Tools and instruments/Outils et instruments

A database about the Members of European Parliament: Contributions and limitations of automated data collection in the study of European political elites

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Résumé
Une base de données sur les parlementaires européens. Apports et limites de la collecte automatisée de données dans l'étude des élites politiques européennes. Au cours des 25 dernières années, un champ de recherche concernant les carrières des députés européens s'est développé. En nous appuyant sur une quantité massive de données ouvertes accessibles, nous avons assemblé une base de données incluant tous les députés européens de 1979 à septembre 2019. Dans cette note, nous décrivons les processus de collecte de données et la construction de la base de données. Ensuite, nous proposons une application concernant le *turnover* au parlement européen (PE) suite aux élections européennes de 2019. La perspective longitudinale offerte par la base de données permet de décrire ce *turnover*, important mais très variable selon la nationalité et le groupe politique, et qui ne modifie pas fondamentalement la division du pouvoir parlementaire. Enfin, nous identifions plusieurs limites : le manque de données dans les profils des députés européens et les difficultés à la fois dans la comparaison entre les personnes de 27 pays et la comparaison sur une longue période (1979–2019). Par conséquent, l'article montre que la collecte automatique de données peut être très utile. Cependant, dans le cas d'individus, comme ici les députés européens, elle doit être considérée comme une source complémentaire à d'autres.

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Mots clés

approche longitudinale, base de données, collecte automatique des données, comparaison, députés européens, élites politiques, parlement européen, Union européenne

Abstract

Over the past 25 years, a field of research concerning the careers of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) has developed. Drawing on a massive amount of accessible open data, we have assembled an updated database including all MEPs from 1979 to September 2019. In this note, we describe the data collection processes and the construction of the database. Then, we propose an application concerning the turnover at the EP following the 2019 European elections. The longitudinal perspective provided by the database allows us to describe this turnover, which is important, but varies greatly according to nationality and political group, and does not fundamentally alter the division of parliamentary power. Finally, we identify some limitations: the lack of data in MEP profiles and difficulties both in the comparison between people from 27 countries and the comparison over a long period (1979–2019). As a result, the article shows that automated data collection can be very useful. However, in the case of individuals, as MEPs, it should be seen as a complementary source to other sources.

Keywords

automated data collection, comparison, database, European parliament, European union, longitudinal perspective, Members of the European Parliament, political elites

Over the past 25 years, a field of research concerning the careers of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) has developed (e.g. Westlake, 1994; Kauppi, 1996; Scarrow, 1997; Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005; Beauvallet and Michon, 2010, 2016; Gherghina and Chiru, 2010; Hobolt and Høyland, 2011; Whitaker, 2014; Daniel, 2015; Pemstein et al., 2015; Lühiste and Kenny, 2016; Van Geffen, 2016; Høyland et al., 2017). These studies take the expansion of European Parliament (EP) powers as a starting point: what gave a career opportunity to politicians, and many MEPs begin staying in office for longer periods (Whitaker, 2014).

In a pioneering study, Scarrow identified the 'European careerists' (Scarrow, 1997) as one type of MEPs: those who serve long-term careers in the EP. In an effort to update Scarrow's pioneering typology, Van Geffen (2016) also described this group as structurally significant. The European careerists were seen as reflecting the emergence of a supranational elite within the EP (Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005), in a position to lead it and to impose longevity as a key variable in the distribution of positions of power within parliamentary space (Beauvallet and Michon, 2010). The most senior members of the institution had far more possibilities to occupy an executive position (president or vice-president of the Parliament, of a political group or of a parliamentary committee, or of the Bureau), especially the most prestigious ones (committee or group president)[1]. The weight of longevity in the EP in access to leadership positions needs to be clarified. If longevity is decisive, it is because it represents an indicator of

investment in legislative activity. The time spent in the institution gives for MEPs the opportunity to invest in the institution's bodies (parliamentary committees, political groups, delegations, intergroups), to acquire knowledge about the EP and, more broadly, about the functioning of the EU (procedures, people, issues), and to develop specialised knowledge and know-how in legislative areas (e.g. renewable energies, cohesion policies, worker mobility). Parliamentary investment and the development of a form of expertise are conditions for obtaining recognition by peers, which is essential for accessing leadership positions (Beauvallet and Michon, 2012).[2] Thanks to rise of Web 2.0, these studies have expanded in scope and analytical possibilities have become broader. Høyland et al. (2009) proposed a database of background information on MEPs from 1979 to 2009. Thus, to study MEP careers, several researchers have employed this database (e.g. Bailer et al., 2009; Häge, 2011; Hobolth, 2014; Whitaker, 2014; Marshall, 2015; Van Aggelen et al., 2017; Hermansen, 2018).

Drawing on a massive amount of accessible open data, we have assembled an updated database including all MEPs from 1979 to September 2019. Compared to the Hoyland et al. database, four improvements should be highlighted. First, our database is accessible to everyone on the web: the database can be downloaded from *Zenodo*, an open access repository. Second, the database includes MEPs elected in 2019, the last elections. Third, some slags have been corrected: wrong identifiers, some positions not recorded, for example, positions in the EP before 1979. Fourth, we have added gender variable for each MP.

This article aims to present the base, its potential and its limitations. In the first part, we describe the data collection processes and the building of the database. To provide a more accurate overview, we propose in the second part an application concerning the EP turnover following the 2019 European elections, and their consequences. Indeed, the very low rate of re-election of MEPs of the previous legislature suggests a certain instability of EP membership and, by extension, a change in the structuring of the parliamentary space: longevity may no longer be so decisive in access to positions of power. The longitudinal perspective offered by the database allows us to describe precisely this turnover, which is important but varies greatly according to nationality and political group, and does not fundamentally alter the division of parliamentary power. Therefore, in the third part, we identify some limitations: the lack of data in MEP profiles and difficulties both in the comparison between people from 27 countries and the comparison over a long period (1979–2019). However, in the case of MEPs, automatic collection should be considered as a complementary source to other sources.

Data collection processes

Available online, the directory of MEPs includes all MEPs since 1979 (when the first direct suffrage European elections were held). It continually records arrivals and departures in the EP. Each MEP has his or her own page featuring a variety of data: socio-demographic features (gender, age, nationality); parliamentary career (membership in groups, committees, positions held, assistants); parliamentary activity (questions asked, reports drafted); and sometimes academic trajectory (CV) and declarations of interests. The first version of the directory was uploaded in 1997 during one of the very first

Figure 1. First online version of the directory of MEPs. Source: EP's official website, 10 April 1997

versions of the EP website (Figure 1). The basic search filters (by group, committee) have since changed (by parliamentary term, country, etc.).

Two characteristics of the online MEP directory make it difficult for researchers to exploit. First, it is only accessible online. Second, it cannot be exported from the EP website as a single file. Datasets are available in XML format, but they contain partial data (ID, group, country). There is also no application programming interface (API) to directly query the MEP database from a third-party software.

Monitoring websites might initially appear to be a viable alternative. They compile data on votes and on a variety of parliamentary practices, such as attendance and speeches made in plenary sessions, reports and motions for resolutions (mepvote.eu, mepranking.eu, mepwatch.eu, etc.), and consulting basic results is fairly easy and free.[3] However, exporting databases in workable file formats requires paying fees. VoteWatch.eu and KnowWho.com,[4] for instance, sell these files at high prices.

To collect data from the directory and perform fairly extensive scientific analysis[5], we disconnected the online tool. Using the offline directory has at least five advantages. First, it can be accessed offline. Second, it allows us to perform statistical calculations and to create indicators concerning MEPs. Third, it makes it possible to go back in time: the political careers of one or several MEPs can each be quantified or retraced within one or several entities (country, group, committee). Four, it allows searching across an entire parliamentary term or longitudinally (by monitoring MEP cohorts over several terms). Lastly, thanks to the single MEP IDs, the directory can be cross-checked with other databases (for instance, those on votes during a given term that quickly identifies group or political party patterns).

To assemble the directory's offline version, we used web scraping, a technique for retrieving data from one or several webpages. These pages rely on a markup language that may include texts, lists or images. We identified and then downloaded the pages that interested us. We then wrote a script (a list of commands) to extract information from them (year of birth, year of entry into the EP, etc.).

Tools that crawl or monitor changes on webpages have been extensively developed in the past few years. Automated web scraping tools (such as Octoparse) have complemented already existing manual tools, available in multiple programming languages (Rvest for R, Scrapy for Python). The latter tools can be used to download and extract data, and then to display it as tables, with individuals (MEPs) in lines and variables (year of birth, positions held, etc.) in columns.

The directory is not a static object; it changes constantly. Two types of changes can occur. First, there are changes of a technical nature: the structure of the directory can change as a result of a change in the presentation of the pages, or as the result of a displacement or removal of information on a MEP's page. This is what happens when a new version of the EP website is introduced. Second, there are changes in the status of MEPs: resignations, deaths, dismissals, or position changes (change of parliamentary committee, access to an executive position within the institution, a political group or committee). This is why it is preferable to update the base regularly and to work on completed terms or on stabilized data before starting analysis.

The resulting tool is effective, but not without imperfections. Information is missing (gender) or inaccurate. In some cases, press sources, websites of groups or parties, and MEP personal websites allow us to collect, cross-check and confirm available data. The places and years of birth of some MEPs were filled in manually, once the directory was compiled. This information was missing from the EP website and was retrieved from their respective personal pages. The only data missing from the proposed database are the places of birth of 8 MEPs. Gender was not included among the identified variables, and to add it, we used the French version of the EP website. The adjectives used for responsibilities in the feminin form gave one indication of the gender of the MEP (e.g. 'membre suppléante' aka 'female deputy member').

On 26 September 2019, the database comprised 4,116 current and former MEPs, characterized by the following variables: year of birth, political group membership, main institutional positions held (presidency and vice-presidency in the EP, a group or a committee) (Table 1). The database is available to anyone on the site of the open archives *Zenodo*: **https://zenodo.org/record/5036957**.

We did not insert last political group and last party, because the information is too heterogeneous and not easy to process and compare. To simplify data, we selected the year of birth instead of the date of birth and we did not insert date of death, name and surname. It should be noted that the MEP names can be easily retrieved from the EP identifier (Id EP). To give an overview of the contents of the database, let us take the example of the MEP 876, from France, born in 1908 (see Table 2). Member of the European Parliament between 1979 and 1981, his parliamentary id is 876. He was vice-chair of Socialist Group from 14 July 1979 to 31 August 1981, then vice-chair of Political Affairs Committee from 14 April 1980 to 31 August 1981. The number can be

Table 1. Database variables

Id EP
Nationality
Gender
Year of birth
Place of birth
Political groups EP
National parties
President EP
Vice chair EP
Quaestor EP
Chair in EP (group, committee, subcommittee, delegation)
Co-chair in EP (group, committee, subcommittee, delegation)
Vice chair in EP (group, committee, subcommittee, delegation)
Member: position as MEP (group, committee, subcommittee, delegation)
Substitute as MEP (committee, subcommittee)
Observer EP
Substitute observer EP

cross-referenced with the page on the EP website: the number 876 corresponds to the MEP Claude Estier:

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/fr/876/CLAUDE_ESTIER/history/1

Table 2. Example of Claude Estier

parliamentary_id	876
nationality	France
gender	Male
birth_year	1908
birth_place	Paris
political_groups	17-07-1979 / 31-08-1981 : Socialist Group - Vice-Chair
national_parties	17-07-1979 / 31-08-1981 : Parti socialiste (France)
chair	
co_president	
vice_chair	14-04-1980 / 31-08-1981 : Political Affairs Committee 13-10-1980 / 31-12-1980 : Delegation to the EEC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee
quaestor	
member	20-07-1979 / 30-10-1980 : Committee on Youth, Culture, Education, Information and Sport 10-12-1979 / 14-04-1980 : Delegation to the EEC-Greece Joint Parliamentary Committee
substitute	
observer	

The database is updated using an R script whose code is to be maintained and can be shared if necessary. As it stands, this is subject to two main constraints: regular updates of the EP website (redesign of the architecture and the page engine) and the possible introduction of technical constraints preventing web scraping. The next revision of the

database is planned for the end of 2021. The update periodicity is planned to be around once a year. To guarantee interoperability, the download of the directory is proposed in open .csv format. More technical details on the directory can be obtained through the documentation provided in .rdf format (metadata and variable schema) and .xml format (metadata following the DDI standard).

An application: The 2019 turnover

Available variables can be used to study indicators and their combination. In the resulting base, time is a particularly central factor for analysis, in terms of changes occurring in time and time spent in the EP[6]. By offering longitudinal measurements since the 1979 European elections, we can move beyond instantaneous measurements (at a particular juncture), and observe variations in MEP profiles term after term (from 1979 to 2019). To give an idea of the possibilities offered by the database and to show the interest of embracing a diachronic perspective, we propose an application concerning the 2019 EP turnover.

The European elections of May 2019 have been much commented on in terms of the election results – the loss of seats for the two main groups (EPP and S&D) – and the rising voter turnout – from 42.6% in 2014 to 51%. The high turnover was mentioned less: the rate of re-election had never been so low (34%). This observation is not self-evident in the light of previous studies of MEP careers, which show the extent to which longevity in the EP has become a structuring variable in the parliamentary space during the 2000s (Verzichelli and Edinger, 2005; Beauvallet and Michon, 2010; Whitaker, 2014).

In the EP, the re-election rate has always been between 41% and 45.5%, depending on the legislature, and thus lower than most national parliaments. At 34%, the re-election rate in 2019 therefore appears particularly low. Effectively, many new members joined the EP (438 in 2019 against 373 in 2014). From this point of view, the case of France, a founding and second largest country in the EU, is emblematic. With 24%, the re-election rate of French MEPs was particularly low in 2019, significantly lower than in 2014 (44%). This was due to the good scores of ecologists and the far right-wing, but also the renewed political offer in France. In the dynamics of 2017, candidates from La République en Marche (LaRem), Emmanuel Macron's party newly created in 2017, gave a large place to election novices (in the liberal Renew Europe group, ex ALDE). The framework of the turnover was also adopted by the Socialist Party with an association to the *Place Publique* movement created in 2018, which led to the designation as head of the list of the essayist, Raphaël Glucksmann (39) and never before elected. In the same vein, France Insoumise, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's party (ex MEP), nominated Manon Aubry (29), former spokesperson for an NGO and never before elected. Even the Republicans staged a form of turnover by entrusting the head of the list to François-Xavier Bellamy (34), presented as coming from a conservative civil society and whose modest experience as deputy mayor of Versailles contrasted with the profiles of some of those he preceded on his list (including Nadine Morano and Brice Hortefeux).

The database allows to characterize precisely the 2019 turnover by giving the possibility of going beyond a few examples and constructing several indicators. The low re-election rate during the last elections suggests that the 2019 MEPs will be less

experienced in the EP than their predecessors. Nevertheless, the indicator of average longevity in the EP at the beginning of each legislature puts this observation into perspective. The MEPs elected in 2019 are slightly less experienced than those of the 7th and 8th terms, but slightly more experienced than those of the 4th, 5th and 6th terms. Turnover is above all unequal according to political group and nationality. Longevity in the EP is lower than before for MEPs from the Renew Europe and Green groups, and for MEPs from countries where elections have seen the emergence of outsiders (France, Sweden, Ireland, Austria, Belgium). However, it is higher for the EPP and S&D members who remain the most experienced (4.7 and 3.7 years), and among those elected in Spain, Greece, Netherlands, Finland, and most post-communist countries.

The database also makes it possible to put into perspective the consequences of this turnover on the profiles and modalities of access to EP leadership positions.

On one hand, 2019 elected representatives are a little younger and feminised. Nevertheless, a comparison of the indicators for the different legislatures leads us to qualify this result and to point out significant variations within the parliamentary space. A comparison of the average age over the long term indicates above all a relative stability in age: an average of 50.1 years for the 2019 elected representatives as compared with more than 51 years during the three previous legislatures. In fact, it is mainly in the Renew (ex ALDE) and Green-EFA groups, and some delegations (among others, Denmark, France, Germany, Sweden, Austria). The feminisation of the EP is also a long-term trend (Figure 2). The proportion of women has increased term after term: from 15,2% in 1979 to 40,4% in 2019. This latter is higher than in most of the national Parliaments. Indeed, the EP is one of the most feminised Parliaments in Europe. However, the proportion of women is still lower in the right-wing parties and in the countries of the most recent European Union (EU) enlargements, those of the 2000s (Cypriot, Estonian, Lithuanian and Hungarian delegations).

On the other hand, the analysis of the EP's distribution of power and leadership positions (Presidency, vice-presidency and Quaestors, presidency and vice-presidency of political groups and parliamentary committees) still shows the importance of seniority in access to EP leadership positions. Presidents and vice-presidents of the EP, committees and political groups have on average more than 5 years seniority in the EP (only committee vice-presidents are exceptions). We insist that longevity in the EP is a synthetic indicator of a medium or a long term investment in the EP, in political groups, in parliamentary committees, in legislative areas through the tabling of questions and amendments, and even more so in the drafting of parliamentary reports. Of course, longevity does not always mean investment in legislative work: indeed some MPs elected for several legislatures have never written a parliamentary report. Nevertheless, this is not the case for a large proportion of MEPs.

The longitudinal perspective also shows the differentiated dynamics of the link between seniority and access to leadership positions (Figure 3). The link was strongest during the 6th legislature and less so during the 7th. EP enlargements have contributed to some redistribution of these positions. Nevertheless, from the 7th to the 9th legislature, the link was again increasingly strong, and longevity in EP leadership positions in the 9th legislature is close to the levels observed in the 6th legislature.
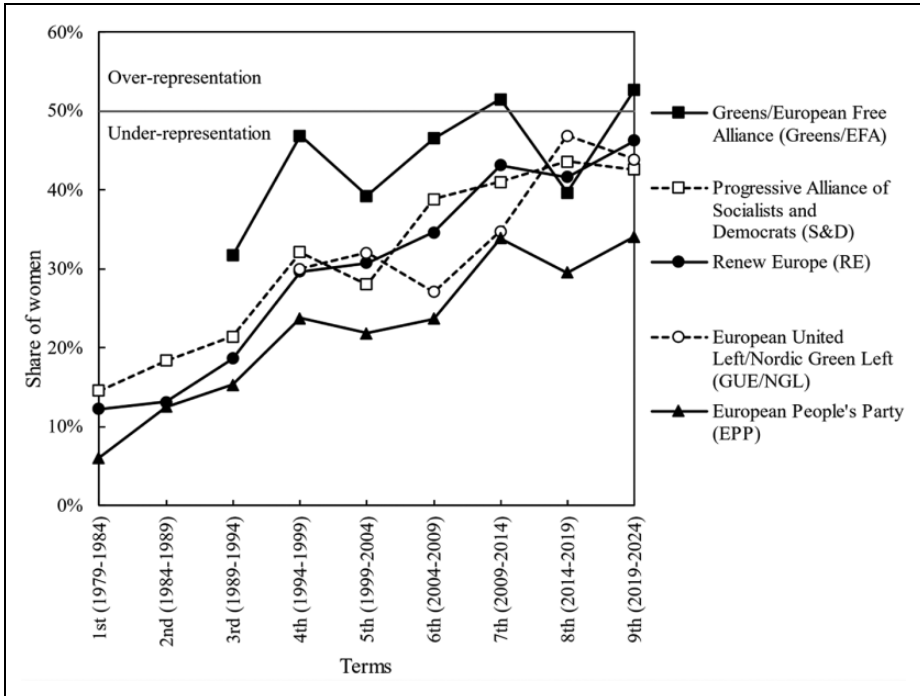
Figure 2. Share of women in the European Parliament, by term and political group (1979–2019). Source: Database of Members of the European Parliament (September 2019). Scope: All MEPs (1979–2019). Reading: In the Green group, there were almost 47 percent of women in the 4th legislature

Thus, collating a number of MEP characteristics, the database offers avenues of research into the transformations of MEP profiles, term after term, and into longevity in the EP in a variety of positions (committees, groups, executive positions, etc.). Indicators of activity in committees and recorded parliamentary practices (contributions to plenary debates, motions for resolutions, reports, etc.) could also be included to further examine the connections between careers and parliamentary practices. Several limits of this tool should now be mentioned.

Limitations of data collection and comparisons

We shall point to three main limitations. Firstly, the variables collected, which are those available on the EP website, relate almost exclusively to the positions held in the EP and the length of time spent in these positions. The only indicators relating to the profiles of elected representatives are nationality, place and year of birth, and gender (information collected in a complementary manner). Like the EP online pages, the database does not include information on individual MEP career paths before joining the EP concerning education (type of degree, discipline studied), profession (which professions were
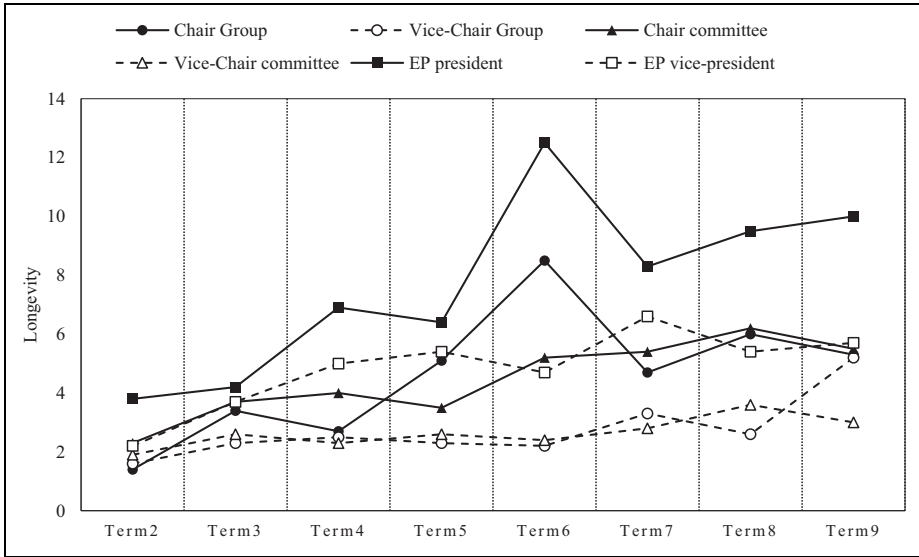
Figure 3. Longevity of MEPs in the EP at the beginning of the mandate according to the legislature (in years). Source: Database of Members of the European Parliament (September 2019). Scope: All MEPs (1979–2019)

exercised, in which countries and for how long) and politics, such as type of position held (if former MP, member of government, local councilor, political aide), length of political career, age at first mandate, etc. This type of information is important for understanding the dispositions to embrace a European career and to exercise power in the EP (Beauvallet et al., 2018). However, these indicators are difficult to collect automatically: positions are likely to vary between countries and professional trajectories may be reconstructed form CVs (by evoking one career stage rather than another, preferring one term to another to avoid giving too much information about one's professional or political past). For example, many elected officials avoid declaring positions of political aides since these positions are typical career stages for political professionals and many elected officials prefer to present themselves in other ways. Similarly, information on longevity in positions is rarely available. For the analyst, having been a lawyer or a political aide for 20 years is not exactly the same as having been one for one year.

Secondly, the database synthesizes information on elected representatives from all EU countries. Comparing people from 27 countries remains difficult. The database centralizes and aggregates the results of various elections that took place in national political arenas with very different histories and relationships to the European Union. The information tends to artificially unify a group on a statistical and symbolic level. The presence of women is a suggestive example. The database allows for variations concerning women. However, an analysis of the unequal presence of women should also take into account the nationality, and the different national political histories. For

example, the conditions for women's access to a European mandate varies greatly depending on the country: some countries have introduced parity or more-or-less circumscribed quotas on the proportion of women (France, Belgium, Spain, Slovenia, Croatia, etc.), others have not.

Thirdly, the database covers a period of 40 years (1979–2019). Comparative analyses over a long period raise the question of the stability of data entities. In this sense, very long-term comparative projects such as the comparative dataset (DATACUBE) by Heinrich Best and Maurizio Cotta (2000), which covers 12 European countries from 1848 to 2000 (Best and Cotta, 2000), have obvious limitations. The same position (being a MP, a lawyer or a teacher) often designates a very diverse reality several decades apart. At the EP, being the chairman of a parliamentary committee or a political group, or even simply an MEP, does not refer to the same reality in 1979 and in 2019. The contours of the EP and its powers have changed, parliamentary roles have become institutionalized, and MEPs have different profiles (Beauvallet and Michon, 2010): besides feminisation, women MEPs less often have national parliamentary and government experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, by gathering a great deal of information, this database is a tool which should save time, aid and assist researchers interested in studying EP careers. This database can thus be a starting point for studies on elected officials from one or more countries, from a political group or those involved in a field of public action. However, we must guard against the uncontrolled use of accessible data, the use of data without due reflection, and the difficulties of temporal and international comparisons. This database can only be a complementary tool to more detailed quantitative surveys, crossing several sources, and to interview surveys, which allow to go further in the explanation of parliamentary investments.

Annex

Table 1. Longevity in the EP at the beginning of the term (in years)

Term	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Political group									
Group of the European People's Party (EPP, ex EPP-ED)	1,9	4,3	3,5	2,3	2,8	3,2	4,0	4,7	
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D, ex PES)	1,5	4,5	3,0	2,9	2,9	3,3	3,3	3,7	
Renew Europe (ex ALDE, ex ELDR)	1,3	2,5	1,9	1,1	1,8	2,9	2,9	1,8	
Non-attached Members	0,4	1,6	2,5	1,8	1,8	1,8	1,8	0,9	
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)		0,6	1,7	1,2	2,9	2,4	3,4	2,4	
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)			2,8	2,0	2,0	1,9	1,6	1,6	
EU	1,6	3,9	2,7	2,3	2,5	3,0	3,0	2,8	

Source: Database of Members of the European Parliament (September 2019).
Scope: All MEPs (1979–2019).

Table 2. Average age of MEPs by term and nationality (in years)

Term	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Political group									
Group of the European People's Party (EPP, ex EPP-ED)	53,6	52,5	52,7	51,7	50,6	51,1	51,4	52,1	51,6
Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D, ex PES)	48,9	48,9	49,1	48,9	50,2	50,5	51,9	51,2	51,1
Renew Europe (ex ALDE, ex ELDR)	52,8	48,4	50,0	50,3	50,7	51,1	50,4	53,7	48,9
Non-attached Members	54,6	47,8	51,1	48,3	50,6	52,0	49,5	52,8	47,7
Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA)				46,6	47,3	48,5	49,0	50,8	47,5
European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)			43,2	50,3	52,9	51,1	52,7	49,3	48,2
Country									
Belgium	49,3	46,5	49,6	52,4	49,4	51,6	51,3	49,9	52,5
Denmark	47,3	48,6	49,2	50,2	53,2	52,5	47,1	46,8	37,6
France	54,2	52,4	48,9	50,3	50,8	53,8	52,8	55,4	50,1
Germany	50,2	49,8	50,6	48,9	49,3	50,6	51,5	52,9	49,3
Ireland	48,2	52,0	52,8	49,9	53,9	49,9	52,9	50,0	54,3
Italy	55,4	55,7	52,9	50,7	52,4	54,2	53,1	48,3	49,6
Luxembourg	47,2	54,4	53,6	51,4	56,1	61,3	56,6	53,6	52,5
Netherlands	50,4	48,7	47,7	51,1	49,3	47,6	47,4	48,2	46,8
United Kingdom	45,6	48,5	49,0	48,9	49,6	53,0	53,9	52,6	51,4
Greece	55,8	54,6	53,8	55,4	55,2	51,5	51,9	55,5	51,2
Portugal		45,7	46,3	48,7	49,4	50,1	48,2	49,8	50,8
Spain		48,2	50,5	49,4	51,4	51,5	52,9	50,7	50,7
Sweden				47,6	51,4	48,4	50,9	50,8	45,0
Austria				47,3	47,9	51,1	51,5	50,5	47,3
Finland				50,3	49,2	51,7	49,7	52,3	55,7
Cyprus					48,0	59,2	53,7	54,4	55,2
Czech Republic					49,8	49,6	51,5	48,8	46,7
Estonia					49,0	56,3	53,0	55,2	48,6
Hungary					47,3	46,2	48,5	49,3	46,6
Latvia					46,7	49,9	55,2	53,3	57,5
Lithuania					49,3	51,1	52,7	53,8	60,8
Malta					46,6	40,7	48,8	49,9	44,2
Poland					49,2	50,5	49,1	56,6	56,4
Slovakia					48,8	50,6	53,8	54,5	49,1
Slovenia					49,3	50,9	49,9	53,9	50,1
Bulgaria						43,6	44,1	43,4	46,1
Romania						45,7	46,4	47,0	49,2
Croatia							47,7	48,9	47,9
EU	**51,5**	**50,7**	**50,3**	**49,9**	**50,5**	**51,0**	**51,2**	**51,5**	**50,1**

Source: Database of Members of the European Parliament (September 2019).
Scope: All MEPs (1979–2019).

Table 3. MEPs' experience in the EP at beginning of parliamentary term according to country of election (in years)

Term	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Belgium	1,7	3,8	3,8	2,5	3,2	4,0	4,4	3,6
Denmark	1,8	3,1	2,7	2,8	2,9	2,3	3,0	3,1
France	1,5	2,8	2,5	2,0	3,4	2,7	3,2	1,4
Germany	2,7	5,8	4,0	5,5	6,1	5,7	5,3	4,6
Ireland	1,7	4,5	4,9	6,3	1,2	3,6	3,6	2,6
Italy	1,7	2,4	1,2	1,3	2,0	2,0	1,5	2,0
Luxembourg	1,7	1,7	2,6	3,0	4,2	6,0	3,5	2,4
Netherlands	2,5	5,5	4,5	2,2	2,8	2,8	2,3	3,2
United Kingdom	2,6	7,4	5,4	4,0	5,4	5,9	4,5	3,1
Greece	0,6	3,1	3,3	2,0	0,7	1,5	0,5	2,3
Portugal	0,0	1,6	1,6	1,3	1,7	1,8	2,9	2,6
Spain	0,0	2,1	2,2	2,6	3,0	3,4	2,8	3,0
Sweden			0,0	1,1	1,9	2,6	2,3	0,7
Austria			0,0	1,6	4,0	2,7	2,6	1,6
Finland			0,0	1,0	2,5	1,8	2,7	3,2
Cyprus				0,0	0,2	0,8	0,7	2,5
Czech Republic				0,0	0,2	3,1	2,1	2,5
Estonia				0,0	0,2	1,5	1,7	1,7
Hungary				0,0	0,2	2,0	3,1	4,6
Latvia				0,0	0,1	1,2	3,0	5,1
Lithuania				0,0	0,1	0,8	2,3	2,4
Malta				0,0	0,1	2,0	1,4	4,8
Poland				0,0	0,1	1,6	2,7	2,5
Slovakia				0,0	0,2	2,3	3,7	1,4
Slovenia				0,0	0,2	1,4	2,5	4,0
Bulgaria					0,0	0,8	1,3	2,2
Romania					0,0	0,7	2,6	1,9
Croatia						0,0	0,5	2,0
EU	1,6	3,9	2,7	2,3	2,5	3,0	3,0	2,8

Source: Database of Members of the European Parliament (September 2019).
Scope: All MEPs (1979–2019).

Table 4. MEP Directory Metadata

MEP Directory Schema	
parliamentary_id – Parliamentary ID	
Type	Numeric (Integer)
Description	MEP's unique and lifetime identifier provided by the EP.
nationalty - Nationality	
Type	Text
Description	MEP's nationality.
gender - Gender	
Type	Code

Table 4. (continued)

MEP Directory Schema	
Description	MEP's gender.
Code	Category
F	Female
M	Male

birth_year - Birth Year
Type	Numeric (Integer)
Description	MEP's birth year (4 digits).

birth_place - Birthplace
Type	Text
Description	MEP's birthplace. Clarifications in brackets when available.
Missing cases	8

political_groups - Political Groups
Type	Text
Description	MEP's membership history to political groups.

national_parties - National Parties
Type	Text
Description	MEP's membership history to national parties.

chair - Chair
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a chair in EP.

acting_president - Acting President
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as an acting President in EP.

co_president - Co-President
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a co-President.in EP.

vice_chair - Vice-Chair
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a vice-Chair in EP.

vice_president - Vice-President
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a vice-President in EP.

quaestor - Quaestor
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a quaestor in EP.

member - Member
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a member in EP.

substitute - Substitute
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a substitute in EP.

observer - Observer
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as an observer in EP.

substitute_observer - Substitute Observer
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a substitute observer in EP.

president - President
Type	Text
Description	MEP's responsabilities history as a President in EP.

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Notes

1. These positions are filled every 2.5 years, at the beginning and in the middle of each of the terms. The bureau is elected by secret ballot and by an absolute majority of member votes and the number of votes determines the order of precedence. The group presidents are elected based on principles that are similar in each group, whereas the committee presidents (in the same way as presidents of delegations and vice presidents of committees and delegations) are designated using the 'd'Hondt system': the number of each group's appointed positions depends on the number of members; the groups then share the positions that they were attributed between their different delegations, and eventually internal delegations in the groups submit names for given positions (but this choice must be endorsed by the group bureau). Their strategic character has considerably increased along with the complexity of parliamentary games, the growth of the institution's internal division of labour and the affirmation of the EP in inter-institutional games.
2. However, longevity does not always go hand in hand with investment in legislative work, as shown by the case of MEPs who have remained in the EP for several legislatures and whose investment is very moderate. See among others the case of Jean-Marie Le Pen, former leader of the French far-right party, elected to the EP for more than 33 years, and whose legislative activity was limited to a few rare plenary interventions, questions asked or even proposals for resolutions with other members of his party.
3. It is worth mentioning the ParlTrack project, which monitors changes made to most European Parliament website pages in real time, from the voting process to information on MEPs. The data are made available free of charge in a little-known format. They contain mistakes (homonyms are badly processed), are sometimes incomplete (no information on practices, such as reports, or on nationality) or are difficult to access (for instance, the presence of a MEP during a specific term).
4. See: https://kw1.knowwho.com/dods-eu-parliament-directory-for-salesforce/
5. The legal notice of the website does not mention webscraping. This database is an archive intended to be used in scientific researches, which excludes it from the scope of the GDPR. See: Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the Protection of Natural Persons with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and on the Free Movement of Such Data, and Repealing Directive 95/46/. Available at: http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj/eng (accessed 12 July 2021).

6. As in the Table 1, the longevity measures are made based on the variables of position in groups, committees, etc.

Supplemental material

The French version of this article is available on the *BMS* website. It can be downloaded as 'supplementary material' from the online version of this article.

Matériel supplémentaire

La version française de cet article est disponible sur le site internet du *BMS*. Elle est téléchargeable en tant que 'matériel supplémentaire' joint à l'article.

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