

Parity Paradox: A Case Study on the Barriers Women Continue to Face Post-Parity

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Abstract for Masters

Parity Paradox: A Case Study on the Barriers Women Continue to Face Post-Parity

Mairin Sullivan

In 2000, following decades of underrepresentation of women in politics, France implemented robust gender quota laws for National Assembly elections that required parties to nominate fifty percent men and fifty percent women. The laws were celebrated for guaranteeing gender parity in access to office. Despite increases in women's representation with each election following the implementation of the parity law, the two most recent elections have shown no progress. Despite these quota laws in France, women's representation in legislatures remains similar to other democracies. I seek to understand what barriers exist for women accessing political office, specifically in the National Assembly. I examine France's unique historical legacy of the exclusion of women from politics and the importance of the concept of the universal citizen. I also delve into issues and gaps within the legislation itself. A lack of placement mandates and other factors can tempt parties to defect from following the law's obligation. I also find that cultural factors, such as childcare obligations and depictions of women in the media, affect women's equal access to political office. Using a combination of historical analysis, institutionalism, and a cultural lens, I conclude that the parity laws in France are not a sufficient condition for equality in access to National Assembly office. There are still significant barriers – both in the law itself, and from cultural and historical legacies - that affect women's equal representation in French politics.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

French women were among the last in Europe to be granted the right to vote. Moreover, for years, they were underrepresented in the National Assembly despite improvements in other areas such as women’s entrance and participation in the labour market and attainment of higher levels of education.¹ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the country introduced a series of gender parity laws that would require political parties to nominate the same number of women as men in legislative elections.

With the passing of the parity laws, women’s representation in the National Assembly increased steadily with each election, reaching over 37 percent by the late 2010s compared to just 6 percent in the 1990s (See Table 1). However, the latest election in 2022 produced a slight decrease in the proportion of women in the French National Assembly. This has been largely glossed over in literature and popular discussion, as the establishment of the parity law was seen as having ‘solved’ the problem of women’s underrepresentation in politics. Does this recent development suggest that women’s representation in France has hit a glass ceiling? In this thesis, I seek to explain why, despite 50 percent of candidates running for office were women, but only around 37 percent have been elected since 2017.

Table 1: Percentage of Female Deputies in French Legislative Elections

1988	1993	1997	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022	2024
5.6%	5.9%	10.8%	12.1%	18.5%	26.9%	38.8%	37.6%	36%

Source: Assemblée Nationale <https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr>

¹ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

This case study examines the historical and institutional contexts of gender parity system in France and both the logistical and societal barriers that women continue to encounter when entering politics. Whether it be related to the penalty system or inherent gender biases, women continue to face countless obstacles in political life.

Research Question

Women are generally underrepresented in political offices around the world. During the late 20th century, the conversation around the implementation of gender quotas to even the playing field grew substantially. The United Nations launched the Decade for Women in 1975. In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women was adopted. It promoted the use of temporary measures to accelerate de facto equality between men and women.² At the 1995 Fourth World Women's Conference in Beijing, a 30 percent gender quota was recommended for parliaments.³ They were a tool to fast-track gender equality and increase the proportion of women in legislative chambers. The inclusion and promotion of women in government is largely seen as essential to the democratic process in the 21st century. While less than one hundred years ago women were being acknowledged in the political sphere in France for the first time as voters, their involvement in political office is now viewed as a critical component to democracy.⁴ However, gender imbalance in legislatures is present in every global region, from the most advanced democracies to autocratic regimes. The imbalance is often

² Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, "Defining Women's Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France," *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 125.

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, "Equality, Democracy, and the Broadening and Deepening of Gender Quotas," *Politics & Gender* 9, no. 3 (2013): 313.

even more obvious in positions of power, such as head of government, party leaders, and cabinet members. Gender quotas have been one tool among many that have been implemented to increase the number of women in national parliaments.

While there has been major progress throughout the globe in terms of women's opportunities in politics, the World Economic Forum has predicted that at the current rate, it will take nearly 260 years to close the gender gap.⁵ Many countries that have gender quota laws in place still struggle in terms of cultural dimensions and value systems.⁶

In 1999, France implemented a unique and unprecedented gender quota law, which referred to the term 'parity.' This law requires political parties competing for seats in the National Assembly to run 50 percent female candidates, plus or minus a maximum of 2 percent.⁷ Today, 37 percent of members in the French National Assembly are women. Major gains were obtained in women's representation in the National Assembly in each election up until the mid-2010s, when progress seemed to have hit a plateau.

In this thesis, I explore why there remains a significant discrepancy between the proportion of women who are nominated as candidates versus the proportion of women who are successfully elected to the National Assembly. I will focus specifically on the behavior and priorities of political parties, and their incentives to adhere to the law, or to ignore it, as well as sociological and cultural barriers that women continue to face in the pursuit of political life. I build on Mazer et al's argument that behind France's parity laws there is less – not more – than

⁵ Rosamund Hutt, "It Will Take 256 More Years to Close the Gender Pay Gap: Here's Why," World Economic Forum, December 17, 2019, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/12/global-economic-gender-pay-gap-equality-women-parity-pay/>.

⁶ Drude Dahlerup, "Gender Quotas Database," International IDEA and Stockholm University, 2009, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas-database/quotas>.

⁷ Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 473.

meets the eye.⁸ I seek to answer the question: **“What barriers do female deputies face when running for office and climbing the political ladder?”**

Theoretical Framework

While there is not much literature on the relationship between political parties and gender quotas, there is a highly developed literature on gender quotas in general. I draw on theories from several scholars in this thesis, including the work of Mona Lena Krook who categorized France as a legislative quota system whereby all parties must adhere to the enshrined law. Krook’s work also highlights the reasons why quota systems are adopted, all of which can be seen in the case of France. Krook’s study is useful because it can tell us about the priorities of the parties whose support was needed for the adoption of the quota in the first place. I draw on Krook’s institutionalist perspective on quotas, which examines the relationships between quota laws and other institutions, as electoral laws. I also draw on Krook’s work with Pippa Norris on alternative strategies that can enhance existing quotas. Seeing if these alternative tools are present within political parties may tell us more about their priorities and commitment to women’s representation in government. This brings me to the sociologically-focused literature. Sociocultural ideas about? are relevant when studying gender quotas, because we must understand why women continue to struggle to achieve equal political representation. Part of my sociocultural analysis will draw on research from Donatella Campus and other scholars who have studied the portrayal of women politicians in media, including Franceschet and Piscopo’s concepts of ‘quota broadening’ and ‘deepening’ shed light on the priorities of political and corporate bodies. In another work, Franceschet and Piscopo use a cultural lens to determine some

⁸ Amy G. Mazur et al, “Party Penalties for Parity: Less than Meets the Eye,” *French Politics* 18 (2020): 28.

of the reasons why gender quotas are needed in the first place and why most parliaments are not gender-balanced. This work is relevant to France as the country is historically Catholic and has a strong tradition of a gendered division of labour.

Case Selection

I have opted to do a case study rather than a broader comparative study due to the presence of a multitude of factors that shape the implementation and outcomes of gender quota laws, which would make it difficult to draw conclusions from a comparative study. Not only do quota systems come in various forms, have different target numbers, and have varying levels of success, but there are other intervening factors in the equation: religious history, democratic tradition, cultural and societal gender roles, penalties for not adhering to quota laws, among others. A single-case study will control for these variables and provide a rich account of the history, implementation, and effects of a specific gender quota law. The French gender parity law provides an ideal case study to explore gender quota systems in the broader context of party-level and socio-cultural factors. In the span of ten years, gender parity was transformed from a fringe demand of radical women's groups to a measure supported and accepted by almost all social and political actors. France uses the term 'parity' in lieu of 'quota,' and this provides insight into the complexities, ideas, and unique attributes of the country's political dialogue. The parity law is unlike any other in the world because it requires that fifty percent of a party's candidates be women.

My aim is to explain what incentives exist for parties to obey it or ignore it based on the laws themselves as well as sociological and cultural factors. Parties are the gatekeepers of candidacy in France and must balance several priorities that may impel them to adhere to the

quota requirements or to defy them. I am also interested to see if there are differences in how parties on the right vs. the left, as well as smaller versus larger parties have responded to the parity law. In this thesis, I argue that women face barriers to accessing political office due to both logistical elements of the parity law itself that affect party behaviour in candidate nomination, and the cultural value systems of political parties and voters.

Outline of the Thesis

The chapter that follows provides an overview of the history of the women's movement in France and how the gender parity law came to be. It situates the case study in France and provides the reader with information on how and why France's unique parity system works the way it does. In Chapter 2, I will examine existing literature on the topics of gender quotas and the study of women in politics. Chapters 3 and 4 will provide important historical context on the women's movement in France and the events leading up to the implementation of the gender parity laws. Chapter 5 delves into the institutional and practical elements, determining what factors are motivating political parties to adhere or defy quotas. Examples of motivating factors include penalties and incumbency. This will be followed by a sociological discussion surrounding why women struggle in politics in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 will be a conclusion which will make suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Gender Quota Scholarship: A New Territory

This chapter provides an overview of the scholarship on gender quotas. I begin by providing a basic definition of ‘gender quota,’ and describing the types of existing quota systems that exist in political systems. This is followed by a concise account of their history, implementation, and discussion on what they mean for equality and democracy. Then, I examine and review the literature of some of the most prolific scholars in the field of gender quota studies. This chapter discusses the general nature of gender quotas on a broad scale to help situate the case of France.

Types of Quotas

Gender quotas are a set of rules that promote women’s participation in political office. Krook identifies distinct types of quotas: reserved seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas. Reserved seats have a set number of seats for women, and the other quota types set a required minimum at either the party or elected level. Party quotas can be subdivided into two types: aspirant quotas, where parties must nominate a woman for a seat; and candidate quotas, where a certain proportion of nominations must be women.⁹ All quota types share the goal of increasing the proportion of women in government. This can involve a ‘critical minority’ of 20-30 percent, or a fully gender-balanced 50 percent.¹⁰

⁹ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 6.

¹⁰ Drude Dahlerup, “Gender Quotas,” Gender Quotas Database, International IDEA, 2009, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/quotas>.

Reserved seat quotas are most common in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.¹¹ They were also the earliest type of quotas adopted, with most of them implemented by the 1970s.¹² While typically used to address gender (in)balance, reserved seats have also been used to advance ethnic or religious minority representation. According to Krooks, reserved seats often provide low levels of female representation - far below gender balance - for several reasons.¹³ Firstly, political actors may see the reserved seats as a maximum rather than a minimum. In other words, they do not feel the need to run 'extra' women because they are already meeting the quota. The non-reserved seats are therefore allocated to men only. Additionally, reserved seat quotas often provide opportunities for fewer women than other types of quotas because they often set lower targets, and the male domination of the political sphere remains the status quo. Reserved seat quotas alter the electoral system by requiring a certain number of female legislators rather than candidates. For example, Pakistan uses a reserved seat system, whereby 17% of seats in the National Assembly and 17 of the 104 seats in the Majlis-E-Shoora are reserved for women, in addition to 10 seats reserved for non-Muslims.¹⁴

Party quotas are the most common type of gender quota, and are typically found in Western Europe, with their origin being traced to socialist and social democratic parties in the 1970s who voluntarily adopted quotas within their parties. From the 1980s to 1990s, green parties and even some right-leaning parties adopted voluntary party quotas. The threshold of party quotas can range from 25 to 50 percent.¹⁵ These quotas attempt to change how parties

¹¹ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Gender Quotas Database: Pakistan," International IDEA, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/241/35>.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

nominate candidates, by forcing them to examine existing biases and barriers to women in government.¹⁶ In proportional representation systems, this type of quota affects the party list composition. In a closed list system, the parties submit an ordered list of candidates, and at the polls, electors vote for the party of their choice. Some closed list quota laws may require a ‘zipper’ whereby the list of names alternate between women and men or have similar rules (e.g., one of the first two names must be a woman). In open list systems, voters pick preferred candidates rather than parties. A quota would be more difficult to implement in this system due to factors including sexism or bias among the electorate, party compliance, and the details of the specific law. In majoritarian systems, a party quota typically requires that a certain proportion of a party’s candidates be women. Sweden, for example, is a country that uses voluntary party quotas. Despite the quota not being legislated, nearly half of Sweden’s unicameral parliament are women. The Social Democratic Party uses a zipper system, the Left Party and the Green Party both have a 50% quota for women on party lists, and the Moderate Party ensures that women make up at least two of the first four names on party lists.¹⁷

Legislative quotas are most commonly found in developing countries and countries in post-conflict stages.¹⁸ They also address the candidate selection process, but they are passed by national legislatures and apply to all parties within the respective systems.¹⁹ These quotas also range from 25 to 50 percent and typically include sanctions if parties do not meet the quota.²⁰ Brazil’s electoral system uses a legislated quota for their lower house. The country’s Electoral

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ “Gender Quotas Database: Sweden,” International IDEA, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/261/35>.

¹⁸ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 9.

¹⁹ Ibidem.

²⁰ Ibidem.

Law stipulates that the Chamber of Deputies is elected by a proportional list system whereby no more than 70% of the party lists can comprise of one sex.²¹

With so so many types of quotas, target percentages, cultural influences, and noncompliance measures, it is impossible to generalize and say that quotas are good, bad, effective, ineffective, etc. This presents the opportunity for plenty of case studies and comparative studies in the field of gender quota research.

A History of Quotas

Discussions around women's underrepresentation in politics began in the mid-1970s, after the United Nations began prioritizing the promotion of gender equality.²² In 1979, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Article 3 of CEDAW directly addresses women's representation in politics, and the use of "temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women."²³ The 1990s signaled the beginning of gender quotas being implemented, starting with Argentina in 1991. At the European Commission's 1992 conference in Athens, a declaration was adopted that called for the egalitarian distribution of power between men and women.²⁴ The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action by the United Nations called on governments "to ensure women's equal access and full participation in power structures and

²¹ "Gender Quotas Database: Brazil," International IDEA, accessed March 20, 2023, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/68/35>.

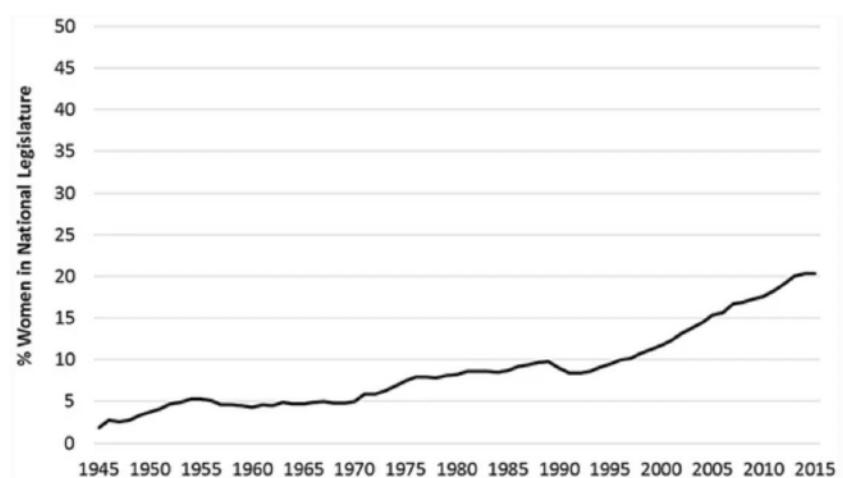
²² Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, "Defining Women's Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France," *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 126.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

decision-making, as well as to increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.”²⁵ At the same time, the Council of Europe was also promoting further representation of women in the political arena.²⁶ We can observe a general pattern of women’s equality in government being viewed as a marker of political modernity during the 1990s.²⁷

Figure 1: Women’s Global Political Representation in National Legislatures (1945-2015)



Source: Palgrave Handbook of Women’s Political Rights (2019): 34.

Figure 1 demonstrates the progress of women’s representation in national legislatures throughout the twentieth century. We can observe around 3 percent of all legislators being women in 1945, compared to around 20 percent in 2015. The 1970s saw a small jump in

²⁵ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

²⁶ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 126.

²⁷ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 126.

representation, coinciding with the second wave of feminism. From the 1990s on, due to greater discussion around women's representation and the effects of quotas, we can observe more rapid progress for women's representation around the world. Still, despite women making up half of the world's population but only around one-fifth of national legislators, there is much work to be done and discussions to be had in this field.

Gender quotas are adopted for a multitude of reasons, and there are multiple paths that a country can choose to attain an effective outcome. Mona Lena Krook, a pioneer in the study of gender quotas, has created four distinct categories of factors that explain why gender quotas may be adopted. Frequently, quotas are adopted due to a combination of these factors. The first category of factors include women's groups and organizations that mobilize and put pressure on political actors to adopt quotas.²⁸ These groups recognize quotas as an effective way to increase the proportion of women in representative legislatures. The second category of factors that contributes to the adoption of gender quotas focus on political elites. While they may support quotas for ideological reasons, it can also be for the sake of their political gain. Supporting a quota can be an attempt to sway the female electorate in their favour, and they can use quotas to maintain control within and outside their parties.²⁹ In the third category, we find new and evolving ideas about representation and equality that inspire actors to support gender quotas. Many quota laws have emerged during democratization and state-building, or other periods of progress.³⁰ Finally, the fourth category of factors include international norms and transnational sharing.³¹ According to Krook, much of the gender quota discussion and initial support of quotas

²⁸ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Ibid*, 11.

occurred on the international stage, through organizations such as the United Nations. Countries are also able to learn from one another through networking about aspects of quotas that do and do not work in various contexts.³² Krook's findings show that there are multiple actors that can work to implement gender quotas, and that different paths or different actors can lead to the same outcome of the implementation of a gender quota system.

In her work, Krook examines gender quotas from an institutionalist perspective to understand the effects of the interactions between quota legislation and other institutions. Krook's *Quotas for Women in Politics* explores why some quotas function more efficiently than others by using a comparative framework in case studies. For Krook, a major factor at play is how quota reforms interact with other institutions, and if these interactions are mutually reinforcing or conflicting. Mutually reinforcing interactions are precluded by harmonized sequences, and conflicting interactions are precluded by disjointed sequences.³³ Both may be intentional or unintentional. Krook's demonstrates that quotas are most effective when supported by other measures, such as their extension into multiple levels of government or being enshrined in constitutional law. In all of her case studies, normative questions were the centre of debate, such as arguments about what democracy, equality, and representation mean.³⁴ This research is interesting for my case study and research aims, as France put the parity laws in the constitution and made many efforts to deepen the quota laws, but this has not translated to an especially 'effective' quota, seeing as only around 40 percent of the National Assembly's deputies are women despite them being 50 percent of nominated candidates.

³² Ibidem.

³³ Ibid, 223.

³⁴ Ibid, 221.

In *Beyond Quotas*, Krooks and Norris examine alternative strategies to increase women's representation in government, which include equality rhetoric, equality promotion, and equality guarantees.³⁵ Different actors may pursue unique non-quota strategies for gender balancing that can complement quota laws or exist on their own. For example, civil society actors, such as women's organizations, may focus on awareness raising campaigns, recruitment initiatives for potential female candidates, training programs, and fundraising.³⁶ Political parties can create women's sections or committees, set soft targets, implement recruitment initiatives, exercise capacity building, and fund campaigns.³⁷ Parliamentary actors may utilize gender neutral or gender inclusive language, utilize women-friendly images and media, ensure that their workplace is safe for women, conduct research on the topic of women and politics, and create women's caucuses.³⁸ State actors are able to implement party funding and campaign support for women, and support or introduce anti-gender-violence laws.³⁹ Non-quota strategies can enhance existing quotas, attempt to increase the visibility of women in politics in places without quotas, and pave the way for potential quotas in the future.⁴⁰ The main issue with non-quota strategies is that it is difficult to measure their success, and there is little research being done in this field of study.

Krook and Norris utilize a culturalism perspective in seeking to address issues surrounding gender quotas and why they must be a tool in the first place. They cite traditional gender roles as a major factor in women's underrepresentation in parliaments around the globe.⁴¹ It is only recently that women have become accepted political figures and that the political

³⁵ Mona Krook and Pippa Norris, "Beyond Quotas: Strategies to Promote Gender Equality in Elected Office," *Political Studies* 62, no. 1 (2014): 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

sphere has welcomed women on a larger scale. Krook and Norris provide a multitude of actions to encourage women to enter politics. They break down the transition from citizen to elected official into three stages in order to pinpoint where the exact cause of women's underrepresentation in government may lie, and provide strategies to address these shortcomings. They ask if the problem is women not wanting to run for office, parties having biases against women, or voters having prejudice against women.⁴² Before any discussion of candidacy, a woman must want to run for office. If the problem lies here, that is the supply of women candidates, they propose several avenues for action, such as awareness-raising campaigns, symbolic actions, reforms to legislative working conditions, anti-gender-violence laws, recruitment funding, and mentoring.⁴³ Krook and Norris assert that any type of action that shows, symbolically or literally, that women belong in politics, can help to address a shortage of potential female candidates. Next, if the issue lies in the actual party recruitment, or in the aspirant to candidate phase, quotas are the optimal strategy.⁴⁴ They force parties to look at existing biases and even the scale between male and female candidates. Political parties can also create women's sections. If the problem exists in the process from candidate to elected official, this is almost entirely aided by the allocation of resources, most often financial.⁴⁵ Krook and Norris offer political actors a variety of strategies that can be applied to address the shortage of women in government.

Manon Tremblay has added important work to the study of women in politics. In *Democracy, Representation, and Women*, Tremblay takes into account the historical, the sociological, and the practical explanations for why women are missing from the political sphere.

⁴² Ibid, 6.

⁴³ Ibid, 7.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

The first democratic societies in Greece and virtually all early political theorists excluded women.⁴⁶ Democracy, she argues, has been built on the exclusion of women. The great revolutions in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, while not deeming women citizens, did help pave the way for representative democracy.⁴⁷ Furthermore, traditional gender roles and ideas of where men and women should be and what they should do almost always exclude women from the public sphere. Sexism and misogyny are deeply ingrained in our societies. One of her findings that is relevant to my thesis is that cultural standards have more influence on the lack of women in government than socioeconomic factors.⁴⁸

In the 21st century, gender equality is seen as an important quality of representative democracy. If it is missing, then there is a democratic deficit.⁴⁹ Gender equality entails not only the political, but also the socioeconomic and cultural. Tremblay argues it is difficult for representative democracy to deliver its virtues of equality when much of society is so resistant to it in such a multitude of ways (sexism, racism, religious discrimination, etc.).⁵⁰ Democracy is therefore not a sufficient condition for the feminization of politics.

Tremblay's study examined a wide array of factors (cultural, political, socioeconomic) in search of any trends or correlations favouring or working against women's representation in parliaments around the globe. She found some general patterns as well as some patterns specific to certain types of countries and regimes. Shorter legislative terms, for example, were found to

⁴⁶ Manon Tremblay, "Democracy, Representation, and Women: A Comparative Analysis," *Democratization* 14, no. 4 (2007): 533.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 534.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁹ Manon Tremblay, *Women and Legislative Representation: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Sex Quotas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 2.

⁵⁰ Manon Tremblay, "Democracy, Representation, and Women: A Comparative Analysis," *Democratization* 14, no. 4 (2007): 533.

be correlated to a higher proportion of women in parliament.⁵¹ There was no conclusive evidence on whether women fared better on open or closed party lists.⁵² Cultural factors tended to play a larger role than socioeconomic factors in explaining a lack of women's representation. However, developing and undemocratic countries are heavily influenced by the voting system in place.⁵³ The findings for liberal democracies and developed countries showed that the electoral system played no major role. Tremblay also found a slight correlation between a female head of government and greater female representation in parliament.⁵⁴ Most importantly, quotas, regardless of type, were found to have no significant effect on female representation in parliament.⁵⁵ Depending on the quota type and other circumstances, the reasons for this can vary. For France, penalties play a major role in how parties behave surrounding the parity law. We will come to see that although financial penalties have been increased, many parties, especially larger ones holding many seats, opt to absorb penalties and run male candidates.

Bjarnegård, Yoon, and Zetterburg provide interesting insight into how corruption can be either reduced or reproduced in gender quota laws.⁵⁶ While, as Krook argues, quotas are often adopted strategically (perhaps in an effort to reduce corruption), they can exacerbate existing corruption issues or create new ones. This is all in spite of their intended purposes to recalibrate existing power structures, change party behaviour, and make the candidate selection process a more even playing field between the sexes.⁵⁷ Although quotas can sometimes lead to and

⁵¹ Ibid, 543.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibid, 546.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 545.

⁵⁶ Elin Bjarnegård, Mi Yung Yoon, and Pär Zetterberg, "Gender Quotas and the Re(pro)duction of Corruption," in *Gender and Corruption: Historical Roots and New Avenues for Research*, ed. Helena Stensöta and Lena Wägnerud (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 106.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 107.

reproduce corruptive practices, it is important to note that we cannot make such a generalization across the board because of the variety in types of quotas, types of regimes, difference in nomination process, etc.⁵⁸ While Bjarnegård et al focus both on how candidates are nominated and what they do in parliament, I will be focusing on the former area of study for this project to identify barriers for women seeking to access political office in France.

Franceschet and Piscopo bring attention to the importance of quota broadening and deepening by applying an institutionalist perspective.⁵⁹ The efforts of broadening and deepening both reflect a highly committed effort to women's equality since actors are guaranteeing rather than promoting equality by using state power to empower women. Quota broadening refers to extending quotas to multiple levels of government, or to boardrooms of corporate entities. Quota deepening is the process where the figures of a pre-existing quota are increased.⁶⁰ This is often done by increasing the percentage to reflect true parity, extending quotas to committees or cabinets, and increasing penalties for noncompliance. Quota deepening, in particular, shows a move beyond tokenism and symbolic representation, where male-dominated politics is being shaken up and power is being redistributed to better reflect principles of equality and parity.⁶¹ Quota deepening and broadening acknowledge that women truly belong in public spaces, and that their presence there is an important part of democracy.⁶²

Franceschet and Piscopo also theorize how the change from promoting to guaranteeing equality has happened. They attribute this to a slow cultural shift. In the mid-to-late 20th century, many scholars believed that as the gender gap narrowed in the field of education and the labour

⁵⁸ Ibid, 108.

⁵⁹ Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, "Equality, Democracy, and the Broadening and Deepening of Gender Quotas," *Politics & Gender* 9, no. 3 (2013): 312.

⁶⁰ Ibidem.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Ibid, 313.

force, so would the gap in politics and other public spheres.⁶³ However, this was not the case, and women continued to face barriers in the legislature and the boardroom despite having equal education and work experience to male counterparts. The argument for quotas is built upon this predicament. State-led programs for gender equality have followed the aforementioned cultural shift. What once was a small gesture of support for gender equality, became setting soft targets or goals for the inclusion of more women. The promotion of gender equality was now complemented by actionable goals. This evolved into legislation carving out a place for women and “fast-tracking” their inclusion, and subsequently, quota broadening and deepening have occurred. Each stage is correcting the mistakes and shortcomings of the last.⁶⁴

Another relevant point brought up by Franceschet and Piscopo is whether or not the motivations for quota implementation truly matter. At the end of the day, there is still a promotion of women’s equality, regardless of whether the quota was implemented for ideological or strategic reasons. Although Franceschet and Piscopo do acknowledge the existence of loopholes within quota legislation and the presence of light penalties for noncompliance, they contend that “quota women” (women who are aided in their election by the quota) are still making strides for women in politics.⁶⁵ At the end of the day, we are still seeing a higher number of women gaining expertise and exerting power. This is similar to Tremblay’s conclusion that quotas may not be the reason for women making progress in political representation.⁶⁶

⁶³ Ibidem.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 314.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Manon Tremblay, “Democracy, Representation, and Women: A Comparative Analysis,” *Democratization* 14, no. 4 (2007): 547.

The study of gender quotas is still in its infancy compared to other fields in political science. While academics have been able to categorize types of quotas, there are still new phenomena surrounding the subject being explored, such as quota broadening and deepening. There is also a lack of academic insight into continued problems that women face *after* quotas are implemented. The message seems to be that quotas are a cure to sexist political structures and continued cultural expectations.

We are seeing a high number of case studies, both single and comparative, drawing on theories and ideas of leading scholars on gender quotas, such as Mona Krook and Manon Tremblay. Many of the authors performing comparative analyses have mixed results and find few distinct patterns and correlation (such as Tremblay, 2007). As a result, many academics, including Tremblay recommend that future research be focused on single case studies to account for political system traits and sociocultural values. Heeding this advice, my thesis focuses on a single case study on France.

For part of my case study, I will be delving into the role of media to examine how female politicians are covered in comparison to male politicians. Media has become a major part of politics. It affects how voters perceive politicians and it can ultimately affect how people vote.⁶⁷ According to Campus, the dawn of television has especially contributed to how politicians are perceived because the audiovisual communication provides viewers with more of a glimpse at personality than a photograph in print media would.⁶⁸ With a ‘good’ personality becoming an increasingly important trait for successful candidates, personalized campaigns focusing more on candidates than parties have become popular.⁶⁹ These campaigns have become more like “horse

⁶⁷ Donatella Campus, *Women Political Leaders and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 22.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 23.

“races” that are focused on candidates rather than a race between party ideologies.⁷⁰ Campus also argues that media coverage of female politicians tends to mention personal appearance, such as attire or hairstyle, compared to coverage of male politicians, which more often mentions aspects surrounding political character.⁷¹

My next chapter will focus on the history of women’s participation in French politics. While France is the birthplace of European democracy, women only won the right to vote at the end of the Second World War. There are many facets of the gender quota laws in France that make this a unique and interesting case. For one, France’s traditional concept of the universal citizen was a major obstacle to surpass for the spear headers of the parity campaign. Additionally, France has the most robust quota laws in the world, being the first country to require that parties nominate women for fifty percent of their candidates. The rapid turn of events from the French being against any form of special treatment to implementing an unprecedented gender-balanced quota is a case that deserves attention.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

⁷¹ Ibidem.

Chapter 3: The History of Gender Quotas and the Women's Movement in France

Much of the literature on French parity laws neglects the important role that women have played throughout the country's history.⁷² However, the following historical context provides critical insight into why women's political representation has been so poor. Despite France espousing values of freedom and republicanism, women were excluded from political participation for decades. There are several factors, including historical documents, Catholicism, and misogyny at play here. This chapter will outline the history of the women's movement in France, setting the stage for Chapter 4, which will detail the history of the adoption and implementation of the parity laws.

Women's Movement in France: From the French Revolution to the 20th Century

While France is one of the sites where modern democracy had its beginnings, women were excluded from politics.⁷³ Like many other societies, men acquired political rights far before women. After the monarchy and ancien régime were overthrown, a new republic was founded where all men were deemed equal universal citizens. This planted the norm of the exclusion of women from politics. Women had played an important role in the Revolution. The Bread Riots of the 1780s had been led by women who were unable to feed their families due to famines.⁷⁴

⁷² Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 10.

⁷³ Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 183.

⁷⁴ "A Bread Riot," *LIBERTY, EQUALITY, FRATERNITY: EXPLORING THE FRENCH REVOLUTION*, accessed July 18, 2024, <https://revolution.chnm.org/d/359>.

The riots and looting helped give rise to the eventual Revolution. During the Revolution, women organized and demanded equal rights, but they were ignored.⁷⁵ The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen only gave men who were not slaves the right to vote. Women were considered passive citizens who did not and should not have any say over public affairs.⁷⁶ This would continue for over one hundred years.

The suffragette movement in Third Republic France (1870-1940) was more muted than those in Great Britain and America, and French women preferred congregating in informal groups rather than staging public protests.⁷⁷ This is in line with the socio-religious image of a woman relegated to the private sphere. While the establishment of the Third Republic in 1840 did present an opportunity to voice demands for suffrage, women in France mostly fought for educational and civil rights until the early 20th century, when women across the globe were rapidly being granted the right to vote.⁷⁸ More women's clubs were founded, and their perspectives were diverse, with some being more radical in their demand for enfranchisement, while others sought a more moderate path.⁷⁹ Hubertine Auclert, a leader of the women's movement, publicly stated that any republic that disenfranchised women was not truly a republic.⁸⁰ Despite the 1848 electoral law giving "tous les français" ("all the French") the right to

⁷⁵ Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 10.

⁷⁶ Noëlle Lenoir, "The Representation of Women in Politics: From Quotas to Parity in Elections," *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 50, no.2 (2001): 222.

⁷⁷ Anika R. Ades, "Female Suffrage and Gender Politics in France," B.A. thesis (Tufts University, 2014), 11.

⁷⁸ Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 11.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁰ Offen, Karen, "Women, Citizenship, and Suffrage in France Since 1789," n.d., https://paris10.sitehost.iu.edu/ParisOSS/D11_Sex_and_Gender/d7_Offen.html.

vote, women were not included. In multiple instances, women did go to court in hopes of winning the right to vote but were struck down each time.⁸¹

Women's clubs that had developed in the early 20th century realized that they needed to establish formal ties with political parties and pique their interest.⁸² Women could only be granted the right to vote if politicians supported and acted on it. Having the clubs and organizations existing without political ties would make the realizations of their universal objective much more difficult. Unfortunately, this was largely a failure as women's entities continued to be ostracized from politics, and no parties felt the need or desire to listen or form a relationship.⁸³

There were, however, multiple bills, proposals, reports, and resolutions heard by the National Assembly from 1901-1937 that would give women the right to vote.⁸⁴ And while the French Parliament approved of enfranchisement on two occasions in the early twentieth century, the Senate struck down both of these motions.⁸⁵ The main argument against women's enfranchisement was that women should be relegated to the private sphere, and that women's bodies were not neutral, and therefore, they could not represent others in office or vote neutrally.⁸⁶ Another belief was that previous instances of women meddling in politics demonstrated that giving women the right to vote could prove dangerous meaning.⁸⁷ It should also be noted that the influence of the Catholic Church and its ideas about gender roles (in

⁸¹ Ibidem.

⁸² Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 12.

⁸³ Ibidem.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 13.

⁸⁵ Anika R. Ades, "Female Suffrage and Gender Politics in France," B.A. thesis (Tufts University, 2014), 13.

⁸⁶ Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 13.

⁸⁷ Offen, Karen, "Women, Citizenship, and Suffrage in France Since 1789," n.d., https://paris10.sitehost.iu.edu/ParisOSS/D11_Sex_and_Gender/d7_Offen.html.

general and within its own institution) certainly played a part in the resistance toward women's suffrage, especially for non-secular parties.⁸⁸ Catholic countries tend to enfranchise women 20-30 years later than Protestant countries, on average.⁸⁹ This is because Catholic doctrine more strictly ascribes traditional gender roles to women both domestically and clerically.⁹⁰ However, there is also evidence that leftist parties were highly against women having the right to vote, because women were typically more conservative than men in France due to higher levels of religious devoutness.⁹¹

Winning the Right to Vote - Second World War

In World War II, women played an important role as Resistance fighters against Nazi forces. They risked their lives on a daily basis to save and honour a country that did not view them as citizens. Women's role in the Resistance allowed them to gain political legitimacy, and in 1944, they were given the right to vote. However, this was not passed in the French National Assembly, but rather by an Order-in-Council from Charles de Gaulle (a type of executive order).⁹² The lack of a representative vote was due to the political context of the time, as De Gaulle, who had virtually no political experience, was running a small provisional government in Algiers, Algeria at the time.⁹³

⁸⁸ Manon Tremblay, *Women and Legislative Representation: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Sex Quotas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 92.

⁸⁹ Anika R. Ades, "Female Suffrage and Gender Politics in France," B.A. thesis (Tufts University, 2014), 3.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 5.

⁹² Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 14.

⁹³ Manon Tremblay, *Women and Legislative Representation: Electoral Systems, Political Parties, and Sex Quotas* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2008), 84.

For De Gaulle, a conservative, giving women the right to vote was a careful and calculated move. As was mentioned earlier, women were more socially conservative than men, on average. Moreover, at the time, the enemy of the French public had shifted through time from the Monarchy to communists. De Gaulle's enfranchisement of women was a strategic effort to ensure that France would not adopt a communist regime.⁹⁴ Additionally, women were granted the right to vote just one month after the liberation of France began, lending evidential support to Krook's point that modernization and transition encourage political change.⁹⁵ The international influence of the Allies should not go unnoticed either, as France was the only nation in the group where women were unable to vote.⁹⁶ De Gaulle had actually been a vocal anti-suffragist, so enfranchising women would help France blend in as a progressive ally.⁹⁷ French women would cast their first votes a year later, in 1945.

Summary and Conclusions

France's traditions led to a resistance to change and a desire to maintain the status quo. While women played important roles in French history from the Revolution to the Resistance, they were second-class citizens. They were believed to be too emotional to vote, and the Catholic church remained influential in its ideas about gender roles despite a Third Republic that valued secularism. The centuries-long fight for women to be equal to men foreshadows and provides context to the difficulty of implementing the parity laws.

⁹⁴ Anika R. Ades, "Female Suffrage and Gender Politics in France," B.A. thesis (Tufts University, 2014), 12.

⁹⁵ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10.

⁹⁶ Anika R. Ades, "Female Suffrage and Gender Politics in France," B.A. thesis (Tufts University, 2014), 5.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

Women have been historically excluded from political life in France due to centuries of tradition. Even prior to the revolution, the second Salic law banned women from inheriting the French crown. Despite women playing an important role in the revolution, voting rights were still not extended to them. Freedom of religion, independent government branches, universal suffrage for men, and the abolition of slavery precluded extending the franchise to women.

Despite several attempts during the early 20th century to get women the right to vote, it was not until World War II that women could go to the polls. This was in turn for the massive role women had played in the French Resistance during Nazi occupation, but also a move that would make Charles de Gaulle even more popular.

It is clear with this information that women in France had to fight continuously, for many years, to be able to vote. This sets the scene for what was to come in terms of implementing the parity law. If it took this long to recognize that women should have the right to vote and be considered persons, how long would it take to recognize that women should be fairly represented within government?

Chapter 4: The Road to Gender Parity

This chapter provides an account of how the parity law came to be. It is important to first understand that the underrepresentation of women in parliaments around the world is a problem that has countless negative effects. As Krook pointed out, pressure to change can come from feminist groups, political strategy, periods of change, and transnational networks.⁹⁸ In the case of France, we see all four at play: Feminist social movements began demanding change; politicians needed to appeal to an increasingly disenchanted electorate; and scandals demanded a culture of greater accountability for politicians and people wanted a more relatable National Assembly that resembled France. Europe was pushing for quota laws and surrounding countries were making gains in women's representation while France lagged behind. Together, these circumstances came together and created a major push to increase and guarantee women's representation in French politics.

The exclusion of women is not only a powerful symbolic message, but it can also signal an incomplete democratic process as half of the population's views may be overlooked, and the resource of effective female politicians is being wasted.⁹⁹ In the 21st century, the inclusion of women in political office is seen as an essential part of democracy as there is a greater desire for legislatures to reflect society. As Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer explain, France had a gender-blind approach to equality and representation, leading to a massive gender gap in political

⁹⁸ Mona Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics: Gender and Candidate Selection Reform* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10-11.

⁹⁹ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

office.¹⁰⁰ The French government was being pressured to recognize this issue while it was in a state of crisis in terms of its relationship with its electorate. In what follows, I will discuss how the concept of gender difference was incorporated into that of the ‘universal citizen’, which had been a major obstacle to quota implementation efforts in France. Then I will discuss some of the bases for both support and opposition to the prospective parity law, followed by some concerns that have emerged since the law’s adoption.

Historical Context of Women’s Political Representation in France

The road to the enactment of France’s gender quota law is long and complicated. By the early 1990s, France’s National Assembly had the same percentage of female deputies that it had in 1945 (about 6 percent).¹⁰¹ This is when women’s groups and academics were impelled to act and make a case for a quota law. The French government had largely ignored the gender imbalance in the National Assembly.¹⁰² France had one of the lowest proportions of women in parliament in Europe, and as one of the cradles of modern democracy, France should act to correct the gender imbalance in its representative government.¹⁰³ Women were underrepresented in every party and at every level of government. There existed a need for change at a significant level when it came to women’s representation in French politics.

¹⁰⁰ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107.

¹⁰¹ Catherine Achin, “The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a “Conservative Revolution”?” in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 184.

¹⁰² Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 126.

¹⁰³ Catherine Achin, “The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a “Conservative Revolution”?” in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 185.

It was mainly feminist activists and academic figures who spearheaded the fight for equality in political representation.¹⁰⁴ The 1992 book *Au pouvoir, citoyennes! Liberté, égalité, parité* brought the issue to light by directly framing parity in the famous French motto *liberté, égalité, fraternité*.¹⁰⁵ One year later, in 1993, a manifesto was published in the *La Monde* newspaper, signed by 577 deputies of both sexes and from all political stripes. It read:

From condescending indifference and contempt to open hostility, we have been able to measure the gap between public principles and reality in the behavior of the political class. To reach real equality between women and men at every level and in every sector of French society, politics has to set a good example. And for that purpose, the time of constraint has come. (Defossez, 2017)

These manifestos became a popular topic of discussion and brought about plenty of dialogue on the topic of women's underrepresentation and how it may be a hinderance to true democracy and equality. However, one historical tradition could not be ignored – the concept of the universal citizen.

The Obstacle of the Universal Citizen

While politicians could easily recognize the lack of women in government, a central theme to French politics proved to be an immense obstacle to introducing a quota law: the concept of the 'universal citizen'. This concept originated during the French Revolution, when the monarchy was overthrown and all 'citizens' were given certain rights. The 'citizen' is

¹⁰⁴ Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 184-185.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 181.

universal in nature - their age, ethnicity, or religion does not matter.¹⁰⁶ France has often used this concept to defend itself from criticism about ignoring the needs of certain groups, such as immigrants and religious or racial minorities.¹⁰⁷ The notion of universalism frowns upon special treatment for marginalized groups and asserts that everyone is equal before the law. The 1789 *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (which holds constitutional value) states: “As all citizens are equal in the eye of the law, positions of high rank, public office, and employment are open to all on an equal basis according to ability and without any distinction other than that based on their merit or skill.”¹⁰⁸

The concept of the universal citizen under a republic is ingrained into French politics and has been since the mid-to-late 1700s. The notions of universalism, republicanism, and democracy are intertwined and inseparable in French political dialogue. Selling a gender quota system to a country with these values would be a near-impossible task. Feminist activists and academics who supported the implementation of a gender quota opted to reorient the concept of a gender quota and situate it into that of the universal citizen by adopting the word ‘parity.’ Parity, a word referring to equality, would promote a quota law in a way that complemented the universal citizens. The concept of parity suggests that the division between men and women was the only division to cross all social groups and boundaries.¹⁰⁹ The two sexes were the only ‘universal’ difference, and there was a ‘dual nature’ to humanity.¹¹⁰ Women were not a special category, but rather one half of the human race. While the term ‘quota’ brought to mind special

¹⁰⁶ Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women’s Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 471.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 473.

¹⁰⁸ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 127.

¹⁰⁹ Mona Lena Krook and Fiona Mackay, *Gender, Politics, and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 55.

¹¹⁰ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 124.

treatment, ‘parity’ meant equitable power-sharing and therefore not contradictory to the model of the universal citizen.¹¹¹ Implementing a parity law would not erase the achievements of the French Revolution and the republican model, but it would ‘fully realize’ them.¹¹²

Support and Opposition to Parity

However, as noted by Dutoya and Sintomer, there were many critics of the concept of parity that came from different directions. These were not so much organized groups as they were schools of thought that existed in some segments of the population and a few political figures. Criticisms against parity stemmed from several sources, including misogyny and republicanism.

There were ‘classical sexists’ who believed that women were not suited to hold political office.¹¹³ This viewpoint was an isolated one and had few supporters. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there was another isolated opinion of the ‘radical marxists and deconstructionists’ who saw the concept of parity as being built upon the dualism that had excluded them from politics for centuries.¹¹⁴ The most popular backlash against parity came from a ‘classical republican’ stance which still saw parity as creating unnecessary division that went against French universalist values.¹¹⁵ Republicans believed that the parity law would denounce “the basic substrata of representative democracy, which is the abstract individual, that is, devoid of any particular attribute (gender, value, class, culture, religion, etc.)”¹¹⁶ There was also the fear that, if

¹¹¹ Mona Lena Krook and Fiona Mackay, *Gender, Politics, and Institutions: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 54.

¹¹² *Ibidem*.

¹¹³ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 129.

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹¹⁶ Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women’s Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 472.

parity was achieved, other marginalized groups would ask for special treatment, which would erode the republican model.¹¹⁷ Finally, many feared that the parity law would create second-class politicians. If women were unable to win without the quota, they argued, then maybe they do not belong in politics.¹¹⁸ Politician Luc Ferry stated that parity “runs the risk of creating ‘quota women,’ elected women who could, rightly or wrongly, be suspected of owing their entry into politics more to legal obligations than to their personal merit.”¹¹⁹

While there was some negative feedback on parity, there was also plenty of support for the idea, as discussed by Dutoya and Sintomer. ‘Differentialist feminists’ believed that women ought to be better included and represented in politics because they had their own unique ideas, values, concerns, and experiences from those of men.¹²⁰ ‘Parity republicans’ saw the concept of parity as changing the political game rather than playing by the rules set out by men.¹²¹ ‘Pragmatist egalitarians’ valued the parity law as an active step towards a stronger democracy that transcended symbolic virtue-signaling.¹²²

A Great Solution and a Natural Step – The Right and Left Support Parity

The birth of the parity movement happened at a time when the French political system was in crisis. The 1990s saw low levels of voter turnout (declined nearly 10 percent since 1986), and an overall attitude of distrust and low faith in the government.¹²³ There was also a host of

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 473.

¹¹⁸ Rainbow Murray, “Parity and Legislative Competence in France,” in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 30.

¹¹⁹ Idem.

¹²⁰ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 130.

¹²¹ Ibidem.

¹²² Ibidem.

¹²³ Catherine Achin, “The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a “Conservative Revolution”?,” in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 185.

scandals on both the left and right, as French political culture had only recently begun to pay attention to corruption and the culture of political impunity was swiftly changing.¹²⁴ Two consecutive Presidents in the 1990s – Jacques Chirac and François Mitterand – were both involved in and prosecuted for corruption scandals.¹²⁵ Between 1992 and 1995, the number of corruption cases brought to court rose from 17 to 54.¹²⁶ After 1988, company donations to political parties were banned, but public funding was increased, and tax laws made individual donations more appealing.¹²⁷ The 1990s ushered in a new political era in France – one where transparency, public accountability, and responsibility were the top priorities for the electorate.

Citizens were demanding some type of reform. The parties were unable to agree on policy reforms and were at a stalemate. Listening to the increasingly loud demand for parity could serve as an aid to spur promise in politics and modernize the government at virtually no financial cost.¹²⁸ The support of the potential parity law by politicians would signify that women were needed to change and improve the functioning of government.

There were several developments in the 1990s that preceded the parity law. In 1994, the left-wing parties participating in European elections used gender-equal candidate lists.¹²⁹ Four years later, in 1998, this was extended to regional elections. In 1997, France’s Socialist Party (PS) implemented a quota for itself requiring 30 percent of its candidates to be female.¹³⁰ After a

¹²⁴ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 127.

¹²⁵ “France - Corruption - Scandals,” Global Security .org,” accessed June 8, 2024, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/fr-corruption-scandals.html>.

¹²⁶ Ibidem.

¹²⁷ Ibidem.

¹²⁸ Virginie Dutoya, and Yves Sintomer, “Defining Women’s Representation: Debates around Gender Quotas in India and France,” *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 3 (2019): 127.

¹²⁹ Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women’s Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 471.

¹³⁰ Quentin Lippmann, “Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?” *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 664.

surprise win in that year's elections, Lionel Jospin became Prime Minister. Both he and his party supported the enactment of a parity law, and with a left-wing majority, a law could easily be passed. Eventually, all parties expressed their support (or acceptance) of a potential parity law.¹³¹ Jospin had campaigned with promises of parity implementation in the Constitution and stronger term limits. It would not require any major concessions and could close the social gap between politicians and the people they represented. Supporting parity would also endear the parties to female voters and would not cost a significant amount of money.¹³² An IPSOS poll from 1998 showed that 80 percent of French citizens surveyed were supportive of parity being enshrined in the Constitution.¹³³ For the right-wing, supporting parity was the right move as it became clear that French citizens were unhappy with the status quo.

After the parties' unanimous agreement on the parity issue, any public criticism and controversy was greatly stifled, and the parity law came to be accepted.¹³⁴ On June 28, 1999 French National Assembly deputies met in Versailles to vote on amendments to Articles 3 and 4 of the Constitution, signaling the first implementation of the parity law.¹³⁵ France was the first country in the world to amend its constitution to ensure that women had equal access to elected office.¹³⁶ They were also the first country to set their quota at 50 percent.¹³⁷ The addition to

¹³¹ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29.

¹³² Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 43.

¹³³ Mariette Sineau, "Institutionalizing Parity: The French Experience," International IDEA, 2002, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/women-in-parliament/les-femmes-au-parlement-au-dela-du-nombre-2002-case-study-france-EN.pdf>.

¹³⁴ Sabine Lang, Petra Meier, and Birgit Sauer, *Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 212.

¹³⁵ Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 472.

¹³⁶ Jocelyne Praud and Sandrine Dauphin, *Parity Democracy: Women's Political Representation in Fifth Republic France* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011), 10.

¹³⁷ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27.

Article 3 reads: “The law favours equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective positions.” Article 4 states that political parties “contribute to the implementation [of this principle] under the conditions set by the law”.

On July 6, 2000, these changes were adopted for “equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective positions.”¹³⁸ There have since been multiple additions that broaden and deepen the law, a summary of which can be found in Figure 2. These additions reflect on Franceschet and Piscopo’s argument that quota broadening and deepening demonstrates a continued commitment to gender equality and egalitarian values.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Mariette Sineau, “Institutionalizing Parity: The French Experience,” International IDEA, 2002, <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/women-in-parliament/les-femmes-au-parlement-au-dela-du-nombre-2002-case-study-france-EN.pdf>.

¹³⁹ Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, “Equality, Democracy, and the Broadening and Deepening of Gender Quotas,” *Politics & Gender* 9, no. 3 (2013): 310.

Figure 2: Broadening and Deepening of Parity Laws in France Since 1999

- **Constitutional Reform (8th July 1999):** Articles Three and Four are modified to include “the law promotes the equal access of men and women to elected offices and elected functions” and “the parties and political grouping contribute to the implementation of this principle”.
- **Law of 6th July 2000:** Political parties are required to present equal numbers of men and women on electoral lists and to respect strict alternation of men and women for elections that use PR with one round—European and Senate—and alternation by groups of six candidates for PR elections with two rounds—regional and municipal elections for cities with populations over 3500. For National Assembly elections, the law incentivizes through the reduction of government party funding by 50% of the difference between male and female candidates above a two percent minimum.
- **Law of 31st January 2007:** Alternation of men and women candidates is mandated in city council elections over 3500 residents; executives of regional and municipal councils are required to follow 50:50 parity; candidates for the cantonal elections are required to name a replacement of the opposite sex. The parity penalty to party funding is increased to 75% of the difference between male and female candidates presented by each party.
- **Constitutional Reform (23rd July 2008):** Article of the constitution is modified to include: “the law promotes the equal access of men and women to elected offices and elected functions as well as professional and social responsibilities”.
- **The Copé-Zimmermann Law (27th January 2011):** Listed companies with more than 500 employees are required to have at least 20% of the members of their board of directors be of the same sex within three years and 40% within six years. (215)
- **The Sauvadet Law (12th March 2012):** A quota of 40% women is put into place for appointed leadership positions in the bureaucracy at all territorial levels, in public hospitals, and for administrative and management councils for any public entity, including search committees (Jacquemart et al., 2020).
- **Law of 7th May 2012:** In departmental elections henceforth run by a first past the post system, each cantonal district has one set reserved for woman and a second for a man, “the gender duo”, and the 50:50 requirement must be followed for the average of all council executives.
- **The Fioraso Law 22nd July 2013:** Governing bodies in public education and research must comply through the alternation of men and women on electoral lists and in appointments.
- **Law for real equality between women and men 4th August 2018:** Parity is required in all leadership positions and representative councils in any public organization regulated by law, including sports federations, health care insurance mutuals, professional associations and government consultative commissions. The parity penalty to party funding is increased to 150% of the difference between male and female candidates presented by each party.

Source: Lang, Meier, and Sauer (2022): 214.

Parity was a concept accepted by French people from both sides of the political spectrum. It promoted equality and democracy through the concept of duality without stepping on the important historical concept of the universal citizen. All parties saw that implementing a set of parity laws brought opportunities both for the promotion of egalitarian ideologies and for popularity at a time when politics was wildly unpopular. However, the idea of implementing a

set of quota laws and obeying those laws are two very different things. While parties seek to maximize their number of seats, following the parity laws put them at risk of losing seats. This brings me to my next chapter where I will discuss which parts of the parity law tempt parties to follow or defy the parity laws.

Chapter 5: Factors Promoting Defection from the Parity Laws

This chapter examines the behaviour of France's political parties in relation to the parity laws. We can think of political parties as rational actors who seek to maximize their seat share and influence while being constrained by sets of rules in the constitution and other institutions.¹⁴⁰ Parity is an institution that affects all political parties' options and preferences when it comes to candidate selection.¹⁴¹ Political parties in France may be influenced to adhere to or defy the quota law based on its practical elements and stipulations, such as financial incentives or penalties. Quota laws shape the expectations for parties (the body to whom the quota applies), and the behavior and actions of the parties determine whether or not the quotas will be a success.¹⁴² Gender quotas create the expectation that women's participation in political office is normal and encouraged, but the actual rules of the quota laws determine how parties will behave.¹⁴³ For example, if there is no penalty for defying the quota law, then parties may be more likely to defect from the quota regulations. Learning and understanding more about how France's political parties have responded to the constraints of the parity law will help us to identify issues and opportunities for improvements.

Implementing measures such as financial penalties not only incentivizes actors to adhere to quotas, but it is also an example of quota deepening, as defined by Franceschet and Piscopo.

¹⁴⁰ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 81.

¹⁴¹ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110.

¹⁴² *Ibidem*.

¹⁴³ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 149.

‘Quota deepening’ is a process wherein quota laws have more regulations added to them – these new regulations may include a rise in the actual quota, financial penalties for non-compliance, or judicial decisions that reaffirm the constitutionality of the quota.¹⁴⁴ Deepening shows a fuller commitment to women’s equality and representation in politics because it engages a more radical redistribution of power than before, and aims to combat tokenism.¹⁴⁵ Quota deepening accepts the norm that women should be included in public spaces and that their participation in government is critical to democracy.¹⁴⁶ However, these laws have much more than just a symbolic effect – they influence the actions of political parties who are constrained by their rules.¹⁴⁷

Political parties are challenged with the difficult task of managing competing and sometimes contradicting priorities. Some of these priorities may favour abiding by the quota law, while others may tempt parties to defect from it.¹⁴⁸ For example, the ideology of a party may favour following the law, while ideas about what makes a good candidate may tilt towards non-compliance. Quotas shift the priorities and the constraints of the actor(s) to whom the quota applies.¹⁴⁹ In the case of France’s National Assembly, parity is the responsibility of political parties, who are required to nominate half women and half men. As such, parties are the gatekeepers of candidacy and parity.¹⁵⁰ Parties also acted together to pass the parity laws.

Understanding the critical role of political parties in relation to the adoption and implementation

¹⁴⁴ Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, “Equality, Democracy, and the Broadening and Deepening of Gender Quotas,” *Politics & Gender* 9, no. 3 (2013): 312.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 313.

¹⁴⁷ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 108.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁵⁰ Sabine Lang, Petra Meier, and Birgit Sauer, *Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 14.

of parity demonstrates how important it is to study how parties have responded to the parity law, and what incentives and deterrents exist within the law that shapes the motivations of the parties.

Rainbow Murray refers to the way that academia overlooks the role of political parties as a ‘myopia.’¹⁵¹ She points out three potential negative implications that may arise due to this myopia. First, it may lead to misunderstandings about the role political parties in implementing and following gender quota laws.¹⁵² Second, it can also lead to a failure to recognize or understand hostility towards women candidates that may be perpetuated by political parties.¹⁵³ This could be done by underfunding women’s campaigns, for example. Finally, it can result in an overall failure to understand why men are still more commonly nominated as candidates over women.¹⁵⁴ Scholars seldom discuss how parties play a central role in determining the equality of women in government and whether or not quota laws are followed. In France, parties are subject to penalties if they do not comply with the stipulations of the parity law.

Context: Candidate Selection in France’s Legislative Elections

France’s political parties employ different processes for candidate selection. Some parties have a more centralized nomination process, and others may give local members autonomy, but most parties utilized a mixed system where local members vote for a nominee that can be vetoed by central officials.¹⁵⁵ Centralization in the nomination process is important because efforts must be coordinated between districts to ensure that there are equal numbers of male and female

¹⁵¹ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

¹⁵² Ibidem.

¹⁵³ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 56.

candidates.¹⁵⁶ Parties can increase centralization in the selection process, over-rule local choices, or reserve certain districts for female candidates as strategies to follow gender parity laws.¹⁵⁷ All of these options are utilized by political parties in France. Parties must strategically nominate candidates to abide by parity laws, and some parties may have to forego strong male candidates for ‘riskier’ female candidates. Interestingly, a study by Murray found that parties giving local members final say in candidates ended up having more female candidates than parties with a more centralized selection process.¹⁵⁸ While some degree of centralization is necessary to abide by parity laws, it is not a sufficient condition for parity.¹⁵⁹

Financial Penalties in the Parity Law

France’s parity law imposes penalties for non-compliance at all levels of government, but the penalties in the National Assembly are undoubtedly the most lenient and forgiving.¹⁶⁰ Originally, parity was simply an objective outlined in the Constitution, but it has since been ‘deepened,’ and it is now law that parties run equal numbers of male and female candidates or risk paying a hefty fine. These financial penalties have increased throughout the years and are imposed in proportion to the non-compliant party’s size as well as the margin by which they have defied the quota.¹⁶¹ In 2014, the Vallaud-Belkacem Law was passed, which doubled the previous non-compliance penalty (See Figure 2).¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁵⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁰ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107.

¹⁶¹ Quentin Lippmann, “Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?” *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 663.

¹⁶² Sabine Lang, Petra Meier, and Birgit Sauer, *Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 14.

Political parties in France receive some public funding, and the penalty reduces the amount of funding received by the proportion of the gender gap in the nominations - if it exceeds the grace area of 2 percent.¹⁶³ About half of all parties' funding is public, so this penalty structure has given parties an incentive to follow the law.¹⁶⁴ Public funding is based on both vote and seat share, but there is more money to be gained in the seat share section, placing an even higher degree of importance on choosing the perfect candidate.¹⁶⁵ We can observe from Figure 3 below that parties depend on varying amounts of public funding, donations, and membership contributions. For example, the PS (Socialist Party) gets a large chunk of its funding from public aid based on number of seats, so candidate selection is critical. As of 2010, one vote gave parties about 1.67 euros per year, while one seat merited over 44 000 euros.¹⁶⁶ The Republicans have consistently incurred the highest penalties for non-compliance, being fined 1.78 million euros in 2021.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ Ibidem.

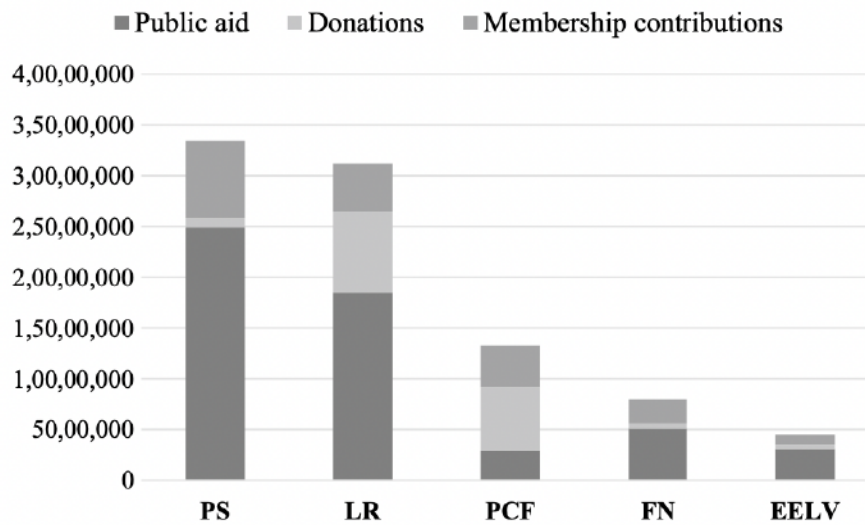
¹⁶⁴ Quentin Lippmann, "Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?" *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 664.

¹⁶⁵ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 84.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁷ Alison Hird, "Drop in the Number of Female MPs Shows Ongoing Battle for Gender Parity in French Politics," Radio France Internationale, France Médias Monde, June 22, 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20220622-drop-in-female-mps-shows-ongoing-battle-for-gender-parity-in-french-politics-feminism-chamboncel>.

Figure 3: Political Party Funding in France in 2017¹⁶⁸



Source: Mazur et al (2020): 35.

Lack of Placement Mandates - Running Women in “Unwinnable” Territory

One issue with the parity law is that, in the case of National Assembly elections, it only applies to nominated candidates rather than elected deputies. This has led to political parties running women in “unwinnable” constituencies to satisfy the parity requirements.¹⁶⁹ There are no placement mandates, which has led to the National Assembly having less than 40 percent of its deputies being female, compared to the fifty percent who are on the ballot. We see many parties playing with, rather than by the rules, which undermines their ideological commitment to the concept of parity.¹⁷⁰ They are doing the bare minimum to meet the law’s requirements

¹⁶⁸ Amy G. Mazur, Eléonore Lépinard, Anja Durovic, Catherine Achin, and Sandrine Lévêque, “Party Penalties for Parity: Less than Meets the Eye,” *French Politics* 18 (2020): 35.

¹⁶⁹ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 29.

¹⁷⁰ Sabine Lang, Petra Meier, and Birgit Sauer, *Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 14.

without changing the position and value of women in politics, who continue to be seen as less important than men.

As Bjarnegård, Yoon, and Zetterberg point out, quotas do not necessarily reduce corruption, although they may be implemented with that intention.¹⁷¹ We see in the case of France with the strategic nomination of female candidates in unwinnable territories to meet quota requirements, that the parity laws have actually brought forth new methods of corruption perpetrated by parties. The parity laws, like all gender quota laws, focus on outcomes – whether that be in terms of candidate lists or reserved seats – rather than the nomination process or curbing corruption within parties. This new opportunity for manipulation presents another barrier to women looking to hold political office in France.

When we examine the actual stipulations of the parity law, abiding by it is not very costly for parties at all.¹⁷² Parties running women in unwinnable constituencies shows that, for them, parity is more of an afterthought than a genuine ideological commitment. Parity is just another set of electoral rules they must follow.

In a 2021 study, Lippman found that the gap between female candidates versus female winners in National Assembly elections has narrowed for left-wing parties and remained stable for right-wing parties.¹⁷³ The study did not include the Renaissance Party, however, since the party is too new to draw any meaningful conclusions on their change in behaviour around running female candidates. Lippman also found that as the probability of winning increases, all

¹⁷¹ Elin Bjarnegård, Mi Yung Yoon, and Pär Zetterberg, “Gender Quotas and the Re(pro)duction of Corruption,” in *Gender and Corruption: Historical Roots and New Avenues for Research*, ed. Helena Stensöta and Lena Wägerud (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018): 106.

¹⁷² Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 43.

¹⁷³ Quentin Lippmann, “Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?” *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 664.

parties are less likely to nominate female candidates.¹⁷⁴ This trend has lessened over time for the left-wing but maintained its consistency for the right-wing.¹⁷⁵ France has traditionally alternated between the main left- and right-wing parties (prior to the Renaissance's existence), which creates a high number of swing seats.¹⁷⁶ This means tighter races, and as a result, fewer women candidates. Lippmann was able to eliminate voter bias as a factor, strengthening their findings.¹⁷⁷

Absorbing Penalties

As previously mentioned, France's political parties receive public funding, which corresponds to the number of seats the party occupies in the National Assembly.¹⁷⁸ When compared to the parity non-compliance penalty, it is actually more advantageous for (some) parties to run established male candidates who will certainly win and then suffer the penalty - than it is to actually adhere to the parity law.¹⁷⁹ Running a woman candidate who may narrow the margins of victory simply is not worth it, financially speaking. UMP (Union for Popular Movement) spokesperson, M. de Saint Quentin has been quoted as saying, "a man who wins is less costly than a woman who loses" and "we still prefer to pay fines than lose elections!"^{180 181}

In the 2002 elections, the largest parties opted to absorb the (then much lower) penalties to increase their victories due to the rise in popularity of the far-right politician Jean-Marie Le

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 667.

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁶ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 81.

¹⁷⁷ Quentin Lippmann, "Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?" *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 677.

¹⁷⁸ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁸⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁸¹ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 88.

Pen.¹⁸² However, parties still ran more female candidates than before. In 1993, both main parties at the time (left-wing Socialist party and right-wing Republican party) ran about 7 percent female candidates and had around 5-6 percent of its overall seat winners being women.¹⁸³

It is important to state that the behavior of absorbing the penalties is not witnessed nearly as much in smaller parties who are more dependent on state subsidies.¹⁸⁴ Even parties who are far-right or oppose parity from an ideological perspective will still run equal numbers of male and female candidates because it is essential to the survival of the party from a financial standpoint.¹⁸⁵ Smaller parties face greater constraints and are more incentivized to follow the law. Additionally, smaller parties also typically have fewer incumbents, according to Murray, which opens the door to more women seeking candidacy nomination.¹⁸⁶

The behavior of larger parties in relation to absorbing penalties has changed over time. In the 2002 elections, the Socialist party lost 4 percent of its state funding while the Republican party lost 10 percent.¹⁸⁷ By 2017, the Socialist Party received no penalties while the Republicans lost 8 percent of their funding.¹⁸⁸ This can be attributed to ideological commitment to parity (Socialists adopted a quota within their own party before parity was enacted) as well as the shrinking influence and popularity of the Socialist party which increases reliance on state subsidies.

¹⁸² Ibid, 89.

¹⁸³ Quentin Lippmann, “Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?” *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 664.

¹⁸⁴ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 107.

¹⁸⁵ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 117.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 120.

¹⁸⁷ Quentin Lippmann, “Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?” *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 664.

¹⁸⁸ Ibidem.

Women's Participation in Political Parties

One more practical reason as to why parties face difficulties in nominating an equal number of male and female candidates is that there are fewer female party members.¹⁸⁹ We can safely assume that party membership and activism is involved in the history of all elected candidates. It is important to note however that party membership in France is relatively low compared to other European countries, sitting at about 1.1 percent in 2004.¹⁹⁰ Countless scholars have studied the subject of group membership and the important social connections that it can create. These social connections prove critical in political campaigns. Additionally, membership in a political party can help potential candidates learn important skills that will be essential to have while in office.¹⁹¹

With fewer female party members, not only are there fewer choices for female candidates in the present, but also potentially in the future. Scholars have also observed fewer women working on political campaigns and having an interest in politics.¹⁹² With women in France only winning the right to vote in 1944, there has been little time for women's groups to firmly establish themselves as important organizations within their respective political parties. Furthermore, fewer women in high-ranking positions means fewer role models for young women to look up to and wish to emulate.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁹² Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 2.

¹⁹³ Sabine Lang, Petra Meier, and Birgit Sauer, *Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 10.

Women are less likely than men to be in the upper hierarchy of political parties.¹⁹⁴ Men continue to dominate leadership in political parties and committees.¹⁹⁵ In looking at the party leadership websites for the three largest parties in France in October 2023, I discovered a universal theme of the underrepresentation of women in executive positions. This is illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2: Women in Party Leadership Positions in 2023

	Leadership Positions	# of Executive Members Total	# of Female Executive Members	% of Female Executive Members
Les Republicains (Republicans)	President - male Vice President - male =100% male	71	26	36
Renaissance	President - male Secretary General - male =100% male	48	19	39.6
Rassemblement National (National Rally)	President - male Vice Presidents (3) - all male =100% male	48	17	35
Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party)	First Secretary - male Secretary General - male =100% male	26	12	46

¹⁹⁴ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 60.

¹⁹⁵ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37.

La France Insoumise	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
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Sources:

<https://republicains.fr/qui-sommes-nous/notre-equipe/>

<https://parti-rennaissance.fr>

<https://rassemblementnational.fr/instances/bureau-executif>

<https://www.parti-socialiste.fr>

This table was intended to show the leadership of the five largest parties in France which have nationwide presence. However, *La France Insoumise* is a decentralized party that relies on local leadership and a consensus model.¹⁹⁶ Both their founder and their coordinator are male.¹⁹⁷

From the table, we can observe that all of the major leadership positions across the four major parties are occupied by men. This suggests no change in the status quo of male dominance in the party leadership. In their executive councils, women are represented in a similar proportion to the National Assembly, except for the Socialists who have almost half of their executives being women. Women are still gravely underrepresented both within their parties and in the National Assembly. Even the Cabinet and Prime Minister’s offices are overly male-dominated. As of 2022, men held 80 percent of Cabinet positions and the Prime Minister’s office employees were two-thirds male.¹⁹⁸ The underrepresentation of women in executive councils suggests that parties may not be as committed to parity and gender balancing as they so

¹⁹⁶ “La France Insoumise,” La France Insoumise (accessed June 13, 2023), <https://lafranceinsoumise.fr>.

¹⁹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁸ Alison Hird, “Drop in the Number of Female MPs Shows Ongoing Battle for Gender Parity in French Politics,” Radio France Internationale, France Médias Monde, June 22, 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20220622-drop-in-female-mps-shows-ongoing-battle-for-gender-parity-in-french-politics-feminism-chamboncel>.

claim. It appears that men continue to dominate party leadership in France and that a ceiling exists for women, who can only aim to be included in a minority within the executive councils of their parties.

There are differences in how well parties have adapted to the parity law, as illustrated by Lippmann. In 1993, most parties had about 7 percent of candidates who were female, and around 5-6 percent elected female deputies.¹⁹⁹ In the 1997 election, the Republicans' numbers stayed the same, while the Socialists' new quota requiring 30 percent of candidates to be female led to 20 percent of their deputies being women.²⁰⁰ In 2002, the Socialists had 35 percent of their candidates being women, but the percentage of elected female deputies remained at 20 percent.²⁰¹ On the right, 25 percent of candidates and 10 percent of elected deputies were women. By 2017, the Socialists had women representing half of their candidates, while the right had around 40 percent.²⁰² On the left, the gap between female candidates and deputies continues to narrow, while it remains stable on the right.²⁰³ The Socialist Party was the first to address the issue of the underrepresentation of women, and they have continued to commit themselves to making gender equality a priority.²⁰⁴ This was not only the case for the federal legislative elections. Left-leaning parties, such as the socialists and greens, in many European countries created voluntary party quotas in the 1990s. In 1994, these parties presented gender-equal candidate lists in European elections.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁹ Quentin Lippmann, "Are Gender Quotas on Candidates Bound to be Ineffective?" *Journal of Economic Behaviour and Organization* 191 (2021): 664.

²⁰⁰ Ibidem.

²⁰¹ Ibidem.

²⁰² Ibidem.

²⁰³ Ibidem.

²⁰⁴ Ibid, 662.

²⁰⁵ Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan, *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 471.

Table 3: Female Candidates and Deputies Ran by Parties in National Assembly Elections²⁰⁶

Year	2002		2007		2012		2017	
PPP	50		50		75		150	
Political party	Candidates	Deputies	Candidates	Deputies	Candidates	Deputies	Candidates	Deputies
PCF/FG	44	23.8	46.5	20	48.2	20	47	20
FI	NA		NA		NA		47	38.9
PS	36.3	16.4	45.2	25.8	43	37.5	44	41.4
EELV	49.8	No MPs	50.4	25	49.4	52.9	46	No MPs
LREM	NA		NA		NA		50	47.5
MODEM	19.6	6.8	36.9	0	28.5	0	49	44
UMP/LR	20.6	10.1	26	14.4	25.6	13.9	39	21.2
FN	48.4	0	48.8	0	49	50	49	25
Total of women candidates	38.9		41.6		40.1		42.4	
Total of elected women	12.3		18.5		26.9		38.8	

Source: Mazur et al (2020): 37.

In terms of gender balance within parties in the National Assembly, as of 2022, the Republicans had 29.5 percent women, while the left-wing coalition had 43.6 percent, Macron’s centrist coalition had 40.4 percent (down 10 points from the previous election), and the far-right National Rally had 37.1 percent.²⁰⁷ Lang, Meier, and Sauer reported that in 2021, men made up between 80-90 percent of mayors and presidents of regional, departmental, and intercommunal councils.²⁰⁸ Women who are included in leadership positions are often relegated to the margins. Women are more likely to be placed in ‘nurturing’ portfolios in cabinets, such as culture and health.²⁰⁹ The more important defense and finance, for example, typically have male leaders.²¹⁰ When women are underrepresented in key leadership and decision-making positions, it

²⁰⁶ Amy G. Mazur et al, “Party Penalties for Parity: Less than Meets the Eye,” *French Politics* 18 (2020): 37.

²⁰⁷ Alison Hird, “Drop in the Number of Female MPs Shows Ongoing Battle for Gender Parity in French Politics,” Radio France Internationale, France Médias Monde, June 22, 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20220622-drop-in-female-mps-shows-ongoing-battle-for-gender-parity-in-french-politics-feminism-chamboncel>.

²⁰⁸ Sabine Lang, Petra Meier, and Birgit Sauer, *Party Politics and the Implementation of Gender Quotas* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 218.

²⁰⁹ *Ibidem*.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 216.

demonstrates a lack of commitment to parity because it shows a lack of effort to change the power dynamics that led to the underrepresentation of women in the first place.²¹¹

Female politicians also have a higher turnover rate than their male counterparts and are likely to serve fewer terms.²¹² This is an important factor because incumbency is a major advantage in elections and promotion to the upper echelon of political parties. Incumbency can translate not only to experience and popularity inside and outside the party, but also developed networks and patronages.²¹³

In France, like many other countries, local politics often serves as a springboard for nomination to the National Assembly seats.²¹⁴ Women are chronically underrepresented in local politics. When women's participation in a major stream to national politics is lacking, they may be less likely to be nominated at all, much less win elections. And with that, being a deputy in the National Assembly is a common role among eventual presidents. There is a general trend that the higher up the position, the fewer women exist in that space.²¹⁵

²¹¹ Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, "Equality, Democracy, and the Broadening and Deepening of Gender Quotas," *Politics & Gender* 9, no. 3 (2013): 312.

²¹² Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 193.

²¹³ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 85.

²¹⁴ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 36.

²¹⁵ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 60.

Conclusion

While political parties in France often claim to unequivocally support equality of the sexes, they do not always act in ways that enhance parity. They must juggle multiple priorities that can entice obedience to or defiance of the parity law. Parity plays a large role when parties are deciding on their election strategies and nominating candidates. We should think of parties as rational actors who seek to maximize their share of the vote, and, more importantly, their seat share in the National Assembly.²¹⁶ Winning a large vote and seat share directly translates to more funding from the state as well as greater influence in general. Larger parties seek to control the National Assembly, while smaller parties wish to improve their position in coalition negotiations.²¹⁷

Parties often skirt the parity regulations by running women in races that they cannot win. This allows them to meet parity law requirements while continuing to prioritize male candidates. Simply abiding by the law does not seem to demonstrate an actual commitment to altering the status quo. There is no actual change of power relations occurring here.

While women are less likely to be members of a political party than men, voter turnout remains relatively equal between the sexes.²¹⁸ This suggests that parties must make a greater effort to recruit women or change the tactics that they currently use. Women are an ‘under tapped’ constituency, and with their lack of involvement, the result is a waste of resources as a talented candidate pool remains largely untouched and immobilized.²¹⁹

²¹⁶ Ibid, 81.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 84.

²¹⁸ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 111.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 20.

We can identify four key areas for major improvement to incentivize parties to follow parity laws. First, the penalty system requires changes to address absorption and party size issues. Penalties should be increased for larger parties so that there is more funding lost from not running an equal number of women than funding gained from a seat. This would hopefully increase compliance by larger parties and put them at an equal playing field with smaller parties who rely more on public funding. Second, there should be placement mandates to lessen the gap between nominated candidates and elected deputies. This would help to avoid the tendency to place women in unwinnable districts to meet parity law requirements. Third, parties should make more concrete efforts to female member recruitment to increase the number of female candidates. Finally, parties should have internal quotas for executive positions. With experience being a critical trait for a deputy in the eyes of voters, this would make female candidates more attractive to the electorate.

Chapter 6: Cultural Bias against Female Politicians

There are cultural and structural barriers to women's involvement in politics that are sometimes put aside because of the assumption that gender equality has been achieved. While many democracies espouse egalitarian values and have championed the fight for women's equality, the legacy of preexisting gender roles and values persist. People may hold unconscious biases that work against women at the polls. Inglehart and Norris, for example, studied how our ideas of appropriate roles for women and men in government are shaped by societal values, which are determined by economic development and religious tradition.²²⁰ With French women only winning the right to vote in the 1940s, as well as the strong Catholic history and tradition within the country, it still makes sense to question if traditional genders roles have played a part in the underrepresentation of women in the National Assembly. While France is a highly developed democracy that values gender equality so much that it is enshrined in the constitution, gender inequality within politics persists. Although earlier research focused on how patriarchal values and practices within institutions were at fault, more recent studies have focused on power dynamics and relations within institutions such as political parties. Additionally, media and social media play a major role in how voters portray candidates and the decisions they make at the polls.

Structuralists attribute the underrepresentation of women in politics to lack of access (until relatively recently) to educational and economic resources.²²¹ Many academics believed

²²⁰ Miki Caul Kittilson, and Leslie A. Schwindt-Bayer, *The Gendered Effects of Electoral Institutions: Political Engagement and Participation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

that as women were given greater access to educational institutions and political participation, that their representation in parliaments and chambers would increase.²²² For France, however, this was not the case, as the proportion of women in the National Assembly remained at around 6 percent until the parity law was enacted.²²³

There may be other, more indirect factors that influence parties to prioritize male candidates. These factors could indicate an unconscious bias that favours males without being outright sexist or misogynist. When we consider what makes a good candidate, are we indirectly discriminating against women? Many of our political preferences put women at a disadvantage. We can look at incumbency as an example. Incumbents in the National Assembly are far more likely to be male.²²⁴ This does not imply overt sexism or anti-woman sentiment, but it is a subtly gendered preference that favours male political domination.

This chapter examines how parties as institutions play a role in terms of perpetuating sex imbalance and perhaps even gender discrimination when it comes to the candidacy process. While these gender preferences are almost always indirect and unconscious in nature, their impacts remain significant and consequential.

Incumbency and Notoriety

Murray conducted a study where she asked French parties what they valued in a candidate. Incumbency and notoriety were both major assets. Notoriety as an electoral asset for a candidate favours men simply because there are more male politicians, and therefore there are

²²² Ibidem.

²²³ See Table 1.

²²⁴ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 120.

more male politicians that are well-known. Murray cited data on mayors of cities with over 30 000 inhabitants as an example, where there were 232 male mayors and just 20 female mayors.²²⁵

As a general rule, entrenched incumbents are favoured over newcomers by both parties and the electorate. They have experience, existing popularity both within the party and among voters, developed networks in and outside the party, and credibility.²²⁶ Familiarity with voters increases the odds of a personal vote.²²⁷ Parties will typically not deny an incumbent's desire to run for reelection as it is often a guaranteed seat which translates to more funding, and also because denying an incumbent could result in the incumbent running anyway and winning for a different party.²²⁸ Running incumbents is often used as a strategy to keep past or potential coalition members from running a candidate in the same constituency.²²⁹

Incumbents in France's National Assembly are more often male.²³⁰ Women deputies have a higher turnover rate compared to their male counterparts.²³¹ Studies have also shown that voters tend to favour male incumbents in elections.²³² Additionally, when a male incumbent retires, the party will often search for someone who the electorate can see as a continuation of the incumbent or someone who the incumbent nurtured in their career.²³³ With most incumbents tending to be male, the 'replacement' will also tend to be male.

²²⁵ Ibid, 64-65.

²²⁶ Ibid, 85.

²²⁷ Ibid, 86.

²²⁸ Idem.

²²⁹ Idem.

²³⁰ Ibid, 120.

²³¹ Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 193.

²³² Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11.

²³³ Ibid, 87.

France has a unique and interesting phenomenon where, because there is a tendency for the government to alternate between the left- and right-wing parties, former incumbents who have lost in the previous election often run again. This poses a disadvantage to women. Furthermore, France has a rule that you can hold two mandates at a time, which also acts as a barrier to women in politics. Overall, we can observe that incumbents are typically males due to the lower turnover rates for men and due to more men in the National Assembly, and this can be an obstacle for women in French politics.

Women are more likely to serve fewer terms.²³⁴ This could be due to several reasons, such as the cultural expectation of women raising children resulting in a later start to their political career, the greater pressure on female politicians to be attractive, and the inaccessibility to higher-tier positions of leadership. Women may also be motivated to leave political office due to the glass ceiling that they inevitably hit when it becomes difficult to get a decision-making position or a promotion within the party.²³⁵ This would place blame on parties who are responsible for their own structure and leadership. Furthermore, women make up a small proportion of party members. When party activism is a leadership skill-building asset and is also seen as an asset to voters, men are subconsciously favoured as candidates.²³⁶ Participation in a political party is almost always part of the path from citizen to deputy. Women tend to

²³⁴ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 37.

²³⁵ Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 187.

²³⁶ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 71.

participate in alternative forms of civic activism, such as homeowners' associations and women's groups.²³⁷ However, these groups are often headed by men.

In the Media

Female politicians are frequently subjected to double standards in the media. Even the way that elections campaigns are covered puts women at a disadvantage, Campus argues.²³⁸ Personal image has become more important to voters over time, and that in turn has changed how voters view races. What was once a battle between competing ideologies is now a "horse race" between candidates where political issues are not discussed as much as before.²³⁹ In two ways, this places women at a disadvantage, according to Campus. First, the inherent conflict in an electoral race exacerbated by the increasing focus on candidates goes against society's ideas of good female qualities, such as fair play and quiet leadership.²⁴⁰ Second, the tendency of personal attacks in personalized campaigns can put female candidates between a rock and a hard place.²⁴¹ Instigating attacks may create more backlash for women than men, reacting to an attack may make women seem emotional, and not reacting could make women seem weak.²⁴²

Studies of European countries have found that men tend to receive more attention than women in media.²⁴³ This could be due to several reasons, including male politicians having more previous experience in local, regional, and party leadership than women. Politicians with more power make for more attractive media stories.²⁴⁴ In a study by van der Pas, there were over

²³⁷ Ibid, 60.

²³⁸ Donatella Campus, *Women Political Leaders and the Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 22.

²³⁹ Ibid, 23.

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 24.

²⁴¹ Ibidem.

²⁴² Ibidem.

²⁴³ Daphne J. van der Pas, "Do European Media Ignore Female Politicians? A Comparative Analysis of MP Visibility," *West European Politics* 45, no.7 (2022): 1481.

²⁴⁴ Ibid, 1483.

100,000 news articles written about male politicians compared to just 15,000 for women.²⁴⁵ This discrepancy is important. Media is an important tool for politicians and a common source of information for voters.²⁴⁶ Most voters value notoriety and visibility in candidates, so if males are getting more media attention, that puts women at a major disadvantage, argues van der Pas.²⁴⁷

Female politicians undoubtedly face greater scrutiny than male politicians. This is especially true in terms of their appearance, which is almost always mentioned in the media.²⁴⁸ Like politics, media is a male-dominated industry.²⁴⁹ Public representations of politicians affect perception as well as political norms.²⁵⁰ In a December 2022 e-discussion hosted by iKnowPolitics on women in politics in the media, all participants agreed that their research demonstrated that males are at an advantage in the media in terms of both quality and quantity.²⁵¹ Claudine Cordani mentioned that female politicians in French media are regularly disrespected and insulted more than men.²⁵² With less visibility and poorer perceptions in media, women are at a disadvantage. Women who are ridiculed in the media may understandably want to withdraw from public life. Cordani has little hope for change in how women are portrayed in French media, at least for the near future.²⁵³ With wealthy men controlling a majority of the country's major news outlets, the status quo is bound to continue.²⁵⁴ Antonetta Lovejoy Hamandishe,

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 1486.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, 1481.

²⁴⁷ Ibidem.

²⁴⁸ Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 195.

²⁴⁹ Marinella Belluati, Daniela R. Piccio, and Rossana Sampugnaro, "Women's Access to the Political Sphere in Italy: When Obstacles Outdo Opportunities," *Contemporary Italian Politics* 12, no.3 (2020): 282.

²⁵⁰ Ibidem.

²⁵¹ "Summary of the e-Discussion on Women in Politics and the Media," iKnowPolitics, December, 2022, https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/english_summary_of_the_e-discussion_on_women_in_politics_and_the_media.pdf.

²⁵² Ibidem.

²⁵³ Ibidem.

²⁵⁴ Ibidem.

another participant in the e-discussion, urged for civil society organizations to support media training, conduct public awareness campaigns on gender inequality in the media, and invest in tools to combat this inequality, especially during elections.²⁵⁵ She also called on electoral bodies to monitor media coverage more, have parliaments make female politicians more visible, and have government institutions and media outlets train journalists on producing gender-balanced content free of discrimination or bias.²⁵⁶ Existing campaigns such as Reclaim the Internet in the UK, #WebWithoutViolence in Germany, and #BetterThanThis in Kenya have raised awareness about the abuse women in politics face online.²⁵⁷

The age of social media has also presented many challenges for female politicians, who are more likely to be victims of aggression and violence on these platforms.²⁵⁸ This can escalate to dangerous real-life situations and cause women to rethink running for political office. A BBC Newsnight investigation found that the online abuse men and women receive online is different, and for women, it often comes from a misogynistic angle.²⁵⁹ Abusive rhetoric can be found on both common social media platforms like Instagram, as well as fringe platforms like 4Chan.²⁶⁰ Within two weeks of France nominating its first Black government spokesperson, over 1 in 5 messages she received on Twitter (now known as X) were abusive and targeted her race and gender.²⁶¹ One user wrote, “who does she think she is with her afro haircut?”²⁶² Facebook groups

²⁵⁵ Ibidem.

²⁵⁶ Ibidem.

²⁵⁷ Lucina Di Meco and Saskia Brechenmacher, “Tackling Online Abuse and Disinformation Targeting Women in Politics,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 30, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/11/tackling-online-abuse-and-disinformation-targeting-women-in-politics?lang=en>.

²⁵⁸ “Summary of the e-Discussion on Women in Politics and the Media,” iKnowPolitics, December, 2022, https://iknowpolitics.org/sites/default/files/english_summary_of_the_e-discussion_on_women_in_politics_and_the_media.pdf.

²⁵⁹ Mariana Spring and Lucy Webster, “A Web of Abuse: How the Far-Right Disproportionately Targets Female Politicians,” BBC, July 14, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-48871400>.

²⁶⁰ Ibidem.

²⁶¹ Ibidem.

²⁶² Ibidem.

and pages, including the page of Rassemblement Nationale, attacked her appearance, including her hair and clothing.²⁶³

Academics argue that social media platforms are responsible for the content they host and promote, and they must do a better job of detecting and blocking violent and discriminatory content. Unfortunately, in 2020, the French constitutional court canceled a law that would make social media platforms responsible for removing abusive and illegal content, citing concerns over censorship.²⁶⁴

Di Meco and Brechenmacher state that the prevalence of abusive and misogynistic content on social media has “direct implications for the democratic process.”²⁶⁵ For female politicians, it can discourage them from running for office, and for female voters, it can lead them to disengage from politics.²⁶⁶ For women who remain in office, social media abuse can cause mental health struggles and exhaust resources from reporting threats.²⁶⁷

Online harassment towards women may be driven by societal norms from decades ago that still prevail, argues Di Meco and Brechenmacher.²⁶⁸ Traits commonly associated with ‘good’ politicians, such as ambition, are typically associated with masculinity.²⁶⁹ Female politicians who embody these traits and run for political office may be seen as defying the

²⁶³ Ibidem.

²⁶⁴ Lucina Di Meco and Saskia Brechenmacher, “Tackling Online Abuse and Disinformation Targeting Women in Politics,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 30, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2020/11/tackling-online-abuse-and-disinformation-targeting-women-in-politics?lang=en>.

²⁶⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶⁶ Ibidem.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem.

²⁶⁸ Ibidem.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem.

norm.²⁷⁰ Online anonymity may exacerbate the abuse female politicians face on the internet and social media.²⁷¹

While women face harassment in traditional and social media, they also face bias in more subtle forms from journalists, specifically in terms of content and presentation. Women in politics have their private lives discussed far more than their male counterparts.²⁷² Their roles as wives or mothers are almost always at the forefront of their image. A 2021 study from the University of Utah comparing news articles written about male and female politicians found that articles discussing women in politics were more likely to mention background, family life, and personality, and gender.²⁷³ Women were also given more “novelty labels,” such as ‘first,’ or ‘lone.’²⁷⁴ While these labels are not inherently negative, they do perpetuate the stereotype of politics being a male domain. Articles about male politicians tended to focus on experience, accomplishments, and occupation.²⁷⁵ When articles described the traits of politicians, men tended to receive qualities such as vigour and assertiveness, while women were praised for communication and integrity.²⁷⁶ Articles about female politicians who were mothers often delved into how they were able to balance childcare responsibilities and professional responsibilities.²⁷⁷

While male politicians can tap into their private and personal lives as a tactic to humanize them to the electorate, women do not get this option.²⁷⁸ And placing so much attention on a

²⁷⁰ Ibidem.

²⁷¹ Ibidem.

²⁷² Catherine Achin, “The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a “Conservative Revolution”?,” in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 195.

²⁷³ Rebecca B. West et al, “An Analysis of Utah Media: Women & Politics,” *Utah Women & Leadership Project* 34 (2021): 1.

²⁷⁴ Ibid, 2.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 3.

²⁷⁶ Ibidem.

²⁷⁷ Ibidem.

²⁷⁸ Catherine Achin, “The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a “Conservative Revolution”?,” in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 195.

woman's close personal circle may diminish the notion of her independence in the eyes of the electorate.

Legacy of Traditional Gender Roles

Additionally, a politician who is also a mother is more likely to receive public backlash compared to a politician who is also a father. Balancing work and parenthood is more often a responsibility given by the public to female politicians as opposed to male politicians.²⁷⁹ This shows how ideas about traditional gender roles still affect politics and public opinion of politicians. Many claim to support gender equality, while still placing greater responsibility on women to attend to the home and raise children. Women who feel this pressure may be swayed from party membership and the pursuit of a political career.

Women are likely to spend more time on domestic chores than men, regardless of employment status.²⁸⁰ The burden of childcare also rests mostly on women, which can harm job advancement prospects as they tend to work shorter hours.²⁸¹ Child-rearing responsibilities on women also mean that they often start their political careers later in life, which contributes to the disadvantage women face due to incumbency preferences among voters.²⁸² Women having shorter political careers on average also means less time to climb the ranks. Furthermore, children whose parents are separated more often spend the entirety or majority of their time living with their mother.²⁸³ This places even more time and resource constraints on women.

²⁷⁹ Ibidem.

²⁸⁰ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 69.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 70.

²⁸² Idem.

²⁸³ Jan Windebank, *Domestic and Care Work in Modern France* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 86-87.

In *Domestic and Care Work in Modern France*, Windebank examines domestic labour discrepancies between men and women in cohabitating different-sex relationships in contemporary France. They found that in households with no children, women spent nearly three hours a day on home chores compared to men spending just over one hour.²⁸⁴ When there was one child, the time spent on domestic chores decreased due to time needed for parental duties, but a gap remained.²⁸⁵ For women with two children, it increased to just over three hours a day, and then up to nearly four and a half hours for women with three children.²⁸⁶ However, men continued to spend around the same time on domestic chores regardless of the number of children.²⁸⁷ In homes with two or more children, thirty percent of fathers admitted to not doing any domestic work, and three out of four fathers reported not doing any parental work.²⁸⁸

There are several factors that can and have acted as obstacles to women's participation in politics. While women are now more likely than men to attend university in France, they are less likely to attend top schools that often breed successful politicians.²⁸⁹ In 2003, the prestigious Ecole Nationale d'Administration's incoming class comprised just 27 percent female students.²⁹⁰ Participation in the workforce is often a pathway to political office as well. While France has a high proportion of females in the labour force, many work part-time and in less prestigious positions that pay less.²⁹¹ Besides the pay gap, women also face higher rates of unemployment than men.²⁹²

²⁸⁴ Jan Windebank, *Domestic and Care Work in Modern France* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 100.

²⁸⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁹ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 69.

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 69.

²⁹² *Ibidem*.

Women in politics continue to be relegated to nurturing and feminine roles and portfolios, such as arts, culture, childcare, health, and education. The University of Utah's 2021 study found that there continues to be a division of labour within politics as women focus on "compassion issues," such as poverty, social issues, and women's issues (including abortion and domestic violence), whereas male politicians were given tougher portfolios, including finance, foreign policy, and military.²⁹³ While this is data for the United States, further information below suggests that it applies to France as well. If women continued to be pigeon-holed into certain roles within government, what does this say about gender equality in French politics? It could suggest a surface-level commitment to egalitarian values where women are seen as tokens rather than genuine leaders. Achin's research (Table 4) proves concretely that women in France are more likely to be placed in 'softer' and more 'nurturing' parliamentary commissions, such as social and cultural affairs, where they make up around 40 percent of these commissions, compared to comprising of just 13.9 and 17.8 percent of the finance and foreign affairs commissions respectively.

²⁹³ Rebecca B. West et al, "An Analysis of Utah Media: Women & Politics," *Utah Women & Leadership Project* 34 (2021): 3.

Table 4: Percentage of Feminisation in Parliamentary Commissions (2015)²⁹⁴

<i>Parliamentary commission</i>	<i>No of women deputies/total number</i>	<i>% feminisation</i>
Finance	10/72	13.9 %
Foreign affairs	13/73	17.8 %
Defence	14/70	20 %
Laws	16/73	21.9 %
Sustainable development	16/72	22.2 %
Economic affairs	21/72	29.1 %
Social affairs	27/71	38 %
Cultural affairs and education	32/71	45 %
Total	149/574	25.9 %

Source: Achin (2015): 187.

Lippmann found that women in the National Assembly were twice as likely to issue amendments on women's issues compared to male deputies.²⁹⁵ When it came to childcare, women were 50 percent more likely than men to issue amendments on the subject.²⁹⁶ With healthcare, they were 25 percent more likely to be involved.²⁹⁷ This could signify that male politicians believe that women should deal with women's issues.

When we look at the backgrounds of candidates, Murray observed that women in French politics are more likely to be from traditionally female-dominated occupations than male-dominated occupations, such as farming or homemaking.²⁹⁸ This could suggest that society still

²⁹⁴ Catherine Achin, "The French Parity Law: A Successful Gender Equality Measure or a "Conservative Revolution"?", in *Gender and Family in European Economic Policy*, ed. Diana Auth, Jutta Hergenhan, and Barbara Holland-Cunz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 187.

²⁹⁵ Quentin Lippman, "Gender and Lawmaking in Times of Quotas," *Journal of Public Economics* 207 (2022): 6.

²⁹⁶ Ibidem.

²⁹⁷ Ibidem.

²⁹⁸ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33.

maintains older ideas about which careers women ought to have and that there is a preference for women to have a certain background that aligns with traditional value systems.²⁹⁹

Quota Women

One common argument against quotas is that women who have not necessarily earned their positions will be elected to office. However, candidate selection has arguably been problematic for far longer than the quota law's existence. Implementing parity can involve sacrificing a favoured male incumbent for a female newcomer as a candidate. Women who are newer to the political scene are often dubbed 'quota women' who are in office to fill the quota rather than through their own merit.³⁰⁰ The argument that quotas sacrifice merit is a common one among critics, but it overlooks the reasons why quotas are needed in the first place. Murray argues that the candidate recruitment process without quotas is not meritocratic, and that is what created the male-domination in politics.³⁰¹ She states, "It is rather insulting actually to suggest that the reason why elite, wealthy, middle-aged white men dominate politics and other echelons of power is because they deserve to – because of their greater merit."³⁰²

In her 2012 study, Murray quotes Catherine Tasca, who said, "there is a demand for proof of competence from women which is never required from men."³⁰³ There is no evidence that women are more ineffective parliamentarians than men. Murray used National Assembly records to prove this and discovered that men were more likely to be most or least active in parliament,

²⁹⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰⁰ Ibid, 30.

³⁰¹ Rainbow Murray, "Merit vs Equality? The Argument that Gender Quotas Violate Meritocracy is Based on Fallacies," The London School of Economic and Political Science, December 7, 2015, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/merit-vs-equality-argument/>.

³⁰² Ibidem.

³⁰³ Rainbow Murray, "Parity and Legislative Competence in France," in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33.

while women were bunched in the middle.³⁰⁴ It is also important to note that active roles such as committee heads are more likely to be filled by men.³⁰⁵ This suggests a ceiling for women's participation in the parliamentary process.

Newly elected women in the National Assembly are less likely than men to have prior political experience.³⁰⁶ Murray's 2007 study of deputies found that men with local political experience served on average 3.69 terms in the National Assembly compared to 2.71 for women. This could be the case for several reasons, such as the limited number of women in elite schools that breed politicians, or the societal expectation that women stay home and raise children rather than pursuing a career. Interestingly, Murray also found that those deputies with no prior political experience were mostly men.³⁰⁷ This evidence helps to disprove the criticism that gender quotas give seats and nominations to undeserving women.

Candidate selection in France is highly centralized, save for *La France Insoumise*, which has its own individual organizations. The centralized nature of candidate selection helps parties to combat the indirect preference for male candidates (through incumbency, etc.) that would be more reinforced if the process was determined by individual constituencies.³⁰⁸

Women Voters Over Women Candidates

When parity was first brought up in political discussion as a possibility, parties favoured it more so because they could gain female voters, rather than actually valuing the ideology behind the concept. We can see this being demonstrated in the 2002 elections when parties opted

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 40.

³⁰⁵ Ibid, 37.

³⁰⁶ Ibid, 36.

³⁰⁷ Ibid, 35.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, 56.

to absorb penalties so that they could prioritize male incumbents in a tight election where there was a lot to lose.³⁰⁹

Support for parity was more ideologically motivated on the left, and more pragmatically motivated on the right.³¹⁰ With parties also continuing to keep the top of their hierarchies dominated by males, we can also infer that parity is more about image than ideology.

Conclusion

Implementing parity requires political will, meaning that it has to take priority over other important factors, such as incumbency or experience. Without political will, parity fades into the background and can easily become an afterthought or neglected altogether. Gender quotas like France's parity law exist because most societies have subtly gendered political preferences and double standards. The best example of a subtly gendered preference is incumbency. Most voters view incumbency as an asset and may vote for an incumbent with less hesitation. Incumbents in France are most often men, and men tend to serve more terms. This is a subtly gendered preference because voters do not hold this attitude because of overt sexism or misogyny, but rather they typically neglect the connection between gender and political preferences as well as the fact that these preferences are often based on traditional gender roles and ideas. While the days of women being relegated solely to the home are mostly over, gender stereotypes from the 20th century still persist and sneakily creep their way into our thinking.

Voters' and parties' ideas of important traits in political candidates place women at a disadvantage, but parties typically view this as a supply issue rather than their own bias. Political

³⁰⁹ Ibid, 89.

³¹⁰ Rainbow Murray, *Parties, Gender Quotas, and Candidate Selection in France* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 44.

parties must first acknowledge their biases that place potential female candidates at a disadvantage. They need to then work on tackling those biases through several measures, such as pouring more resources into young female candidates who wish to have a long career in politics. Creating more female incumbents will be a worthwhile start to breaking the norm of majority male incumbents.

Female candidates are viewed as a deviation from the status quo and are seen by parties as more risky, less popular, less-suited for political life. The perceived riskiness of female candidates may very well be exaggerated, though this could be challenging to prove as it would require examining voter attitudes and party attitudes as well as parties' conceptualization of voter attitudes. It is critical for parties and voters alike to acknowledge that they hold biases placing women at a disadvantage and perpetuate double standards.

Female politicians face unequal and unfair coverage and abuse from traditional and social media. This can range from subtle biases, such as the tendency to discuss the personal lives of female politicians more often, to death threats and blatant misogyny. While social media is a new phenomenon, it is evident that there is still much work to be done to protect women, especially women in male-dominated fields, from digital violence and abuse.

Based on the research presented in the thesis, we can provide some actionable suggestions for combatting the legacy of patriarchy in women's political representation in France. Firstly, parties create campaigns to showcase the careers of prominent female politicians. Girls and young women should have figures they can look up to. There also needs to be more targeted directives for party recruitment, candidate recruitment from party membership, and candidate to elected deputy for women specifically. These directives would help to compensate for the exclusive legacy of French politics concerning women. The push to get girls interested in

politics could even start from school age by providing more funding for schools and organizations that promote youth civic engagement. This finally brings us to the role of the media. My analysis here demonstrates that the way female politicians are portrayed in traditional and social media needs to change. By utilizing public awareness campaigns fighting against media sexism, providing media training to journalists so they can understand unconscious bias, and introducing measures to combat online abuse on social media, there are major opportunities to change how women politicians are portrayed in French media.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This thesis aimed to identify the structural and cultural barriers that women in France face when entering politics, specifically in the National Assembly. It examined existing literature on the topic of gender quotas, the historical context of the French case, the adoption of the parity law, and the logistical and cultural obstacles that French women face when entering federal politics.

In the late 20th century, there began a greater conversation on a global level surrounding women's participation in politics. In an egalitarian society, men and women should be more equally represented in legislatures. Countries and political parties in all regions adopted gender quota laws that required certain proportions of candidates who are nominated or elected to be women. Quotas can exist in several forms and at several levels of government. Most of the literature in this field studies the pros, cons, and quirks of different types of quotas in different case studies. There is a gap in the literature on the barriers that women continue to face even with gender quota laws in place. My case study on France seeks to fill in some of this gap.

Historically, women have been excluded from political life in France. This important historical account provides vital context and suggests that women have not necessarily been excluded because of a lack of ambition, but rather because of a sexist political system that is built against them. The suffragist movement in France post-Revolution was mostly concentrated in Paris and among the elite. The goal was for increased civil and educational rights rather than enfranchisement. Women mainly gathered in private groups and clubs rather than engage in protests on the street. At the beginning of the 20th century, women began to be more vocal in

their demands, but they continued to be ostracized from politics. Despite hearing multiple proposals and reports, it was not until after WWII that women were given the right to vote as a 'thank you' to their critical role in the Resistance. The hesitation in enfranchising women came from several factors, including the influence of the Catholic Church and the belief that women were not neutral beings.

Even after women won the right to vote in France, their representation in politics at all levels was among the lowest in Europe. In the early 1990s, women represented just 6 percent of deputies in the National Assembly. The French people had little trust in the government after a slew of scandals on both the left and right. Voter turnout had decreased. Neighbouring countries were making gains in women's political representation while France lagged behind. Feminist groups and academics started to make more noise and published manifestos and petitions. While many supported the notion of more women in government, there remained a seemingly impossible challenge to overcome. France's Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, which enshrines its democracy, contains the concept of the universal citizen. This refers to all people being abstract and equal individuals regardless of sex, gender, religion, or race. The concept of the universal citizen has made France as a whole vehemently against any form of affirmative action or special treatment, including quotas. But feminist activists and academics used the term 'parity' rather than 'quota.' Parity, they argued, was the only division crossing all groups and humanity as a whole had a dual nature. Parity meant equitable power-sharing, not special treatment.

Supporting parity would prove beneficial for all political parties who could appear more in touch with public opinion and not incur extensive expenses from the implementation. Opposition was unorganized and mostly came from individuals at the fringes. Parties met in

1999 at Versailles to negotiate changes to the Constitution, and those changes were adopted in 2000 to guarantee equal access to politics for men and women. Every party would have to nominate 50 percent male and 50 percent female candidates, plus or minus 2 percent. If they did not, there were noncompliance penalties that would decrease the amount of public funding for parties. The percentage of female deputies rose dramatically with each election as parties increased the numbers of female candidates. In 2022, the National Assembly consisted of 37 percent women.³¹¹

Despite monumental achievements that should be celebrated, women still continue to face major obstacles when seeking to enter politics. Many of these barriers are logistical and have to do with existing institutions and structures. Women face a multitude of logistical obstacles when entering French politics despite the existence of the parity law. While the financial penalties have increased as quota laws have deepened, it may be in a party's best interest to absorb noncompliance penalties if they have a male candidate more guaranteed to win. This is because the public funding that parties are allotted based on seat count is significant, making it easy for parties to absorb the penalties and nominate men. Women's participation in political parties remains a concern as well. Although France has relatively low party membership compared to other European countries, membership remains male-dominated. This results in a smaller pool of female candidates, not to mention the fact that men continue to dominate party leadership positions and executive councils. Additionally, women tend to be placed in more 'nurturing' portfolios in Cabinet, with responsibilities such as childcare, as opposed to more senior portfolios such as finance and defense.

³¹¹ See Table 1.

Ease of access to political office for women can vary between parties, as some make it more of a priority than others. The Socialist Party first implemented its own quota voluntarily in the 1990s and continues to excel in female representation with stable progress. The right-wing parties typically have lower percentages of female candidates and elected deputies, with the gap between male and female candidates remaining stable.

Many of the obstacles that French women face when entering politics stem from centuries-old ideas of gender roles and division of labour. For example, the expectation that women stay at or closer to home than their husbands often results in a later start to a political career. This leads to women having a much higher turnover rate than their male counterparts in the National Assembly. Due to this, as well as the legacy of the male-dominated National Assembly, most incumbents are usually men. Incumbency, in France, as in most countries, is a major advantage in an election. When we think of what makes a good candidate, we consider attributes such as notoriety and experience. One major pathway to the National Assembly for French politicians is local politics. Many deputies have served as mayors and on regional councils. However, local politics are even more male-dominated than the National Assembly, placing women at a disadvantage yet again. The schools and universities that the majority of deputies attended also have male-majority student bodies.

Female politicians are often faced with greater public scrutiny over appearances, competence, and the notion that they must prove themselves. The media plays a critical role in shaping how voters see candidates. When news items focus on personal lives over political substance and portray female leaders as aggressive for the same behaviour as their male counterparts, that matters because it affects voters' perspectives.

One common argument against gender quotas is that the best candidates won't be nominated. There is a fear that 'quota women' will be elected solely to appease quota laws and will be ineffective political tokens. Women have to work against this belief constantly, and also have to prove that they are suitable and competent candidates and deputies despite their disadvantages that they face due to the legacy of the National Assembly and societal ideas of gender roles.

Some parties make gender equality more of a priority than others. The Socialist Party implemented its own quota voluntarily years before the Constitution was changed to accommodate gender parity rules. Left-wing parties tend to run more female candidates and vocally espouse egalitarian values and priorities. Right-wing parties remain more silent on this topic but support the concept of parity due to its popularity.

I conclude this thesis with several suggestions. First, I will outline my logistical suggestions having to do with the parity law itself and the role political parties play. The parity law should be altered to increase noncompliance penalties so that parties are more inclined to follow the parity law rather than absorb the comparatively insignificant penalties. Next, there should be placement mandates so that women are run in districts they have a chance of winning. Many parties run female candidates in unwinnable districts to meet parity requirements. Additionally, parties ought to dedicate more resources to female member recruitment and participation. Finally, parties should be required to have follow a quota or have a gender balanced executive council.

I now present suggestions to counter cultural obstacles that female politicians in France face. Firstly, there should be more public campaigns highlighting prolific women in French politics and outlining their lives and accomplishments. This increased visibility could prompt

more women to consider running for political office. There should also be directives to promote women climbing the ranks of political parties from member to candidate. Thirdly, there should be more public discussion on the double standards that female politicians face and the disadvantages that remain despite the implementation of the parity law, perhaps via a public awareness campaign. Finally, there should be greater funding for schools and extracurricular activities that promote community activism and political education, especially for women. All of these suggestions open avenues for future research, such as determining the right penalties to incentivize compliance to the law among political parties, how placement mandates could work, and how to make public campaigns promoting women in government as effective as possible.

Although the introduction of the parity laws is a major step in addressing women's underrepresentation in French politics, my goal in this thesis is for readers to understand that the discussion around gender equality in the National Assembly is far from over. A measure intended to decrease corruption has led to new corruptive practices, particularly surrounding candidate nomination. We must keep the conversation going and address the barriers that women continue to face when seeking to enter political office. This continued conversation should involve discussion over the roles that parties play in candidate nomination, and the effectiveness of penalties. Further research could also delve into how specific factors such as lower party membership, incumbency, and male-dominated party leadership affect women in politics. Despite less noise around the subject, women are still underrepresented in French politics. While measures like parity help us make progress in women's political representation, they are not a cure-all, and women continue to face significant barriers when accessing political office.

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