

Book review:
H. Müller, I. Tömmel (eds) (2022),
Women and Leadership in the European Union,
Oxford, 371 pages

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Notwithstanding the positive changes observed in female descriptive representation, women continue to be inadequately represented in the political arena. The rise of female representatives is discernible in the European Union; nonetheless, their representation remains unevenly allocated. Women have several obstacles of individual, societal, and organisational nature, as well as gender-based stereotypes at every step of their career development. Academic research examining women leaders, including the circumstances and routes that lead to their acquisition of leadership roles, as well as their performance and ability to exercise influence in European decision-making and governance, is notably scarce.

Therefore, the book entitled *Women and Leadership in the European Union* edited by H. Müller and I. Tömmel addresses this significant research gap by focusing on the investigation of women's leadership in the EU, especially on women leaders' ascent to high-level positions and their leadership style, not only in the EU institutions but also in the Member States. In this regard, the study is concentrated on three fundamental research questions:

- 1) How have women accessed leadership positions in EU institutions?
- 2) How have they performed the official functions of their offices?
- 3) To what extent have they achieved significant successes and lasting impact?

The book consists of *case studies* from the executive, legislative, judicial, expert, and administrative branches of the Union, taking into consideration a range of Member States and diverse situational contexts. Furthermore, for the purpose of analysis, the authors distinguish positional and behavioural leadership, as well as political, administrative, and expert leadership. Developing a conceptual framework for women's leadership, at the

intersection of three separate academic fields (namely: EU studies, leadership studies, and gender studies) is a unique contribution of this book, because they have not been combined in previous research.

The main idea provided by this monograph is that the examination of women's positional and behavioural leadership in the EU highlights that, despite being a relative newcomer to gender equality, the European polity presents opportunities for women to ascend to power and exercise leadership in their respective roles, both positionally and behaviourally. In this regard, the authors highlight that the intricate institutional framework favours a more collaborative and consensual leadership approach than authoritative one. Moreover, it has been observed that women have encountered less difficulty in attaining political positions in supranational institutions as opposed to intergovernmental bodies. Conversely, when it comes to administrative roles in EU institutions, the progress in women's representation has been slow, with women facing considerable impediments in acquiring expert positions.

The book consists of a table of contents, dedication, acknowledgements, a list of figures and tables, a list of abbreviations, a section about the Contributors, an introduction, 16 chapters, appendix *Women Leaders in the European Union: (as of October 2021)* and an index. The chapters are organised into seven distinct parts that correspond to the main themes explored in the monograph. The authors, who contributed to this book, mostly originate from universities in Western Europe. However, several contributors also hold positions at universities outside of Europe, including the United States, Canada, and the United Arab Emirates.

The first part of the book is devoted to the conceptualisation of women's leadership and a more profound theoretical comprehension of women's agency within the European context. It also sheds light on the numerous challenges that women encounter, while striving for leadership positions and when in power, drawing analytical distinctions between positional and behavioural leadership, as well as political, administrative, and expert leadership. Furthermore, the chapter intends to offer perspectives from integration theories, gender studies, and leadership studies.

The second part is mostly focused on the analysis of positional leadership in the Union, particularly in its two institutions – the European Commission (EC) and the European Parliament (EP). In the case of the EC, there is a significant rise in the share of women among commissioners and directors general. Additionally, the results indicate that women not only access leadership positions through "feminine" portfolios, but they also hold influential and prestigious EU portfolios, such as budget or external affairs. Regarding female leadership at the administrative top, there is no apparent pattern that would explain the women's career development process. In the case of EP, that at first sight seems to be an exceptional success story for the representation of women in elected office, the research results are not so optimistic, especially in terms of the most influential positions such as EP presidents, European party group leaders or committee chairs. Furthermore, observations led to the conclusion that there is a rich variance in the number of female EU parliament members (MEP) that exists between countries

depending on, for instance, cultural context, delegation size, electoral rules or the left-right dimension of political parties.

The next part takes into account the behavioural aspect of leadership. It provides the readers with four *case studies* concerning women-leaders in both EP and EC. One of them is particularly interesting, because there is qualitatively examined the case of Viviane Reding's performance both as commissioner and MEP. The investigation highlights that different institutions demand distinct leadership styles. While Reding's proactive leadership was suitable for the EC's function of proposing policies, in the case of the EP it was less successful, as it requires a more collective leadership approach.

The book also includes the analysis of national-level leaders, examining women's descriptive representation in the post of prime minister and their performance in the example of two cases – Angela Merkel and Theresa May. The study reveals that female prime ministers typically do not complete a full term in office and tend to resign at a relatively young age, with only a few exceptions. Furthermore, EU institutions have not been attractive options for post-prime-ministerial careers for the limited number of women, who have held this position in the Member States. These findings also validate the notion that EU Member States have not made significant progress in promoting women to national political executive roles. Regarding cases, it analyses the female leaders' performance during crises, uncovering their ways of crisis management and the challenges they need to face, such as extremely gendered media assessments.

The next part is dedicated to administrative leadership, including the analysis of Catherine Day's performance as secretary general of the EC and the examination of German EU policy coordination. The single *case study* reveals that Day not only successfully performed her office's multifaceted functions, but also managed to convert the Secretariat General into an office with a central position between the political and administrative levels of the Commission. Simultaneously, this part's next chapter contributes theoretically and empirically to the question of whether EU integration leads to changes in women's leadership in national public administrations by linking the EU's multilevel administration to feminist public administration theory.

The next part is focused on exercising expert leadership in two EU institutions – the European Central Bank (ECB) and The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). In both cases, women remain underrepresented due to the socially constructed stereotypes and performance expectations specific to the fields that those institutions deal with. Additionally, the book's authors emphasise the significance of Member States in the nomination process, revealing their tendency to exclusively designate men to such positions.

The last part of the book is devoted to the case of Ursula von der Leyen and her pathway towards achieving one of the highest positions in the EU – the president of the EC. It uncovers her capabilities such as political drive and determination, ability to remain steadfast during challenging situations, and non-partisan stance, which were essential to both ascending to the presidency and leading the Commission. The chapter also serves as a glimpse into the prospects of women's leadership in the EU.

The book's strengths are definitely an important contribution to the studies on EU integration, leadership studies, and gender studies, as well as the provision of cases not only of political positions, but also administrative and expert ones. It is noteworthy that the title corresponds well with the content, and the concepts presented in the first part are being followed in further chapters, which makes them all fit together. The authors also indicated the research gaps, which may be a worthy hint for scholars working in this research area.

In terms of weaknesses, it is worth noting that the majority of the cases examined in the book originate from Western Europe, with other EU Member States being overlooked. Although this is understandable with regard to positions held within EU institutions, to ensure geographical diversity, it may be advisable to include other cases in the sections on national leaders or administrative leadership.

The book could be recommended to scholars, who are interested in EU studies and gender studies. This monograph book can be an inspiration for further research, particularly in the areas of research gaps that have been clearly defined in individual chapters.

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