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The role of political parties (at national and European level) in the European elections and their capacity of mobilizing electors

**Gender, Voter Participation and Parties in
European Parliamentary elections**

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Introduction

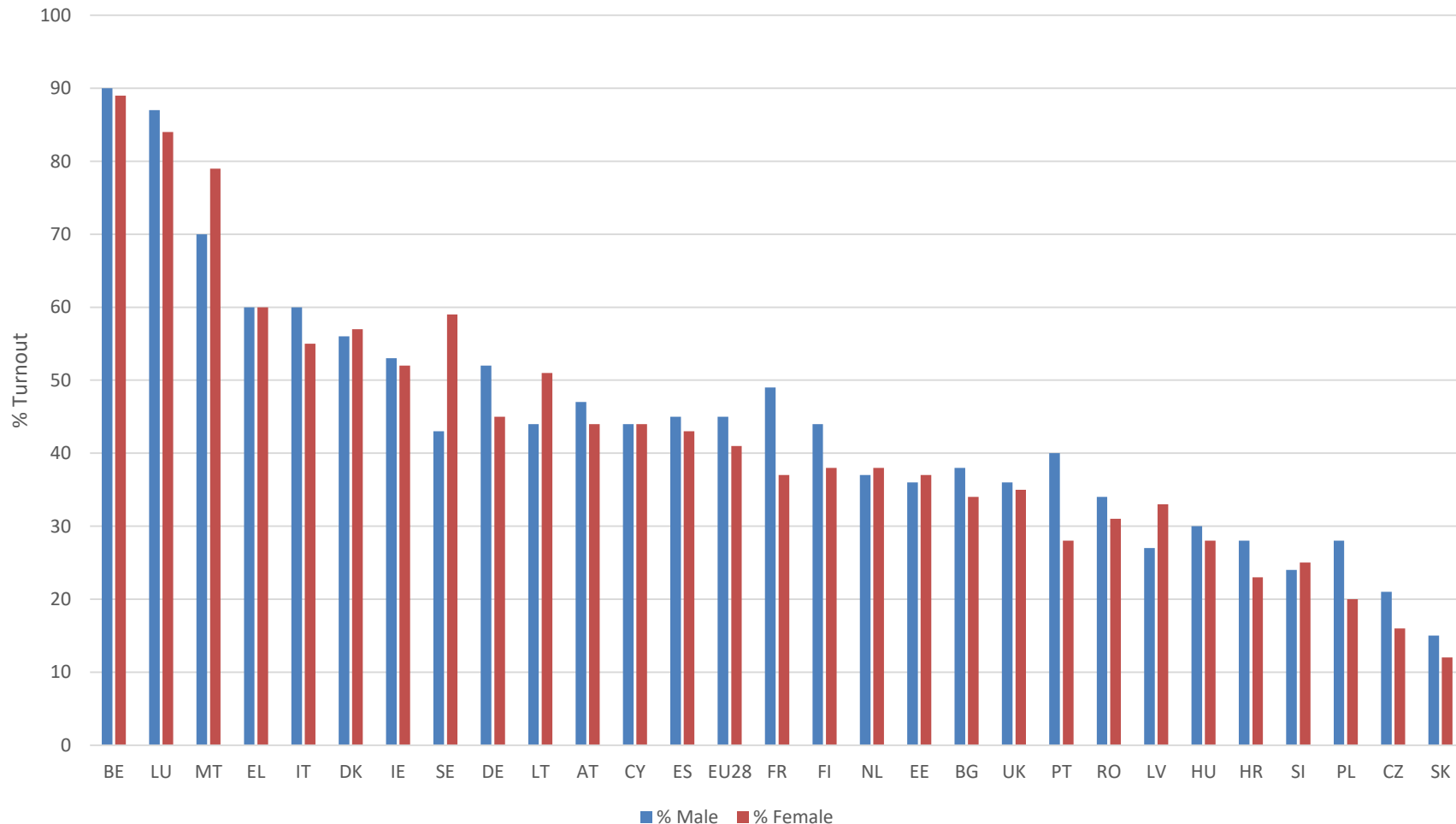
- A large body of scholarship shows that the ways in which ordinary citizens connect to the democratic process is gendered (Caul-Kittilson, 2016).
- Gender still has an effect on turnout trends in European parliamentary elections.
 - Reasons for this gap?
 - What is the role of political parties (at national and European level) in the mobilisation of women electors?

The “Gender Gap” in turnout

- Unfortunately, gender disaggregated statistics as officially reported by electoral authorities is not available in most countries; most studies utilize large-scale survey datasets to ascertain whether there are gender differences in voter turnout, e.g. World Values Survey, European Election Study.
- Across the EU28, participation in national elections is mostly gender-equal (IDEA, 2016).



Voter turnout 2014 EP



Explaining gendered turnout

- The literature has identified two significant factors: women are less interested in (formal) politics and there is a persistent gender gap in political knowledge that negatively affects female voter participation (Kostelka et al, 2018). These differences are amplified by the nature of second order elections (e.g. European elections, local elections, referendums).
- In addition, there are some gender differences in voluntary and circumstantial abstention. Women were somewhat less likely to abstain on a voluntary basis than men and are somewhat more likely to cite circumstantial reasons which they were more likely to attribute to personal and family-related matters than were men.

The role of political parties in mobilizing women voters

- Individual, resource-based explanations for gender gaps in voter participation largely place the burden of change mainly on women themselves.
- A contextual approach to gendered voting behaviour is more instructive, recognising that political institutions including parties and political assemblies may privilege some demographic and social groups over others, usually those outside of the male norm (Caul-Kittilson, 2016).
- Modern means of communication and social networks, such as targeted posts and information campaigns on social media, provides a new way for parties to reach out to women voters and to prospective women voters. But campaign teams should be mindful of any inequalities in access to technology.

Women's issues?

- Parties can mobilize different groups of women voters around particular issues pertinent to EU politics.
- 2014/2019 surveys show some minor gender differences in priorities for women and men voters.
- But women, like men, are not a monolithic bloc with shared interests and it is important that parties reach out to women voters in an intersectional way, particularly to groups whose interests are under-represented in conventional political discourse, e.g. ethnic minority women, women with disabilities.

Presence of women candidates and MEPs

- Highly visible offices are covered more often in the news media and signify power, e.g. women president/prime minister, presidential candidates, cabinet ministers etc.
- 20% of those surveyed for a Special Eurobarometer on Democracy and Elections in 2018 stated that having more female candidates on the ballot would make them more inclined to vote in May 2019 (31% said having younger candidates).
- However, in EP elections, the gender gap in voting is unlikely to be caused by male-dominated institutions.

Thank you

- Questions?



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