Politics and Governance
2026 • Volume 14 • Article 12378
https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.12378

cogitatio

ARTICLE

Open Access Journal

Young Faces, Youth Voices? Representation by Young Politicians in the French, Italian, Polish, and European Parliaments

Elodie Thevenin [1], Magdalena Góra [1], Katarzyna Zielińska [2], and Małgorzata Maria Fijał [1]

[1] Institute of European Studies, Jagiellonian University, Poland
[2] Institute of Sociology, Jagiellonian University, Poland

Correspondence: Elodie Thevenin (elodie.thevenin@uj.edu.pl)

Submitted: 13 March 2026 **Accepted:** 23 September 2026 **Published:** 12 November 2026

Issue: This article is part of the issue "The Representative Disconnect in Contemporary European Democracies" edited by Eline Severs (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) and John Erik Fossum (University of Oslo), fully open access at https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.i492

Abstract

While scholarly attention to the descriptive representation of young people in legislative bodies has increased, considerably less is known about the behaviours of young representatives in parliaments and the extent to which they engage with issues relevant to other young people. Against this background, we focus on the discursive practices of young elected politicians in parliaments and explore how they represent youth in their speeches. Beyond mere descriptive representation, this article analyses the substantive representation of young people by young political actors in parliamentary fora. To explore the complex dynamics of youth representation in parliaments, we employed a conceptual framework based on a representative claims analysis of young members of parliaments supplemented by semi-structured interviews with them. This article is based on data from the French, Italian, Polish, and European parliaments. It demonstrates that structural factors, especially party competition, hinder the ways in which young parliamentarians represent fellow young people. In addition, in contrast to other permanent features such as gender, (young) age is only partially relevant to structuring the representation choices of members of parliament.

Keywords

democracy; European Union; parliaments; representation; youth

© 2026 by the author(s), licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY).

1. Introduction

There are not many young people in parliaments; even if they constitute a significant portion of national populations, only 2.6% of members of parliament (MPs) worldwide are aged under 30 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2021). While what we know about the descriptive representation of young people in legislative bodies is growing (Stockemer & Sundström, 2022, p. 4, 2025), we know far less about what young representatives do in parliaments as well as whether and how they relate to the issues relevant to other young people (Diener, 2025).

In political debates, young people are seen as key to reviving democracy by increasing trust in political institutions (Kolodziejczyk et al., 2025). They also prefer to be represented by other young people in these institutions (Kurz et al., 2025). However, a simple increase in the number of young representatives does not necessarily lead to substantial improvements in the issues relevant to young people and in the adoption of solutions to their key problems (Rosenthal, 2019; Wright et al., 2025). Furthermore, many people enter politics at a young age, not necessarily to represent other young people but to start a political career (McDonnell et al., 2025). Identification with a political party and its ideological stances structures young parliamentarians' behaviour, as party organisations embed young politicians within institutional structures that reward ideological consistency and prioritise strategic party competition (Kurz et al., 2025).

This article builds on studies of descriptive and substantive representation, drawing on Anne Phillips's notion of "politics of presence" (Phillips, 1995) and Hanna Pitkin's seminal work on representation (Pitkin, 1967). We focus specifically on representation in parliaments and on the actual practices of elected young politicians in parliaments, which remain remarkably understudied. Based on a comparative study of several parliaments, we explore how young parliamentarians represent young people in parliamentary speeches. The plenary speeches of the young members (up to 35 years old) of the French, Polish, Italian, and European parliaments from a comparable time period serve as our empirical material, which we analyse using qualitative content analysis. This is supplemented by 16 semi-structured interviews with young parliamentarians in these chambers.

The article proceeds as follows. We begin with theoretical reflections on representation and youth, before outlining our methodology and the characteristics of the empirical material. We then analyse the descriptive representation of youth, mapping young elected representatives in France, Italy, Poland, and the European Parliament (EP). This is followed by an examination of how young parliamentarians substantively represent youth interests, reflecting on parties and gender as influencing factors. The article concludes with a discussion of the key findings and their broader implications.

2. Representation and Youth: Theoretical Reflections

In the context of modern democracies, representation implies that elected bodies and their members act on behalf of the people or particular social groups. The representative's role entails acting in the interest of those represented, voicing the group's interests in decision-making, and linking the people/group to political authority. Pitkin's work (1967) conceptualises representation as a multidimensional concept, with the descriptive and substantive dimensions garnering the most scholarly attention. The distinction between the descriptive and substantive dimensions of representation is also most relevant to this study. The former

representation builds on the assumption that the representatives resemble those whom they represent in terms of social or demographic traits. This dimension of representation is usually explored in research on diversity in legislatures, especially on women and minorities (Agerberg, 2024; Wängnerud, 2009). The latter, substantive representation, defined by Pitkin as "acting for" the interests of the represented in a responsive way, is more problematic to operationalise and study (Pitkin, 1967).

The existing scholarship reveals both the growing popularity of the concept of representation, especially in studies on underrepresented groups, i.e., women, ethnic minorities, or migrants, and the challenges related to conceptualising and measuring the substantive aspect (Celis, 2009; Celis & Childs, 2012; Siow, 2023). Studies problematise the link between descriptive representatives and acting on behalf of a group, stressing that it is not only descriptive representatives who may perform representation, but their allies can also do so (Celis & Erzeel, 2015). In this study, we apply the concept of representative claims, which shifts the focus from the question of "who represents whom" to how political actors construct and justify their claims of representation (Saward, 2010). Drawing on Saward's (2006) representative claims framework, we understand representation not as a static condition but as a dynamic process constructed through performative claims-making. Representative claims function as the fundamental building blocks of political representation, wherein claimants actively assert their legitimacy as the rightful representatives of specific constituencies or causes when addressing particular audiences. In addition, scholars have discussed how a broader claim-making approach could help us understand the dynamic nature of substantive representation (Vermassen et al., 2023). Eline Severs clarifies:

> The definition of representative claims as "claims to speak for the represented or to know what is in their interests" currently fails to specify any substantive activity on the part of the representative such as the formulation and promotion of interests on behalf of the represented. (Severs, 2012, p. 179)

Another issue key to our study relates to the conceptualisation of interests in the representation relationship. Various groups, such as women or young people, by no means constitute homogeneous groups. Generational factors, as well as intersections of, among others, age, social class, and religion, complicate the conceptualisation and operationalisation of each group's interests, specifically the difficulty of a priori defining what constitutes the interest of a social group. Furthermore, one of the key differentiating features of young people is that they constitute a group whose identity can be defined as a transient state, i.e., young people get older; hence, their interests are changing.

This transient nature of age also applies to young representatives, who mature during their tenure in legislative bodies, and hence their representative relationship with youth is temporally limited (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2024; Kurz et al., 2025). Following findings from Julius Diener's research, we assume that young people's underprivileged position and underrepresentation in legislative bodies motivate young legislators to act on behalf of them, thereby engaging in their substantive representation (Diener, 2025). In addition, following research on structural factors affecting youth representation (Stockemer & Sundström, 2025), we expect that practices in parliaments, driven by party competition, party socialisation, and career orientation (Kurz & Ettensperger, 2024; Mai & Wenzelburger, 2024), impact the way young parliamentarians build their representation relations. Several studies have investigated the underrepresentation of young people in legislatures using a supply-and-demand framework. They indicate a lower willingness of young people to run in elections, political parties' reluctance to insert young candidates in electoral competition, or

structural obstacles, such as age limits in elections, as barriers to their election (Stockemer & Sundström, 2025). However, less attention has been paid to how young legislators enact their roles once elected to representative bodies. Our study partially fills this gap. We examine how young parliamentarians fulfil their role as youth representatives and explore the factors that shape the enactment of this role.

Finally, parliaments are highly gendered institutions that impact not only the presence of women and men in parliament, but also their activities and representation (Erikson & Verge, 2022). Gender intersects with other categories (Acker, 2006), including age. Such intersections further shape the positioning, activities, and ways of enacting their role as representatives. Although research on this topic remains underdeveloped, results suggest that young female representatives tend to be exposed to a reinforced bias of age and gender (Erikson & Josefsson, 2022; Joshi & Och, 2021). Based on this research, we also anticipate that gender will differentiate the way young representatives act.

The aforementioned theoretical framework allows us to examine how young MPs construct themselves as legitimate spokespersons for youth interests through their parliamentary activities and discourse. Rather than assuming that representation follows automatically from election, this constructivist perspective highlights how representation is continually negotiated and contested through discursive practices (Castiglione, 2024; Saward, 2006). By analysing the claims made by young parliamentarians—how, if at all, they invoke, define, and speak for "youth" as a constituency—we can better understand the substantive dimensions of youth representation. Adding the data from the interviews with young parliamentarians also provides more context and allows us to assess their opinions on the representative functions as well. As representatives also actively co-construct the very category of the represented (Castiglione, 2024), a focus on representative claims helps to reveal how the category of young people is constructed in parliamentary discourse. This is particularly important, as "young people" or "youth" does not constitute a natural or self-evident social group, but rather a political and discursive category that is continuously redefined.

3. Methods

Our study analyses how young members of the French, Italian, Polish, and European parliaments represent young people in parliamentary debates, allowing for a better understanding of how factors such as party politics affect the exercise of substantive representation of youth by young legislators. The recent parliamentary elections in France, Italy, and Poland reveal opposite trends in youth electoral participation, providing a particularly instructive contrast: Both the 2024 snap election in France and Poland's 2023 election recorded high overall turnout and a strong youth mobilisation. This contrasts with Italy's 2022 election and its low youth participation, similar to the 2024 EP elections. In all cases, party systems underwent significant shifts, allowing more radical parties to enter parliaments and achieve prominent positions.

This study is based on the analysis of all speeches made by French, Italian, and Polish MPs up to 35 years old (as of 31 March 2025, i.e., born on or after 1 April 1989) during plenary sessions in the lower chambers of national parliaments—the French National Assembly, the Italian Chamber of Deputies, and the Polish Sejm—as well as speeches from all members of the EP (MEPs) up to 35 years old. These data, described in detail below, were supplemented with semi-structured interviews with young M(E)Ps in the selected parliaments. The key focus of the interviews was to understand the representative disconnect and was part of a broader research framework (see Severs et al., 2025). Altogether, 16 interviews were analysed for this

article. However, the age span of M(E)Ps was broadened compared to the claims analysis to also include M(E)Ps up to 40 years old in order to increase the sample and in line with recent scholarly discussions on the age indicator for young parliamentarians (Stockemer & Sundström, 2025). The interviews were conducted online in 2025 (February–December) in the parliamentarians' native languages or in English (Severs et al., 2025) and overlapped with the legislative period selected for the claims analysis. The composition of the interviewee sample, including descriptive characteristics, is provided in Annex 1 in the Supplementary File. Both datasets provide complementary perspectives, allowing us to identify claim-making patterns and complement them with insights from the interviews.

For the claims analysis, we selected speeches delivered between 8 July 2024 and 31 March 2025 from each analysed parliament. Examining the same chronological period across all selected parliaments allowed us to conduct meaningful cross-national comparisons that control for temporal factors and events that might influence parliamentary discourse and priorities (e.g., no election during the timeframe). A total of 8,133 speeches were analysed: 6,383 from the French parliament, 110 from the Italian parliament, 584 from the Polish parliament, and 1,056 from the EP. Table 1 provides an overview of the empirical material analysed from the three parliaments.

Table 1. Number of young legislators in each parliament and overview of analysed data.

Parliament	France	Italy	Poland	EP	Total
Number of M(E)Ps up to 35 and number of all M(E)Ps	83 (577)	11 (400)	30 (460)	71 (720)	195 (2,157)
Number of speakers (i.e., M(E)Ps under 35 taking the floor during analysed timeframe)	80	9	25	70	184
Number of analysed speeches	6,383*	110	584	1,056	8,133
Number of conducted interviews with M(E)Ps	6	2	5	3	16

Note: * In France, the speeches collected from the selected MPs included all interruptions during debates (i.e., unscheduled, sometimes minor, interventions); this resulted in a dataset of more than 11,000 speeches, which was further restricted to those containing more than five words; this allowed us to reduce the size of the dataset to 6,383 while retaining sufficient content for our research purposes.

When collecting speeches, we used variables to inform our data, notably the M(E)P's gender, age, incumbency, and nationality. We also described each speaker using variables reflecting their party affiliation (see Annex 2 in the Supplementary File for all analysed cases) and the party's ideological orientation, based on the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Rovny et al., 2025).

The codebook aimed to capture claims made by young parliamentarians—how, if at all, they invoke and define "youth" and speak for the "youth." We adapted the representative claims approach inspired by several scholars (de Wilde et al., 2019; Gora & de Wilde, 2019; Koopmans & Statham, 1999) and focused on the addressee, the issue raised, the object the M(E)P seeks to represent, and the justifications provided (see detailed codebook in Annex 3 in the Supplementary File). To capture the core issues related to youth interests, we used a code listing the main themes identified in the *Youth survey* (Eurobarometer, 2024). A similar analytical scheme was used to process the interviews; we focused there on M(E)Ps' understanding of representation, notably in relation to young people, as well as their perception of their own youth in a parliamentary context.

The interviews are treated here as complementary material only due to the limited number of interviews conducted. Furthermore, although members of all political parties were contacted, invitations to members of far-right parties did not receive a response, resulting in possible underrepresentation of perspectives from this part of the political spectrum.

4. Descriptive Representation of Young M(E)Ps in the French, Italian, Polish, and European Parliaments

Across the four studied parliaments, young people remain significantly underrepresented due to institutional barriers and established political practices, despite some variation in their gender, party affiliation, and parliamentary activity.

In France, following the 2024 elections, 83 young MPs (up to 35 years old) entered parliament out of 577. The average age was 49 years and seven months (slightly higher than during the 2022 elections), with 25 MPs under the age of 30 ("Elections législatives 2024," 2024). Eighty of them took the floor during the analysed timeframe—two of the others resigned shortly after the elections, while one did not speak. Among those elected young MPs, 76.25% are male, and the vast majority are incumbent (almost 60%). As shown in Figure 1, the political party affiliation of young MPs reveals a striking feature of current French politics, i.e., polarisation between two extremes. Indeed, most of the young French MPs were elected from either the far-right Rassemblement national (RN; 29) or the left-wing La France insoumise (LFI; 21). Macron's party Renaissance (RE) had only 12 young MPs, and traditional parties on either side of the political spectrum (e.g., Parti socialiste [PS], Les Républicains [LR], Mouvement démocrate [MoDem]) also saw only a few young MPs elected. This is in line with youth voters' orientation, as explained above, as young French people tend to go for extremes. As shown in Figure 1, LFI's speech frequency was prevalent compared to other parties; this is mostly explained by the fact that a few MPs spoke a lot during debates, and notably interrupted other MPs' speeches on numerous occasions (see also Algan et al., 2025).

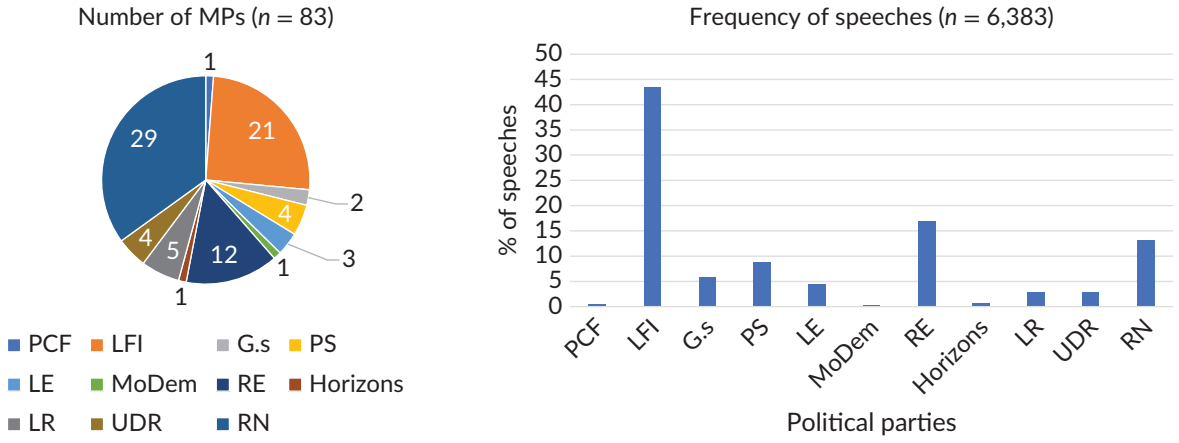


Figure 1. Number of young MPs and frequency of speeches in the French parliament by political parties. Notes: PCF = Parti communiste français; G.s = Génération.s; LE = Les Écologistes; UDR = Union des droites pour la République.

In Italy, the minimum age for candidacy to the 400-member Chamber of Deputies is 25, effectively excluding the youngest adults from standing for election. After the 2022 elections, the presence of young legislators

remained marginal: 11 deputies were under 35 (2.75%). The low presence can be linked to institutional reforms introduced in 2020 that reduced the size of the Italian parliament and increased competition for positions on party lists, limiting opportunities for new or younger candidates to enter parliament (Boldrini, 2026; Zucchini & Verzichelli, 2026).

The near-balanced gender representation among young MPs (women constitute 54.5% of the small group of 11) stands in stark contrast to the overall gender imbalance in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, where women make up around one third of all deputies. More than half of the young MPs had already held a parliamentary seat and were re-elected. Nine of the young Italian MPs took the floor during plenary debates, with a strong level of parliamentary engagement among young female representatives. The most active MPs were from Partito Democratico (PD), significantly outnumbering those from other groupings (see Figure 2).

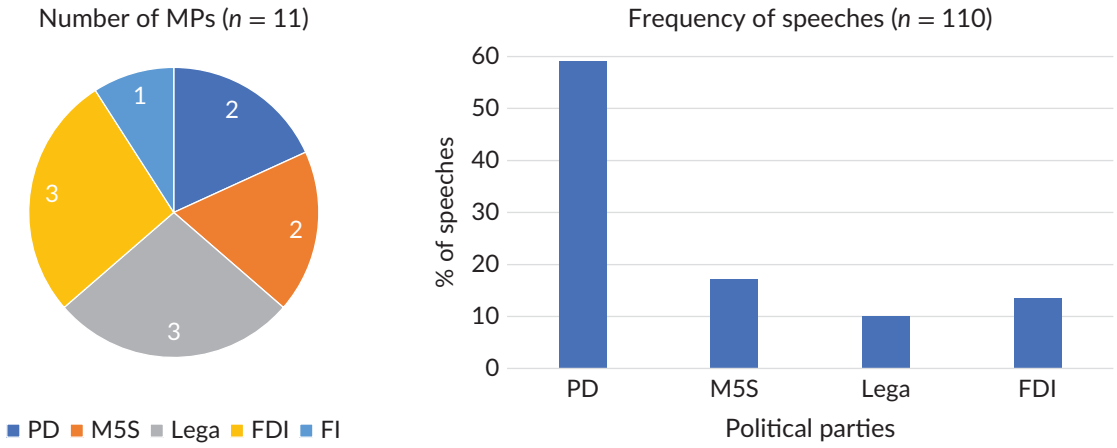


Figure 2. Number of young MPs and frequency of speeches in the Italian parliament by political party.

In terms of party affiliation, young Italian MPs were predominantly associated with right-wing formations: three from Lega, three from Fratelli d'Italia (FDI), and one from Forza Italia (FI). The remaining representatives were affiliated with the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S; two MPs) and the PD (two MPs; see Figure 2).

In Poland, young adults also remain underrepresented. The Sejm comprises 460 members, of whom 30 (6.5%) were under 35 years of age as of 31 March 2025, including two members below 30. These figures confirm that young citizens continue to occupy a minority in parliament. In terms of gender, young MPs are predominantly male: 73.3% compared to 26.6% female young MPs. There is a very high proportion of first-time MPs in this young cohort, as 46.6% are newly elected. This differs from the other analysed cases, but the small size of the Italian sample calls for caution in drawing conclusions. In terms of political party affiliation (see Figure 3), the majority of young Polish MPs were from the national-conservative party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS; 46.6%), followed by the centrist alliance Koalicja Obywatelska (KO; 33.3%)—showing the long-standing duality between the two parties. Despite relatively high support among young citizens for the radical right in the elections (17.8% of voters aged 18–29), only two MPs represented Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość (KWiN). A similar case can be noticed with the left-wing Nowa Lewica (NL), fourth in the vote of young cohorts, and represented by three young MPs. Out of the 30 young MPs, only 25 of them actually took the floor during plenary sessions. Looking at the share of speeches delivered by those 25 MPs (see Figure 3), we see a predominance of the PiS party (48.8% of speeches). Despite the small number of MPs from KWiN, they ranked

second in the frequency of speeches (17.8%), followed by 17.1% for KO with nine young MPs. This illustrates the predominance of conservative and nationalist voices among young people in the Polish parliament, even at a time when those parties have been in opposition.

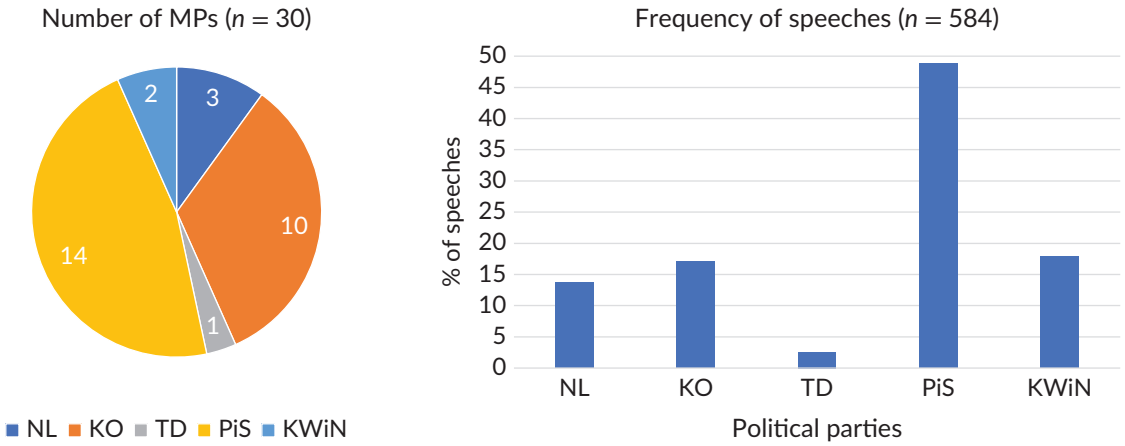


Figure 3. Number of young MPs and frequency of speeches in the Polish parliament by political parties. Note: TD = Trzecia Droga.

Following the 2024 EP elections, 71 MEPs aged 35 or younger entered the parliament out of 720 seats. These young MEPs represent all EP parliamentary groups and come from 22 EU member states. Five national delegations lack young representation: Belgium, Latvia, Finland, Ireland, and Romania. Several countries, including Bulgaria, Croatia, and Cyprus, have just one MEP under 35. The 2024 EP maintains the same age profile as the 2019 term, with an average MEP age of 50. Research conducted by the European Youth Forum reveals a systematic barrier to youth participation: Candidates under 35 are typically relegated to lower positions on electoral lists, where their chances of election fall below 50%, while older candidates keep the most winnable spots (Maraffa, 2024). This structural disadvantage contributes to a significant representation gap: Despite young people making up more than a quarter of Europe's population, they occupy less than 10% of seats in the EP.

Among the 71 young MEPs, 70 of them actively participated in plenary debates during the analysed timeframe. One French far-right politician indeed did not fulfil his EP mandate, as he was subsequently elected to the French parliament following the snap elections. Furthermore, the majority of those young MEPs were women (57.75% compared to 42.25% of men)—the reverse of the overall picture of the EP (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2025). In terms of incumbency, 25.35% of the young MEPs were elected to the EP for the first time in 2024. As shown in Figure 4, out of the 71 speakers, 17% of them come from the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) group, followed by the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA; 15.5%) and the European People's Party (EPP; 14.1%). In terms of left–right division, we see an almost even number of young MEPs from left-wing parties (The Left, S&D, and Greens/EFA—29 MEPs) and from right-wing/far-right parties (EPP, European Conservatives and Reformists [ECR], Patriots for Europe [PfE], and Europe of Sovereign Nations [ESN]—30 MEPs).

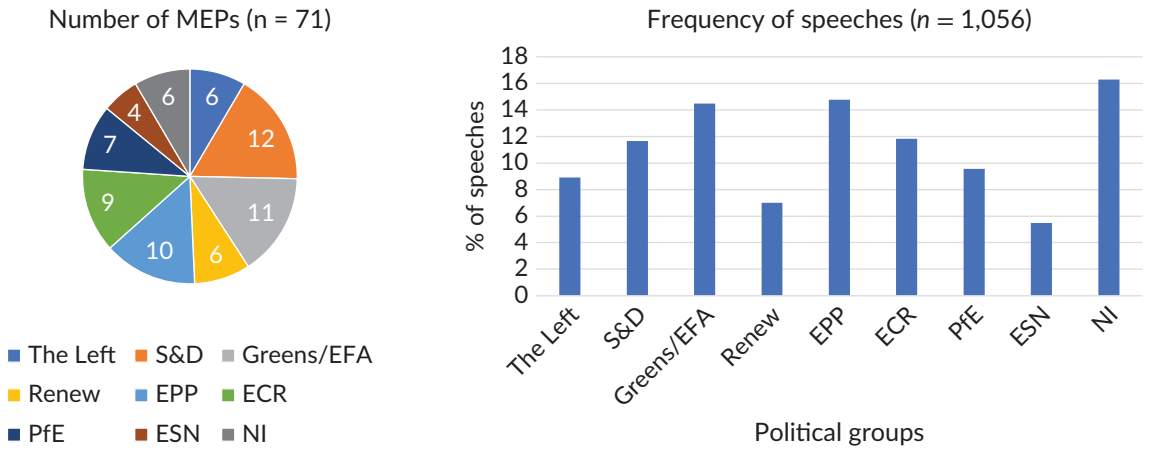


Figure 4. Number of young MEPs and frequency of speeches in the EP by political groups. Note: NI = Non-inscrits.

Analysis of the young M(E)Ps' characteristics shows several interesting patterns. Firstly, relatively few young parliamentarians were re-elected. Incumbency was highest in the EP, with over 70% of all young MEPs elected previously. In three national parliaments, approximately half of the group was elected for the first time. Secondly, the young cohorts in Italy and the EP included a higher number of female parliamentarians than in the other parliaments. In France and Poland, this age cohort was dominated by male politicians. In addition, all far-right MPs in both countries were male. When it comes to party affiliation, there is no clear overarching pattern across cases, as young M(E)Ps were distributed across all key parties in each parliament. Their activities, however, measured by the frequency of speeches, demonstrate that in the French and EP contexts, the members of radical parties (LFI and NI, respectively) were very active, while in the Italian and Polish contexts, the most active speakers came from key opposition parties (in Italy's case, two MPs from PD spoke the most—almost 60% of all speeches, but the small sample of Italian MPs prevents us from drawing significant conclusions from this fact).

5. Young M(E)Ps and the Substantive Representation of Youth

In the analysis of speeches by young representatives from the parliaments studied, as well as in the interviews, we sought to determine whether and how young MPs define themselves as representatives of youth. Analysing both explicit and implicit ways of practising representation sheds more light on what aspects play a significant role in M(E)Ps' discursive constructions of representation.

In the French National Assembly, MPs who sought to speak on behalf of young people rarely did so by explicitly identifying themselves as members of that group. Instead, youth interests were generally articulated from a representative position, with only occasional references to the MP's own age: e.g., "as the young MP that I am" (Charles Alloncle, UDR, 2024-11-08). More commonly, however, MPs referred to youth indirectly through their own past experiences, particularly as former students, or framed their interventions around young people's interests and MPs' responsibility towards future generations. For instance, Bruno Clavet argued that political engagement aims not only to improve citizens' daily lives but also "to prepare the future for coming generations" (RN, 2025-01-23).

Similarly, young Italian MPs almost never explicitly identify themselves as "young" or as representatives of the younger generation in an identity-based manner. Across the entire dataset, only one clear case of generational self-definition was identified. Grazia Di Maggio stated: "Allow me to begin…with thousands of young people, like those of my generation—today's 30-year-olds" (FDI, 2025-03-11). Some other MPs, such as Marco Sarracino, also referred to their own generational experience, for example: "the years of my adolescence in that neighbourhood" (PD, 2024-07-23). Similarly, in the interviews, Italian MPs did not identify as representatives of young people, emphasising their territorial constituency as a key reference for representation (IT01; IT02). However, they did refer to young voters and activists as important groups that they cooperated with and engaged with in their everyday work in parliament.

In Polish debates, MPs also rarely defined themselves as representative of young people, but they occasionally referred to generational belonging. The interviews shed additional light on their explicit positioning as representatives of youth, stressing the difficulties of young and newly elected MPs in adapting to the workings of parliament and the need for specialisation that is not necessarily linked to youth but often to specific issues or groups (PL01).

In the EP, only 2.5% of the analysed speeches contained explicit or implicit instances in which MEPs defined themselves as representing the young. In those instances, MEPs capitalise on their youth to discuss policies. For instance, the second youngest MEP, Sabrina Repp (S&D, DE), asked the audience at the beginning of her speech to imagine "a young student from a small town in a rural region" who is able to explore Europe thanks to educational programmes (e.g., Erasmus):

> And who knows, perhaps one day she will be standing here before you in the European Parliament, one of the youngest members of parliament, working to ensure that even more young people want to discover Europe. (2025-03-13)

In this instance, the speaker clearly and explicitly defined herself as young and used her own experience to develop her political views regarding EU education in schools. Some topics triggered more links between the MEPs' own youth and identification with the object of the policy. This was the case of the use of new technologies and social media: "we young people who use social media" (Lena Schilling, Greens/EFA, AT, 2024-10-24). In this example, the youngest MEP built on her own experience of growing up with technology and social media to demand further regulation by the EU. As shown, these explicit references to MEPs' youth often came from the youngest MEPs, who brought young people's questions onto the plenary floor, often associating themselves with those on whose behalf they sought to speak. Other instances of explicit representation of youth were also present in some speeches, referring to specific issues that impact young people. This occurred, for instance, during a debate on housing: "My generation does not want to and cannot wait until demographics create the housing we urgently need now" (Niels Geuking, EPP, DE, 2024-10-09). Similarly, when debating the EU's demographic challenge, Nikos Pappas (The Left, EL) began his speech as follows: "Mr President, allow me to speak to you not as a politician but as a young person" (2025-01-22). Other references referred to climate change and climate justice, mental health, or education—as we discuss in the following section, issue-related representation was more frequent than direct M(E)Ps' identification with youth.

Most often, the representative claims took the form of identifying with the generation of young adults or through thematic identification with issues such as education, the labour market, or health. The implicit representation of youth was much more common in all analysed contexts when MPs did not call themselves representatives of this group but discussed its problems from the position of an observer or legislator. In this sense, youth was more of an object of political concern than a direct subject of representation.

Topic-wise, social protection as well as education were the policies predominantly discussed in France. These included matters of protecting young people against violence, mental health, and homelessness of children—topics that are particularly relevant to today's French politics. Indeed, after the #MeToo movement, several controversies occurred in France regarding institutionalised violence against children and young people (Dauphin, 2023; Lacroix et al., 2023).

Young Italian MPs focused primarily on education and training, as well as social protection, healthcare, and welfare systems, indicating that young politicians consider these areas crucial to ensuring that young people have stable conditions for entering adult life. Economic topics, such as employment and the general economic situation, were mentioned less frequently, as were issues related to rising prices and the cost of living, while environmental and climate change concerns were not raised at all. Young people thus appeared primarily as objects of public policy, beneficiaries of reforms, recipients of systemic interventions, or groups requiring institutional support.

The analysis of the statements made by Polish MPs reveals a relatively consistent range of topics, although their hierarchy and the way in which they are problematised vary. The most frequently raised issues are the material living conditions of young people (cost of living, economic stability, access to care), which indicates that young MPs treat young people primarily as a structurally vulnerable group, rather than solely as cultural or political actors. Across the entire body of research material for this analysis, the issues of social security and access to care appear most frequently (a clear majority of statements), with cost of living and the economic situation the second most numerous category; climate and the environment appear less frequently, and education appears marginally as an autonomous topic.

In the EP, similarly to the three national examples, most references to young people were made through discussing policies that impact young people, notably issues with EU and international consequences. In that regard, climate change and environmental protection ranked first, followed by social protection and rising costs of living. Climate change was clearly a topic that young MEPs often brought up on the EP plenary floor, criticising the inaction of European leaders on this topic. Interestingly, all EP groups mentioned the issue of climate change, albeit with contrasting views on the EU's involvement: While some EP groups (e.g., Greens/EFA, Renew, S&D) proposed further rules at the EU level regarding environmental protection, others preferred a national response to such issues and fiercely criticised the EU. This was the case, for instance, of ECR when discussing biodiversity protection. The known political conflict about the EU's competencies (Thevenin & Umit, 2026) therefore also remains noticeable in young MEPs' claims.

6. Prevailing Partisan Identity and Interests

As assumed in the theoretical section, partisan affiliation and, as a result, strategic behaviour driven by parties' interests significantly impact M(E)Ps' claims toward youth. A key dynamic results from strategic parties' competition between those in government and in opposition.

In France, the two extreme ends of the spectrum (LFI and RN), which also spoke the most frequently compared to other parties, were those that talked most on behalf of young people. Political dynamics in France shaped young MPs' speeches through a form of double opposition. On the one hand, many young parliamentarians from opposition parties positioned themselves against President Macron's governing party by criticising its policies that affected young people:

> You [member of governing party] did not hesitate to boast about appointing the youngest prime minister of the Fifth Republic, Gabriel Attal, while being resolutely an anti-youth party….Students will, in any case, see that the National Rally stands on their side. (Bruno Clavet, RN, 2025-01-23)

On the other hand, they simultaneously engaged in conflictual opposition against competing political forces, particularly the left vs. the far right. For instance, Raphaël Arnault (LFI) attacked both the government and the far right, arguing:

> We are nevertheless living through a particular moment. The National Rally and the far right are going so far in their attacks on the most vulnerable and on young people that even the Macronists can no longer keep up with them! (2024-11-31)

The left side of the spectrum was keener to denounce generational asymmetries. For instance, during a debate on pensions, Arnault remarked that "older people explain to us what young people think: Nothing makes sense any more in this debate!" (LFI, 2024-11-28). These examples illustrate how young MPs framed themselves not only in opposition to the government but also in competition with rival political actors seeking to claim representation of youth interests.

Parliamentary position in governing coalition or in opposition strongly shaped the form of representative claims in Italy. Coalition MPs (e.g., FDI) presented young people as beneficiaries of reforms, emphasising effectiveness, stability, and value transmission. For instance, Grazia Di Maggio stated: "Young people are not vessels to be filled, they are torches to be lit…we aim to train today's youth, the citizens of tomorrow, and thus the future of our nation" (FDI, 2024-09-16). Here, young people were constructed as a moral and civic resource whose development legitimises government action. The recurrence of these references across different policy areas suggests a consistent discursive pattern in which they are positioned as a key justificatory category for policy interventions and as a symbolic foundation for broader social and moral objectives. Such an observation is confirmed in interviews, where young people are identified as a relevant element in improving the representation system and as a group that needs to be better linked to and involved in politics, also through issues relevant to them and through emotional engagement. One MP stated: "Therefore, politics must be able to give these young people a long-term vision, based precisely on ideals" (IT01). Among opposition MPs, particularly from PD and M5S, youth representation has been constructed through criticism of government neglect or structural inequalities.

Similarly, the strategic party competition also visibly impacted Polish MPs' framing of youth representation. MPs from the governing coalition (liberal-leftist at the time) frequently made claims about agency and the ability to effect change. They addressed the country's youth, demonstrating the government's solutions aimed at young citizens. For instance, Aleksandra Gajewska said: "This government is developing social policy not from the perspective of the party headquarters but from the perspective of a young mother from

the Tatra county, a father from Błędów, or a single parent from Mińsk Mazowiecki" (KO, 2025-04-03). In this logic, representativeness has been built through referring to effectiveness and legitimised the current authority. At the same time, a narrative framework typical of the ruling coalition was utilised, specifically differentiating from predecessors and attributing to them, for example, the instrumentalisation of social policies. The opposition MPs employed a reverse but similar strategy—delegitimising the current government and stressing its inefficiency in areas relevant to young people. This also demonstrates that the substantial representation in the current politically polarised setting takes more of a form of managing electoral expectations than symbolic mobilisation. PiS MPs also often made moralising statements addressed (indirectly) to young Poles. They were described as a group displaying shifting priorities, departing from traditional values such as family, and—especially importantly, given Poland's severe demographic crisis—decisions not to have children. As an illustration:

> We have a big problem with lifestyle and certain priorities among young people, and we should have a comprehensive discussion on how to restore the family and the desire to have children as something that is a value that improves our lives. (Krzysztof Ciecióra, PiS, 2025-01-10)

In the analysed material, young people therefore often function not as subjects of representation but as resources in polarised politics and political conflict. This can be seen, for example, in the statements of Krzysztof Ciecióra (PiS), who links the issue of fertility and the priorities of young people with defence of the achievements of the PiS government in the area of social benefits for families. Addressing young people thus became a useful argument in the competition to assess the government's effectiveness. In the interviews, the structuring role of party strategies, and especially of the governing coalition's inner mechanisms of control, was listed as a key constraining factor for the young MPs' ideas (PL01). In addition, internal party disciplines and coercive means employed to ensure adherence to the party line were mentioned as having an impact on positioning during the work in parliaments (PL03).

In the EP, the partisan drivers of youth representation mostly came from left-wing parties, specifically MEPs from the Greens/EFA, S&D, and The Left. Several interventions were made by Renew or ESN MEPs, but these were more sporadic. References to youth in ESN or NI MEPs' speeches were often linked to a criticism of the EU, accused of making the life of young people harder: "In its quest for uniformity, the European Union itself created the crisis in education because universities became factories for people with degrees without real knowledge" (Rada Laykova, ESN, BG, 2024-10-24). The case of young people was brought up in far-right MEPs' speeches to blame the EU for its "woke" ideology:

> The political decisions of this Commission and this Parliament take away the hope of a normal, dignified future for young people in Europe… Is it not by any chance a progressive ideology that is spreading like a plague here, telling even the smallest children that they can change their gender as needed? (Milan Mazurek, ESN, SK, 2025-02-12)

Far-right conservative, anti-woke, nativist ideas were present, as well as the nostalgic rhetoric of "it was better before," as seen in the example above, although coming from MEPs not yet 35 years old.

7. Does Gender Matter?

While our analysis shows that political party affiliation plays a major role in structuring MPs' representation and discourse about youth, gender also plays a role. In terms of speech frequency, in France and Poland male MPs dominated the discussion of young MPs (83% and 69.9%, respectively), while it was mostly female MPs who spoke in the Italian and European parliaments (36.4% and 48.8%, respectively).

However, similar discursive patterns could be seen across the four analysed parliaments: Male and female MPs' arguments were distinctly different. Female MPs were more often engaged with empathetic, caring, and protective discourse, specifically raising issues of mental health, education, climate change, labour conditions, and human and women's rights. Their image of youth representatives was rather built on personal experiences and ethical responsibility. Male MPs, on the other hand, more often took political or ideological positions aligning with highly individualistic perspectives, placing greater emphasis on young people's personal responsibility for their life choices. Topics such as women's access to healthcare (including abortion), gender inequality, and violence against women and children were also discussed predominantly by female M(E)Ps. Yet the discussion on these issues further illustrates the gender backlash and anti-woke views often expressed by some of their male colleagues. For example, during a debate on the cross-border recognition of civil status documents of same-sex couples and their children, one MEP stated: "We will be the dam that will stem your furious ideological tide. We will never stop reiterating it: Children can only be born of a father and a mother, only of a man and a woman" (Paolo Inselvini, ECR, 2025-02-13).

Gender emerged as a highly salient dimension during the interviews—a dimension that shapes MEPs and their behaviours. From our admittedly limited sample, male interviewees recalled very few, if any, instances of difficulties in performing their roles related to their age: "Just because I was elected at a young age…does not mean that I was the representative of young people" (FR06). Male MPs tended to emphasise more easily that MPs "represent the entirety of your constituency and, more broadly, the nation as a whole," "whatever your age" (FR03). The age dimension therefore appeared quite anecdotal and detached from their day-to-day work and role as MPs.

The situation was markedly different for young female MPs, who reported greater difficulty in moving beyond age-based categorisations. Several interviewees noted that the visibility of young women in parliament is a relatively recent phenomenon and expressed the hope that their presence could contribute to change by embodying a form of descriptive representation (e.g., FR01). Although one female interviewee mentioned that she believes "it is somewhat easier to be a woman in politics than to be a man," she nevertheless recalled numerous instances in which her competences as a young woman were questioned:

> The issue is more about age. In fact, during my 2017 campaign, that was the question that came up most often. Many people would say to me, "Well, you have no life experience at all.…How can you claim to represent us?" (FR02)

As one interviewee explained, gender is a persistent source of bias in politics, whatever the age: "A woman in politics is seen as a silly little girl until she turns 60, and after 60 as an old woman who shouldn't be expressing her opinions" (PL03). Such age- and gender-based stereotypes translate into various forms of discrimination (from colleagues, citizens, or journalists). According to the same Polish MP, these biases are evident even in the

ways politicians are addressed: "Different kinds of questions are directed to them [men], right? Or it's 'Mr MP so-and-so,' whereas a female MP is addressed as 'Marysia' [a diminutive form of the name Mary]" (PL03). This illustrates how women politicians are often denied the same degree of professional recognition and authority that their male counterparts effortlessly acquire. Female MPs also highlighted the role of social media as a site where age- and gender-based discrimination are frequently expressed:

> I have lots of comments like, "Oh, you're too young, too young. You don't know what you're talking about." And something like that. "You should go to work. Maybe have a family and then later on, maybe you can represent some people"...this is something people say. "OK, you have no experience because you are young or maybe because you are a woman." (EP03)

Young women MEPs thus refer to some kind of double burden of being both young and a woman in politics. Due to the limited size of our interview samples, this finding cannot be generalised, yet it was quite a prominent feature of our French, Polish, and EP interviews. In this context, one MEP explicitly expressed her desire not "to be perceived as the young woman in politics" (EP01).

Female interviewees also pointed to the specific challenges of combining parliamentary office with family responsibilities. One respondent argued that being a woman between the ages of 30 and 40 in politics is particularly difficult, especially when raising children. She highlighted a number of structural barriers that continue to constrain women's political participation, including "parliamentary sessions that last until midnight [and] the inability to delegate one's vote while pregnant" (FR01). Such institutional arrangements illustrate how parliamentary practices may disproportionately affect young women and contribute to the persistence of gendered inequalities in political representation.

8. Conclusion

The descriptive representation of young politicians across four contexts reveals differences in terms of who was elected and how often they spoke in parliaments. In all four analysed contexts, however, young politicians very rarely explicitly positioned themselves as representatives of their fellow young people. If they did, it was rather implicit through referring to their own experience and raising issues relevant to youth. The most common form of youth presence in statements has been indirect narration, in which young people were the subject of concern, problems, diagnoses, or interventions—without establishing a direct representative relationship or connection between the speaker and young people.

Party competition clearly structured the way MPs from both ruling and opposition parties built relationships with young people. Our findings indicate that among young parliamentarians, party competition and power-related relations among them constitute the dominant factors shaping how they enact representation, while references to youth remain marginal and episodic. The data also confirm that gender matters in how young M(E)Ps enact their role as representatives. Although our study confirms the intersectional effect of gender and age, the former, as a permanent feature, seems to have a prevailing effect, whereas age has a transient character.

Contextualising these findings demonstrates that descriptive and substantive representation of the young operates under a different logic than other, more permanent features, such as gender. Youth is a temporary

feature of MPs, changing with the passage of time; hence, they are engaged in party-driven competition in parliaments and do not clearly define themselves as representatives of the young. The prevailing representation connection is vertical and one-sided. MPs speak in the parliamentary setting about young people, rather than to them as equal participants in the public debate.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Jan Krętkowski for his help with the Polish and EP data collection and coding, as well as Jan Firlit and Maciej Jaszczuk for their assistance with the Polish interviews. We are also sincerely grateful to Alexia Bertholin, Jules Geoffroy, Ania Maby, and Emma Rebeyrol for processing and coding the French data. We would further like to thank Rasmus Põder for coding the EP data, as well as Ben Koschalka for proofreading. Our special thanks go to the editors of this thematic issue, Eline Severs and John Erik Fossum, for their insightful comments. We are also grateful for the anonymous reviewers' constructive feedback.

Funding

This research was supported by the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme through the project REDIRECT: The REpresentative DIsconnect: diagnosis and strategies for RECTification (HORIZON-CL2-2022-DEMOCRACY-01/HORIZON-RIA, Grant No. 101095142).

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request to the corresponding author.

LLMs Disclosure

DeepL and Claude was used for translation of the quoted material from the original language to English. Grammarly was used for language correction.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited).

References

Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender & Society*, *20*(4), 441–464.

Agerberg, M. (2024). Understanding preferences for descriptive political representation among citizens with immigrant background. *Electoral Studies*, *90*, Article 102802. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2024.102802

Algan, Y., Renault, T., & Subtil, H. (2025). *La fievre parlementaire: Ce monde où l'on catche! Colère, polarisation et politique TikTok à l'Assemblée nationale*. Observatoire du bien-être du CEPREMAP. https://www.cepremap.fr/depot/2025/01/2025-01-Fievre-Parlementaire.pdf

Boldrini, M. (2026). Parliamentary size reduction and candidate selection: Evidence from Italy. *Representation*, *62*(3), 307–326. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2025.2596989

Castiglione, D. (2024). *The forms and dimensions of the "representative disconnect*. REDIRECT. https://redirect.unisi.it/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/D1.3.pdf

Celis, K. (2009). Substantive representation of women (and improving it): What it is and should be about? *Comparative European Politics*, *7*(1), 95–113. https://doi.org/10.1057/cep.2008.35

Celis, K., & Childs, S. (2012). The substantive representation of women: What to do with conservative claims? *Political Studies*, *60*(1), 213–225. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2011.00904.x

Celis, K., & Erzeel, S. (2015). Beyond the usual suspects: Non-left, male and non-feminist MPs and the substantive representation of women. *Government and Opposition*, *50*(1), 45–64. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2013.42

Dauphin, S. (2023). Le féminisme d'État et les violences de genre en France: Avancées et limites de la politique de lutte contre les violences conjugales. *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, *42*(1), 101–116. https://doi.org/10.3917/nqf.421.0101

de Wilde, P., Koopmans, R., Merkel, W., Strijbis, O., & Zürn, M. (Eds.). (2019). *The struggle over borders: Cosmopolitanism and communitarianism*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108652698

Diener, J. (2025). Age and representation styles: Are young candidates more likely to prioritize their voters over their own opinion or their party? *Party Politics*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688251371605

Erikson, J., & Josefsson, C. (2022). The parliament as a gendered workplace: How to research legislators' (un)equal opportunities to represent. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *75*(1), 20–38. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsaa049

Erikson, J., & Verge, T. (2022). Gender, power and privilege in the parliamentary workplace. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *75*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsaa048

European Institute for Gender Equality. (2025). *Gender balance in politics*. https://doi.org/10.2839/1431695

Elections législatives 2024. (2024, July 19). *franceinfo*. https://www.franceinfo.fr/elections/legislatives/infographies-elections-legislatives-2024-age-genre-csp-visualisez-le-nouveau-visage-de-l-assemblee-nationale-en-quatre-graphiques_6671280.html

Eurobarometer. (2024). *Youth survey 2024*. https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3392

European Parliament. (2024). *European Parliament 2024–2029*. https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/european-results/2024-2029

Gora, A., & de Wilde, P. (2019). *Representative claims analysis handbook*. RECONNECT. https://nva.sikt.no/registration/0198cc83660c-f85b04e6-616e-48b5-b11f-d8f8419e5ea4

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2021). *Youth participation in national parliaments*. https://www.ipu.org/youth2021

Joshi, D. K., & Och, M. (2021). Early birds, short tenures, and the double squeeze: How gender and age intersect with parliamentary representation. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, *9*(3), 629–645. https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2019.1629319

Kolodziejczyk, K., Stockemer, D., Buckle, M., Gammon, E., & Nzohabonayo, I. (2025). More youth representation, higher trust? The impact of youth representation on young people's trust in parliament. In D. Stockemer, E. Abou-El-Kheir, & K. Kolodziejczyk (Eds.), *Democracy under scrutiny: Unpacking the causes and consequences of democratic dissatisfaction* (pp. 13–34). Springer Nature. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-06596-4_2

Koopmans, R., & Statham, P. (1999). Political claims analysis: Integrating protest event and political discourse approaches. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *4*(2), 203–221. https://doi.org/10.17813/maiq.4.2.d75933706071l6756

Kurz, K. R., & Ettensperger, F. (2024). Exploring the conditions for youth representation: A qualitative comparative analysis of party parliamentary groups. *European Political* Science, *23*(3), 349–397. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-023-00460-7

Kurz, K. R., Wurthmann, L. C., & Gross, M. (2025). The influence of age on citizens' preferences for age-related descriptive representation. *Politics and Governance*, *13*, Article 9251. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.9251

Lacroix, I., Chaïeb, S., Dietrich-Ragon, P., & Frechon, I. (2023). De la violence familiale à la violence institutionnelle. Le continuum des violences dans l'expérience des jeunes placés en protection de l'enfance. *Populations vulnérables*, *9*. https://doi.org/10.4000/popvuln.4224

Mai, P., & Wenzelburger, G. (2024). Loyal activists? Party socialization and dissenting voting behavior in parliament. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *49*(1), 131–160. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.12416

Maraffa, F. (2024, July 31). European Elections 2024: Young people never had a chance. *European Youth Forum*. https://www.youthforum.org/news/european-elections-2024-young-people-never-had-a-chance

McDonnell, D., Ammassari, S., Valbruzzi, M., Bolin, N., Werner, A., Heinisch, R., Jungar, A.-C., & Wegscheider, C. (2025). Inside party youth wings: The YOUMEM project. *Party Politics*, *31*(6), 1049–1063. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688241310349

Phillips, A. (1995). *The politics of presence*. Oxford University Press.

Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. University of California Press.

Rosenthal, M. (2019). When does descriptive representation become substantive? Systematic luck, social power and the allocation of resources. *Ethnicities*, *19*(6), 1015–1037.

Rovny, J., Polk, J., Bakker, R., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., Steenbergen, M., & Vachudova, M. A. (2025). The 2024 Chapel Hill Expert Survey on political party positioning in Europe: Twenty-five years of party positional data. *Electoral Studies*, *97*, Article 102981. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102981

Saward, M. (2006). The representative claim. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *5*(3), 297–318. https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.cpt.9300234

Saward, M. (2010). *The representative claim*. Oxford University Press.

Severs, E. (2012). Substantive representation through a claims-making lens: A strategy for the identification and analysis of substantive claims. *Representation*, *48*(2), 169–181. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2012.683491

Severs, E., Mansoury, E., Poblome Y., & Meyvaert, K. (2025). *Young politicians: Interview topic guide, pilot and coding scheme*. REDIRECT. https://redirect.unisi.it/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/D8.2.pdf

Siow, O. (2023). What constitutes substantive representation, and where should we evaluate it? *Political Studies Review*, *21*(3), 532–538. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/14789299231154864

Stockemer, D., & Sundström, A. (2022). *Youth without representation: The absence of young adults in parliaments, cabinets, and candidacies*. University of Michigan Press.

Stockemer, D., & Sundström, A. (2025). Age inequalities in political representation: A review article. *Government and Opposition*, *60*(1), 271–288. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2023.11

Thevenin, E., & Umit, R. (2026). European Parliament groups' perspectives on the future of Europe: In the European house of conflicting ideas. In M. Góra, E. Thevenin, & K. Zielińska (Eds.), *Political actors' narratives on the reforms of the European Union: Future visions of Europe?* (pp. 207–224). Routledge.

Vermassen, D., Caluwaerts, D., & Erzeel, S. (2023). Speaking for the voiceless? Representative claims-making on behalf of future generations in Belgium. *Parliamentary Affairs*, *76*(3), 579–599. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsac002

Wängnerud, L. (2009). Women in parliaments: Descriptive and substantive representation. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *12*, 51–69. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053106.123839

Wright, D., Gause, L., & Stout, C. (2025). The link between educational socialization, descriptive representation, and substantive representation. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, *50*(4), Article e70010. https://doi.org/10.1111/lsq.70010

Zucchini, F., & Verzichelli, L. (2026). Few but good? The effects of the reduction of parliamentary seats on the socio-professional profile and political careers of Italian MPs. *Parliamentary Affairs*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsaf058

About the Authors



Elodie Thevenin is a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Her academic interests encompass topics related to European integration, migration, and political discourse.



Magdalena Góra is an associate professor of political science and European studies at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University. Her research deals with democratic challenges in the EU and legitimacy and contestation in the external relations of the EU.



Katarzyna Zielińska is an associate professor at the Institute of Sociology of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. Her academic interests focus on a few areas: gender and democracy in Central and Eastern European societies, (post)secular European societies, as well as transformations of collective identities in Central and Eastern Europe in the context of European integration.



Małgorzata Maria Fijał, Europeanist and cultural studies scholar, is a researcher at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University and a research expert at the Polish Academy of Sciences in Rome. Her research and academic interests focus on the culture and politics of contemporary Italy, as well as issues related to identity and the socio-cultural dimensions of nationalism and populism.