

WHO HOLDS THE PRESIDENTIAL OFFICE? THE EVIDENCE FROM EUROPE, 1990-2023

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Abstract. This article maps the biographical characteristics of European presidents elected in direct elections after 1989. The author focuses on the structure of age, education, previous political experience, and gender. The article aims to describe the original dataset and to examine it in the context of the theoretical framework of descriptive representation and concepts of presidential power. Although only a partial relationship has been found between age structure and presidential power, and between gender structure and the Woman Political Participation Index, the general applicability of these findings to Europe is problematic. The effect of other factors was not shown at all, which indicates the specificity of the presidential election. The shape of the electoral system, the particularity of each case, and the current political situation determine who is elected president, and these findings cannot be generalized to the entire analyzed area.

Keywords: presidents, heads of state, biographical characteristics, Europe, descriptive representation, presidential power

Introduction

Heads of state can be found in many forms on the European continent, with most states having a single individual in this role. However, there are also instances where the position is held collectively, as demonstrated in the case of states within the former Communist bloc prior to 1989, as well as in present day Andorra, San Marino, or Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹

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¹ Karl Loewenstein, "The Presidency Outside the United States: A Study in Comparative Political Institutions," *The Journal of Politics* 11, no. 3 (1949): 447-496, <https://doi.org/>

Nevertheless, the crucial question remains who becomes the head of state. On the one hand, we can find monarchies on the European continent where the situation is clear. The head of states are members of royal or other highborn families, and their accession to the throne is based on the principle of succession. Therefore, it is assumed that future monarchs are prepared from childhood to become the head of state one day. Their upbringing, education, or political skills are adjusted for this moment.

In contrast to the monarchies of Europe, the presidents of democratic countries are elected through free and fair elections, or by any legislative or electoral assembly, and their starting position is completely different. Their education is not necessarily determined by their future performance in the presidential office. In the last ten years, they have not often had party affiliation or previous political experience, as is the case for Andrej Kiska in Slovakia or Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine.

This article has two aims. Firstly, it aims to map the biographical characteristics of directly elected European presidents after 1989. Based on the original dataset, it describes four characteristics and their structure in Europe: age, education, previous political experience, and gender. Criteria for sampling are not random. The focus is on presidents elected in direct presidential elections, given that the situation in political systems with an indirect election is different. In these countries, the elected individuals are either related to any political party, or they are former significant politicians (e.g. former prime minister). The analyzed timeframe of this research includes only the period following 1989 due to the collapse of the Communist bloc in Central and Eastern Europe. This enables a comparison drawn between this region, and traditional democracies in Western Europe and their political systems. In the next step, the aim is to integrate the findings from the dataset into a theoretical framework where this is possible. Two theoretical concepts, used in the analysis of political representation, are considered: those of descriptive representation and presidential power. The aim is to ascertain whether there is any pattern in the European area or, conversely, whether the presidential election is specific for each European country. The presidential

10.2307/2126136; John Quigley, "The Soviet Presidency," *The American Journal of Comparative Law* 39, no. 1 (1991): 67–93, <https://doi.org/10.2307/840671>.

election is often highly personalized, and its results can depend on various particularities.

The article is structured as follows: Firstly, a summary of the existing literature on the biographical characteristics research in past is presented. Secondly, the theoretical framework is introduced, and hypotheses are defined. The history of direct presidential elections in Europe is introduced in the next part. The analytical part of the article is divided into four sections. Each of these sections connect to a specific biographical characteristic. Finally, the results of the dataset are described, and the results are contextualized within the theoretical framework.

Biographical Profiles of Politicians: An Overview

The research of biographical characteristics of legislative and executive politicians has a long-standing tradition in political science, especially in the context of the problematics of political representation and elites. However, this research is mainly focused on analyzing political institutions, such as parliamentary or executive assemblies, which have a collective character and can be compared within a single legislature timespan. The approach to this phenomenon and its importance is not always the same. For some, the biographical characteristics of politicians or candidates are an important factor that voters consider when voting from the perspective of effectiveness.² On the other hand, in the context of selecting ministers for the government, these characteristics are secondary.³ In addition, the research endeavors are designed as case studies of individual states. Comparative research on presidents and their biographies is very limited in political science, especially in the longitudinal perspective.

The current political research on parliamentary and executive representation is largely focused on a few factors and perspectives. The case studies are designed to provide a description of the representation

² Craig Volden and Alan E. Wiseman, *Legislative Effectiveness in the United States Congress: The Lawmakers* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

³ Julia Fleischer and Markus Seyfried, "Drawing from the Bargaining Pool: Determinants of Ministerial Selection in Germany," *Party Politics* 21, no. 4 (2015): 503-514.

in the context of newly formed democracies following a transition process or a change in the character of the regime, which can bring any changes in the representation.⁴ A contrasting perspective, typical of countries with well-developed regional institutions in Western Europe, is important in the comparison of differences between national and regional levels.⁵ This encompasses the examination of varying voting preferences in different types of elections, respectively, the impact of the process of decentralization on the regional government formation and its composition.⁶

On the other hand, there is also literature that is not strictly connected with any theoretical background, its main goal being to describe the composition of parliaments or candidate lists not only in a synchronic and a diachronic comparative perspective, but also to analyze candidates in terms of gender, age, education, previous occupation before entering politics, political experiences, or the description with the consideration of the geographical perspective.⁷ Such studies usually use the lens of

⁴ Elena Semenova, "Patterns of Parliamentary Representation and Careers in Ukraine: 1990-2007," *East European Politics and Societies* 26, no. 3 (2012): 538-560, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325412439464>; Elena Semenova, "Parliamentary Representation in Post-Communist Ukraine: Change and Stability," in *Parliamentary Elites in Central and Eastern Europe: Recruitment and Representation*, eds. Elena Semenova, Michael Edinger and Heinrich Best (Milton Park: Routledge, 2013), 275-97; Elena Semenova, "Ministerial and Parliamentary Elites in an Executive-Dominated System: Post-Soviet Russia 1991-2009," *Comparative Sociology* 10, no. 6 (2011): 908-927, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156913311x607629>.

⁵ Mark Shephard, Neil McGarvey and Michael Cavanagh, "New Scottish Parliament, New Scottish Parliamentarians?," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 7, no. 2 (2001): 79-104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/714003869>; Robyn Hollander, "Who Sits in Parliament? An Analysis of State and Federal Members of Parliament," (referred paper, Australasian Political Studies Association Conference, Hobart: University of Tasmania, 29 September – 1 October 2003).

⁶ Selena Grimaldi and Michelangelo Vercesi, "Political Careers in Multi-level Systems: Regional Chief Executives in Italy, 1970-2015," *Regional & Federal Studies* 28, no. 2 (2018): 125-149.

⁷ Otto Eibl and Miloš Gregor, *Volby do Poslanecké sněmovny v roce 2017* [Czech Parliamentary Election in 2017] (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2019); Lukáš Linek, "Socio-demografická struktura poslanců a její vliv na politické postoje" [Socio-demographic Structure of MPs and Its Influence on Political Attitudes] in *Český parlament ve druhé dekádě demokratického vývoje* [The Czech Parliament in the Second Decade of Democratic Development], ed. Zdenka Mansfeldová and Lukáš Linek (Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2009), 95-111; Lukáš Linek and Petra Šalamounová, *The Parliament of the Czech Republic, 1993-1998: Factbook* (Praha: Sociologický ústav AV ČR, 2001).

splitting according to political parties or parliamentary clubs and committees. This strategy, known as the diachronic perspective description, is the primary approach employed in this article when describing the composition of presidential offices. A similar strategy, of analyzing and describing the representation in the international context, is adopted by researchers investigating the executive composition. For this reason, it is possible to find texts in political science comparing the composition of governments in Southern Europe or countries in the post-communist area.⁸

Similarly, there are numerous one-case studies of other European countries, often examining only one biographical factor, such as political experiences.⁹ The problems of gender structure and women's representation also have a long-standing tradition in political research, indicating that these issues have been present for a considerable period of time, despite the fact that there has been a slight improvement in the share of women's representation in parliaments, executive cabinets and in politics in general.¹⁰ This perspective is also mentioned in the analysis of parliaments and executive composition. There is also research focused on the issues of the relatively low representation of the young generation depending on the type of electoral systems and the corresponding age quotas.¹¹

⁸ Pedro Tavares de Almeida, Nancy Bermeo and Antonio Costa Pinto, *Who Governs Southern Europe? Regime Change and Ministerial Recruitment, 1850-2000* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); Elena Semenova, "Recruitment and Careers of Ministers in Central Eastern Europe and Baltic Countries," in *Technocratic Ministers and Political Leadership in European Democracies*, ed. Antonio Costa Pinto, Maurizio Cotta and Pedro Tavares de Almeida (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 173-202.

⁹ Lieven De Winter, Jean Blondel and Jean-Louis Thiébaud, *The Profession of Government Minister in Western Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991); Michal Pink, Aneta Pinková and Matěj Pospíchal, "Typologie českých ministrů - kdo jsou členové vlád? [Typology of Czech Ministers – Who Are Members of Governments?]," *Acta Politologica* 12, no. 1 (2020): 40-64.

¹⁰ Lena Wängnerud, "Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation," *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2009): 51-69, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.053106.123839>; Jacob, Suraj, John A. Scherpereel and Melinda Adams, "Gender Norms and Women's Political Representation: A Global Analysis of Cabinets, 1979-2009," *Governance* 27, no. 2 (2014): 321-345.

¹¹ Daniel Stockemer and Aksel Sundström, "Age Representation in Parliaments: Can Institutions Pave the Way for the Young?," *European Political Science Review* 10, no. 3 (2018): 467-90, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773918000048>.

Typically, when it comes to political experience, the careers of politicians are scrutinized before they enter parliament or the executive cabinet. However, some studies focus on the political pathways of the most important state representatives (*e.g.*, prime ministers, members of the government or high representatives of regions) after leaving these offices, mapping their later political positions on the national or federal level or in the European Union.¹² In connection with the deepening of European integration and the expansion of the European Union over time, the research has also been focused on the composition of European institutions, such as the European Commission or European Parliament during the time.¹³ One study analyzing the composition of the European Parliament also brings an interesting analytical approach, by juxtaposing the structure of the European Parliament members in old-member states and newer states.¹⁴ While this study provides interesting insights into the membership structure of the European Union, its conclusions are beyond the scope of this research.

Theory and Hypotheses

In order to move beyond the descriptive level, it is necessary to fit the topic into a theoretical framework. Given the author's interest in a range of biographical characteristics, it is proposed that each phenomenon to be fitted with a different approach that suits it. In addition, specific hypotheses for each characteristic will be formulated.

The section focused on the age structure of European presidents will engage with the concept of descriptive representation. Although

¹² Klaus Stolz and Jörn Fischer, "Post-Cabinet Careers of Regional Ministers in Germany, 1990-2011," *German Politics* 23, no. 3 (2014): 157-73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2014.949683>.

¹³ Hussein Kassim, John Peterson, Michael W. Bauer, Sara Connolly, Renaud Dehousse, Liesbet Hooghe and Andrew Thompson, *The European Commission of the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniel Stockemer and Aksel Sundström, "Young Deputies in the European Parliament: A Starkly Underrepresented Age Group," *Acta Politica* 54, no. 1 (2018): 124-44, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-018-0078-0>.

¹⁴ Willy Beauvallet-Haddad, Sébastien Michon, Victor Lepaux and Céline Monicolle, "The Changing Composition of the European Parliament: MEPs from 1979 to 2014," *French Politics* 14, no. 1 (2016): 101-25, <https://doi.org/10.1057/fp.2015.21>.

this approach is mostly used in politics in connection with gender or race, for the purposes of this study, the author considers it applicable to the question of age. The essence of descriptive representation is based on specific marks or characteristics shared by elected representatives and a larger group of voters.¹⁵ It can be reasonably assumed that the probability of electing an older candidate is greater in populations with a higher age average. Therefore, the author investigates the relationship between the age of the elected president, and the share of seniors in the population. In connection with the concept of representation, the following hypothesis can be formulated: *In countries with a proportion of older citizens, older candidates are elected to the presidency* (H1). However, another important factor must be considered, namely the nature of the electoral system and the type of election. As is known, presidential elections in European countries are held through a two-round majoritarian system, or through instant-runoff voting, which is inherently highly personalized.

The education section is limited only to the description of the dataset due to difficulty of the theoretical anchoring. However, this does not apply to investigating previous political experiences. The second theoretical approach will be connected to this phenomenon. The character of the political regime in relation to the head of state is investigated. The literature regarding the relationship between presidential power and the predisposition of party nominations for the presidency highlights the following tendency: If the president is perceived to have a weaker power and is unable to significantly influence the political situation, the willingness of the party to nominate the presidential candidate is likely to be lower because there is no chance to influence the political situation through this function.¹⁶ I will convert this finding into a factor of political experience. Starting from the fact that political parties usually nominate for the presidential office meritorious politicians with experience in other political functions (*e.g.*, former prime ministers, members of government, chairman of parliament), the presidents in systems with higher presidential

¹⁵ Jane Mansbridge, "Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent «Yes,»" *The Journal of Politics* 61, no. 3 (1999): 628-657, 629, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2647821>.

¹⁶ Allen Hicken and Heather Stoll, "Electoral Rules and the Size of the Prize: How Political Institutions Shape Presidential Party Systems," *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 4 (2008): 1109-1127, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0022381608081097>.

power are expected to be (1) older, and (2) more experienced in the executive offices. Conversely, in political systems with weaker heads of state, the age and political experience in the executive branch should not be too significant. It can be expected that there a greater proportion of presidents would lack previous political experience. Based on this fact, the second hypothesis can be defined: *elected presidents are older and have previously held executive office in countries with higher presidential power* (H2).

The concept of descriptive representation will also be employed for the analysis of the gender structure, in a manner consistent with the age structure. Previous research on the relationship between the character and opinions of the population and women's representation in legislatures confirmed that higher women's representation in politics increases the willingness for political engagement and reduces the differences in the gender structure of political representation.¹⁷ This finding will be further applied to the presidential elections in Europe. The presumption is that, if the representation of women is higher in the politics of the state, there would be a higher chance of electing a woman to the presidential office. Regarding the research about descriptive representation, I will define the following hypothesis: *Women are elected to presidential office in states with a higher share of women in the political representation* (H3).

Data and Methods

From a methodological standpoint, two approaches will be used. While the topic has not been extensively documented, the first part of this article is conceptualized as a descriptive analysis. Despite the perceived limitations of this method, particularly in the scientific community, the description of phenomena in the world around us is the absolute basis of each research process.¹⁸ For the purpose of establishing and providing

¹⁷ Tiffany D. Barnes and Stephanie M. Burchard, "«Engendering» Politics: The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Women's Political Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 7 (2012): 767-790, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463884>.

¹⁸ Kevin A. Clarke and David M. Primo, "Modernizing Political Science: A Model-Based Approach," *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 4 (2007): 741-753, 749, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592707072192>.

an explanation of causal mechanisms, it is important to firstly map the phenomenon of interest. In the process of this methodological frame, the dataset is built, and the phenomenon is described. Descriptive research is the basis of analytical work and provides a basic background for future research.¹⁹ This fact and the approach will be crucial for the following evaluation of hypotheses.

Nevertheless, at the beginning, because a complete data source is not available, it is necessary to collect the requisite data. The first step of the research is based on building the original dataset with information on the age, education, previous political experiences, and gender of directly elected European presidents. This represents a crucial aspect of the subsequent research steps.

In the descriptive part of the article, a summary of data is presented, pertaining to the social and biographical characteristics of European presidents who have held office after 1989. This year was not randomly selected, but rather in response to the fall of communist non-democratic regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, when many of these countries enacted direct presidential elections to their constitutional systems. The focus of this analysis is on the set of main social and biographical characteristics: age at the time of the first election to the presidential office, profession (which means the specialization in education) and finally, previous experiences in politics. The key sources of this information about presidents are based on the completion and on the comparison of their *curricula vitae* available in public sources or encyclopedias, for example, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Wikipedia*, etc. It is of great importance to note that the official *curricula vitae* on websites of the presidential offices of each country or personal websites, often serve as a crucial source of information. I will analyze all European countries except Russia and Belarus. Both are excluded from this analysis as they do not adhere to the principles of free and fair elections.²⁰

¹⁹ John Gerring, "Mere Description," *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2012): 721-746, 721, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123412000130>.

²⁰ Jan Holzer and Petr Hlaváček, "Lukašenkovo Bělorusko: případová studie nedemokratického režimu [Lukashenka Belarus: Case Study of Non-democratic Regime]," *Central European Political Studies Review* 7, no. 4 (2005): 409-427; Grigorii V. Golosov, "The Regional Roots of Electoral Authoritarianism in Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 4 (2011): 623-639, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2011.566427>; Ora John Reuter, Noah Buckley, Alexandra

The aforementioned sources provide the complete dataset, which include researched biographical characteristics. These data will then be operationalized, as they are to be sorted into categories of two basic types. The first category is made of nominal variables, including education and previous political experiences. The second category is ratio variables, represented by age in this article.²¹ These will also be aggregated in graphic figures according to defined groups, with percentage shares.

The second part of the research will focus on comparing the background defined in the theoretical of the article. For this part, qualitative comparative analysis will be used, from a longitudinal perspective, to compare heads of state with the concrete variable. In general, if data for a given state or year is unavailable for all indicators, it will be excluded from the analysis for the given factor. As was mentioned previously, two concepts will be used. The approach of the descriptive representation is used to evaluate the relationship between the proportion of seniors and the age of the head of state. The proportion of seniors in the population will be based on the data from the *World Bank*.²²

The relationship between these two variables will be illustrated in a point chart in order to evaluate the effect and possible correlation. The concept of presidential power is necessary to identify a suitable method of measuring this phenomenon. A large scale of processes and criteria for measuring this phenomenon has been developed; The dataset created by Alan Siaroff brings together the dataset with the quantification of presidential power in each European state with the direct presidential election. The dataset is comprehensive in its analysis of all aspects of presidential politics, including popular election, concurrent election of president and legislative, discretionary appointment of important

Shubenkova and Guzel Garifullina, "Local Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: An Elite-based Theory with Evidence from Russian Mayoral Elections," *Comparative Political Studies* 49, no. 5 (2016): 662-697, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414015626439>.

²¹ John Gerring and Dino Christenson, *Applied Social Science Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²² "Population (age group as % of total population)," *World Bank – Gender Data Portal*, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/indicators/sp-pop-zs/?age=65%2B>.

political actors, chairing the cabinet, veto power, decree powers, central role in foreign policy, central role in government formation, and the ability to dissolve legislative assembly.²³ However, this dataset has a few shortcomings. It was constructed in 2003; therefore, it does not fully reflect the reality of the current settings of political systems in Europe. Therefore, the author has enriched the dataset in some cases. If there has been a significant constitutional change since its creation, the score has been adjusted considering the current situation. This mainly concerns the issue of (re)adopting a direct presidential election in any country (e.g., Czech Republic, Moldova, Turkey). At the same time, if data on some states were not found in the dataset, it was necessary to supplement them based on the analysis of constitutional texts available in the database of the *Constitute* project.²⁴

Based on this quantification, dividing the regimes into two categories is necessary – countries with a weak and strong presidency. The list of presidencies is shown in Table 1. For the purposes of the analysis, the countries with presidential power from 1 to 3 points have been classified as a weak presidency, and countries with a score from 4 to 7 points are considered a strong presidency. The uneven spread of both categories on the scale is chosen for two reasons. Firstly, maintaining at least an approximate even representation of both categories in Europe is necessary; secondly, Secondly, it is important to partially consider the theories of authors regarding their views on the distinction between parliamentary and semi-presidential regimes and their classification.²⁵

²³ Alan Siaroff, "Comparative Presidencies: The Inadequacy of the Presidential, Semi-presidential and Parliamentary Distinction," *European Journal of Political Research* 42 (2003): 287-312, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00084>.

²⁴ "Constitutions," *Constitute*, accessed April 8, 2024, <https://constituteproject.org/constitutions>.

²⁵ Maurice Duverger, "A New Political System Model: Semi-presidential Government," *European Journal of Political Research* 8 (1980): 165-187, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00569.x>; Robert Elgie, "The Politics of Semi-presidentialism," in *Semi-presidentialism in Europe*, ed. Robert Elgie (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1-21.

In the part of the analysis focused on the gender structure, the election of women to the presidential office is compared to the gender structure of the political representation. The Women Political Participation Index collected by the *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* is used in order to evaluate the hypothesis.²⁶ This variable achieves a value from 0 to 1 and measures women's representation in legislatures and the equal share of the power distribution.²⁷ The data about women's political participation are collected for each state in the each year, so a comparison with the presidential election's result is facile. A descriptive statistic is calculated from data provided by the *V-Dem* project. This is followed by a comparison of the elections of women's winners with the mean and median values for all analyzed states. Based on this, we will be able to determine whether women are elected to the presidential office in countries with a high value of the Women Political Participation Index, and whether the results correspond to the defined hypothesis.

²⁶ Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Michael Bernhard, Cecilia Borella, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Linnea Fox, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerlow, Adam Glynn, Ana Good God, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Joshua Krusell, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Natalia Natsika, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefine Pernes, Oskar Rydén, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson and Daniel Ziblatt, "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v14", *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.23696/mcwt-fr58>.

²⁷ Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Michael Bernhard, Cecilia Borella, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Linnea Fox, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerlow, Adam Glynn, Ana Good God, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Oskar Rydén, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Luca Uberti, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, and Daniel Ziblatt, "V-Dem Codebook v14", *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* (2024), 308, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4774440>.

A Short History of Direct Presidential Election in Europe

The beginnings of direct presidential elections on the European continent can be traced back to the nineteenth century. In 1848 in France, Jean-Louis Napoléon Bonaparte, the first directly elected European president, gained more than seventy-five per cent of votes.²⁸ Under his mandate, France reverted to an imperial regime. The Weimar Republic was the only country to implement a direct presidential election between the two world wars. According to the constitution, drafted by a group led by the famous constitutional lawyer Hugo Preuss, bestowed considerable authority upon the head of state. The president was elected for a seven-year term and had significant attributions.²⁹ The first direct presidential election took place in 1925, after the death of president Friedrich Ebert. Paul von Hindenburg won, after having participated in the second round of the election only. He gained forty-eight per cent of the votes and defeated centrist Wilhelm Marx, and communist Ernst Thälmann.³⁰ His victory was repeated seven years later when he defeated Adolf Hitler, and Thälmann once again.³¹ This was the last direct presidential election to take place on the European continent for a long time.

Following the establishment of the Fifth French Republic, the system of direct election was reintroduced in France. However, the rules for election have undergone numerous amendments since 1962.³² In the first direct election in 1965, Charles de Gaulle was elected. Between 1988 and 1994, elements of direct election were gradually introduced in

²⁸ Malcolm Crook, "Universal Suffrage as Counter-Revolution? Electoral Mobilisation under the Second Republic in France, 1848-1851," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 28, no. 1 (2015): 49-66, 61, <https://doi.org/10.1111/johs.12035>.

²⁹ Dagmar Moravcová, *Výmarská republika: problémy demokracie v Německu 1918-1932* [The Weimar Republic: Problems of Democracy in Germany 1918-1932] (Praha: Karolinum, 2006), 214-215.

³⁰ Peter Fritzsche, "Presidential Victory and Popular Festivity in Weimar Germany: Hindenburg's 1925 Election," *Central European History* 23, no. 2/3 (1990): 205-24, 214, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s000893890002135x>.

³¹ Larry E. Jones, *Hitler versus Hindenburg: The 1932 Presidential Elections and the End of the Weimar Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 308.

³² Michel Perottino, *Francouzský politický systém* [The French Political System] (Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2005), 83.

Finland.³³ Nevertheless, a significant occurrence of this type of electing the head of state is observed after the dissolution of the Communist bloc, when many of its former members enacted direct election to their constitutional system. In 1990, the first presidential election was held in Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Serbia. The following year, Moldova and Ukraine also held their first direct presidential elections. An exceptional case in this region is Slovakia, where the first direct election was held in 1999, following a constitutional crisis, the Slovak parliament had not been able to elect a new head of state for almost one year. Eventually, they adopted the direct election method, which was enforced by the coalition formed against Vladimír Mečiar.³⁴ The first directly elected Slovakian president was Rudolf Schuster in 1999.³⁵ The last country from this region that enacted direct election was the Czech Republic in 2012, after lengthy discussions for the approval of the cabinet.³⁶ The direct presidential election was also adopted in Turkey in 2012, followed by a radical change in the political regime. Since the constitutional referendum in 2017 initiated by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish political system is typically regarded as presidentialism, a novel regime design characterized by extensive presidential powers.³⁷

However, the most exceptional case in Europe is Moldova, which underwent many constitutional changes during the post-Soviet era. Although in 1990 the chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Moldovan Soviet Republic, Mircea Snegur, had been indirectly elected to the

³³ Margit Tavits, "Direct Presidential Elections and Turnout in Parliamentary Contests," *Political Research Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (2008): 42-54, 43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912908317026>.

³⁴ Petr Just, "Přímá volba prezidenta na Slovensku: Inspirace pro Českou republiku?" [Direct Presidential Election in Slovakia: Inspiration for the Czech Republic?] *The New Presence*, no. 3 (2011): 19-28, 22.

³⁵ Peter Horváth, Peter Juza, Leon Richvalský and Marek Šafár, "Exercise of the Presidential Powers in the Slovak Republic in a Comparative Perspective (1999-2019)," *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 21, no. 1 (2021): 51-78, 53, <https://doi.org/10.34135/sjps.210103>.

³⁶ Miloš Brunclík and Michal Kubát, "Český demokratický režim po roce 2012: přechod k poloprezidencialismu?" [The Czech Democratic Regime after 2012: A Transition to Semi-Presidentialism?] *Czech Sociological Review* 52, no. 5 (2016): 625-646, 634, <https://doi.org/10.13060/00380288.2016.52.5.274>.

³⁷ Berk Essen and Sebnem Gumuscu, "The Perils of «Turkish Presidentialism,»" *Review of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 1 (2018): 43-53, <https://doi.org/10.1017/rms.2018.10>.

presidential office, in the next year, the first direct election of a president took place, with wide presidential competencies and characteristics of semi-presidentialism.³⁸ But the direct election was only held twice. At the end of the 1990s, the system had been changed back to indirect election, but in the first years after this reform, all elections were unsuccessful. The change came in 2001 after the victory of the Moldovan Communist Party in the parliamentary election, when it gained almost seventy per cent of seats. The smooth election of a member of the communist party, Vladimir Voronin, to the Moldovan presidential office followed.³⁹ In 2016, the direct presidential election system was reinstated, by constitutional reform.⁴⁰

Analysis

Age

The age-factor brings a methodological problem that should be resolved at the outset. In numerous cases, the incumbent president is re-elected, which increases the age in the average. The re-election of politicians is usually connected with expressing satisfaction with the performance of the office, and the biographical characteristics play a minor role in the re-election, which may distort the analysis.⁴¹ To avoid these problems, each person is included only for the moment of the first election, except the presidents who were re-elected after a certain pause in office (*e.g.*, Ion Iliescu in Romania or Valdas Adamkus in Lithuania). The same logic is used in the analysis of education and political experiences. For the

³⁸ Steven D. Roper, "From Semi-Presidentialism to Parliamentarism: Regime Change and Presidential Power in Moldova," *Europe-Asia Studies* 60, no. 1 (2008): 113-26, 118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130701760364>.

³⁹ Lucan A. Way, "Weak States and Pluralism: The Case of Moldova," *East European Politics and Societies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 454-482, 456, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325403255309>.

⁴⁰ Ion Marandici, "Nostalgic Voting? Explaining the Electoral Support for the Political Left in Post-Soviet Moldova," *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 63, no. 4 (2022): 514-542, 520, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2021.1918565>.

⁴¹ Ignazio De Ferrari, "The Successor Factor: Electoral Accountability in Presidential Democracies," *Comparative Political Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 193-220, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414014546442>.

analysis of the age structure, five categories using ratio variables have been created. The first category is limited to individuals aged 39 years or younger, while the last category is limited to individuals aged 70 years or older. All other categories are defined at an interval of 10 years.

As illustrated in Figure 1, there is a wide age variability among European voters. Candidates are selected based on their age, with younger and middle-aged individuals receiving the most support. The dataset indicates that the largest age group is of the fifties, representing more than a third of presidents in our dataset. The second most common category is the forties, and the third is the sixties. Due to the trend which can be seen, for example, in North American politics with the election of Donald Trump or Joe Biden, only eight persons were elected in or after reaching 70 years of age. This represents only less than nine per cent of the data. For example, Michael D. Higgins (Ireland; 70 years old), Alexander van der Bellen (Austria; 72 years old) or Kiro Gligorov (North Macedonia; 73 years old) were elected to office for the first time at this age.⁴²

Although only eight persons represent this category, there are more presidents over 70 years old. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these individuals have been elected for the second term, which logically increases the age. Many of these presidents are elected in Western democracies, for example, Heinz Fischer (Austria; 71 years old in the moment of re-election), Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa (Portugal; 72 years old) or Glafcos Klerides (Cyprus; 78 years old), but some of them are from Post-communist Europe as well.⁴³ For example, Miloš Zeman (the Czech Republic; 73 years old in the moment of re-election).

A review of the second end of our scale reveals that the presidents who were elected at an age of below 40 years are significantly less numerous. The explanation of this phenomenon is very simple. Many European countries have an age limit for the election in their constitution. Most often, the limit is 40 years, so we cannot be surprised that younger presidents are such a rare group in Europe. This limit is enacted, for example, in the

⁴² Kiro Gligorov was in 1991 elected as the first president of independent Macedonia (today *North Macedonia*).

⁴³ Glafcos Klerides is the oldest head of state in our dataset for the first and second time (73 and 78 years old).

Czech Republic, Slovakia, Lithuania, or North Macedonia.⁴⁴ Most European countries have a lower limit, defined as 35 years of age, as is the case in Romania, Poland, Ukraine, Portugal, Iceland, or France.⁴⁵ Figure 1 shows the minimum age limit is not used in contrast to other countries, and elected presidents are usually older. A particularly intriguing case is that of Croatia, where the constitutional limit for election is not defined, nor mentioned in the literature about Croatian politics.⁴⁶ In my dataset, only four presidents are found to be below 40 years of age; three of them are from Montenegro (Momir Bulatović, Milo Đukanović and Jakov Milatović), and the last one is current French president Emmanuel Macron (39 years old in the first election).⁴⁷

The next step of this chapter is to compare the relationship between age structure and the share of seniors. As illustrated in Figure 2, the assumption about the descriptive representation is not confirmed in this case. The age structure can be found on axis x and the share of seniors on axis y. The location of points (each of them represents one analyzed presidential election) in the graph does not show regularity. In addition, when fitting the trend line, there is only a weak and almost unidentifiable relationship between these variables. Consequently, the statement about the descriptive representation is not valid, and the factor of the electoral system and personalization predominated. Therefore, hypothesis H1 is rejected.

If the age structure is compared with presidential power in European countries, a significant difference between strong and weak presidencies emerges, presented in Table 2. Assuming that, if the country has a weaker

⁴⁴ Michal Kubát, ed., *Politické a ústavní systémy zemí střední a východní Evropy* [Political and Constitutional Systems of Central and Eastern European Countries] (Praha: Eurolex Bohemia, 2004); Robert L. Maddex, *Constitutions of the World* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2008).

⁴⁵ Kubát, *Politické a ústavní systémy*; Maddex, "Constitutions"; Blanka Říchová, ed., *Západoevropské politické systémy: komparace politických systémů* [Western European political Systems: A Comparison of Political Systems] (Praha: Vysoká škola ekonomická, 2009).

⁴⁶ Kubát, *Politické a ústavní systémy*; Małgorzata Podolak, "Croatia," in *Political Systems of the Former Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia*, ed. Tomasz Bichta (New York: Peter Lang), 117-148.

⁴⁷ Bulatović and Đukanović were presidents in 1990s when Montenegro was the part of former Yugoslavia. Milatović was elected in 2023.

presidency, the elected heads of state should be younger, considering that political parties do not have a strong motivation to nominate their presidential candidates, who are usually experienced politicians. At the same time, presidents in strong presidencies should be older. This is confirmed by analyzing the age structure. If the total share in the whole of Europe is compared with the presidential power, elected heads of state are younger in weak presidencies, and there is a higher share of politicians in categories to 59 years old, as Table 2 demonstrates.

In political systems with stronger presidential power, older heads of state predominate. The conclusions of the analysis correspond to the assumption defined in hypothesis H2. It is also possible that other factors that are not included in the analysis may also influence this phenomenon. For example, the duration of a given political regime (especially in relation to post-communist countries) or the specific settings of a political system. An interesting role could also play the phenomenon of presidential parties, connected mainly with semi-presidential regimes.⁴⁸ This is very often founded in connection with the candidacy of a particular person. So that, if elected, he or she can also get representation in parliament. Typical examples are *Renaissance* (Macron in France) or *Servant of the People* (Zelensky in Ukraine).⁴⁹ It is obvious that such a political party does not have to follow the “merit system,” which can significantly distort the age structure and the overall picture of previous political experience.

Education

Although it is not a rule, most elected presidents have a university degree. For a better orientation in the dataset, this information will be divided into seven categories according to different specializations in education. The specific category will be education in social sciences. There are many lawyers and economists in the dataset, so they have

⁴⁸ Gianluca Passarelli, “The Presidential Party: A Theoretical Framework for Comparative Analysis,” *Political Studies Review* 18, no. 1 (2020), 87-107, 92, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929919862232>.

⁴⁹ Previously under the names *En Marche!* and *La République En Marche!*

been assigned to a special category, even though it is still social sciences education. In the category of presidents without a university degree, there was not take into account other specialization in their education. Before the analysis, it is important to note one methodological problem that needs to be resolved. If some heads of state graduated from more than one university, only one of them has been taken into consideration in our dataset, with a preference for the specialization that proves important to their life-long career, not only to their political one. For example, the current Bulgarian president Rumen Radev graduated in mathematics for the first time, then in military school as well, and served as commander of the Bulgarian Air Force. In this case, only the second school will be used. This procedure simplifies the categorization.

As Figure 3 shows, the proportion of representatives in each category varies significantly. Most of the directly elected European presidents have a degree in law, which accounts for more than a third of the total, very often in combination with other social sciences. The second most represented categories are graduates of other social sciences (*e.g.*, political science, psychology, or history) and presidents with degree in economics. Generally, it can be said that degrees in social sciences are clearly predominant. Ten presidents in the dataset graduated from technical colleges and five from natural sciences colleges. Three directly elected heads of state were included in the “other” category. Rumen Radev, the current president of Bulgaria, graduated from Air Force University; Petr Pavel, the current president of the Czech Republic, also graduated from the Military Academy; and the former president of Moldova, Mircea Snegur, graduated from agriculture graduate school. Only one head of state has a degree in education. He is the former Finnish president, Martti Ahtisaari. Only one of the presidents in the dataset did not have a university degree. He is Lech Wałęsa, the first Polish president after 1989, who was originally a shipyard worker in Gdansk.

Political Experience

In most countries, the office of the head of state is constructed mainly as a representative one, or important only in selected procedures, depending

on the type of political regime.⁵⁰ For most politicians, this office is the pinnacle of their political career, as they rise through the lower echelons. For some, however, it is their “first stop” in politics. After leaving the office, they continue with their career. Such are the examples of Algirdas Brazauskas (Lithuania) as prime minister, or Andrej Kiska (Slovakia) as the leader of his own political party.⁵¹

In the following section, the political skills of presidents from previous functions are analyzed, particularly focused on the highest positions they have ever held. To complete this analysis, eight categories with different political functions are defined. Two of them focus on members of the government, prime ministers and ministers. The next categories include representatives of the legislative power, chairmen of chambers of parliament or members of parliament. The next category focuses on lower levels of the political system, regional and local politicians. For post-communist Europe, there is also the category of presidents who held any function in a non-democratic regime before 1989. The last two categories are represented by heads of state with other political functions, and presidents with no experience. The results of this part of the analysis are summarized in Figure 4.

Although the prime minister is one of the most important and significant political figures, especially in parliamentary regimes, these are not the most common categories defined for the purposes of this article.⁵² The most represented category in the dataset is “minister” which means that the most often, the deputy prime minister or minister is elected. The ministerial portfolio of the future head of state is very heterogeneous in Europe – finance (e.g., Dalia Grybauskaitė in Lithuania), foreign affairs (Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović in Croatia), interior affairs

⁵⁰ Miloš Brunclík, “Patterns of Government Formation in Europe: The Role of the Head of State,” *Czech Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (2015): 26-42, 26, <https://doi.org/10.5817/pc2015-1-26>; Siaroff, “Comparative Presidencies.”

⁵¹ Andrej Kiska was elected as a leader of political party *For the People (Za ľudí)* to National Council of Slovakia in election in 2020, but he did not take over the seat for health reasons.

⁵² Florian Grotz and Marko Kukec, “Prime Ministers and Party Governments in Central and Eastern Europe,” *East European Politics* 37, no. 3 (2021): 401-416, 402, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2021.1873777>.

(Tassos Papadopoulos in Cyprus), defense (Bronisław Komorowski in Poland), or transport (Traian Băsescu in Romania). Comparing, the former economic or diplomatic ministers were most often elected. The heads of government, prime ministers, come second.

As mentioned above, the presidency is very often the pinnacle of a political career. The third most common category is presidents with no previous political experience, but their proportion is close to fifteen per cent. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that these people participate in public life. Although they did not hold any political office, they were well known to the public. They participated in solving numerous public problems (Zuzana Čaputová in Slovakia), and were political activists (Vigdís Finnbogadóttir in Iceland), or former diplomats (Danilo Türk in Slovenia). A source of recruits in this category are university teachers; rare cases include Rumen Radev in Bulgaria, a representative of the armed forces, and Volodymyr Zelensky in Ukraine, a former actor.

In this analysis, members of parliament are also represented by leaders of political parties (e.g., Nikos Anastasiadis in Cyprus), key figures during the transition of former communist parties to social democracy, the specific process of party transformation in democratic transitions, defined as *social democratization*⁵³ in political science (Ivo Josipović in Croatia), or members of the European Parliament (Andrzej Duda in Poland). An important part of the dataset consists of politicians of the non-democratic regime before the democratic transition. Their common feature is that they held office in the 1990s, during the consolidation of the political system, very often as representatives of the reform wings of the respective communist parties that each symbolized regime change (Ion Iliescu in Romania, Zhelyu Zhelev in Bulgaria, Algirdas Brazauskas in Lithuania, Mircea Snegur in Moldova, or Leonid Kravchuk in Ukraine).

⁵³ Michael Waller, "Adaptation of the Former Communist Parties of East-Central Europe: A Case of Social-Democratization?," *Party Politics* 1, no. 4 (1995): 473-90, 474, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068895001004003>; Vít Hloušek and Lubomír Kopeček, *Politické strany: původ, ideologie a transformace politických stran v západní a střední Evropě* [Political Parties: The Origin, Ideology and Transformation of Political Parties in Western and Central Europe] (Praha: Grada, 2010), 49.

Only two presidents did not hold a hierarchically higher office than a regional or local one. The first one is Klaus Iohannis, former mayor of Sibiu. He had stepped into national politics as a candidate for prime minister and had parliamentary support, but in the end, he was not appointed by the president.⁵⁴ Therefore, most citizens probably perceived him as a national political actor rather than a mayor of a Romanian city. The second one is Viktor Yanukovich, the former governor of the Donetsk region in Ukraine. Otherwise, it can be said that there are many former mayors among the presidents, such as Lech Kaczyński (Warsaw), Rolandas Paksas (Vilnius), Rudolf Schuster (Košice) or Jorge Sampaio (Lisbon). However, they all went on to hold some kind of national political office. Five presidents have held a different function from a common office, such as Boris Trajkovski (Deputy Minister) or Lech Wałęsa (founder of the Solidarity unions). In this category there are also heads of state who were elected for the second term after a break in their political careers (Valdas Adamkus in Lithuania, Ion Iliescu and Emil Constantinescu in Romania).

As with the age structure, the results are analyzed in relation to presidential power. While in the case of the age structure, the distinction within the type of presidency approximately corresponded to the defined hypothesis, this is not the case of political experience. As it can be seen in Table 3, there is no positive correlation between presidential power and the political experience of the elected candidates. Moreover, the results are exactly the opposite of the defined hypothesis. As can be seen, presidents who held one of the important constitutional positions in the years prior to their election (*e.g.*, prime minister, member of the government) tend to prevail in weak presidencies. Although even these former influential politicians also form a significant proportion of elected presidents from countries with strong presidential powers, it is significantly lower than in the second category. At the same time, it is interesting to note that according to the data, a significantly higher proportion of former communist politicians were elected to the

⁵⁴ Aurelian Muntean, Grigore Pop-Eleches and Marina Popescu, "The 2009 Romanian Presidential Election," *Electoral Studies* 29, no. 4 (2010): 753-757, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2010.07.006>.

presidency in countries with a strong presidency in Central and Eastern Europe. However, this may be related to the fact that many of these post-communist countries have adopted some constitutional principles from Western Europe. At the same time, there was no effect of the variable analyzed for presidents with no previous political experience. Although one might expect these presidents to predominate in countries with less power, the proportion is almost the same in both categories. This fact shows us that the hypothesis defined in relation to presidential power does not correspond to the analyzed results.

Gender

The last characteristic that to be analyzed is gender. Although it might seem that simply describing the proportion of men and women in presidential offices would be meaningless due to the fact that women are severely underrepresented not only in political positions, it is also interesting to observe this factor, especially in a comparative context.⁵⁵ The gender structure of European presidents is introduced in Figure 5.

As the figure illustrates, presidencies in European countries tend to be a “men’s club.” In the post-1989 period, only nine women have held the presidency. This situation confirms the global political trends, in the sense that there is a lack of women in politics, not only in the position of the head of state but in all political positions, and women are under-represented.

Finally, the results are evaluated in terms of the gender structure in European presidencies in comparison with the Women Political Participation Index created by the V-Dem project. The results are summarized in Table 4. As it can be seen, women are elected to the presidency mainly in countries which have a higher index than the mean and median value in the dataset. In almost all countries, the value of the index reaches 0.9, indicating a significant role of women in politics.

⁵⁵ Thushyanthan Baskaran and Zohal Hessami, “Does the Election of a Female Leader Clear the Way for More Women in Politics?,” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 10, no. 3 (2018): 95-121, 95, <https://doi.org/10.1257/pol.20170045>.

However, there is one case that does not follow the pattern. In Ireland, two women were elected to the presidency, although there was a significantly lower value of the Women Political Participation Index. Its score is well below the global mean and median. The specificity of the Irish case is likely to be reflected in this deviation, specifically, the role of Mary McAleese in the political events in Ireland before her election to the presidency. This factor can interfere with the election of other women. Another example is Zuzana Čaputová, who was elected at a time of significant anti-government protests and dissatisfaction with the political situation in Slovakia. Although it has been shown that the election of a woman to the presidency in most cases goes hand in hand with a greater role for women in politics, this certainly cannot be generalized to the whole of Europe. Therefore, it is necessary to reject the hypothesis H3. The descriptive representation concept could not be applied to the presidential elections. It seems that the type of election associated with significant personalization also prevails here.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to map the biographical characteristics of European presidents elected since 1989 and to examine them within the theoretical framework of descriptive representation and presidential power. In the theoretical part, the author has outlined the theory and methodology and briefly summarized the history of direct presidential elections in Europe very shortly. In the analytical part, the focus was placed on four biographical characteristics – age, education, previous political experience, and gender. Their configuration in Europe was explained through a descriptive analysis based on the original dataset. The second part of the analysis tried to investigate the pattern of the information in the dataset using the theoretical concepts mentioned above.

The dataset shows that the age structure of elected presidents is very heterogeneous in relation to the descriptive representation. The relationship between the age of elected presidents, and the age structure of the population is negligible and almost undetectable. Thus, it turns out that the factor of seniors' proportion, which we used for the research, is

not a suitable predictor for the age structure of European presidents. It is therefore necessary to reject our hypothesis H1, since neither a positive nor a negative correlation between the variables has been found.

In the case of hypothesis H2, that examines the relationship between age and previous political experience on presidential powers, we have only partially obtained the results we predicted. Indeed, in the case of age, it has been shown that presidents tend to be older in countries with a greater volume of presidential powers. This is in line with the assumption based on the nominations of political parties that favor older politicians for presidency. However, it is important to emphasize that this factor may not be the determining factor regarding other facts, and that other factors may also be reflected there. In the case of previous political experiences, the effect was exactly the opposite. While former politicians in high constitutional positions were expected to predominate in strong presidencies, the exact opposite is true. These politicians are more likely to be found in countries with a weak presidency.

At the same time, the proportion of presidents with no previous political experience is similar in both categories. Regarding the question of the gender structure of presidential offices linked to hypothesis H3, it can be noted that women are elected to this position in countries where the Women Political Participation Index is higher. However, this is not always the case, as it was argued in the case of Ireland. It is thus once again confirmed that the specific political situation or the current system design can play a role in the election of the president.

Therefore, it is clear that although the effect assumed in our hypotheses was more or less strong in some cases, these findings cannot be generalized to the whole of Europe. The electoral systems used in Europe are strongly connected to the personal profile of the candidate, which was clearly manifested here. It also depends on the specific political context in each country, and the personal characteristics of the candidates. It is therefore necessary to consider each country as unique case, the specifics of which influence who is elected to presidential offices.

Annexes

Table 1

Presidential power in analyzed European countries

| Country | Presidential power | Type of presidency |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Austria | 1 | Weak |
| Bulgaria | 3 | Weak |
| Croatia (1990-2000) | 6 | Strong |
| Croatia (since 2000) | 4 | Strong |
| Cyprus | 6 | Strong |
| Czech Republic (since 2013) | 2 | Weak |
| Finland (1994-2000) | 5 | Strong |
| Finland (since 2000) | 2 | Weak |
| France | 7 | Strong |
| Iceland | 1 | Weak |
| Ireland | 3 | Weak |
| Lithuania | 4 | Strong |
| Moldova (1994-2000) | 5 | Strong |
| Moldova (since 2016) | 3 | Weak |
| Montenegro | 2 | Weak |
| North Macedonia | 4 | Strong |
| Poland (1992-1997) | 6 | Strong |
| Poland (since 1997) | 3 | Weak |
| Portugal | 3 | Weak |
| Romania | 5 | Strong |
| Serbia | 2 | Weak |
| Slovakia (since 1999) | 2 | Weak |
| Slovenia | 1 | Weak |
| Turkey (2011-2017) | 4 | Strong |
| Turkey (since 2017) | 7 | Strong |
| Ukraine (1992-1996) | 6 | Strong |
| Ukraine (since 1996) | 7 | Strong |

Source: author's own elaboration based on Siaroff (2003).

Note: The presidential power is modified in the cases of the Czech Republic (since 2013), Moldova (since 2016) and Turkey (2011-2017) because of the adoption of the direct presidential election. Presidential power of the presidents in Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey (since 2017) are not included in the dataset. The score of presidential power for these countries was made according to constitutional texts.

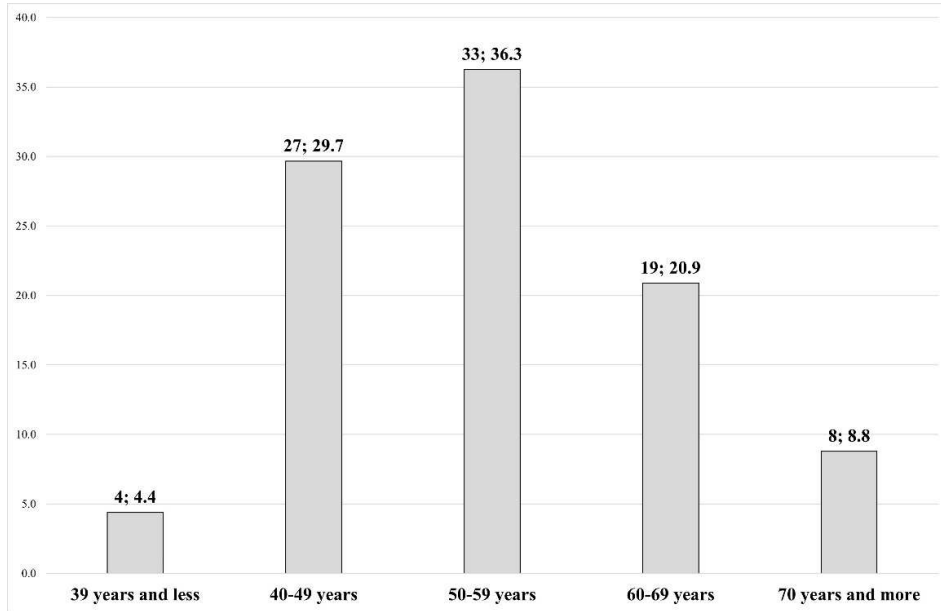


Figure 1. Age structure of European directly elected presidents (total; %)
 Source: author's own elaboration based on the analyzed collected data

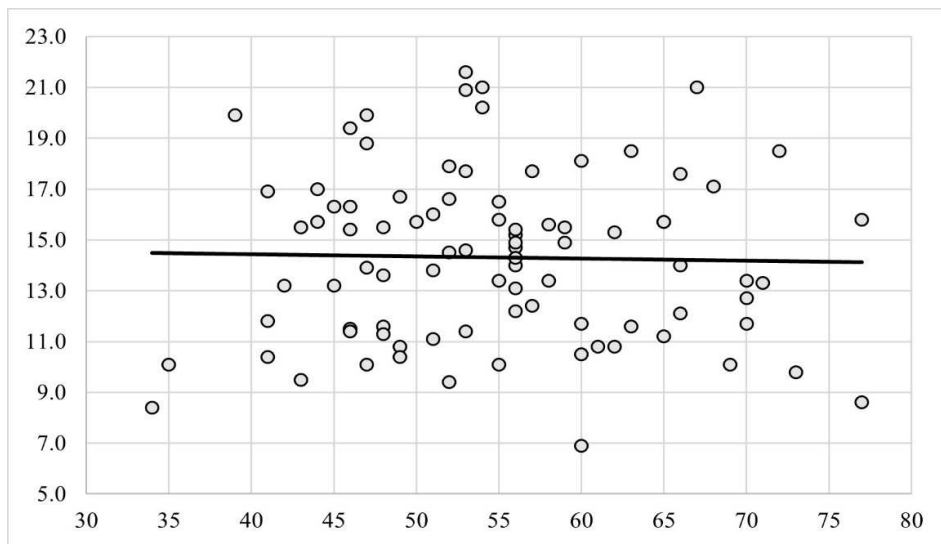


Figure 2. Relationship between the age structure (axis x) and the share of seniors (axis y)
 Source: author's own elaboration based on analyzed collected data and World Bank – Gender Data Portal.

Table 2

Age structure in comparison with presidential power (%)

| Type of presidency | Weak | Strong | Total |
|--------------------|------|--------|-------------|
| Power | 1-3 | 4-7 | – |
| < 40 years | 6.1 | 2.5 | 4.4 |
| 40-49 years | 36.7 | 20.0 | 29.7 |
| 50-59 years | 30.6 | 42.5 | 36.3 |
| 60-69 years | 22.4 | 20.0 | 20.9 |
| > 70 years | 4.1 | 15.0 | 8.8 |

Source: author's own elaboration based on the analyzed collected data and Siaroff (2003).

Note: N = 89 (data are not available for 2 cases).

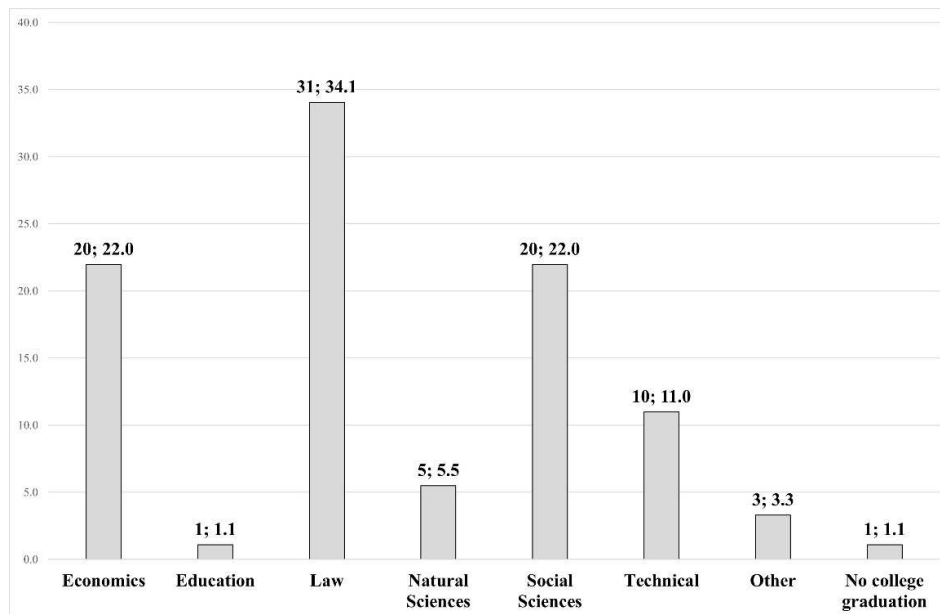


Figure 3. Educational structure of European directly elected presidents (total; %)

Source: author's own elaboration based on the analyzed collected data.

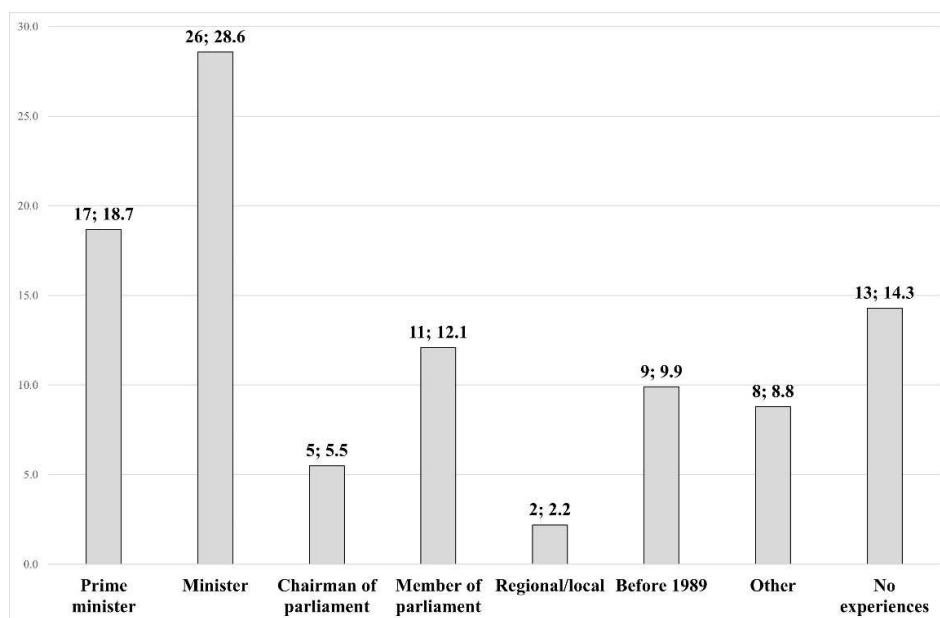


Figure 4. Previous political experiences of European directly elected presidents (number; %)

Source: author's own elaboration based on the collected data.

Table 3

Comparison of previous political experience and presidential power (%)

| Type of presidency | Weak | Strong | Total |
|------------------------|------|--------|-------------|
| Power | 1-3 | 4-7 | – |
| Prime minister | 20.4 | 17.5 | 18.7 |
| Minister | 34.7 | 22.5 | 28.6 |
| Chairman of parliament | 4.1 | 7.1 | 5.5 |
| Member of parliament | 12.2 | 12.5 | 12.1 |
| Regional/local | 0.0 | 5.0 | 2.2 |
| Before 1989 | 6.1 | 12.5 | 9.9 |
| Other | 8.2 | 7.5 | 8.8 |
| No experiences | 14.3 | 15.0 | 14.3 |

Source: author's own elaboration based on the collected data and Siaroff (2003).

Note: N = 89 (data are not available for 2 cases).

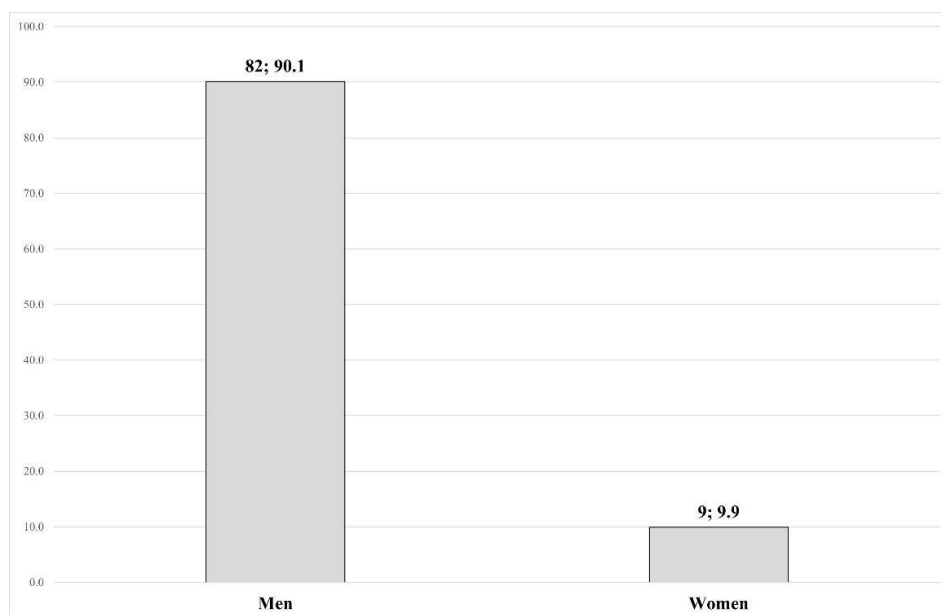


Figure 5. Gender structure of European directly elected presidents (number; %)
Source: author's own elaboration based on the collected data.

Table 4

Women as presidents in comparison with the Women Political Participation Index

| DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS (Women Political Participation Index) | | | |
|--|------|--------------------------|---|
| Mean | | | 0.864 |
| Median | | | 0.910 |
| Highest value | | | 1.000 |
| Lowest value | | | 0.487 |
| COMPARISON OF ELECTION OF WOMEN WITH THE WOMEN POLITICAL PARTICIPATION INDEX | | | |
| Country | Year | Elected president | Women Political Participation Index value |
| Croatia | 2015 | Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović | 0.920 |
| Finland | 2000 | Tarja Halonen | 0.998 |
| Iceland | 1992 | Vigdís Finnbogadóttir | 0.950 |
| Ireland | 1990 | Mary Robinson | 0.716 |
| Ireland | 1997 | Mary McAleese | 0.834 |
| Lithuania | 2009 | Dalia Grybauskaitė | 0.927 |
| Moldova | 2021 | Maia Sandu | 0.999 |
| Slovakia | 2019 | Zuzana Čaputová | 0.916 |
| Slovenia | 2022 | Nataša Pirc Musar | 0.996 |

Source: author's own elaboration based on Michael Coppedge, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan I. Lindberg, Jan Teorell, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Michael Bernhard, Cecilia Borella, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Linnea Fox, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerlow, Adam Glynn, Ana Good God, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Katrin Kinzelbach, Joshua Krusell, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Natalia Natsika, Anja Neundorf, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefina Pernes, Oskar Rydén, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi-ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson and Daniel Ziblatt, "V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v14", *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.23696/mcwt-fr58>