

## Elite Bias, Not Voter Bias: Gender Quotas and Candidate Performance in France

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## **Elite Bias, Not Voter Bias: Gender Quotas and Candidate Performance in France**

### **Abstract**

Gender quotas have diffused rapidly around the world in response to concerns about the under-representation of women in political life. In France, the constitution was amended in 1999 and the electoral law revised in 2000 to require the nomination of equal numbers of male and female candidates. While the spread of quotas implies the emergence of new norms to facilitate women's access to elected office, the need to displace men as candidates and office-holders raises questions as to why the same elites who may lose their seats would pass quota policies. One answer put forward recently relates to incumbents' interests and voter bias. In this article, we critique this account by drawing on qualitative and quantitative evidence revealing (1) a combination of principled and pragmatic motivations for quota reform and (2) the role of elite actions, not voter bias, as the main explanation for women's electoral performance.

Over the course of the 1990s, a movement emerged in France for the equal representation of women and men in political life. Proponents of ‘parity’ argued that existing understandings of equality and representation were originally deemed to apply only to men. To overcome this historical legacy, they sought constitutional and legal reforms that would open the way for more women to be nominated and elected to political office. They achieved this goal in 1999, when Article 3 of the Constitution was amended to state that “the law favors the equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective functions,” together with Article 4 to require that political parties “contribute to the execution of the principle set forth in the last section of Article 3 under the conditions determined by the law” (*Journal Officiel*, 9 July 1999: 10175). In 2000, these reforms were bolstered by changes to the electoral law that specified the elections to which the parity principle would be applied, the moments when compliance would be monitored, and the sanctions that would be imposed on parties for not fully meeting these requirements. As a result of these changes, parties are now required to present roughly equal numbers of male and female candidates to a wide range of political offices at the local, regional, national, and supranational levels.

The dramatic nature of these reforms has captured international attention among scholars, activists, and politicians around the world interested in issues of gender and political representation. In these and many French sources, parity is portrayed as a specifically French answer to the under-representation of women in political life (Gaspard 1994; Scott 2005). However, these reforms are not unique to France: more than 100 countries have witnessed the adoption of candidate gender quota policies, almost all within the last fifteen years. Although these measures may take a number of forms, most – like the policy in France – have been passed unanimously, or nearly unanimously, by male-dominated political parties and national legislatures (Krook 2009).<sup>1</sup> The widespread adoption of quotas thus indicates a growing international trend recognizing the need to include

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<sup>1</sup> The current world average of women in parliament is 18.4% (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008).

more women in political decision-making. Yet, these patterns also raise a fundamental puzzle. Because the percentage of women identified in these policies is often significantly higher than the existing proportion of women in political office, implementing these policies to their fullest extent requires, by definition, a reduction in the number of men. As such, many of the same men voting for these reforms would lose their positions as a result. If this is the case, why have elites – who are in most cases men – passed quota provisions, often quickly and with substantial margins of support?

One answer has been put forward in a recent contribution by Guillaume R. Fréchet, François Maniquet, and Massimo Morelli (2008). In their article, the authors argue that the passage of the parity reforms in France can be explained with reference to the strategic calculations of male incumbents, in the context of a systematic preference among voters for male candidates. More specifically, they propose that “given voters’ bias in favor of men candidates...parties are in favor of a gender quota because it increases the incumbents’ probability...of running against a woman and being reelected” (Fréchet et al 2008, 892). Evidence of self-interest on the part of legislators, the authors argue, is the presence of fees for non-compliance for national elections: whereas party lists that do not meet parity requirements for local elections are rejected, parties that present less than equal numbers for the National Assembly are assessed a financial penalty proportional to the gap between male and female candidates. This provision introduces a crucial ‘escape clause’ that enables parties to pay a fee in order to allow male incumbents to run, thereby reducing the risk for any particular male incumbent to ‘lose out’ because of the parity provision. The validity of this argument hinges on (1) corroborating elites’ self-interested motivations for quota reform, and (2) establishing that there is a voter bias against female candidates. At first glance, the authors offer powerful proof for both claims, the first using a game-theoretic model and the second via a statistical test showing that female candidates fare worse than men. Yet, when these arguments are juxtaposed with existing research, it becomes clear that they are not supported by the wealth of qualitative and quantitative

evidence from the French case. Importantly, the authors do not cite the bulk of this work, despite the fact that the French parity campaign is among the most extensively studied in the rapidly expanding literature on gender quota reforms.

In this article, we address the more general puzzles surrounding quota adoption through the particular lens of the parity reforms in France. We begin in the first section by detailing the arguments put forward by Fréchet et al (2008), outlining their claims and research design and evaluating their measures and evidence. Upon closer inspection, we find that there are reasons to doubt their two central claims regarding incumbent self-interest and voter bias. We develop an alternative account in the remainder of the paper, incorporating a broader range of research and evidence from the French case. We argue that (1) while strategic interests did play a role in the parity reforms, ideological factors and principled beliefs are equally, if not more important, in explaining patterns of quota adoption and implementation, and (2) while claims about voter bias are occasionally voiced by political elites, almost all the available evidence suggests that voters express favorable attitudes towards women in politics and that party leaders often perceive the promotion of female candidates as a means for attracting voter support. Together, these points suggest that the analysis should focus not on legislators or voters, but rather on political parties.

We elaborate this argument in the next three parts of the paper, using a wide range of sources. In the second section, we discuss the history of quotas in France and basic details of the parity movement, drawing on archival materials, newspaper debates, and personal testimonials. In the third section, we trace the events leading up to the adoption of the parity reforms, paying close attention to the activities of civil society groups, political parties, and individual politicians at various stages of the policy-making process. This qualitative evidence casts doubt on explanations focused exclusively on the self-interests of male office-holders. We also find support for the argument that voters were positive towards parity, and in fact, were perceived as such by the political parties. In the

fourth section, we more explicitly address the question of voter bias through a quantitative analysis of quota implementation and candidate performance. Using a more complete dataset and set of controls, we find that perceptions about women's poor electoral performance are in fact an artifact of where female candidates tend to be placed, which is often in districts judged by party elites to be lost in advance. We conclude with reflections on the implications of these two competing accounts.

### **Voter Bias as an Explanation for the Parity Reforms**

The parity reforms in France are unusual, but not unique, in comparative perspective in that they make provisions for parties to nominate equal numbers of male and female candidates. Belgium and Spain have passed similar 50% quota laws, and many parties have adopted voluntary 50% quota policies. Yet, the vast majority of quotas around the globe require a smaller proportion of female candidates, most often 30% (Krook 2009). Puzzles concerning their adoption, however, remain basically the same: why would elites, who are for the most part men, vote in favor of a policy that appears to go against their own self-interests? The answer, for Fréchette et al (2008), is simple: quota adoption *is* in their self-interests. Similar strategic arguments have been made by other scholars. Some view quota adoption as an empty gesture by elites who want to appear progressive, especially to female voters and international audiences, but do not intend to actually change existing patterns of representation (Mossuz-Lavau 1998). Others argue that quotas provide a means for elites to sustain an existing regime (Howard-Merriam 1990), consolidate control over political rivals (Chowdhury 2002), and even demonstrate autonomy from other branches of government (Baldez 2004). What distinguishes the argument made by Fréchette et al (2008) from these other accounts is the notion of 'male advantage,' or the idea that voters express a systematic preference for male over female candidates. Indeed, the authors go so far as to say that "for the main point of the article to

hold, and for the theoretical model to be meaningful, proving the existence of such a male advantage is all that matters” (2008, 895).

The authors begin by framing their model in terms of the specific incentives created by the majoritarian, single-member district system employed for elections to the French National Assembly. They contend that this system leads deputies to anticipate an incumbency advantage against challengers, an effect which is likely to be enhanced by quota reform given the existence of male advantage, increasing opportunities for male incumbents to face off successfully against female challengers. Crucial evidence for this version of events, the authors suggest, is the presence of the escape clause consisting of financial penalties for non-compliance: whereas ‘pure parity’ would decrease the probability for male incumbents to run again, ‘parity with fees’ enables a larger number to stay on and defend their seats, as long as their parties are willing and able to absorb the resulting loss of state funding. As such, the details of the quota law passed in France have two attractive features for incumbents: they raise the probability that incumbents will run against women, at the same time that they do not prevent incumbents from running, especially in the large parties that can better ‘afford’ not to nominate women. These dynamics, in turn, they argue, explain the marginal increase in the proportion of women elected from 10.9% in 1997 to 12.3% in 2002 (Fréchette et al 2008, 891). Women either lost in contests against men or were overlooked as candidates by the parties most likely to win seats in the National Assembly.

To establish the validity of this argument, Fréchette et al (2008) turn first to the task of substantiating their claims about male advantage and voter bias. Importantly, they focus only on districts where the election went into a second round (required if a single candidate does not win more than 50% of all votes) and where the two second-round candidates were from the Socialist Party (PS) and the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the two major parties. Their model seeks to explain a candidate’s percentage of votes in the second round of elections in 2002, controlling for

the score obtained in the previous election by the candidate in the same district and same party as the present candidate (a measure of the ‘winnability’ of the district), the age difference between opponents in the same district (a proxy for political experience), and the party affiliation of each candidate (on the assumption that party ideology may be related to gender bias, with left-wing parties being more open to female candidates). The key independent variable is male advantage, captured by noting when a male has a female opponent (value 1), the two candidates are of the same sex (value 0), and a female has a male opponent (value -1).

On the basis of this research design, the authors find that male advantage is statistically significant for both new candidates and incumbents: “For a male, having an opponent of opposite gender increases the probability of winning – and for a woman it decreases it” (Fréchette et al 2008, 898). The party holding the district in the previous election also had a significant positive effect, as did age and whether the candidate represented the UMP. The authors dismiss the possibility of party bias, on the grounds that the regression analysis controls for the score of the party in 1997 and 2002, and thereby the ‘winnability’ of the district in 2002 and 2007. They conclude, therefore, that “no party has shown a biased preference for men over women in ‘good’ districts where it did not have an incumbent” (Fréchette et al 2008, 900). Having made their case for voter bias against women, Fréchette et al (2008) then develop a game-theoretic model of quota adoption, focusing on the calculations of incumbent deputies. Their crucial simplifying assumption is that “if a man candidate runs against a woman, he is elected no matter what the voters of that district think of the candidates’ policy platforms” (Fréchette et al 2008, 901). In other words, voter biases in favor of male candidates trump other considerations like policy preferences or voter loyalties to individual parties.

The validity of this game-theoretic model is dependent upon the soundness of this simplifying assumption, which in turn relies heavily upon the statistical analysis preceding it, demonstrating the presence of a male advantage. The question of voter bias against female

candidates has been the subject of an extended literature in political science, but the findings have been mixed. While some early work noted that the public was reluctant to vote for female candidates (Ekstrand and Eckert 1981), and some more recent studies discover that bias against women remains a factor in voter choice (Lawless 2004), the vast majority of research finds that voters not only vote for male and female candidates at equal rates, but may even vote in greater numbers for women over men (Black and Erickson 2003). These discrepancies stem in large part from the fact that voter choice is a complex phenomenon, which norms of gender may further complicate. On the one hand, women often run in districts that are less competitive than their male counterparts. However, when features like seat, region, and incumbency are factored in as statistical controls, success rates even out among male and female candidates (Norris, Vallance, and Lovenduski 1992). On the other hand, the women who do win office often have higher than average credentials and in many cases are seen to represent an important break with the political status quo. In some countries, this has meant that female incumbents who run again have higher re-election rates than men (Milyo and Schosberg 2000), in some instances because women are more willing than men to cross party lines in order to vote for a female candidate (Brians 2005).

A closer look at the research design employed by Fréchette et al (2008), therefore, offers an opportunity not only to assess male advantage, but also to inform a larger research agenda on voter bias. In the case of France, it is notable that the three studies which analyze sex differences in candidate performance reach opposite conclusions. Whereas the present authors observe that men enjoy a significant electoral advantage over women, Rainbow Murray (2008) and Priscilla Southwell and Courtney Smith (2007) find that women's poor performance relative to men is a direct result of the safety of the seats in which women are placed. When adequate statistical controls are introduced, the impact of sex on electoral performance ceases to be significant. Indeed, Southwell and Smith (2007) discover that female candidates were more likely to be elected than were male candidates.

Murray's (2008) evidence, which draws on a much larger dataset of elections taking place between 1988 and 2002, shows that women are consistently and strategically placed in more challenging seats than men. We build on these results in section four below, incorporating new data from the 2007 elections. To make the distinctions between models clear, it is necessary to revisit some of the decisions made by Fréchette et al (2008) when operationalizing their model. We argue that a number of these choices are problematic, translating into a statistical model which is incorrectly specified and fails to capture adequately the relationship between candidate sex and electoral performance.

As already mentioned, the model seeks to explain a candidate's percentage of votes in the second round of elections in 2002. The first oversight is that the model does not control for changes in the sex of candidates over time. If the sex of candidates for both parties does not change from one election to the next, any change in the electoral outcome, as measured by the previous election result, cannot be attributed to candidate sex. This links to a second concern regarding the measure for seat safety: while the authors include the score for the candidate's party in the previous election, central features of French politics suggest that this is not a sufficiently robust control because it does not take swing into account. Elections in France are associated with volatility and frequent changes back and forth between governments ruled by different parties, a trend known as *alternance*. This trend is strikingly illustrated by the fact that the 2007 election was the first since 1978 to result in the re-election of the incumbent government. As such, it is a crucial omission to exclude swing from a measure of electoral performance, even more so because swing varies significantly from one region to another, causing some seats to be more volatile than others. Furthermore, a small swing is of greater significance in a seat held by a small majority, whereas a safe seat may be able to tolerate a larger swing without changing hands. As we argue below, this may have a greater impact on women due to the seats in which they are placed.

A third issue relates to the importance given to age in the model proposed by Fréchette et al (2008) as a proxy for assessments of political experience. This variable is problematic for at least two reasons. First, the authors provide no reference for any study which uncovers a relationship between candidate age and voter preferences. In contrast, a recent study by Shephard and Johns (2008) finds an ambiguous relationship between age and preferences, speculating that opinions on the age of the candidate may be influenced by the age of the voter. Further, the average age of first-time deputies in 2002 and 2007 was nearly identical for men and women. Second, there are reasons to believe that incumbency is a more reliable measurement of experience. Because the study focuses on two-horse second-round elections, the visibility of candidates qualifying to the second round will be relatively high. Consequently, whether or not a candidate has qualified to the second round in a previous election – and, in turn, won that seat – is likely to be more salient to the electorate than age.

This links to a fourth concern related to the measure of incumbency and political experience. The authors control for whether or not the candidate was an incumbent and whether the opponent was a new candidate or the loser from the previous election. However, this fails to capture two significant trends. First, recording the status of losing the previous election does not differentiate between candidates who were previously incumbents prior to losing the seat and candidates who had previously contested the seat unsuccessfully. This is a crucial distinction in light of the tradition of *alternance*, which means that many seats will feature a former incumbent seeking to regain the seat at the next shift of the electoral tide. Second, seats have an electoral history which precedes the previous election. There are numerous seats where the runner-up had won the seat in the 1993 or even 1988 election but had not been re-elected since. While the benefits of this status as a former incumbent are questionable, such candidates are not accurately viewed as ‘new’ candidates even if they were not present in the second round of the previous election.

Given that the self-interests model of quota adoption hinges upon demonstrating the presence of a voter bias against female candidates, it is necessary to re-run the statistical analysis with these revised specifications in order to evaluate (1) whether a male advantage does indeed exist, and (2) whether deputies perceived this bias and acted in their self-interests in passing the ‘parity with fees’ reform. To ensure that the findings remain as faithful as possible to the details of the French case, we make use of a wide range of sources to ‘triangulate’ the account of quota adoption and implementation in France. Presenting the data chronologically, we first draw on qualitative evidence, using both primary and secondary sources, to examine the background and campaign for the parity law and the events leading up to the passage of constitutional and electoral reform. We then engage in a quantitative analysis of patterns in the implementation of parity and the performance of male and female candidates, using a more expansive dataset and more carefully specified set of controls.

Taken together, this evidence calls into doubt the two central claims made by Fréchette et al (2008) regarding self-interest and voter bias, revealing (1) a combination of principled and pragmatic motivations for quota reform and (2) the role of elite actions, not voter bias, as the main explanation for women’s electoral performance. What is especially striking is the extensive evidence suggesting that voters are favorable towards female candidates and that party leaders perceive the promotion of women in politics as a means for attracting voter support. Therefore, what seems to explain female candidates’ poor electoral performance is not voter preference for male candidates, but on-going power struggles inside the political parties leading to systematic disparities in the placement of male and female candidates. These patterns are not unique to France, but have been documented in a wide range of countries, where quotas have clashed with the interests of incumbents (Cutts, Childs, and Fieldhouse 2008), raised the ire of local party organizations (Freidenvall 2005), and vied with claims for ‘fairness’ to aspiring male candidates (Dahlerup 2007).

## **Historical Precedents and the Movement for Parity**

The parity reforms are often viewed as a discrete instance of policy reform, the result of extended public debate over the nature of the French republic. Yet, the shape of these discussions – and, indeed, the use of the term ‘parity’ itself – cannot be fully understood without considering earlier failed attempts to promote women’s political presence in France. The Socialists were the first to adopt voluntary gender quotas in the early 1970s, for a combination of reasons linked to party ideology and electoral motivations. The Gaullist parties, in contrast, have been more hesitant to embrace quotas, stemming both from their more traditional views of women’s roles and their general aversion – much like other conservative parties around the world – to measures that might interfere with ‘merit’ as the primary consideration for candidate selection. However, over the course of the 1990s, party officials began to express more open support for parity, due to growing beliefs that such a position would enable the party to capture – or at least stem the loss of – the support of female voters (Opello 2006). These trends indicate that the story of quota adoption in France cannot be adequately restricted to incumbents and their self-interests. Rather, a much wider array of actors have been involved in quota debates, leading political elites to articulate principled stands in favor of quota policies, often when they perceived that doing so would enable them to achieve electoral gains, particularly among female voters.

The first gender quotas in France were proposed by two female members at the PS national party convention in 1974. The women suggested that the party statutes be revised to include a 10% quota for women in party leadership positions and among the party’s candidates for political office, arguing that the adoption of quotas was consistent with socialist ideology and would demonstrate the party’s commitment to achieving equality between women and men. The proposal received unanimous support from the party committees responsible for statutory reform and was approved by a majority of the delegates to the party convention. Before voting in favor of the provision,

however, delegates changed the requirement slightly so that the quota would apply only to elections governed by proportional representation (PR), thus excluding elections to the National Assembly. Women sought to expand these provisions at subsequent conventions with the goal of eventually increasing the quota to reflect the proportion of women among party members. Delegates voted to raise the quota to 15% in 1977, and in 1979 they agreed to a 30% quota for European Parliament elections, a 20% quota for women in the party leadership, and the nomination of as many women as possible to 'winnable' districts in majoritarian elections.

The value of these gains, however, was not entirely clear: despite some acceptance of gender quotas on ideological grounds, there was resistance within the party to expanding these measures and implementing the provisions which did exist. In 1981, Véronique Neiertz, National Secretary for Women's Rights, proposed to increase the quota to 30% for the party leadership and the party's candidates in PR elections, as well as to extend the 30% quota to elections run by majoritarian vote. In spite of their earlier support, party leaders postponed discussion of this proposal until the party convention in 1982, where it was never presented or voted on by party delegates. Similar calls by the new National Secretary for Women's Rights, Martine Buron, for party quotas to be increased to 30% were rejected by delegates at the next three national congresses in 1983, 1985, and 1987. A number of women reiterated these demands in 1990, and although delegates did eventually vote to raise the existing quota, they still made no provisions to extend such measures to majoritarian elections. Meanwhile, over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, the PS rarely implemented any of these policies to their fullest extent, in part because the party never established any enforcement mechanisms to ensure their application. Further, in the few cases where the percentage of female candidates did approximate the quota, as in the 1986 legislative elections, most women were placed in positions where they were unlikely to be elected. It was not until the 1997 elections, when the PS formed an

alliance with other leftwing parties, that the party applied a 30% quota in elections governed by the majoritarian system (Krook 2009; Opello 2006).

The importance of ideology can also be seen in the support for positive action measures in the two smaller parties on the political left, the Greens and the French Communist Party (PCF). The statutes of both parties call for gender parity of candidates wherever possible. Following the example of the German Greens, which some claim were the first to use the term ‘parity’ to refer to equal representation of women and men in politics (Scott 2005), the French Greens have inscribed the principle of parity in their rules and regulations and applied it to all party lists since the European Parliament elections in 1989. The PCF, in turn, has been the French party that has most consistently included a high proportion of women among its candidates and elected representatives, although it did not formally incorporate the principle of parity into its bylaws until the passage of the national gender parity law in 2000 (Mazur 2001). Further reinforcing the importance of left-wing ideology, the leaders of both parties were vocal supporters of instituting a national parity law (Mossuz-Lavau 1998; Opello 2006).

In contrast, parties on the right of the political spectrum largely opposed gender quotas until the mid-1990s. This resistance is most evident in the main party on the right, which was strongly associated with the ideas of General Charles de Gaulle. Created in 1976 as the Rally for the Republic (RPR) and renamed the UMP in 2002, the party supported neither the incorporation of quotas into their party statutes nor the adoption of positive action, despite demands made for them by female supporters. In the run-up to the 1995 presidential elections, however, the party’s rival candidates both came out in support of positive action to promote women in politics. Edouard Balladur, who was prime minister at the time, stated that the Constitution should authorize quotas in elections governed by PR and that women should receive one-third of all cabinet positions, while Jacques Chirac rejected quotas in favor of gender parity (Opello 2006; see below for the distinction made in

French debates between ‘quotas’ and ‘parity’). In a departure from the other political parties, the extreme right-wing National Front (FN) consistently rejected parity. During the 1995 presidential campaign, for example, FN leader Jean-Marie Le Pen expressed opposition to any measure that would create divisions, reminding voters that “the Constitution recognized only one category of citizens, French citizens, and it is very good as such” (Mossuz-Lavau 1998, 52).

As these various party-level debates got underway in the 1970s and 1980s, women in parliament pursued a parallel strategy to increase women’s representation by proposing several versions of a national law to require quotas in local elections. In 1975, the Secretary of State for Women’s Status, Françoise Giroud, proposed limiting to 85% the percentage of candidates of the same sex who could appear on lists for municipal elections. In 1979, the Minister of Women’s Status and the Family, Monique Pelletier, changed this demand to 80% in an amendment to a bill on municipal election reform. The measure was approved almost unanimously in the National Assembly, but never reached the Senate, in part because the government preferred not to pursue such a controversial reform during the 1980-1981 presidential campaign (Mossuz-Lavau 1998). When the PS came to power, the new government decided not to include quotas for women in a bill that would introduce semi-PR for municipal elections. However, in 1982 an independent deputy affiliated with the PS, Gisèle Halimi, proposed that lists of candidates not include more than 70% of candidates of the same sex, applied to every three positions on the list.

The Socialist group in parliament reduced her proposal to 75% with no restrictions on the ordering of male and female candidates, but the government remained unconvinced and argued publicly that the parties, not the National Assembly, should decide the ratio of male and female candidates. During the parliamentary debates, Minister of the Interior Gaston Defferre requested that the measure appear as a separate article so that, if the Constitutional Council should annul it, the broader law might still be applied (Bird 2003). Because Defferre was speaking on the government’s

behalf, this suggestion fed rumors that the high court would declare the quota unconstitutional, creating an opportunity for deputies to appeal to female voters by supporting the quota, while secure in the knowledge that it would never actually be applied (Mazur 2001). Thus, after separating the quota provision from the main legislation, legislators voted nearly unanimously in favor of the measure. Several months later, as expected, the court reviewed the bill on municipal electoral reform. While its attention focused initially on articles other than the one providing for quotas (Mossuz-Lavau 1998), the Council later took up the quota article and declared it unconstitutional on the grounds that Article 3 of the Constitution and Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen together affirmed the principle of equality before the law, which precluded all types of division of voters and candidates into categories for all types of political voting.<sup>2</sup>

This verdict had an enormous impact on campaigns to increase women's representation in France. Most crucially, the decision affirmed an interpretation of 'equality' that precluded attempts to institute equal outcomes through sex-specific policies. For this reason, advocates of quotas turned their attention over the course of the 1980s and 1990s toward developing a critique of the existing principle of equality as a root cause of sex-based differences in political representation (Bird 2003).<sup>3</sup> To accomplish this, they argued that current understandings of equality and representation – as well as their subject, the universal citizen – were originally deemed to apply only to men. Rather than abandon these concepts, they proposed reforming the Constitution to provide for equal representation, on the grounds that this was the only way to recognize explicitly the two sexes of the abstract universal citizen. Instituting parity was crucial to the general welfare of society, they claimed,

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<sup>2</sup> Décision no. 82-146 DC du 18 novembre 1982.

<sup>3</sup> The body of literature arguing in favor of parity, as well as surveying these contributions, is enormous. Central contributions include Agacinski (2001); Gaspard (1994); Gaspard, Servan-Schreiber, and Le Gall (1992); Mossuz-Lavau (1998); Scott (2005); Sineau (2002).

because ‘sex’ was the universal difference among human beings, a division that cut across all other groups, categories, and communities. This policy differed fundamentally from establishing quotas, because while ‘quotas’ implied special representation rights for minorities, ‘parity’ simply called for equitable sharing of power between women and men, the two halves of the human race.<sup>4</sup>

While this reformulation had strong opponents who argued that giving political value to sexual difference was invariably reactionary (Badinter 1996), would spur ‘differentialism’ and ‘communitarianism’ among other groups with fatal consequences for the secular and universal republic (Ozouf 1995), turned women into victims who needed special help to succeed (Trat 1995), and would draw attention away from substantive policy questions affecting women (Le Dœuff 1995), the concept remained sufficiently ambiguous to garner the support of groups who otherwise disagreed on other political issues. Indeed, one critic observed that parity was like a chameleon, able to accommodate all publics and all sensibilities (Varikas 1995). It quickly gained a broad base of support, spanning women in civil society, the political parties, and the state; new and established women’s groups; feminist activists and academics; politicians on the left and the right; and male and female voters (Krook 2009). These unexpected coalitions were facilitated by a number of important ambiguities in the formulation of parity, leading some opponents to worry that not enough attention was being paid to the arguments against parity (Amar 1999). Although the campaign for parity is detailed at greater length below, these discussions over basic political principles suggest that an account focused solely on the self-interests of incumbents provides, at the least, a shallow version of the events at hand. The evidence presented here also provides very little indication of voter bias against female candidates, pointing instead to recurring perceptions among elites that measures to promote women in politics would prove popular among ordinary citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> While this rebranding of ‘quotas’ as ‘parity’ may be viewed simply as a semantic shift to implement a measure that, for all intents and purposes, acts as a 50% quota, assertions about functional equivalence are controversial.

## **Parity Adoption and the Motivations for Quota Reform**

Public proclamations in favor of women's increased representation are a recurrent theme in quota debates across the globe and appear, at least at first glance, to be a major explanation as to why quotas have become the widest reaching electoral reforms of recent years. However, there are also good reasons to doubt the sincerity of at least some of these principled claims, given that quotas have not produced uniform increases in the percentage of women elected to parliaments worldwide. Rather, some countries have seen dramatic increases following the adoption of quota regulations, while others have witnessed more modest changes or even setbacks in the number of female office-holders (Krook 2009). These patterns suggest that an adequate explanation of quota adoption must pay attention to, and make sense of, some of the competing dynamics behind the passage and translation into practice of quota policies. A closer look at the case of France, therefore, offers an opportunity to unravel the complexities present across many instances of quota reform. The evidence reviewed here indicates that elites made public declarations and voted in overwhelming numbers in favor of the parity reforms, in large part because they believed – at least at some level – that doing so would attract substantial voter support. Differences in party ideology, however, also played a role. At the same time, however, the limited success of parity in practice – increasing the percentage of women in the National Assembly from 10.9% in 1997 to 12.3% in 2002 and 18.5% in 2007 (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008) – suggests that because open opposition was not possible, efforts to preserve the status quo were transformed into more covert forms of resistance (Bird 2003), beginning with the design of the parity law but extending into the implementation process.

The comparative literature on gender quotas identifies three main types of quota policies: reserved seats, party quotas, and legislative quotas. Despite their distinct means of influencing the candidate selection process, these policies as a group share similar concerns to increase the numbers

of women elected to political office. Explanations for quota adoption across these diverse contexts are varied, but can be organized into four main accounts (Krook 2009): women mobilize for quotas, usually when women's groups come to realize that quotas are an effective, and perhaps the only, means for increasing women's representation (Kittilson 2006); political elites adopt quotas for strategic reasons, related to competition with other parties or as a means to promote other political ends (Chowdhury 2002); quotas are adopted when they mesh with reigning notions of equality and representation, although this normative 'fit' may take a variety of different forms (Meier 2000); and quotas are supported by international norms and spread through transnational sharing, most often through the work of international organizations (Krook 2006). These explanations point to a mix of normative and pragmatic motivations for quota reform, suggesting that the adoption of quotas may be about efforts to empower women in politics but, in many cases, may also be about how quotas fit in – perhaps serendipitously – with various other struggles among political elites.

In the case of France, little progress was made at either the national- or the party-level for several years following the 1982 Constitutional Council decision. In the late 1980s, however, women found renewed inspiration in the Green movement, which as already mentioned inscribed the principle of parity in its party statutes, and a series of discussions in the Council of Europe on deepening democracy in Europe through the promotion of 'parity democracy.' These developments coincided with more critical examination of theory and practice of democracy in France on the occasion of the bicentennial of the French Revolution (Gaspard 1994). The first parity association was formed in 1990, but it was not until 1992 with the publication of the pro-parity book, *Au pouvoir citoyennes! Liberté, égalité, parité* (Gaspard, Servan-Schreiber, and Le Gall 1992), that the term 'parity' entered the realm of public debate. Almost immediately, women around the country began to establish new parity associations, as well as to make parity a goal of many existing women's organizations. When elections in 1993 returned only 6% women (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1995,

121), activities in favor of parity multiplied with debates, roundtables, conferences, newsletters, and demonstrations. By the end of the year, the Manifesto of the 577 for Parity Democracy, a reference to the number of deputies, was signed by 289 women and 288 men from all points across the political spectrum to demand the incorporation of parity into the Constitution.

Soon after the publication of this manifesto in *Le Monde*, one of the largest newspapers in France, a number of left parties announced they would apply parity to their lists for elections to the European Parliament in 1994. Over the next year, various deputies submitted proposals to institute parity. Although President François Mitterrand expressed his reservations, he publicly agreed that dramatic increases in women's representation were unlikely to occur on their own. To increase their influence, parity associations created an umbrella organization with the goal of collecting a million signatures in favor of constitutional reform. These events enabled advocates to place the issue at the forefront of debate during the 1995 presidential elections, gaining a commitment from all the major candidates for some type of reform (Mossuz-Lavau 1998; Sineau 2001). Upon being elected, Jacques Chirac created the Observatory for Parity, a state agency responsible for studying and developing strategies to increase women's representation. In 1996, ten prominent female politicians from both the left and the right came together to outline their own proposals for equal representation, which appeared in *L'Express*, a major weekly French news magazine, as the Manifesto of the Ten for Parity. In the same edition, the paper published the results of a nation-wide poll showing that 71% of the population would support a law or constitutional amendment establishing equal representation (*L'Express*, 6 June 1996). It also included interviews of Alain Juppé, the Gaullist prime minister, and Lionel Jospin, the leader of the PS, both of whom endorsed a constitutional amendment.

The public debate on parity, combined with pressures from party women, led Jospin to announce that at least 30% of the PS candidates for the 1998 legislative elections would be female. Chirac and Juppé, in contrast, took no concrete initiatives. In fact, Juppé became more reticent

about his support following a 1997 survey showing that 75% of all deputies opposed inscribing parity in the constitution, with most of this opposition coming from the conservative majority of the RPR and Union for a Democratic France (UDF) (Sineau 2001, 176). In the first parliamentary debate on parity in March 1997, therefore, he suggested reducing the demand for parity in the constitution to some form of temporary measure to encourage female candidates (Bird 2003). A vote never took place, however, because shortly thereafter Chirac dissolved the Assembly and called for new elections, one year ahead of schedule. Although Chirac had anticipated that early elections would help consolidate the power of the UDF-RPR alliance, his strategy backfired when a majority of voters chose the PS, leading to the appointment of Jospin as the new prime minister. Within a matter of days, Jospin announced that he planned to pursue an amendment to incorporate parity into the constitution (*Le Monde*, 21 June 1997). Chirac responded a month later that he too would support constitutional reform (Mossuz-Lavau 1998). Both leaders reaffirmed their commitments to parity on International Women's Day in March 1998.

One month later, Jospin argued that the best place to introduce this amendment was Article 1, which affirms the principles of the French republic and guarantees equality before the law. As the President has the power to initiate constitutional amendments, along with members of parliament, Chirac considered these proposals and, despite his earlier statements, rejected the term 'parity' in favor of the term 'equal access,' and proposed to reform Article 34, which lists the policy areas in which the legislature may make law. The two men eventually reached a compromise to support a law guaranteeing equal access to positions of political, economic, and social responsibility, but this was rejected by the Council of State (an organ that assists the executive with legal advice), which argued that economic and social equality were already included in the Preamble of the Constitution. Upon further negotiation, Chirac agreed to reform Article 3, which outlines the basic rights of citizens in relation to national sovereignty, on the condition that Jospin drop his demand to introduce a new

electoral system for the National Assembly (Giraud and Jenson 2001). Conservatives in the Senate, further, insisted that the verb ‘guarantees’ be replaced with ‘favors’ equal access, thus reducing the claim for equal representation to the milder goal of increasing the number of female candidates.

With these changes, the amendment was submitted for its first reading in the National Assembly in December 1998. Minister of Justice Élisabeth Guigou (1998) opened the debate, arguing that reform of Article 3 of the Constitution would not introduce a sexual cleavage into politics, but would bring an end to political exclusion, and thus finally fully realize the goals of the French Revolution. This speech indicates that the normative arguments made by supporters of parity had entered official discourse and were used, together with strong public pressure, to make it difficult for male deputies in particular to express outward opposition to parity reform. Notably, the most public resistance came from a group of female politicians, who lobbied against parity, contending that a good cause had taken the wrong path (*L'Express*, 11 February 1999). In spite of their efforts, the measure was adopted unanimously by the National Assembly in March 1999. The Senate, in contrast, rejected the measure on its first reading, in large part because it was dominated by members of the UDF and RPR. However, under heavy pressure from Chirac, Senators eventually passed it by an overwhelming majority (Opello 2006). Both houses of parliament then met in a special session at Versailles in July 1999 and approved the provision as constitutional law.

Passage of the constitutional amendment, in turn, set in motion a second round of debates regarding reform of the electoral law to specify the meaning of “equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective functions.” At this stage, there were increased opportunities to write the new law in such a way that it would not have much effect, along the lines described by Fréchette et al (2008). However, these were limited, and over time, have grown more restricted. In December 1999, Minister of the Interior Jean-Pierre Chevènement submitted the proposals of the government. To the disappointment of many advocates, the bill focused on the nomination of female candidates,

not the proportion of women elected, and made the weakest provisions for the National Assembly. For these elections, organized around single-member districts, the bill mandated that parties present equal numbers of male and female candidates. The penalty for non-compliance was financial, with parties losing a percentage of their state funding equal to half the difference in percentages of male and female candidates. In contrast, the bill outlined more specific and relatively strict requirements for other kinds of elections, held under the PR system, identifying where on lists women should be placed and rejecting lists that did not comply with these requirements.

This text was adopted almost unanimously, with only one vote cast against it, in January 2000. The Senate adopted a slightly different version in March, leading to additional votes in the Assembly in March, the Senate in April, and the Assembly again in May 2000. Opposition to the bill continued, however, upon its approval in the Assembly, when a group of 60 senators referred the bill to the Constitutional Council. They charged that the measure instituted quotas by constraining and penalizing means, broke a constitutional tradition of not changing the electoral law less than a year before the next elections, prevented incumbents from being re-elected on their original lists, and limited the free choice of voters. As late as January 1999, the Council had, similar to events in 1982, declared quotas to be unconstitutional in a decision concerning provisions for regional elections (Lenoir 2001, 244, n. 98). Yet, slightly more than a year later, the effects of the parity movement had led to a shift in this view and the Council confirmed the constitutionality of quotas,<sup>5</sup> leading to the promulgation of a new electoral law in June 2000. At this point, vocal philosophical objections to parity virtually disappeared, being replaced by more subtle and insidious opposition from sitting deputies and party elites (Bird 2003). As a result, the first three elections governed by parity produced enormous variations in the impact of quotas at different levels of government.

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<sup>5</sup> Décision no 2000-429 DC du 30 mai 2000. For commentary, see Lenoir (2001).

In the wake of these mixed effects, legislators have pursued a number of reforms related to the parity provision. Some of these changes, together with ongoing struggles inside some of the parties, reveal continued resistance to parity at the level of practice. The bulk of reforms, however, reflect pressures to ensure effective implementation in ways that further undermine the self-interests of male incumbents. On the one hand, the new right-wing government elected in 2002 initiated discussion on a number of electoral reforms that would, in essence, undo several of the most effective aspects of the parity law, including changes to the electoral system for regional, European, and Senate elections (Krook 2009). On the other hand, legislators also considered measures to strengthen the parity provision. In April 2003, a new law was passed to require strict alternation between women and men on lists for regional elections.<sup>6</sup> In 2007, a new law extended the reach of the parity law and increased the financial penalties that were already in force.<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that this last development coincided with extensive attention to issues of gender in the presidential elections, which pitted a Socialist woman, Ségolène Royal, against a Gaullist man, Nicolas Sarkozy. Following the second round in May 2007, the victor, Sarkozy, named a new cabinet that included record numbers of women. Taken together, these events suggest that political elites have continued to feel strong pressures from voters to take more concrete steps to incorporate more women into the political process, even in light of the zero-sum stakes this may entail for the male incumbents and aspirants. All the same, small pockets of resistance remain that exert influence over election results, as parties struggle to balance the need to respect the requirements of the parity law with the desire to manage internal party conflict.

### **Parity Implementation and the Performance of Female Candidates**

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<sup>6</sup> Loi no. 2003-327 du 11 avril 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Loi no. 2007-128 du 31 janvier 2007.

Patterns in quota implementation around the world suggest that similar tensions operate in other contexts as well. As already noted, quotas have varied effects across the countries where they exist. The comparative literature explains these variations by pointing to the details of the measures themselves (Jones 1998), the institutional frameworks in which they are introduced (Matland 2006), and the balance of actors for and against quota implementation (Baldez 2004; cf. Krook 2007). The details of quotas vary in terms of their wording, requirements, sanctions, and perceived legitimacy. In general, quotas tend to be the most effective when they are applied in PR electoral systems with closed lists and high district magnitudes. Party elites are typically viewed as the actors most directly responsible for variations in quota impact, as implementation depends on the willingness of elites to recruit female candidates. In many instances, elites mitigate these requirements, from passive refusal to enforce quotas to more active measures to subvert their intended effects (Krook 2009).

This work suggests, therefore, that the patterns observed in France are not unusual in international perspective, in terms of disparities between the ostensible intentions of quota reforms and their actual effects. A closer look at election data, consequently, presents a chance not only to assess the account given by Fréchette et al (2008) for the French case, but also to consider what these findings might imply for other instances of quota reform. The qualitative evidence reviewed thus far indicates that voters are favorable towards efforts to promote women in politics – and, indeed, are perceived as such by the parties – whereas elites are more mixed in their propensity to support quota policies. The quantitative analysis presented below confirms this finding: once the proper controls are introduced, sex is never a significant effect in patterns of candidate performance. Rather, performance is directly related to placement, suggesting that elite bias against women – not voter bias – explains women’s electoral fortunes in France.

The first three elections governed by parity revealed major variations in the impact of quotas at different levels of government. For local elections in 2001, parties were required to present equal

numbers of women and men, placing three women and three men in any order for every group of six candidates. The percentage of women in local councils in towns and cities with more than 3500 inhabitants increased from 26% in 1995 to 48% in 2001.<sup>8</sup> For Senate elections later that year, parties contested 102 seats, 74 determined through list-based elections governed by parity and 28 selected by majoritarian elections exempt from the parity requirement. For list-based elections, parties were required to alternate between women and men from the top to the bottom of the list. As a result, many male incumbent senators were moved to lower positions. Rather than risk not being elected, many decided to set up alternative lists where they appeared in the first position. In at least four cases, these dissident lists split the right-wing vote, contributing to the election of four Communist Party women ranked second after Socialist men. Twenty of the twenty-two women elected won their seats in the list-based elections, increasing women's total representation in the Senate from 6% in 1998 to 11% in 2001 (Sineau 2002, 4).

In comparison, for National Assembly elections in 2002, parties were required to present equal numbers of male and female candidates across all electoral districts, with financial penalties for those parties that did not comply. These fees created distinct incentives for parties of different sizes. In general, the smaller parties respected parity in their nominations, both because they did not have many incumbents to unseat and because they were under pressure to maximize the amount of state subsidy they could claim. Some of these parties had long practiced parity, like the Greens and the PCF, because it was consistent with their party ideologies. Others, like the FN and the Hunting-Fishing-Nature Party, were largely male-dominated parties which mainly applied parity to avoid drastic cuts in their state subsidies. In contrast, the larger parties opted not to apply strict parity in their nominations, because they were unwilling to 'sacrifice' male incumbents and they had the financial resources to absorb losses in state funding. The belief that female candidates are not

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<sup>8</sup> Parity does not apply to towns with fewer than 3500 inhabitants because they use a different type of electoral system.

competitive endures, as evidenced by a comment made by a UMP party official who claimed that “we would probably have lost the elections [in 2002] if we had fielded unknown women in half the constituencies. We still prefer to pay fines than lose elections!” (*Le Figaro*, 6 January 2006). The PS has been less vocal in denouncing female candidates, but was still reluctant to see incumbents deselected. The reasons for this appear to stem from a desire to maintain party unity, avoid rebellion by disaffected men evicted from their seats, and reserve some new opportunities for an up-and-coming generation of young male hopefuls (Murray 2007, 572-573).

As large parties, the UMP and the PS were able to recoup some of their financial losses during the second round, since the penalty assessed on the first round could be compensated by an increase in the number of deputies elected, which raised the amount of state subsidy. Consequently, the UMP and the UDF presented fewer than 20% female candidates, while the PS nominated 36% (Murray 2004). These low numbers were exacerbated by the lack of a placement mandate, enabling parties to concentrate their female candidates primarily in districts that were judged lost in advance. As a consequence of these various calculations, parties yielded record numbers of female candidates, 38.9%, but women’s representation increased only marginally, from 10.9% to 12.3%. As several analysts point out, however, these results may not have been as low had it not been for the outcome of presidential elections in April-May 2002, when Jospin was eliminated in the first round in favor of FN leader Le Pen. This situation sowed panic in all the parties, but especially the PS, and led the mainstream parties to reverse many of their selections in April 2002, withdrawing many female candidates in favor of more experienced male politicians (Remy 2002).

In the wake of these various elections, legislators pursued a number of reforms related to the parity provision, including an increase in the financial penalties for non-compliance. Losses from the earlier penalty were not insignificant: in each year of the 2002-2007 sessions, the PS lost more than 1.5 million euros and the UMP nearly 4 million, around 10% of their budget (Zimmermann 2003).

The 50% rise in the penalty is therefore likely to escalate the pressures on all parties to comply with the parity requirements. However, because this measure did not apply to National Assembly elections held in 2007, similar trends emerged in terms of smaller parties being more likely than larger ones to respect parity. The former nominated between 47% and 50% female candidates, including the FN which nominated 49%. Among the latter, the PS improved significantly, nominating 46% women, whereas the UMP and UDF fielded only 27% and 28%, respectively (*France 2*, 8 June 2007). As a result, women occupied 26% of the seats won by the PS, but only 14% of the seats won by the UMP (Zimmermann 2007). Overall, women were elected to 18.5% of the seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008). This six-point increase stemmed in large part from attempts to reform party selection practices: the Greens, PCF, and UDF pledged to field 50% women, while the PS adopted a target of placing at least 30% women in winnable seats (defined as a seat that had been won by the party at some point over the last four elections), and the UMP set a goal of 30% women with no commitment on where they would be placed.

These trends indicate that parties increasingly recognize that their placement decisions have an impact on the overall numbers of women elected to the National Assembly, even as some party officials continue to attribute women's loss rate to their status as weaker candidates. To determine which of these accounts holds greater weight, we subject the model developed by Fréchette et al (2008) to a more robust examination. More specifically, we present an alternative regression model which locates candidate sex within a broader narrative of change in electoral performance within each seat over time. To provide a more accurate measurement of the impact of candidate sex, we make two alterations. First, we change the dependent variable so that instead of monitoring the second round candidate score in a given election, we measure the change in second round scores from one election to the next, controlling for swing and for seat effects. In order to construct the dependent variable for use in the election at  $t_0$ , we collect data from two previous elections ( $t_{-1}$  and

$t_2$ ). This permits closer examination of how the change in parties' electoral performance within each seat, after controlling for regional swing, varies from one election to the next. The change from elections  $t_2$  to  $t_1$  provide a base measure against which the change from  $t_1$  to  $t_0$  can be contrasted.<sup>9</sup>

Second, we construct more precise independent variables that enable us to test whether changes in these factors between the two elections might have contributed to any change in the party's performance. These are sex, to examine whether men enjoy an electoral advantage over women, and incumbency, to see whether incumbents benefit from standing against newcomers. We monitor the sex balance and incumbency status of the second round candidates from one election to the next, and measure whether this has any significant impact on party performance. We employ a dataset that spans all five elections since the electoral system was restored to the two-round system, namely the elections of 1988, 1993, 1997, 2002 and 2007.<sup>10</sup> Because data from two prior elections is required to construct the dependent variable, our regression focuses on the elections of 1997, 2002 and 2007, using the insights provided by all five elections. We also expand the cases to include all second-round elections which featured a left-right battle, in contrast to the focus of Fréchet et al (2008) exclusively on contests between the PS and the UMP. This is because the two-round system in France leads to a combination of formal and tacit agreements between the UMP and the UDF, on the one hand, and the PS and other left-wing parties, on the other. For example, if more than one left-wing candidate qualifies to the second round, the candidate with the lower score stands down in order to avoid splitting the left-wing vote.

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<sup>9</sup> To construct the dependent variable, the change in party score from  $t_2$  to  $t_1$  is deducted from the regional swing for that election to create a 'deviation' score, illustrating the individual features of that seat. This deviation score is contrasted to the deviation score created for the election at  $t_0$ . As party strengths are not evenly distributed throughout the country, regional swing is used as it provides a much more sensitive measure than national swing.

<sup>10</sup> Fréchet et al claim, in error, that there was a legislative election in 1995 (2008, 903); the correct date is 1993.

The revised model develops and expands upon the model provided by Murray (2008). The dependent variable captures change in party performance from  $t_{-1}$  to  $t_0$  after controlling for swing and seat effects. The independent variables record changes in the sex and incumbency status of candidates from both parties from  $t_{-1}$  to  $t_0$ . In both variables, the effects of party are integrated into the variable design, eliminating the need for a separate independent variable controlling for party. Changes in candidate sex are measured through a series of dummy variables which control for the different possible combinations of sex and party over both elections. Left-wing candidates are denoted in the model by the letter L, and right-wing candidates are denoted by an R. A shift from a male candidate at  $t_{-1}$  to a female at  $t_0$  is denoted as m-w, and vice versa.<sup>11</sup> To capture the effects of incumbency, we created a variable of different levels of prior experience in that seat. The four measures were incumbent (coded as 4), former incumbent (anyone who had won the seat prior to the previous election but was no longer the incumbent, coded as 3), former candidate (anyone who had previously qualified to the second round in that seat but without winning, coded as 2) and new candidate (coded as 1). In order to measure any change, we recorded the incumbency status for the candidates of both parties and provided this status for both time periods. The results of our models are reported in Table 1. <Table 1 about here>

The most striking finding is that none of the variables measuring change in candidate sex is significant in any of the models. Once appropriate controls for seat safety and incumbency are applied, sex carries no additional impact. This negates the argument of male advantage, revealing

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<sup>11</sup> As these dummy variables were mutually exclusive, and as the  $n$  for the dummy indicating no change in candidate sex between the two elections was larger than the combined  $n$  for the other candidate sex variables, we ran each regression twice, once using the variable indicating whether there was any change in the sex of either candidate, and once using the variables to illustrate the different kinds of change that did take place. Not every combination occurred in every election, and we excluded any combination for which the  $n$  was lower than five.

that once the tests for candidate performance are made more robust, there is no evidence of voter bias against female candidates (cf. Southwell and Smith 2007). A second finding is that incumbency does appear to have some significance, although its impact varies from one election to another. As the majority of incumbents and former incumbents are men, while the majority of women are new candidates, there could be a sex effect that is masked by controlling for incumbency. However, a closer look at the results makes such a conclusion implausible.

In 1997, there was a particularly high proportion of right-wing incumbents following the landslide victory of the right in 1993. Far from enjoying an advantage, these incumbents lost seats in large numbers as the electoral tide shifted back to the left. Meanwhile, although incumbency status does appear to have been significant for left-wing candidates in 1997, a higher level of experience is actually associated with a better than expected performance for the right. This may be explained by the fact that the only seats to be held by the left in 1993 were those where their baseline support was strongest. For this reason, swing to the left in these seats was likely to be lower than the swing experienced in the seats which returned to the left in 1997. The PS came close to fulfilling its target of 30% women candidates in 1997, resulting in a significant rise in the number of new female left-wing candidates. If an increase in the ranking of prior experience results in a better score for the right, it follows that the new candidates – many of whom were women – were those who performed most strongly for the left in 1997.

In the 2002 election, the incumbency status of candidates is completely insignificant. The variable for incumbency status in the previous election indicates weak significance for right-wing candidates, where incumbents faced a larger swing to the left, consistent with the findings for 1997, when many right-wing incumbents lost their seats. Finally, in 2007, incumbency is highly significant for both parties. This is intuitive, given that in 2007, unlike all other elections included in this study, the incumbent government was re-elected. Hence the success rate for incumbents in this election

was 87.4%, compared to 71.4% in 2002 and only 57.6% in 1997. Given the stark variations in incumbent performance from one election to another, it is hard to accept the thesis that voters re-elected incumbents in 2007 due to a preference for this type of candidate. A much more plausible explanation lies in the new electoral calendar introduced prior to the 2002 elections, resulting in a harmonization of presidential and legislative terms, with the presidential elections occurring shortly before legislative elections. Prior to this reform, it was possible to have a president of one party and a government of the other party, resulting in a scenario of ‘cohabitation’ which was unpopular with voters due to its associations with political stalemate and lack of accountability. The harmonization was designed to increase the likelihood of giving the president a parliamentary majority.

As sex effects disappear after providing stronger controls for safety of seat, our analysis supports the claim by Murray (2008) that weaker outcomes for female candidates are the consequence of the seats in which women are placed. Against the claims of Fréchette et al (2008), the evidence presented here reveals that women are consistently placed in the most challenging districts. Given the history of *alternance* in France, the governing party will primarily be concerned with minimizing its losses and defending its seats. For this party, the most desirable seats will be those held with the highest margin. Conversely, for the opposition party, the main focus will be on attacking and trying to take back as many seats as possible. For this party, the most desirable seats will be those held by its opponents with the lowest margin. The study by Murray (2008) finds that parties shift their strategy depending on whether they were attacking or defending: women who were defending were proportionally over-represented in the most marginal seats, while women who were attacking were over-represented in the seats least likely to fall. Further analysis using data for 2007 demonstrates that the trend continued to be as significant in 2007 as it had been in all previous elections. Table 2 illustrates that the majority of safe right-wing seats were held by men, while left-wing women challengers were disproportionately placed in the seats least likely to change hands.

<Table 2 about here>

Given these disadvantageous seats, it is perhaps surprising that the proportion of women rose from 12.3% to 18.5% in 2007. This can be explained both by the overall rise in the number of female candidates and in the events that took place between the two rounds of the election. In the first round, the right performed very well, with 112 seats being won outright. Of these seats, 100 (90%) were held by men. The improved performance for women in the second round was closely linked to improved performance by the left following a scandal over value-added tax which emerged in the week between the two rounds and hurt the right-wing government. As parties of the left fielded a much higher proportion of female candidates, the moderate swing back to the left in the second round enabled more women to get elected. In addition, despite their unfavorable placements, female incumbents performed strongly in 2007, with a success rate of 88.2% compared to 87.3% for men. This trend further undermines the notion of male advantage and indeed demonstrates to the contrary that women perform at least as well as men in the seats to which they have been allocated.

In turn, the finding that women are disproportionately placed in the most challenging seats, as illustrated in Table 2, supports the alternative explanation of elite bias. It is clearly parties, and not voters, that are discriminating against women and providing them with fewer opportunities. The source of this bias, however, is multi-faceted: while patterns in candidate nomination are informed to some degree by sexism, ideological commitments suggest that they can be more directly attributed to ongoing power struggles within the political parties. Evidence suggests that parties continue to privilege male over female aspirants: more than 70% of ‘inheritors,’ new candidates placed in seats held by their party, were men in 2007. Even allowing for the reasonable assumption that parties will wish to reselect their incumbents wherever possible, parties are not compensating for the fact that most incumbents are men by prioritizing female candidates in vacant seats. At the same time, the preference for incumbents goes beyond expected electoral performance and can be explained in

terms of desires to maintain good relations with party members and avoid the risk of the outgoing male incumbent standing against the new female party nominee. In sum, the gendered nature of candidate performance in France can be attributed to seat effects rather than candidate effects, and thus to patterns of elite decision-making, not the inherent undesirability of female candidates.

### **Conclusions on Gender, Bias, and Quota Reforms**

Gender quotas have diffused rapidly around the world in response to concerns about the under-representation of women in political life. While this implies the emergence of new norms to facilitate women's access to elected office, the need in most instances to displace men – both as candidates and as office-holders – raises questions as to why the same elites who may lose their seats as a result of these reforms would pass quota policies, and indeed, with nearly unanimous decisions. The fact that many quotas lead to mixed results offers one clue as to the nature of elite calculations, suggesting that at moments of policy design, or later during implementation processes, attempts are made to mitigate the full effect of these measures, thereby preserving opportunities for men to run for and be elected to political office. The two accounts outlined in this article seek to make sense of these developments, presenting alternative explanations as the source and content of elite decision-making. Fréchette et al (2008) argue that (1) in the context of a systematic preference among voters for male candidates, (2) elites, who are overwhelmingly male, support 'parity with fees' because it increases the probabilities that male incumbents will run against a woman and be reelected.

We take issue with this account on several grounds. First, the vast majority of research on the question of voter bias finds that voters not only vote for male and female candidates at equal rates, but sometimes even vote in greater numbers for women over men. Introducing more robust measures of seat safety and incumbency, we find that there is no relation between sex and candidate performance. Rather, the average tendency for women to lose at higher rates than men in France has

the features of a self-fulfilling prophecy: women are deliberately placed in the districts judged by party elites to be lost in advance. Second, the assertion that male deputies act exclusively in their self-interests and believe that voters will elect male over female candidates is undermined by a wealth of qualitative and quantitative evidence from the French case. In addition to the long history of voluntary quotas in left-wing parties, pointing to the importance of party ideology, the broad-based campaign for parity and resulting public stands made by elites in favor of parity indicate that politicians perceived that it was popular with voters. Third, this explanation cannot be generalized to the broader universe of quota reforms, which do not take the form of ‘parity with fees’ in a two-round majoritarian vote. Even if the model were valid for France, it does not shed light on why more than 100 countries have witnessed quota reform. Although motivations may vary across contexts, an account that holds beyond France can offer more explanatory power.

On the basis of evidence from the French case, as well as insights from the comparative literature on gender and politics, we argue that (1) voters express favorable attitudes towards women in politics, and party leaders often perceive the promotion of female candidates as a means for attracting voter support, and (2) strategic interests play a role in the parity reforms, but ideological factors and principled beliefs are also important. Once quotas are adopted, however, they create a number of internal conflicts for parties related to the entrenched interests of incumbents, the concerns of local constituencies to select their own candidates, and the claims of new would-be male candidates. The need to conform to quota requirements leads parties to resolve these struggles by nominating more women but placing them in slots and districts that the party does not expect to win. The advantage of this explanation is two-fold: it gives a more nuanced account of the role of ‘gender’ in candidate selection and performance, and it provides tools for understanding the diffusion – and generally limited effects – of quota reforms in diverse contexts around the globe.

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**Table 1: Candidate Impact on Party Performance**

Independent variables		1997				2002				2007			
		a		b		a		b		a		b	
		$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig	$\beta$	Sig
Candidate sex	No change	0.211	.834			0.721	0.225			-0.714	.292		
	R same; L m-w			0.005	.997			-0.813	.472			0.100	.918
	R same; L w-m			-2.121	.372			-0.515	.741			.936	.513
	R m-w; L same			0.294	0.898			-0.806	.300			0.356	.753
	R & L m-w							2.315	.329			1.900	.541
	R w-m; L same							-0.849	.510			2.791	.107
Incumbency	R status $t_0$	-0.456	.134	-0.425	.167	-0.063	.802	-0.007	.979	1.182	.000***	1.227	.000***
	L status $t_0$	.844	.032**	0.856	.032**	.029	.902	0.109	.677	-0.700	.022**	-0.748	.020**
	R status $t_1$	-0.116	.742	-0.107	.763	-0.384	.077*	-0.394	.074*	-0.125	.656	-0.072	.801
	L status $t_1$	-0.323	.276	-0.322	.280	0.117	0.640	0.131	.606	-0.275	.300	-0.247	.368
R <sup>2</sup>		0.028		0.023		0.005		-0.003		0.127		0.122	

Source: election results provided by [www.assemblee-nationale.fr](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr) and [www.lemonde.fr](http://www.lemonde.fr)

\* significant at 10% ( $p < 0.1$ ); \*\* significant at 5% ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*\*\* significant at 1% ( $p < 0.01$ )

**Table 2: Sex and Safety of Seat**

		1993				1997				2002				2007			
		L		R		L		R		L		R		L		R	
		M <sup>1</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
DEFENDER	Very safe	8 (4)	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (2)	1 (0)	5 (2)	0 (0)	4 (2)	1 (1)	5 (3)	3 (2)	24 (7)	4 (1)
	Fairly safe	52 (25)	4 (2)	7 (7)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	78 (29)	6 (2)	62 (23)	13 (5)	23 (12)	2 (1)	26 (15)	5 (3)	92 (28)	10 (3)
	Could swing	35 (16)	6 (3)	10 (10)	3 (3)	7 (13)	1 (2)	51 (19)	4 (2)	39 (14)	11 (4)	37 (19)	2 (1)	29 (17)	9 (5)	60 (18)	8 (2)
	Vulnerable	63 (30)	2 (1)	29 (30)	3 (3)	19 (36)	3 (6)	71 (27)	6 (2)	68 (25)	11 (4)	64 (33)	7 (4)	33 (19)	12 (7)	59 (18)	10 (3)
	Marginal	37 (17)	8 (4)	40 (42)	2 (2)	21 (40)	2 (4)	35 (13)	7 (3)	43 (16)	20 (7)	50 (26)	5 (3)	36 (21)	12 (7)	53 (16)	9 (3)
CHALLENGER	Very safe	11 (11)	2 (2)	31 (15)	4 (2)	44 (17)	11 (4)	6 (11)	2 (4)	19 (10)	20 (10)	38 (14)	12 (4)	14 (4)	14 (4)	2 (1)	6 (4)
	Fairly safe	28 (29)	4 (4)	63 (30)	1 (0)	67 (25)	10 (4)	21 (40)	1 (2)	36 (18)	35 (18)	61 (22)	18 (7)	40 (12)	62 (19)	12 (7)	19 (11)
	Could swing	36 (38)	6 (6)	42 (20)	3 (1)	39 (15)	3 (1)	20 (38)	3 (6)	36 (18)	19 (10)	57 (21)	6 (2)	41 (12)	27 (8)	18 (11)	20 (12)
	Vulnerable	8 (4)	0 (0)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	6 (2)	1 (0)	5 (2)	0 (0)	4 (2)	1 (1)	38 (12)	31 (9)	24 (14)	21 (12)
	Marginal	52 (25)	4 (2)	7 (7)	1 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	78 (29)	6 (2)	62 (23)	13 (5)	23 (12)	2 (1)	42 (13)	20 (6)	23 (14)	25 (15)

<sup>1</sup>Male candidate <sup>2</sup> Female candidate

Figures represent the actual *n*. Figures in brackets are percentages within the columns for defenders and for challengers, rounded to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

Pearson chi-square results for this table are as follows:

**1993** Areas shaded in grey:  $p=0.042$  Unshaded areas: No significance

**1997** Areas shaded in grey:  $p=0.035$  Unshaded areas: No significance

**2002** Areas shaded in grey:  $p=0.042$  Unshaded areas: No significance

**2007** Areas shaded in grey:  $p=0.031$  Unshaded areas: No significance