legislators (see also Joshi 2015). Stockemer and Sundström's (2018) comparative study confirms this latter finding using a global sample of more than 100 countries.

Yet, what is missing from existing studies is a comprehensive analysis of political parties. This is surprising given that parties are at the centre of the recruitment process; they fill the representative space and aggregate interests (Gauja 2016). Even more importantly, it is mainly party elites who decide who gets nominated, for what constituency or on which list position (Hassell 2016). Given the empirical record of a stark underrepresentation of young politicians, it is safe to conclude that political parties are reluctant to nominate young members to their parliamentary delegations. Nevertheless, there is variation between parties. For example, in the European Parliament – the empirical referent of our study – there are some party delegations, such as the one of the Spanish Podemos Party in the most recent parliament, in which the average age was less than 40 at the time of election. Other delegations, such as the ones from parties in Estonia or Poland, do not have a single parliamentarian aged 40 or below in the current 2014–2019 Parliament.

Which party characteristics contribute to the representation of young legislators? We test this question based on a comprehensive analysis of five party features. While the empirical record indicates that parties are reluctant (to say the least) to nominate young candidates, there should still be variation in the types of political parties in promoting or hindering young politicians to gain representation. Therefore, party features should matter in influencing the representation of young adults in parliaments including the EP. In this article, we evaluate the extent to which the five party features – the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of party support, party ideology, and formal recruitment procedures – explain variation in parties' propensity to have young politicians elected for a seat in Strasbourg and Brussels.

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## Party characteristics and youth representation: hypotheses

### *Age of the party leader*

Party elites are important in the candidate nomination process and the most important elite person is the party leader. In particular, the leader can propel individuals upwards within the party hierarchy and on electoral lists. We see several reasons why young party leaders should promote other young candidates. First, the

psychological literature highlights that individuals tend to prefer other individuals that resemble themselves (Hamlin et al. 2013). According to Crowder-Meyer (2013), this should be especially true for outgroup leaders, who might be particularly willing to support members of their own group to control imbalances in representation. As such, young leaders representing one outgroup might be especially willing to nominate other young adults.<sup>5</sup> Second, the professional and private networks of young leaders should naturally consist of other young individuals, which, in turn, should further foster their likelihood to nominate other young individuals. Third, young leaders might feel more of a normative need to balance the inequalities in age representation than older leaders.

*Hypothesis 1:* Parties with a younger party leader are likely to have younger MEPs.

#### *The age of the party*

The age of the party organisation is a second party-level factor that might influence the representation of young legislators. Most importantly, we expect that old organisations have long-established networks of command consisting mainly of middle-aged and senior men, so-called “old boys networks” (Dahlerup/Leyenaar 2013). Outgroups, including female and young party members, might have problems in penetrating these networks, which have formed over decades and which are crucial for the advancement of a political career (e.g. Bjarnegård/Kenny 2015). In contrast, younger parties do not usually have the same established and close-knit networks, which tend to benefit middle-aged and old men. In these parties, politicians of different ages, including the young, should find a more level playing field because closed-off networks are likely to be rarer.

*Hypothesis 2:* Parties that are younger are likely to have younger MEPs.

We expect that old organisations have long-established networks of command consisting mainly of middle-aged and senior men, so-called “old boys networks”.

#### *The size of party support*

The third characteristic is the size of the party’s support base, which directly influences the party’s magnitude. Parties with a small legislative presence that can count on nominating only one or two members to the parliament are likely to nominate the type of individual which has the largest appeal to voters. In most cases, actors in gate-keeping positions of parties still think that this “winning candidate” is a middle-aged to senior man (Henig/Henig 2001; Beauregard 2014). Young individuals might therefore not gain much traction if the party magnitude is small. In contrast, parties with larger support might have an incentive to diversify their slates to appeal to as many constituents as possible (in particular in the larger EU countries a large support base triggers a high party magnitude in EP elections). This diversification might include the nomination of young individuals on eligible lists to portray the party as inclusive as possible.

*Hypothesis 3:* Parties with larger vote shares are likely to have younger MEPs.

#### *Party ideology*

We believe that the ideology of parties should not only matter in determining the voters they attract, the policy programmes they adopt and the legislation they pass if they are in power, but also the type of representatives they send to parliament (Paxton/Kunovich 2003). Generally, left-leaning parties with a pluralistic and egalitarian culture should send more young individuals to parliament than traditional parties with a rather more regressive agenda. Nevertheless, a simple dichotomy between left and right might be too simplistic to capture the multidimensionality of the ideological space in Western societies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Caul 1999). To highlight this point: a party such as the Front National can be economically left-leaning but highly conservative in social values. Other parties, such as some green or former communist parties, tend to be state-centred economically but very post-modern when it comes to their social values (Burchell 2014). With regard to the ideological party space in Europe, there is also a third important value dimension, the pro-/anti-European integration dimension (see Bakker et al. 2012). Since the three dimensions do not necessarily overlap, we formulate hypotheses for each of them in the following sections.

With regard to the economic dimension, we expect state centred (i.e. left-leaning) parties to nominate, on average, younger individuals for electoral positions than centre or right-wing parties.

With regard to the economic dimension, we expect state-centred (i.e. left-leaning) parties to nominate, on average, younger individuals for electoral positions than centrist or right-wing parties. Two points could support this hypothesis. First, state-centred parties focus on equality in outcomes rather than opportunities (Bryson/Heppel 2010): this focus on equality could benefit outgroups such as young people. Second, economically left-leaning parties tend to fight for outgroups such as ethnic minorities and women (Franceschet/Thomas 2015). They might also do so for young individuals.

*Hypothesis 4a:* Parties with a left-leaning position on economic issues are more likely than economically right-leaning parties to have young MEPs.

Even more so than the economic dimension, we expect the libertarian/authoritarian cleavage to affect the representation of the young. Compared to their parents and grandparents, younger generations are more pluralistic and open to new ways of living and cultures. Parties with a post-materialist/libertarian position carry the values of the majority of young adults (see Sloam 2014). For example, some green parties such as the German Green Party promote very progressive values and are disproportionately popular among the young on Election Day (Dolezal 2010). It is thus likely that the parliamentary delegation of these parties is also comparatively young. In contrast, parties with an authoritarian platform tend to be traditional, protectionist and masculine, values that might not appeal to the majority of the young (Givens 2005). Having a rather old support base, these parties also tend to have an older parliamentary delegation.

*Hypothesis 4b:* Parties leaning towards a libertarian position are more likely to have young MEPs than those with an authoritarian position.

In Europe, the pro-/anti-European cleavage is another important policy dimension, in particular for the young. Young individuals tend to support Europe and the European ideals; Europe provides them with opportunities to travel, study and work. Since young people tend to be strong advocates for European integration, and it is they who carry forward the European idea most convincingly, it is likely that pro-European parties will also nominate more young politicians (Keating 2014). More indirectly, pro-European parties also frequently fare best in cosmopolitan cities, which also have a higher share of younger-generation inhabitants than rural areas. In contrast, older individuals tend to be more sceptical about the European idea (Gorodzeisky/Semyonov 2015). They might fear for their traditions, values and their nation state and might be drawn to more Eurosceptic parties, which, in turn, can be expected to nominate more of the elderly.

*Hypothesis 4c:* Pro-EU parties are more likely than anti-EU parties to have young MEPs.

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#### *Formal recruitment procedures*

Finally – and using a subsample of our data, because information on this feature is only available for certain years – we look at the influence of formal recruitment procedures on youth representation. An article by Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2015) suggests that different nomination procedures (i.e. self-nominations/applications versus party-nominations) as well as the inclusiveness of the selectorate matters for the nomination and election of female MEPs. We define the selectorate in legislative recruitment as “the group selecting the candidates” (2015: 770). They argue that self-nominations/applications could benefit the nomination/representation of women; it allows those who have the ability and confidence to step forward. In contrast, party nominations are dependent on the decision by party-elites, which tend to consist of middle-aged men who often exclude outsiders such as women. Hence, they might be less likely to nominate women.

A similar argument could be made for young candidates. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there should be numerous young candidates who have the ability, background and capability to put their name down for a nomination. As such, personal nominations or applications could benefit young individuals. In contrast, in party nominations young candidates might not even be part of the pool of candidates to be considered, because they do not have the network connection and experience, yet. A similar argument can be made about the selectorate: a very small selectorate of a small party elite mainly consisting of middle-aged to senior men may be less prone to present diverse lists that reflect the heterogeneity of the social groups in the party. In contrast, a large selectorate – consisting of a broader composition of actors – might benefit outgroups including women and the young.

*Hypothesis 5a:* Parties promoting self-nominations/applications rather than party nominations are likely to have younger MEPs.

*Hypothesis 5b:* Parties with an inclusive selectorate are likely to have younger MEPs.

There should be numerous young candidates who have the ability, background and capability to put their name down for a nomination. As such, personal nominations or applications could benefit young individuals.

#### **Data and methods**

Our case to study the influence of party characteristics on youth representation is the European Parliament (EP). The EP gathers together parties from all member states of the European Union. While nationally all of these parties operate within a different institutional context, they all run in the EP election within the same three to four days' election timeframe under a similar institutional context (i.e. after 1999 all parties get elected in multi-member districts) (Meserve et al. 2009). The fact that they are running for the same parliament, within the same time window and in a similar institutional context, increases the comparability of parties across countries (Raunio 2014).

In theory, the EP should be an institutional setting where young candidates could perform comparatively well. Generally labelled “second-order elections”, the EP elections are considered less important than the first-order national parliamentary or presidential elections in the eyes of the media, politicians and voters (Schmitt 2005). As a result, a seat in Brussels and Strasbourg might not be as prestigious as a seat in the national legislature. This, in turn, could increase the chances of young individuals to gain a seat for two reasons. First, party elites might prefer a seat in the national legislature or executive. Second, a run for the EP might be a first stepping-stone for young individuals to gain their first parliamentary experience.<sup>6</sup>

We test the influence of our different party characteristics on the age of MEPs based on the full population of legislators who have ever served in the eight European Parliaments that have existed so far (1979-1984 to 2014-2019). In the statistical analysis that follows, the bivariate graphs and the multivariate models measure the effect of the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of party support, and the ideology of the party on youth representation between 6069 and 5616 observations.<sup>7</sup> Because of data unavailability for the other years, the models measuring the effect of territorial nominations and the selectorate on youth representation use a subsample of approximately 700 MEPs for the session 2009-2014.

The dependent variable is the age of each parliamentarian at the time of election. We opt against an aggregation of the age of individual MEPs to the party level for several reasons: first, such a structure would treat small parties with one or two MEPs similarly to large parties with 20 or 30 seats, despite the fact that the former only add a much smaller number of MEPs than the latter. Second, aggregating the data would also lead to more variation in the average or median age among smaller parties as compared to larger parties. To highlight this point: a party might send one member to Brussels and Strasbourg aged 70 years at time *t*. At the next election (*t* + 1) the MEP might retire and be “replaced” by a young candidate aged 35. Hence, the aggregate age difference between the two elections would be 35 years. For larger parties, these considerable differences in the average or median age will

not happen. For these reasons, having individual MEPs as unit of analysis seems to be the most clear-cut analytical choice.

In theory, the EP should be an institutional setting where young candidates could perform comparatively well.

Our party variables are operationalised as follows. The first variable, the age of the party leader, is the age (in years) of the party leader at the time of the election. Information on party leadership is primarily built from Zárát's Political Collections (2016). We complemented this information by various sources on leaders' date of birth, such as their personal webpages and publications such as the Political Handbook of the World (Lansford 2015). In the few cases where a party had several leaders or spokespersons (i.e. some green parties), we computed an average figure of their age. When a leadership change took place in the same year as an EP election, we chose the leader prior to the election. The second variable, party age, gauges the age (in years) of the respective party at the time of election. We mainly collected this information from the respective parties' websites as well as from Zárát's Political Collections (2016). The third variable, size of the party support, is the vote share that the respective party gained in the preceding national election. While we acknowledge that there are some fluctuations in parties' vote share between the national and the European Elections (e.g. non-government parties tend to gain support in the second-order context), we nevertheless believe that the national vote share provides a good estimate for parties to calculate their expected vote share in the EP elections. The data on a party's national level vote share for the election preceding the European context come from the European Election Database (2016).

We used data from the ParlGov project to code the three dimensions of parties' ideology (Döring/Manow 2016). The ParlGov data has information on party positions that are time-invariant unweighted mean values of established party expert surveys on a 0 to 10 scale. The economic scale aggregates the taxes versus spending dimension by Benoit and Laver (2006) with the dimension on state intervention in the economy by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2015). The libertarian versus authoritarian dimension uses the same sources and aggregates positions related to personal freedoms as well as the environment and lifestyles. The EU dimension gauges established measures (Ray 1999; Benoit/Laver 2006) on parties' stance toward the EU based on their general orientations toward the EU, as well as their views on EU expansion.<sup>8</sup>

The third variable, size of the party support, is the vote share that the respective party gained in the preceding national election.

For the dimensions of formal recruitment procedures, we used two variables compiled by Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger (2015). *Nominations* is a variable with four categories, gauging whether (a) candidates can formally nominate themselves, (b) if they have to be nominated, (c) whether parties allow for both types, or (d) if this information is unknown. To capture these four categories, we created three dummy variables, with the category "candidates can formally nominate themselves" serving as the reference category. The second dimension, the *inclusiveness of the*

*selectorate* measures the size of the selectorate. It has six categories: (1) all party members, (2) a subset of all party members, (3) committees, (4) party executives, (5) not specified and (6) mixed actors.<sup>9</sup> The first category again serves as the reference category, the other five categories are captured by dummy variables.

To analyse the influence of party characteristics on the age of elected officials, we engage in six types of analyses. First, we display some univariate tables confirming the notion that the representation of young individuals at the European Parliament is low. Second, we present a number of scatterplots displaying the bivariate relationship between each of the four independent variables – the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of the party support, and the party ideology – and the dependent variable, the age of MEPs. To measure the influence of the nomination and selectorate dummy variables, we also display some descriptive statistics. Third, we present a multiple regression model (i.e. OLS regression), where we regress the age of the politician at the time of election on the four party level characteristics for which we have complete data.<sup>10</sup> There is also a very high turnover rate. In fact, we find that of the total of 6069 observations, only 2423 were filled by incumbents. Substantively, this high turnover rate should give young candidates ample chances to get elected. More methodologically, this significant turnover rate makes a clustered approach or a pooled time series framework less suitable for the study at hand.

To analyse the influence of party characteristics on the age of elected officials, we engage in six types of analyses.

Fourth, we run separate OLS models for each of the eight parliamentary sessions (1979-1984 to 2014-2019), to disentangle possible trends over time. We deem OLS regressions an adequate modelling strategy. First, the dependent variable, the age of each parliamentarian at the time of the election, is normally distributed. Second, the high turnover rate renders a pooled approach impossible to perform. In the fifth step of the analysis, we perform two additional analyses as robustness checks. We create a dummy variable for young MEPs aged 40 and under at the time of election and run a binary logistic regression with this additional dependent variable. Moreover, we create an ordinal variable distinguishing young parliamentarians (aged 40 and under), middle-aged parliamentarians (aged 41 to 60) and elderly parliamentarians (aged 61 and above) and measure the influence of our party-level characteristics on this categorical variable in an ordinal regression framework. Finally, as a sixth step, we run an OLS model with our 2009-2014 data featuring nomination procedures and different types of selectorates on the right-hand side and the age of the MEP on the left hand side of the equation.

### Results from the quantitative investigation

First, the univariate statistics confirm that there is indeed an underrepresentation of young legislators over time. Throughout the history of the EP, the presence of young MEPs of 40 years and below at the time of election has constantly loitered between 16 and 20%. This figure has remained constant throughout the EP's history (see Tables 1 and 2). If we look at the percentages of individuals of 35 years and below at the time of election they

are generally under 10% in the nearly four-decade history of the EP. Even more telling, the mean and median age of incoming MEPs is approximately 50 years (see Table 3). In more detail, the average MEP is elected at the age of 50.2. There is some slight variation between Western and Eastern Europe. Throughout the parliament's history, MEPs from the West are 50.6 years old at the time of elections and MEPs from the East "only" 48.2 years old. This implies that at the end of each parliamentary term, the outgoing parliament has a median age of about 55 years, which is substantially older than the constituents in the EU, with a median age of 42.6 years in 2016 (Eurostat 2017).

At the end of each parliamentary term, the outgoing parliament has a median age of about 55 years, which is substantially older than the constituents in the EU, with a median age of 42.6 years.

	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
<b>Under 40</b>	<b>1058</b>	<b>17.44</b>
<b>40 to 60</b>	<b>3950</b>	<b>65.10</b>
<b>Over 60</b>	<b>1060</b>	<b>17.47</b>

Table 1: Age distribution of MEPs since 1979, at the start of a term

	1979-1984	1984-1989	1989-1994	1994-1999	1999-2004	2004-2009	2009-2014	2014-2019
<b>Under 40</b>	18.33	19.53	17.09	16.51	16.54	17.85	17.80	16.39
<b>40 to 60</b>	62.98	63.44	66.13	69.17	70.81	65.14	61.85	60.40
<b>Over 60</b>	18.69	17.03	16.77	14.32	12.65	17.01	20.35	23.20

Table 2: Age distribution through the eight parliamentary terms, at the start of a term (percentage)

Overall	1979-1984	1984-1989	1989-1994	1994-1999	1999-2004	2004-2009	2009-2014	2014-2019
50.35	50.95	50.08	49.12	49.56	49.59	50.65	50.98	51.66

Table 3: Median age throughout the eight parliaments, at the start of a term (years)

If we look at individual parties, we find that the youngest party delegation was, on average, 21 years old and the oldest 78 years. However, parties with a median and average age below 30 or above 70 are generally single-person delegations. In the category of very young delegations (i.e. those aged under 30, on average), we find, for example, the German Pirate Party in 2014, the Portuguese Communist Party in 2009, or the Danish Peoples' Movement Against the EU in 2014. In the category very old (i.e. delegations with an average age over 70 years), we find the Polish Labour Union (2014), the Communist Party of Greece (1989), and the Christian Social Peoples' Party of Luxembourg in 2004. In general, another trend we note is that the larger party delegations tend to be aged 50 to 60 years, on average, over the span of our study. This includes the Christian Democratic Party of Germany, the Socialist Party in France or Labour in Great Britain.

How much influence do party characteristics have on the age of incoming parliamentarians? Figures 1 to 6 disconfirm all of our initial hypotheses. Even in the bivariate realm the predicted line

between any of the measures of party characteristics and the age of parliamentarians is rather flat in all graphs, indicating little to no impact. Neither the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of the party support, nor the ideology of the party influence whether parties send older or younger MEPs to Brussels and Strasbourg. Even more disappointing, the multivariate regression model indicates that all of the party characteristics together explain only about 1% in the variance in the age variation in the European parliament (see Table 5). The libertarian/authoritarian ideology dimension is the only variable where we find some very small substantive influence. As such, the regression model predicts that a rather libertarian party with a ranking of two is expected to have MEPs two years younger, on average, than a rather authoritarian party with a ranking of seven. For the other variables the influence is non-perceptible.

Neither the age of the party leader, the age of the party, the size of the party support, nor the ideology of the party influence whether parties send older or younger MEPs to Brussels and Strasbourg.

If we look at the eight regression analyses for the parliamentary sessions 1979-1984 to 2014-2019, there are also no consistent findings and the models have little to no explanatory power, explaining between 1 and 8% of the variance in a parliamentarian's age (see Table 6). If we look at individual predictors, we see no consistent results. The only variable that has a significant influence in most models is the age of the party leader; yet substantively this influence is, again, tiny. The lack of influence of the party characteristics is further confirmed in the binary and ordinary logistic regressions (Table 7). Not only have both models a miniscule pseudo R squared, even more importantly, the proportional reduction in error is 0% for both models, further illustrating that the models do not add anything in comparison to random selection.

When we look at nomination procedures, the picture is similar (Table 8). With the exception that local nominations seem to slightly benefit the presence of young MEPs (i.e. local nominations trigger parliamentary party delegations that are two to three years younger than nominations at another territorial level), neither the other levels of nomination nor the type of selectorate matters. This applies even more so considering that in our regression framework, the three dummy variables for levels of nominations and the five dummies for type of selectorate explain about 1% of the variance in parliamentarians' age variation.

## Conclusion

This study allows for rather sober conclusions. Even in a second-order setting, like the European Parliament, young people's representation has been consistently low. Throughout the parliament's history about 10% of the members have been aged 35 years and below and the median parliamentarian at the time of her election has been aged over 50 years. We also find that parties of all types seem to do little to actively promote the presence of young adults and break the vicious cycle of young people's political disengagement. Whether these political parties are old or young, have a larger or smaller support base, are right or left-leaning, or whether they have a younger or older leader, they all appear reluctant to see young MEPs elected.

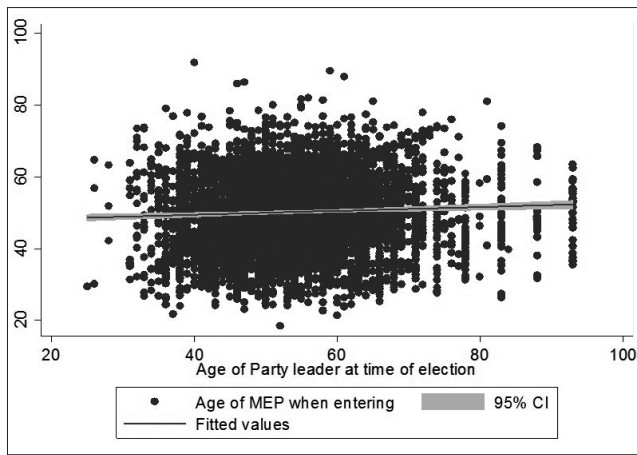


Figure 1: Scatterplot displaying the relationship between the age of the party leader and the age of MEPs from this party

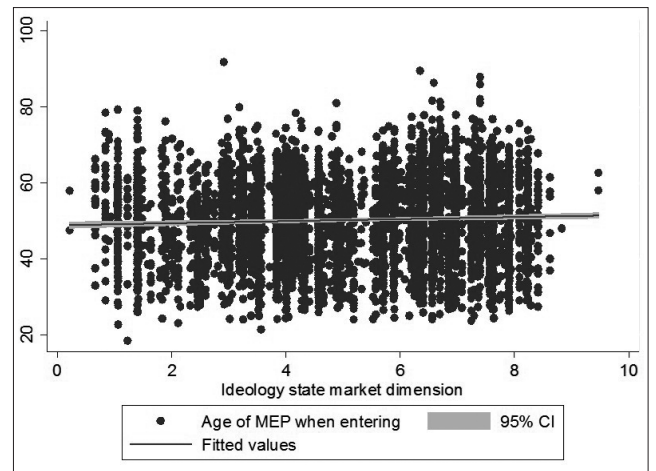


Figure 4: Scatterplot displaying the relationship between the ideology of the party (state/market dimension) and the age of MEPs from this party

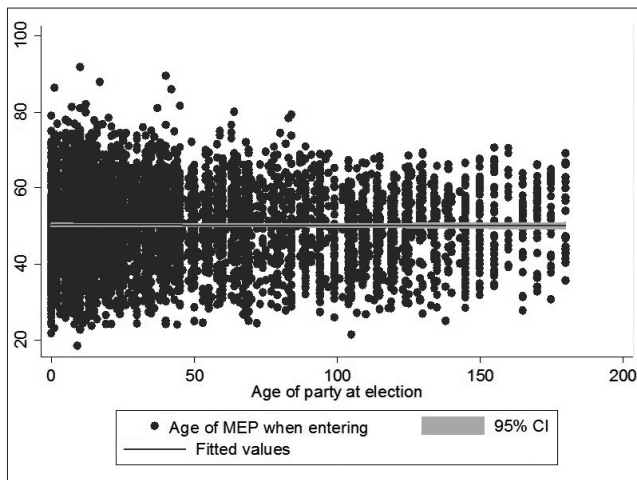


Figure 2: Scatterplot displaying the relationship between the age of the party and the age of MEPs from this party

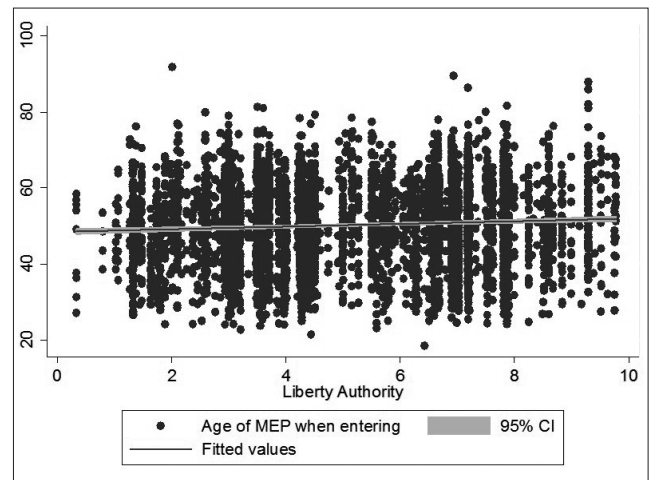


Figure 5: Scatterplot displaying the relationship between the ideology of the party (authority/liberty dimension) and the age of parliamentarians

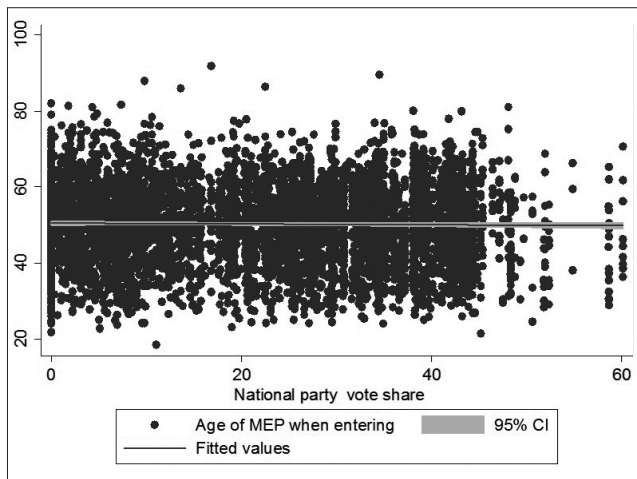


Figure 3: Scatterplot displaying the relationship between the party support size and the age of MEPs from this party

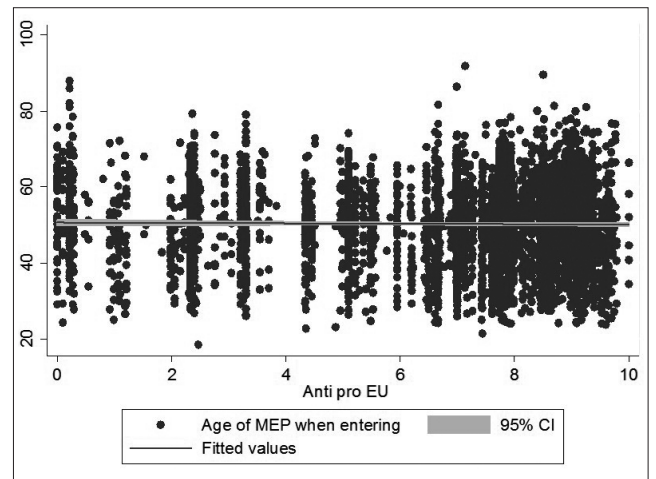


Figure 6: Scatterplot displaying the relationship between the ideology of the party (pro-European/anti-European dimension) and the age of MEPs from this party

What might increase young people's representation could be the adoption of quotas (see Tremmel et al. 2015). As the literature on women's representation shows, quotas can provide a relatively quick boost in the representation of a so-far underrepresented group (Paxton/Hughes 2016). With a quota of 10 or 20%, parties would actually be obliged to replace some of their available seats with young candidates. This would give a direct boost to youth representation. Quotas could also have an indirect and psycho-

logical effect; they would show to young individuals that politics is not only the domain of the old. Rather, to the contrary, quotas would signal to young adults that politics is an area where their participation is encouraged and supported. While we are doubtful that many parties will engage in this path, we deem it the only quick fix to rectify the underrepresentation of young people in the European Parliament, and possibly elsewhere as well.



Territorial centralisation	Average age of parliamentarians (years)
Local	48.59
Regional	52.16
National	51.13
Mix	50.67
<b>Selectorate</b>	
All members	50.99
Subset of members	49.97
Committees	50.92
Party Executives	48.60
Not specified	51.59
Mixed actors	50.79

Table 4: The influence of nomination procedures and the size of the selectorate on the age of parliamentarians, at the start of a term (2009 sub-sample)

	Coefficient	Std. Err.	Sig
Age of the party leader	.065	.014	.000
Age of the party	.003	.003	.398
Size of the party support	-.034	.012	.003
Ideology of the party (state/market dimension)	.046	.094	.621
Ideology of the party (libertarian/ authoritarian dimension)	-.396	.091	.000
Ideology of the party (pro-EU/ anti-EU dimension)	.093	.068	.170
Constant	44.38	1.03	.000
Rsquared	.01		
N	5647		

Table 5: Multiple regression model measuring the influence of party level characteristics on the age of parliamentarians<sup>11</sup>

	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009	2014
Age of the party leader	.073 (.061)	-.009 (.042)	.110*** (.042)	.093*** (.035)	.082*** (.031)	.098** (.043)	.081** (.038)	.005 (.043)
Age of the party	-.041*** (.015)	-.018 (.014)	.002 (.013)	-.003 (.010)	.001 (.008)	.011 (.008)	.020** (.008)	.016* (.009)
Size of the party support	-.113*** (.042)	.037 (.037)	-.064 (.038)	-.061* (.034)	-.020 (.029)	.036 (.027)	-.020 (.029)	-.077** (.031)
Ideology of the party (state/market dimension)	-.108 (.378)	-.964*** (.372)	.226 (.395)	.182 (.309)	.115 (.226)	.159 (.196)	-.145 (.214)	.554** (.236)
Ideology of the party (libertarian/authoritarian dimension)	1.11 (.403)	1.25*** (.360)	.748** (.361)	-.437 (.290)	.094 (.221)	-.160 (.204)	-.262 (.214)	.295 (.237)
Ideology of the party (pro-EU/anti-EU dimension)	.019 (.263)	-.365 (.225)	.285 (.215)	-.392** (.189)	-.116 (.165)	-.334* (.176)	.084 (.183)	.442** (.178)
Constant	46.72*** (3.89)	51.31*** (2.98)	37.99*** (2.97)	39.88*** (2.69)	46.23*** (2.32)	44.26*** (3.02)	44.95*** (2.86)	44.75 (2.63)
Rsquared	.08	.05	.05	.03	.01	.03	.01	.03
N	514	608	566	694	825	884	812	744

Table 6: Multiple regression model measuring the influence of party level characteristics on the age of young parliamentarians per election year

On a more general note, we need more studies tackling (the lack of) young people's representation. Not only do we know relatively little about the factors that could potentially increase youth representation, we know even less about the factors surrounding young people gaining candidacy status. Are some types of parties more likely to nominate more candidates than others? Based on the results of the election of young deputies to the EP, we doubt that there is huge variation within parties. Nevertheless, to confirm this conjecture, future research should look at young politicians as candidates to elected office. Yet, and while there is still abundant research on young people in politics to do, we have

	Binary logistic regression analysis	Ordinal logistic regression analysis
Age of the party leader	-.013*** (.004)	.013*** (.003)
Age of the party	.001 (.001)	.0002 (.007)
Size of the party support	.006** (.003)	-.007*** (.002)
Ideology of the party (state/market dimension)	-.008 (.023)	.034* (.018)
Ideology of the party (libertarian/authoritarian dimension)	-.054** (.023)	.065*** (.018)
Ideology of the party (pro-EU/anti-EU dimension)	-.038** (.017)	.018 (.013)
Constant	-.372 (.254)	
Cut-off point 1		-.404*** (.199)
Cut-off point 2		2.76 (.203)
Pseudo Rsquared	.005	.006
N	5660	5660
Proportional Reduction in Error	.00	.00

Table 7: Binary logistic and ordinal logistic regression models measuring the influence of party level characteristics on age categories of parliamentarians

	Coefficient	Std. Err.	Sig
<b>Territorial centralisation</b>			
Local	ref. category		
Regional	3.55	1.29	.006
National	2.74	1.26	.030
Mix	2.49	1.54	.107
<b>Selectorate</b>			
All members	ref. category		
Subset of members	1.30	1.37	.343
Committees	.073	1.34	.957
Party Executives	-2.73	4.09	.504
Not specified	.042	1.31	.974
Mixed actors	-.165	1.39	.905
Constant	48.59	1.04	.000
Rsquared	.01		
N	698		

Table 8: The multiple regression model measuring the influence of party level characteristics on the age of parliamentarians, 2009 sub-sample<sup>12</sup>

On a more general note, we need more studies tackling (the lack of) young people's representation. Not only do we know relatively little about the factors that could potentially increase youth representation, we know even less about the factors surrounding young people gaining candidacy status.

shown that differences in types of parties and their nomination procedures do not explain any substantial variation in the age of parliamentarians in the EP.

## Notes

- Historically, there are numerous examples where the younger generations were described as unfit for holding office. For instance, Plato believed that the philosophical maturity of individuals was reached after the age of fifty (McKee/Barber 2001).
- To illustrate this point, being from an ethnic minority group is a feature that seldom changes for an individual. Gender identity is mutable for some individuals and, similarly, economic standing is a group characteristic from which some individuals shift during their lifespan. As a contrast, the shifting of age is inevitable; being young is a characteristic that is temporary from an individual's perspective.

3 Forthcoming work by the authors, building on representatives' roll-call votes since 2016 on issues relating to environmental legislation.

4 For a theoretical discussion of the benefits of higher youth representation, see Henn et al. 2002; Tremmel et al. 2015.

5 Paxton and Hughes (2016) make a similar argument when it comes to the representation of women.

6 A prerequisite of our large-n study is that we discuss processes of candidacy, yet we study observational data on the final outcomes of these processes: the MEPs that are successful in getting elected. We chose this scope since it is election that matters the most, across time and parties. For example, simple candidacy status will not empower young politicians to draft legislation, vote on bills and make sure that young people get what they want – but the election of these young candidates does. In addition, studies that use data on candidates to the EP (e.g. Meserve et al. 2009) can only study those lists and parties where electoral information is available, which tremendously limits the scope of these analyses.

7 We do not include independents in our data-sample. Our data mainly stems from national parties, but, of course, there are also some MEPs from regional parties, such as the German Christian Social Union. See the Online Appendix on [www.igjr.org](http://www.igjr.org) for a list of the parties, with their English names.

8 To further gauge that the three dimensions are distinct, we run a correlation analysis and find a medium-strong correlation between the economic and the value dimension (the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is .59), a rather weak correlation between the pro-/anti-EU dimension and value dimension (the Pearson Correlation Coefficients is .32) and no correlation between the pro-/anti-EU dimension and the economic dimension (the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is .02).

9 In their dataset, no information exists on parties in Croatia, which is therefore excluded in these models.

10 To test for the appropriateness of OLS, we first check for normality. Appendix 1 highlights that the age of EU parliamentarians is nearly perfectly normally distributed; there are also no outliers, which is a sign of homoscedasticity.

11 If we add country dummies or fixed effects, the effect of the independent variables becomes even smaller.

12 If we add country dummies or fixed effects, the effect of the independent variables becomes even smaller.

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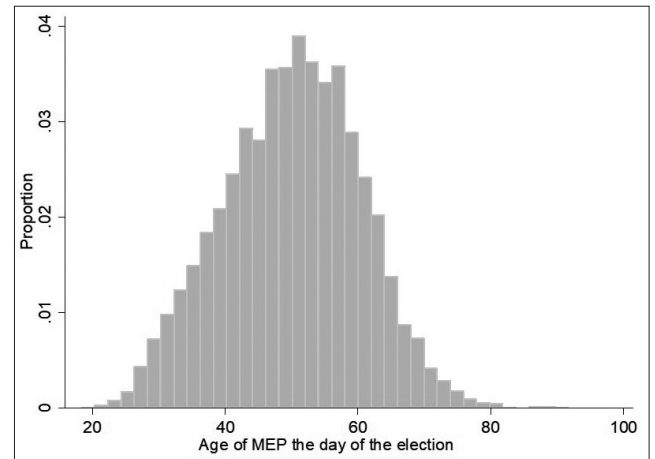
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## Appendix



Appendix 1: The distribution of the dependent variable, the age of MEPs on the day of the election



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