DATA BRIEF
May 2017
GENDER, POLITICAL PARTIES & PIPELINES

The Women in Public Service Project is pursuing the goal of 50x50: 50% representation of women in policy and political leadership by 2050. This ambitious vision is only achievable through data-driven solutions and partnerships to understand the reality of women’s leadership in government and to advocate for meaningful change.

Party politics is experiencing tectonic shifts as waves of populism and national rhetoric shift the sand away from centrisim. As France and its voters demonstrated in its most recent round of presidential elections, historically preferred parties are losing ground to parties that previously operated on the margin. This change in party politics begs the question, who is in charge? Who is leading the parties and how has this changed in recent years? Data on the gender composition of party leaders and deputy leaders across Europe shows an unsurprising reality: women are not in charge. Globally, women make up 40 – 50% of political party members, but hold only 10% of leadership positions within parties.¹

¹ Source: European Commission Gender Balance in Decision-Making Positions
Analysis of the party leadership data in Europe reveals similar results to global averages. Only in Norway are the number of women and men party leaders equal in 2016. On average across Europe, only 16% of party leaders are women. This has improved from 5 years prior where only 11% of major party leaders were women.

An examination of deputy party leaders is more optimistic, giving hope that the next wave of women party leaders is waiting in the wings, but there is much progress left to make. On average, 26% of deputy party leaders across Europe are women with Sweden leading the pack at 80%.

Why should it matter if women are leading political parties? Political parties are the engine of democratic systems. They conduct elections, recruit and train candidates, and act as the gatekeepers for political candidacy. Political parties are a critical piece of the public leadership pipeline from the local to the national level and support candidates to reach positions the legislative and executive branches of government. Having women serve in party leadership signals to other women that there is a place for them in politics. If we want to see an improvement in women’s participation in government, we must strengthen their participation and leadership in political parties.

Notes
2 The European Institute for Gender Equality Database of Women and Men in Decision-Making Positions is available online at http://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs/browse/wmidm

The Women in Public Service Project will accelerate global progress towards women’s equal participation in policy and political leadership to create more dynamic and inclusive institutions that leverage the full potential of the world’s population to change the way global solutions are forged.

Explore the Data: data.50x50movement.org