

## Gendered Leadership in the European Parliament's Political Groups

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The 2019 European parliamentary elections saw a historical increase in women's political representation to 40%. While not constituting full parity, it is considered a threshold for a gender-balanced institution in many European countries. The European Parliament (EP) has been considered a highly gender-equal actor in comparison to other EU institutions. It has historically been more amenable to claims to equal representation and the Parliament has succeeded in pushing for progressive gender-equality policies (Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín 2019; Kantola 2010). In recent years, scholars have begun to question this image of the EP as an unequivocally gender-friendly actor. Gender equality as a norm and a policy question has been shown to be highly politicized, contested, and polarized in the Parliament. The EP's political groups are highly divided in their support for and promotion of gender equality (Kantola 2022; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2016, 2019). The share of radical-right populists has increased to one-quarter and they voice strong opposition to gender-equality norms in the plenary debates both directly and indirectly (Kantola and Lombardo 2020).

In this chapter, we contribute to these debates by analyzing how leadership continues to be gendered in the EP, failing to provide a level playing field for MEPs. We do this by

focusing on the leadership positions provided by the political groups of the Parliament. Political groups have grown in importance alongside the institutional development of the EP (Ahrens, Elomäki and Kantola 2022; Kreppel 2004). Political group leadership positions include political, policy, and administrative leadership. This chapter analyzes *political leadership* in terms of political group leaders and national party delegation leaders; *policy leadership* in terms of nominations to the key positions of committee chairs and coordinators; and *administrative leadership* in terms of political groups' secretary generals (SGs).

Theoretically, we draw on the concepts of positional leadership (see Chapter 1 in this volume) and gendered norms and practices, which shape the conditions of leadership in the Parliament. We use extensive interview material (n=123), which covers MEPs and staff and includes responses to questions about political, policy, and administrative leadership within the political groups in the 8th (2014–2019) and 9th legislatures (2019–2024). Key findings show how men continue to dominate political leadership despite the gender-equal reputation of the EP (see Chapter 4 in this volume). A particular hidden gendered structure is the leadership of national party delegations (NPDs), where women are significantly in the minority. Policy leadership, in contrast, is the most gender-balanced area, though the conservative European People's Party (EPP)—the biggest political group—is a notable exception in this regard. Finally, women are underrepresented in administrative leadership of the political groups. Gendered norms and practices continue to shape the scope of action within these leadership positions and underpin the challenges involved in making the EP a gender-equal arena.

## 8.1 Studying Gendered Leadership in the European Parliament: Background, Concepts, and Research Material

Focusing on leadership in the EP provides important insights into how gender works within the institution. The concept of *positional leadership* captures the dynamics around women's access to power (Chapter 1 in this volume) and helps us answer questions raised by the "women and politics approach" (Kantola and Lombardo 2017): where are the women leaders and what factors contribute alternately to their underrepresentation in politics or to gender parity? Open, transparent, and democratic selection norms and processes enhance women's opportunities to enter political leadership positions. Gender-equality guarantees, such as gender quotas or comparable rules in party or parliamentary statutes, can enable women's access to power.

Studies of women's leadership in the EP are rare and most scholarly efforts have been directed at studying women MEPs' political representation and pathways to power (Fortin-Rittberger and Rittberger 2015; Kantola 2010; Kenny and Luhiste 2016). Women's representation has increased steadily in the EP, now providing a strong pool of women candidates for parliamentary leadership positions (see the Appendix to this volume; Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín 2019). This representation, however, varies greatly by political groups. In the 9th legislature (2019–2024), women constituted a majority in the Greens/EFA; achieved near parity with at least 40% representation in the left and liberal S&D, GUE/NGL, and Renew Europe groups, as well as in the radical-right populist ID; and were underrepresented in the conservative EPP and the radical-right populist ECR, with just above 30% of the groups' MEPs (see Ahrens and Rolandsen Agustín 2019; Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019).

There have been several studies looking at women's positional leadership in the EP beyond the MEP level. These studies show that women have historically been underrepresented within EP leadership structures. Chapter 4 in this volume gives an overview of the underrepresentation

. [Beauvallet and Michon \(2010\)](#) suggest that in 2004, during the 6th legislature, only 14% of the political group leaders, 19% of committee chairs, and 22.5% of vice-chairs were women (see [Chapter 4](#) in this volume). This was partially explained by seniority, a key factor in MEPs' obtaining the highest leadership positions in the EP, especially the presidencies of the Parliament and the political groups ([Beauvallet and Michon 2010](#)). Committee vice-presidents, rapporteurs, and shadow rapporteurs, in contrast, are policy-related positions that on occasion go to relatively new MEPs ([Beauvallet and Michon 2010](#): 158).

It seems then vital to provide an updated analysis of women's positional leadership within the EP structures. The EP offers a wide spectrum of leadership positions at the parliamentary level including the presidency (only once held by a woman—see the [Appendix to this volume](#)), Conference of Presidents, Bureau, questors, and [SGs](#). Instead of analyzing the entire Parliament, we focus on the *political group* level. In addition to providing a novel empirical perspective, we demonstrate differences in women MEPs' representation that suggest gendered leadership may vary considerably by political group. Understanding this diversity allows us to analyze gendered leadership in a more nuanced way.

We identify and analyze three key leadership position types in political groups: political, policy, and administrative. First, *political leadership* is exercised by political group leaders and national party delegation leaders. Political group leaders represent the groups both within the Parliament and outside of it. While there is a public and academic debate about how well known they are outside the Brussels bubble, their roles and powers are wide-ranging. Group leaders participate in setting the agendas of parliamentary politics in the EP's Conference of Presidents as well as when preparing group meetings and chairing them. They play a central role in coalition-building within the groups and work to ensure

their discipline and cohesion (Bressanelli 2014; Bailer et al. 2009). The group leaders sit in the front row in the plenary and are often called first to speak. They also exercise power in relation to appointments to the EP's permanent committees. Their leadership is complemented, but also challenged, by the heads of NPDs. On the one hand, heads of delegations (HoDs) complement the group leader because they can exert discipline more readily (Corbett et al. 2016: 139–140). These leaders chair their national party delegation (NPD) meetings, provide a link with national parties, can influence party electoral lists in member states, and can also informally control the distribution of leadership positions within the EP hierarchy and the committees (Kreppel 2004: 217). On the other hand, they can challenge group leadership by joining forces with other national party delegation leaders on votes.

Second, *policy leadership* takes place in the EP's committees. Committees elect their chairs and up to four vice-chairs on the basis of proportional allocation between political groups and bargaining between the party leaders and national delegations. The chairs are in a powerful position, leading the committees' meetings and determining their policy agendas (Whitaker 2019; Chiru 2020). In addition to chairs, coordinators are important policy leadership positions. The political groups also select committee coordinators, who act as the groups' representatives within the committees. The coordinators are responsible for allocating committee reports (legislative and own-initiative) in the political groups and are chosen on the basis of incumbency in the committee system and professional background (Daniel and Thierse 2018).

Third, *administrative leadership* in political groups is represented by SGs. They are often professionals who have worked in transnational environments and are familiar with the EU institutions. The SGs are heads of the Secretariat, the Parliament's permanently staffed administrative body. They are responsible for staffing both in a

representation and expertise sense. In the representation sense, when a group is formed, the [SGs](#) and their deputies need to ensure that national delegations are represented, so they may simultaneously have to fire and engage staff. In the expertise sense, they ensure that the MEPs receive effective expertise from advisors. Crucially, the [SGs](#) prepare the agenda for the Conference of Presidents, the organ charged with the [EP's](#) legislative planning. Overall, SGs perform a gatekeeping role by shielding the group president from everyday problems, allowing the president to focus on the most critical matters.

Questions about positional leadership address but one aspect of gendered leadership. For example, Müller and Tömmel ([Chapter 1](#) in this volume) suggest focusing on behavioral leadership to inquire how women lead and what gender differences there might be. In this chapter, we combine an analysis of positional leadership with a focus on *gendered norms and practices*, which shape the ways in which positional leadership is exercised in political groups. In short, gendered norms and practices constitute different forms of gender bias that influence women's and men's leadership opportunities. For example, women carry the burden of doubt about their competences and may face different forms of surveillance when they enter leadership positions. If they don't conform to gendered norms, they may face sanctions and their leadership ambitions may be thwarted (see [Kenny 2013](#); [Verge and de la Fuente 2014](#)). Men, in contrast, may benefit from having more access to informal networks where political decisions are taken—not least on leadership positions ([Bjarnegård 2013](#)).

Gendered norms and practices are institutionalized in the ways that parliaments and political groups work, which makes changing them difficult. This is evidenced by the persistence of horizontal segregation: women are delegated to those committee and working-group positions deemed feminine, while men's expertise in areas such as

economics, finance, and foreign and security policy is more easily [recognized](#) ([Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019](#)). Appointments to committees in national parliaments likewise show how this gendered division of labor is intimately connected to prestige, with men holding the key positions in most prestigious committees ([Goodwin et al. 2020](#); [Pansardi and Vercesi 2016](#); [Krook and O'Brien 2012](#); O'Brien 2011).

As a transnational parliament, the EP provides a specific context for gendered norms and practices. The culture of long working hours in Brussels makes it difficult to combine care responsibilities with the representative role, affecting both women and men MEPs but particularly amplifying the difficulties that younger women MEPs face in the Parliament ([Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019](#)). Young mothers suffer from the difficulties of combining a career in Brussels and Strasbourg with a family and the lack of political will in the EP to address these issues ([Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019](#)). The EP has also been shown to be a site of significant sexual harassment and attempts to remedy the situation have faced resistance ([Berthet and Kantola 2020](#)). At the political group level, a familiar left-right distinction emerges, with gender equality a recognized political goal for left, liberal, and green groups, while unequal gendered norms hold sway in the conservative and right groups ([Kantola 2022](#); [Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019](#); [Kantola and Lombardo 2020](#)).

In order to explore both positional leadership and the gendered norms and practices that shape it in the political groups, we draw on interviews conducted with 123 MEPs and staff during the 8th and 9th legislatures. We used an in-depth qualitative approach, speaking with different actors involved in different aspects of the political groups, including both women and men. The interviewees came from all of the existing political groups. The category of staff included the powerful secretary and deputy SGs, whom we interviewed from six political groups. The transcribed interviews were coded by the

research group using Atlas.ti. While we have read the interviews in their entirety, we have selected the citations under the codes “Leadership” and “Secretary General: role and function” for closer scrutiny. In addition, we analyzed all of the secretary and deputy secretary general interviews in detail. We also used group statutes as primary documents to analyze some of the political groups’ formal practices.

## 8.2 Political Leadership: Political Group and National Party Delegation Leaders

In this section, we explore political group leaders and national party delegation leaders as key agents of political leadership. We first explore positional leadership and then the gendered norms and practices through which leaders are selected and enact leadership. As discussed above, up through the 6th legislature the position of group leader was very male dominated (Beauvallet and Michon 2010). This has since improved to an extent. Table 8.1 shows that three out of 14 (21%) group chairs were women in the 8th legislature and three out of ten (33%) were women in the 9th legislature, when the number of political groups fell from eight to seven. While the progress between the last two legislatures may seem remarkable, the number of women leaders in fact stayed the same. Two female chairs served in these two Parliaments as absolute chairs, Iratxe Garcia Perez (S&D) and Gabi Zimmer (GUE/NGL), the remaining three—Marine Le Pen (ENF), Ska Keller (Greens/EFA), and Manon Aubrey (GUE/NGL)—as cochairs. The second largest group, the S&D, selected its third female leader in 2019, which left the EPP as the only one of the three mainstream groups never to have had a female leader (Table 8.1).

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The group leaders are chosen via elections whose procedures are set out in the groups’ statutes (e.g. ALDE 2009: 4, 5; EPP 2013: 27) and that take place every two and a half

years. Group leaders are selected through voting by the respective groups' MEPs. A number of our interviewees described the practices around the election of the political group leaders as democratic, which should support women's chances of winning these positions. Yet, after making statements about "straightforward elections" (ECR MEP F 210219, ALDE MEP F 210219), the interviewees gave quite different descriptions of the politics surrounding the leadership contests. Despite formal democracy and open voting, nominations are agreed to in advance by a small group and "settled at the very high level" (ALDE MEP F 210219). One male MEP from the ECR said that sometimes "they can be very hotly fought elections" and "different delegations want different things and different deals are done." He said that leadership elections can also be used as a "tactic" to get other things (ECR MEP M 051218). MEPs from other populist right groups said that the political group leader "sort of emerged" and "appeared" out of negotiations between the national delegations (EFDD MEP M 290119\_3; EFDD Group Staff M 070219). Women's positional leadership can be weakened in situations where other concerns and priorities, such as national representation, dominate and gender\_equality norms are pushed aside.

Beneath the group leadership, NPDs are key players within the groups at the start of each new legislature, when agreements over leadership positions are brokered. NPDs vary widely in size from single-person delegations to ones of around 30 MEPs in the two most recent Parliaments. One of our findings—missing from all previous literature—is that the leadership of the largest NPDs remains heavily dominated by men (see [Table 8.2](#)). These are powerful leadership positions as HoDs are often called to speak first in group meetings; they also meet in HoD meetings to discuss pressing matters and broker intra-group compromises.

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Table 8.2 shows that, in the 9th legislature, all of the biggest NPDs in the EP are headed by men. In fact, the leaders of all five of the largest NPDs within the S&D, ID, and ECR groups are male as are four out of the five largest EPP delegations. Renew, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL each have two or three female leaders among their five largest NPDs. In the words of one MEP, becoming an HoD involves a gendered “hidden structure,” particularly in the larger political groups (S&D M MEP 060320; S&D F MEP 060320). One male HoD said:

[W]e have a lot of women leaders, not just Iratxe, at all levels in the group.

But I can say that all the biggest delegations that count for most of the MEPs are led by men. So there is not real equality in terms of the heads of delegation, which are the stakeholders of the group. In the end, the heads of delegation are the ones that are in fact after the group leader, to some extent even more than the group vice-presidents, the ones that are giving the political impulse and are the ones that are the leadership behind the group leader. So if you look at our heads of delegation, only the smallest delegations they have women leading. The bigger ones, all men. So this is not totally balanced.

(S&D M MEP, 060320)

The way that HoDs are selected also varies. Some NPD leaders are elected by the members of their delegations, while, in other cases, those who head the domestic party list are supposed to become HoDs, though this is not always a certainty (S&D MEP F 060320):

[W]e have delegations where the leader of the delegation is decided by the leader of the party, so there is no vote in the delegation on who becomes a leader, but they're told, this is your leader, full stop. I mean in this kind of culture then it depends on who is, who's vice-president, who's president, I mean you could see certain elements and see some cultural differences there as regards to the way certain things are dealt with.

(S&D Group Staff M 040320)

Discussing persistent gender inequalities and gendered norms and practices was difficult for the interviewees on the political right. An ECR MEP said that she had never felt “any bias”: “where we have women contest, they win. So, I think it's very good, freedom” (ECR MEP F 210219). Another spoke to us about the “great desire to see more women in these positions. So we would have voted for a woman if there was one willing to stand” (ECR MEP F 21021). Typical of right-wing gender\_equality discourse, according to such interviewees it remained the personal choice of women to come forward—and a personal failure if gender parity was not achieved. This perspective appears to turn a blind eye to the gendered structures that potential women candidates may face when putting themselves forward for leadership positions. At the same time, it must be noted that the ECR was the only group to have a Muslim leader and some interviewees recognized the significance of a right populist group being the only one in the EP to elect a leader with a BAME (Black, Asian, and minority ethnic) background (ECR Staff M 200219).

Members of other radical\_right populist groups saw gender as irrelevant to political leadership of the groups. Either it did not and should not matter at all, according to the

interviewees, or they saw women everywhere. An ENF interviewee said: “I have to disappoint you on all your questions that are related to gender balance for instance. We, no one mentions this in our group. And as you say we don’t need to do so because we have some very strong women” (ENF Staff M 260419). Yet the share of women MEPs in the ENF was the lowest of all political groups in the Parliament (about 30%), similar to that of the EPP and EFDD. The interviewee went on to argue that gender\_equality measures—especially quotas—would be offensive to the group’s women MEPs (ENF Staff M 260419), and indeed there were no equality provisions in the ENF statutes (ENF 2015, modified 2018).

Interviewees from other political groups, in contrast, discussed how leadership might be based on gendered norms and practices. A female interviewee from the ALDE, formerly a group vice-president, explained her lack of power and the way that power was concentrated in the group leader:

I was part of that presidency and we met once a week or something. We never dealt with political questions, we dealt with some practical issues. Then me and also some others, we complained, sometimes that we should discuss policy. But no, it is . . . . In our group it is the group leader. And nobody wants to quarrel. That’s why those who don’t agree, they are quiet.

(ALDE MEP, F 210219)

This observation illustrates the relatively weak position of the vice and deputy political group leaders. In the well-established S&D, too, some of our interviewees suggested that, as one put it, the group is “both formally and informally, tightly controlled by a very small

group of people, in a very undemocratic, unaccountable way. And it's very hierarchical, it's, everything goes up to there and it characterizes everything, I think" (S&D MEP M 161018).

This masculine leadership style was perpetuated through *favoring seniority* in the selection process for key positions. While ensuring that leaders had valuable experience of the way that the group and the Parliament work and maintaining continuity, some of our interviewees were also critical about the way in which this reproduced the institutions—often based on the norms of whiteness and maleness. As one interviewee commented on the election of Udo Bullman as chair of the S&D group:

R: You mean a middle-aged white man, and a German?

I: Yeah . . . R: Yeah, well, I think that's true. The alternative was a Belgian woman who would have been better, I think. But I don't really think it makes that much difference, because the shape of the institution is very fixed, and you'd have to have a leader who is resolutely determined to do even quite modest reform.

(S&D MEP M 161018)

The interviewee also stated that many politicians have broader ambitions than reforming their political groups: "But the problem with that is that the institution never gets reformed, and it gets increasingly run in the image of invisible people behind the scenes, their interests as well as their image" (S&D MEP M 161018). This argument implies that it doesn't matter whether a group leader is an insider woman or a man—either is likely to maintain existing practices and focus on policy issues rather than reforming internal group practices and making them more democratic.

To summarize the position of women in group leadership, while women remain underrepresented among sole group leaders, a more significant gap exists in the

underrepresentation of women—or rather the overrepresentation of men—at the head of delegation level in the largest delegations.

### 8.3 Policy Leadership: Committee Chairs and Coordinators

In this section, we look at EP committee chairs and coordinators. More specifically, we present the positional leadership of committee chairs and coordinators in terms of female and male officeholders (for horizontal segregation in committees, see [Chapter 4](#) in this volume). We then consider the structures, norms, and practices that affect how these actors perform leadership.

In the 8th legislature, 12 committee chairs were men and eight were women. The women came from the S&D, ECR, and ALDE (see [Table 8.3](#)). In the 9th Parliament, 10 were men and 11 were women, pointing to a stepwise progression toward gender balance. Women are now well represented as committee chairs in relation to their total presence in the Parliament. The EPP, in particular, saw a major improvement, with women's share of committee chairs held by the group growing from 15% to 43% between the two legislatures.

<COMP: INSERT Table 8.3 NEAR HERE>

In terms of the total share of coordinators, the gender composition of the 8th and 9th Parliaments was exactly the same: 56% men and 44% women (see [Table 8.4](#)). The EPP had a significantly poorer share of female coordinators in both the 8th and 9th legislatures than other groups, an issue explored in more detail below. The S&D and GUE/NGL have more female coordinators than male. The ID group now has 45% female coordinators.

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Given this imbalance, let us turn to coordinator selection to see whether there are gendered norms. The ALDE, S&D, and EPP have statutory rules to achieve more equal

gender representation. An ALDE statute makes it the responsibility of the bureau to “confirm the election of all the Coordinators in order to guarantee a fair representation” (ALDE 2009: 11). The EPP and S&D mention women and sex composition explicitly but make only general references to parliamentary bodies and posts. The S&D uses a formulation of “balanced representation”: “The bureau should also seek to bring about balanced representation of women in all parliamentary bodies” (S&D 2014: 14.4). The EPP sets the goal at one-third women: “The Chairman should ensure that, as the result of elections, the overall representation of members holding posts within the Group are composed of at least one third of members belonging to another sex than the majority of members” (EPP 2013: 19.6). This has not been achieved among EPP coordinators, but there has been a clear improvement in committee chair positions as noted above.

The practical means by which the groups select coordinators vary. An ECR member said that she had served under two different selection procedures; originally, she was nominated by her leader and then in the second half, she was voted unanimously (ECR MEP F 060219, also in ECR MEP M 310119). If there is a disagreement in the grouping, then this is resolved at bureau level (ECR M Staff 180319). In the EFDD, one female MEP said that nomination was based on national delegations (EFDD MEP F 290119\_1). According to another EFDD member, there was little transparency in how coordinators were chosen, they just “sort of appeared”; this paralleled interviewees’ responses about the selection of EFDD leaders more generally (EFDD MEP M 290119\_3, see also EFDD 2014). Again, “appearing” and “emerging” point to a lack of open procedures, and a lack of political will about implementing democratic decision-making structures. Yet there was no deep discontent among the EFDD interviewees regarding this matter. A staff member from the EFDD compared the process to the “usual channels” in the UK Parliament and as overseen by the secretary general of the group (EFDD staff member, M). In the EPP, in contrast,

coordinators were selected by a “simple election” where candidates campaign for the position and lobby their colleagues (EPP MEP F 210219). In both the ENF and ID groups, the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, hereafter FEMM, coordinators were also coordinators for PETI and CULT committees respectively in the 8th and 9th Parliaments. This practice suggests that FEMM may be devalued when allocating coordinators because responsibility is combined with another committee, the FEMM work does not occupy the sole focus of the coordinator (cf. [Krook and O’Brien 2012](#)).

Looking at [Table 8.5](#), we can assess the gendered results such processes bring. The EPP’s selection procedure (despite the stipulation of gender balance in its rules) brings only 19% female coordinators. ECR had dropped to under 30% in the 9th Parliament. The EFDD had 36% women coordinators in the 8th Parliament. As noted above, over 50% of coordinators in the left-green-liberal groups were women.

The position of the EPP is interesting from a gender perspective considering the norms, practices, and structures in the EP and the relationships between political groups. Structurally, it is the biggest and most powerful group and so highly significant for gender relations in the EP and yet it is the farthest from gender balance, especially among coordinators. Gender, age, and policy issues produce hierarchies in the EPP. For example, the EPP’s Economic and Monetary Affairs, hereafter ECON, committee group was called “the most conservative,” a point underscored by one interviewee:

[I]n the very beginning of my work there, I applied for every report, but I noticed I didn’t get any report at all. Up until the moment where I started applying for just opinions. So I do think a certain informal hierarchy plays a role. I do think the age/experience within the EPP ECON family definitely plays a role as well. Because now I have ended up being the rapporteur of

the semester file, but I'm 100 percent sure I would never have been able to do that in 2015. Because of a certain trust-building with the coordinator, that's you might have known, who definitely had a very carrying voice there as well. You can see that there needs to be trust-building relationship or a trust-relationship that needs to be built up. And that definitely plays a role. There is a very interesting element there, and that is the element of the group assistants, so the people who work, who support the coordinator.

(EPP MEP M 220319)

The EPP thus appears to be a hierarchical group, where the hierarchy, according to the interviewee, is built from norms based on age, experience, and obtained "trust." The established, largely informal procedures for the selection of committee leaders, such as coordinators, are not immediately comprehensible to new MEPs, who have to learn the rules of the game. Specifically, previous research supports the conclusion that the ECON Committee—and thus the direction of economic policy—appears to be especially conservative, closed off, and strongly dominated by men and a masculine leadership style (see [Kantola and Rolandsen Agustín 2019](#)).

One of the women MEPs interviewed from the EPP put the focus on gendered structures within the group. Asked whether women get the support they need and have a real chance of winning or not, she suggested that a practice exists where if women agree not to run for top positions they may be rewarded with deputy posts, resulting in women occupying "vice vice vice this and that." Women and men competing for top leadership positions are framed in gendered ways, as well: "if a man campaigns, 'Good for you. It was a fine campaign. We have to raise you because you did your best,' and if a woman stands and stands, 'Oh but she's a difficult one,' and then, 'Do not pick her because she's the difficult one.' It's always

incentivized to be a mediocre good girl” (EPP MEP F 291118). The MEP suggests that leadership norms are gendered and tough, ambitious women are not tolerated. By her account, the price of testing these boundaries is being sidelined in the group (EPP MEP F 291118).

To summarize the position of women in policy leadership, women have at an aggregate level been overrepresented in policy leadership in relation to their overall numbers in the Parliament. However, this varies significantly by group, with the EPP having a smaller share of women in policy leadership positions at both committee chair and coordinator level.

#### 8.4 Administrative Leadership: Secretary Generals of Political Groups

In this final section, we turn our focus to the SGs of the political groups, powerful administrative leadership positions. The SGs have been underresearched in general and from a gender perspective in particular. In terms of positional leadership, in the 8th legislature, there were three women (37.5%) and five men [SGs](#) (62.5%). The three women came from Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, and EFDD. In the 9th legislature, two women SGs from Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL continued in their positions and the EFDD group ceased to exist, making the positions more male dominated (29% women, 71% men).

[Table 8.5](#) makes it evident that the SGs ensure continuity for the political groups, tending to stay in their positions from one parliamentary term to another. They take part in the formation of the political group after EP elections, sitting in talks with national party delegation leaders. Both the ALDE and ENF, which respectively transformed into the new political groups Renew Europe and ID, changed political group leadership but maintained their same SGs and most deputies ([Table 8.5](#)).

From a positional leadership perspective, the ECR and ENF SGs and deputies were all men. The GUE/NGL has more women than men in these positions and other groups have about one-third women.

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In some groups, the SGs and their deputies are elected by all the MEPs (Greens/EFA Group Statutes 2010: 3.4); in others, they are proposed by the group president and appointed by the group bureau (S&D, EPP Group Statutes, Article 27, ENF, GUE/NGL). The S&D group is committed to gender balance in the nomination of their top management, including secretary and deputy **SGs** (S&D Staff F 050320). The ECR and the ENF give no formal consideration to equality in staffing. In the words of one male staffer, this was “not a concern. . . . We just go from the principle that we take the best person. And whether that person is a man or a woman, it’s not relevant to me really.” He described the recruitment rules as “objective,” with professional experience and education taking precedence (ENF Staff Member M 260419). In the 9th Parliament, the appointment of the EPP SG was described as a “mystery” and a “total surprise” by one of our interviewees, who said she had “read about it in the newspaper” and then later the group meeting was “informed that he had been selected” (EPP MEP F 100320). What happened prompted members of the group to raise questions about the [selection](#) process.

The administrative leadership is nested alongside a political leadership structure. A practice is that **SGs** have moved from PG administrative to political leadership posts and vice versa. **SGs** and deputy SGs have also moved from administrative group leadership to the parliamentary administration (ALDE Staff M 050419). A staff member said, “the previous secretary-general, he was more focused in his political career in the future than in the wellbeing of the secretariat . . . we have more trust for [the new secretary general] in terms of how he’s going to, support our work, and value

our work” (S&D Staff, F 060220), while another participant observed that the newly appointed EPP secretary general in the 9th legislature was “an outsider (with political allies actually)” (EPP Staff F 060320). The literature on national party leadership tells us that back office party political experience can confer gendered resources for political actors (Verge and Claveria 2018). The SG and DSG positions then may be important stepping stones to other political and administrative positions in the Parliament. Because more men have historically been SGs and DSGs, this matters for gendered movement at the very top of the EP. Examples include Klaus Welle (EPP-ED SG to EP SG), Javier Moreno Sanchez (S&D MEP to S&D SG to S&D MEP), Bo Manderup Jensen (ELDR SG to the EP president’s cabinet), and Marco Campomenosi (ENF Deputy SG to MEP).

Group secretariats, mirroring the political organs (Bressanelli 2014) are both vertically and horizontally differentiated through departments and sub-units. Each department and subunit is managed. For secretary and deputy SGs who have come through the group career structures, the norm is that they and managers have often served as political advisors to committees (ALDE Staff M 050419). According to one participant, this means that managers may not have had adequate management training: “we have managers that don’t really care about management” (S&D Staff F 060220, see also Renew Staff F 240320). This is important since, as mentioned above, SGs and DSGs are in charge of considerable recruitment and redundancy processes after the European elections.

To summarize the position of women in administrative leadership, the Greens/EFA group and GUE/NGL group have women represented at the very top of their administrative structures. The secretary and deputy SGs are key positions to examine in terms of movement from and into other leadership positions in the Parliament.

## 8.5 Conclusion

Looking at the gender composition of a range of leadership positions in the EP's political groups illustrates how gender continues to matter. Although the share of women MEPs has increased rapidly to reach a gender balance of around 40% in the 9th EP, these numbers are not matched at the level of political group leaders. The leadership of NPDs within groups and the power of the largest national delegation leaders is built on a hidden gender structure and these positions remained heavily dominated by men in all but three groups (Renew, Greens/EFA, and GUE/NGL).

Policy leadership in committees has been more gender balanced. Women were even slightly overrepresented in committee coordinator posts relative to the total number of women in the Parliament. While women's share of committee chairs also increased between the 8th and 9th Parliaments, positional leadership varies numerically and qualitatively for different political groups, with the EPP having an especially low share of female coordinators. In administrative leadership, the position of secretary general continued to be male dominated. Selection procedures vis-à-vis all of these political and administrative leadership positions tended to be clear on paper (for example in political group statutes), with nominally democratic voting within the groups, yet power politics, the influence of trust networks, and the prioritization of seniority were rife, routinely trumping gender concerns.

Political, policy, and administrative leadership are thus organized through gendered norms and practices. Political group leadership is shaped in some groups through norms such as seniority in the EPP. Stepping-stone structures also exist between administrative leadership and the political leadership and the Parliament; therefore, analyzing positional leadership through a gendered lens matters.

It is evident that the political groups fare differently in relation to women's positional leadership. The Greens/EFA and GUE/NGL are most systematically gender equal and show a strong commitment to gender equality in relation to political, policy, and administrative leadership. In the ALDE/Renew and S&D, gender equality and leadership is more negotiated—a commitment to gender equality is not always evident and gaps remain, for the S&D especially in relation to national party delegation leadership. Renew, certainly at the level of committee leadership and coordinators, is very gender equal and it is only the top group leadership positions that are not equally shared between women and men. The EPP, ECR, EFDD, and ENF/ID are at the bottom when it comes to gender-equal leadership, barely reaching the 30% threshold in many cases. (There are exceptions: for example, the ECR has put forward women committee chairs and coordinators and the ID women coordinators.) These are the most gender-conservative groups in the interview data too. This can be expected from the radical-right populist groups on the basis of what we know of their hostile or indifferent stances toward gender equality. The role of the EPP is, however, most decisive for the fate of gender-equal leadership in the [EP](#). As the largest political group, it exerts the most power in leadership selection and the loudest voice in democratic representation and participation. And, as ever, gender-equal representation does not automatically translate into gender-equal leadership. Maintaining focus on the substance of policies as well as broader gendered norms and structures thus remains vital.

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Table 8.1

Political group leaders in the 8th and 9th European legislatures

	<i>8th European legislature</i>	<i>9th European Legislature</i>
<b>EPP</b>	Manfred Weber (M, DE)	Manfred Weber (M, DE) ◀
<b>S&amp;D</b>	Gianni Pitella (M, IT) Udo Bullman (M, DE)	Iratxe Garcia Perez (F, ES) ◀
<b>ECR</b>	Syed Kamall (M, UK) Ryszard Legutko (M, PL) (from 2017)	Raffaele Fitto (M, IT) ◀ Ryszard Legutko (M, PL)
<b>ALDE/ Renew Europe</b>	Guy Verhofstadt (M, BE)	Dacian Ciolios (M, RO) ◀
<b>Greens/EFA</b>	Phillipe Lamberts (M, BE) Ska Keller (F, DE) ▲	Phillipe Lamberts (M, BE) ◀ Ska Keller (F, DE)
<b>GUE/NGL</b>	Gabi Zimmer (F, DE)	Martin Schwirdewan (M, DE) ◀ Manon Aubrey (F, FR)
<b>EFDD</b>	Nigel Farage (M, UK) David Borrelli (M, IT) (until 2017)	N/A ◀
<b>ENF/ID</b>	Nicolas Bay (M, FR) Marine Le Pen (F, FR) (until 2017) ▲	Marco Zanni (M, IT) ◀

	Marcel de Graaff (M, NL)	
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Table 8.2

Leaders of the five largest national party delegations in the 8th and 9th European legislatures

<i>8th European legislature</i>				<i>9th European legislature</i>			
<b>Delegation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Size</b>	<b>Delegation</b>	<b>Group</b>	<b>Leader</b>	<b>Size</b>
<b>PD (IT)</b>	S&D	Patrizia Toia (F)	31	Lega (IT)	ID	Marco Campo (M)	29
<b>CDU (DE)</b>	EPP	Herbert Reul (M)	29	PiD (PL)	ECR	Ryszard Legutko (M)	27
<b>SPD (DE)</b>	S&D	Udo Bullmann (M)	27	Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (or some shorter version) (DE)	Greens/ EFA	Sven Giegold (M)	25
<b>UKIP (UK)</b>	EFDD	Roger Helmer (M)	24	CDU (DE)	EPP	Daniel Caspary (M)	23

<b>FN (FR)</b>	ENF	Édouard Ferrand (M)	23	En Marche (FR)	Renew	Stephane Sejourne (M)	23
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Table 8.3-

Committee chairs by gender and political group-

	8th Legislature	8th Midterm Legislature	9th Legislature
<b>EPP</b>	7 1 F (14%) 6 M (86%)	7 2 F (29%) 5 M (71%)	7 3 F (43%) 4 M (57%)
<b>S&amp;D</b>	7 3 F (43%) 4 M (57%)	7 3 F (43%) 4 M (57%)	5 3 F (60%) 2 M (40%)
<b>ECR</b>	2 2 F (100%)	2 2 F (100%)	2 1 F (50%) 1 M (50%)
<b>ALDE/ Renew</b>	3 2 F (67%) 1 M (33%)	3 2 F (67%) 1 M (33%)	4 2 F (50%) 2 M (50%)

<b>GREENS/E</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>FA</b>	1 M (100%)	1 F (100%)	2 F (100%)
<b>GUE/</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>NGL</b>	1 M (100%)	1 M (100%)	1 M (100%)
<b>EFDD</b>	0	0	0
<b>ENF/ID</b>	0	0	0

Table 8.4

Committee coordinators in the 8th and 9th European legislatures-

	<b>8th legislature</b>	<b>8th legislature</b>	<b>9th legislature</b>	<b>9th legislature</b>
	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>
<b>EPP</b>	4 (19%)	18 (81%)	3 (18%)	14 (82%)
<b>S&amp;D</b>	14 (64%)	8 (36%)	13 (57%)	10 (43%)
<b>ECR</b>	7 (35%)	13 (65%)	6 (29%)	15 (71%)
<b>ALDE/Rene</b>	9 (39%)	14 (61%)	11 (52%)	10 (48%)
<b>w</b>				
<b>Greens/EFA</b>	13 (59%)	9 (41%)	12 (52%)	11 (48%)
<b>GUE/NGL</b>	13 (59%)	9 (41%)	10 (53%)	9 (47%)
<b>EFDD</b>	8 (35%)	15 (65%)	NA	NA

<b>ENF/ID</b>	7 (33%)	14 (67%)	10 (45%)	12 (55%)
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Table 8.5

Secretary generals and their deputies in the 8th and 9th legislatures:

	<i>8th legislature</i>	<i>9th legislature</i>
<b>EPP</b>	<u>SG:</u> Martin Kamp (M, DE)  <u>Deputy:</u> Natacha Scriban-Cuvelier (F, FR) Joanna Jarecka-Gomez (F, PL)	<u>SG:</u> Martin Kamp (M, DE) until March 01 2020  <u>Deputy:</u> Simon Busuttil (M, MT) March 01 2020 Deputy: Juan Salafrañca (M, ES) Natacha Scriban-Cuvelier (F, FR)
<b>S&amp;D</b>	<u>SG:</u> Javier Moreno Sanchez (M, ES)  <u>Deputy:</u> Annabel Garnier (F, FR) Michael Hoppe (M, DE)	<u>SG:</u> Michael Hoppe (M, DE)  <u>Deputy:</u> Annabel Garnier (F, FR) Annalisa Gliubizzi (F, IT) Fraser Clarke (M, UK) Antony Beumer (M, NE)

<p><b>ECR</b></p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Frank Barrett (M, IE)</p> <p>▲</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Gabriel Beszlej (M, PL)</p> <p>Stephen Woodard (M, UK)</p>	<p><u>SG:</u> ▲</p> <p>Gabriel Beszlej (M, PL)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Oumar Doumbouya (M, FI)</p> <p>▲ Stephen Woodard (M, UK)</p>
<p><b>ALDE/ Renew Europe</b></p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Alexander Beels (M, NL)</p> <p>▲</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> François Pauli (M, FR)</p> <p>▲ Marieta Colera (F, IT)</p>	<p><u>SG:</u> ▲</p> <p>Alexander Beels (M, NL)</p> <p>▲ Anders Rasmussen (M) DK from Jan 2020</p> <p>▲</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> François Pauli (M, FR)</p> <p>▲ Marieta Colera (F, IT) (until 2019)</p> <p>▲ Philip Drauz (M, DE)</p>
<p><b>Greens/ EFA</b></p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Vula Tsetsi (F, EL)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> José-Luis Linazasoro (M, ES)</p> <p>▲ Jan-Paul Brouwer (M, NL)</p>	<p><u>SG:</u> ▲</p> <p>Vula Tsetsi (F, EL)</p> <p>▲</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> José-Luis Linazasoro (M, ES)</p> <p>▲ Jan-Paul Brouwer (M, NL)</p>

<p><b>GUE/NGL</b></p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Sanna Lepola (F, FI)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Francisco Orozco Dopico (M, ES) Soulтана Pantazidou (F, EL) Mireia Rovira (F, ES)</p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Sanna Lepola (F, FI)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Francisco Orozco Dopico (M, ES) Stelios Christodoulou (M, CY) Panayota Maniou (F, EL)</p>
<p><b>EFDD</b></p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Aurélie Laloux (F, FR)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Tobias Teuscher (M, DE) Dovile Rucyte (F, LI)</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p><b>ENF/ID</b></p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Philip Claeys (M, BE)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Dietmar Holzfeind (M, AT) Marco Campomenosi (M, IT)</p>	<p><u>SG:</u> Philip Claeys (M, BE)</p> <p><u>Deputy:</u> Sergio Garuzzo (M, IT) Tobias Teuscher (M, DE) Dietmar Holzfeind (M, AT) Thibaut Francois (M, FR)</p>