



National Solution or Model from Abroad? Analyzing International Influences on the Parity Movement in France

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In the 1990s a movement emerged in France for the equal representation of women and men in political life. Proponents of ‘parity’ achieved reform of the Constitution in 1999 and the electoral law in 2000, which together require political parties to nominate 50 percent women and 50 percent men among their electoral candidates. Given the unusual set of theoretical arguments developed over the course of the campaign, many sources portray parity as a uniquely French answer to the underrepresentation of women in political life. I argue that the parity instead constituted a reaction to earlier failed attempts to promote women’s political presence, shaped strongly by two influences from abroad — the Green movement and the Council of Europe — and one at home, the bicentennial of the French Revolution. *French Politics* (2007) 5, 3–19. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fp.8200114

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Introduction

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 — as well as their subject, the universal citizen — were originally deemed to apply only to men. To overcome this historical legacy, they sought to reform the Constitution in a manner that would explicitly recognize the two sexes of the universal citizen and thus open the way for more women to be nominated and elected to political office. In 1999, they achieved this goal when both houses of parliament amended Article 3 to state that ‘the law favors the equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and elective functions,’ as well as 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. For elections held under proportional representation, party lists were to alternate between women and men in elections with only one round (European, regional, and Senate elections in departments with three or more Senate seats), and achieve parity per group of six candidates, with three women and three men in any order, in elections with two rounds (regional and municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 inhabitants), with the penalty for non-compliance being rejection of the list. For elections using two-round majoritarian voting (National Assembly elections), parties were to present 50 percent female and 50 percent male candidates across all electoral districts, under the risk of losing state financing proportional to the gap between female and male candidates.

Although the ultimate shape of the parity reforms disappointed many of their advocates (Gaspard, 2001; Giraud and Jenson, 2001), they quickly captured international attention among scholars, activists, and politicians around the world interested in issues of gender and political representation (cf. Lovenduski, 2005). In these and many French sources, parity is portrayed as a uniquely French answer to the under-representation of women in political life (Gaspard *et al.*, 1992; Agacinski, 2001), in light of the unusual set of theoretical arguments for parity developed over the course of this campaign (Gaspard, 1994; Scott, 1998). More careful attention to the origins of these reforms, however, reveals that they did not materialize as a simple response to the low numbers of women in French politics. Rather, they constituted a reaction to earlier failed attempts to promote women's political presence through quotas and other types of electoral reform (Krook, 2005a, b), shaped strongly by two influences from abroad — the Green movement, which embraced the principle of parity in its various party statutes as early as 1986 (Lipietz, 1994; Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a, b, http://www.wib.ethz.ch/spsr/debates/debat_egal/art-1-2.html), and the Council of Europe, which identified parity as a central feature of democracy and a matter of social justice in 1989 (Hoskyns, 1996; Lovecy, 2000) — as well as one at home, the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989, which inspired a host of new publications re-examining the role of the Revolution in promoting women's exclusion from the public sphere (Helft-Malz and Lévy, 2000; Giraud and Jenson, 2001). As French women played a crucial role in all of these developments, including those that originated beyond French borders, parity appears to be a national solution to the issue of women's under-representation. Nonetheless, the importance of international actors in providing moral leverage — as well as the parallel discussions taking place at the same time in many other countries, leading to the passage of similar laws guaranteeing women a certain proportion of candidacies on all parties' electoral slates (Krook, 2005b) — suggests that



parity is a model from abroad, or at least one that shares many features in common with debates beyond French borders.

In this article, I elaborate and weigh these influences by tracing the various origins of the parity reforms in France. In the first section, I outline the development and basic arguments of the movement and those of its opponents in order to establish the ways in which the concept of parity both challenges and shares substantial continuities with existing tenets of French republicanism. In particular, I find that ‘parity’ reframes demands to promote women’s political representation by claiming that ‘sex’ is the universal division among human beings, the logic of parity is distinct from the logic of quotas, and the goal of parity is to change patterns of participation and not the content of public policies. In the second section, I examine how these ideas were shaped by national and political party debates over the legitimacy — and legality — of employing quotas to promote the selection of female candidates to political office. I emphasize the various ways in which the parity reforms remain closely tied to accepted principles of French political life — and, indeed, the goals of the French Revolution — thus lending support to the argument that parity is a uniquely French solution to women’s under-representation in electoral politics. In the third section, however, I temper these claims by noting several distinct trends that developed outside of French borders that informed many of the discussions that took place over parity at both the national and party levels. Viewed in conjunction with developments elsewhere, these patterns indicate that the French case does not constitute an isolated incident of policy reform, but rather represents one among many other manifestations of a larger global trend towards the adoption of candidate gender quotas. In the final section, I bring these arguments together to highlight the innovative nature of the parity reforms, even when viewed within broader global trends to quota adoption. I conclude with some insights for analyzing other quota debates around the world, focused on both the domestic and international origins of these reforms.

Arguments for and Against Parity

The first organization devoted to promoting parity was formed in 1990, but many observers date the beginning of the movement to 1992, when Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, and Anne Le Gall published *Au pouvoir citoyennes! Liberté, égalité, parité*, self-proclaimed manifesto for the parity movement in France. The book introduced the term ‘parity’ to a wider public, and after outlining various reasons why women were under-represented in electoral politics, proposed that parity be inscribed in the law with the phrase ‘Elected assemblies, at the regional as well as the national level, are composed



of as many women as men.’ 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 (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998b; Scott, 1998). These activities multiplied in the wake of elections in 1993, which returned only 6.4 percent women to the National Assembly (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1995, 121), as women organized debates, roundtables, conferences, newsletters, and even demonstrations in front of the National Assembly (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a). By the end of 1993, various women’s organizations drafted the Manifesto of the 577 for Parity Democracy — a reference to the number of deputies in the National Assembly — signed by 289 women and 288 men from all points on the political spectrum to demand the incorporation of parity into the national constitution. Soon after the publication of the manifesto in *Le Monde*, a number of left-wing parties announced they would apply parity to their lists for the upcoming EP elections in 1994. Over the course of the next year, various deputies submitted proposals in the National Assembly to institute parity or, at least, to ensure greater political representation for women. To increase their influence, parity associations created an umbrella organization, *Demain la parité*, with the goal of collecting a million signatures in favor of constitutional reform (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a; Ramsay, 2003). These various developments enabled parity advocates to place the issue at the forefront of political debate during the 1995 presidential elections and to gain a commitment from all the major candidates for some type of political reform (Sineau, 2001; Bird, 2003).

Upon being elected, Jacques Chirac appointed Alain Juppé as prime minister and oversaw the nomination of a record number of women to the cabinet. Together they commissioned the *Observatoire pour la Parité*, a state-level agency, to study and develop strategies concerning women in politics. The proportion of women in the cabinet soon dropped precipitously from 27.9 to 12.5 percent (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a, 21–22), as parity advocates continued to lobby for legal reform. In 1996, 10 prominent female politicians from both the left and the right came together to outline their own proposals for attaining equal representation, which were published in *L’Express* as the Manifesto of the Ten for Parity. Much less radical than the Manifesto of the 577, this document called for voluntary measures within the political parties rather than a parity law, an expansion in the use of PR, a drastic reduction in multiple office-holding, public financing for parties that respect parity, and a referendum on a constitutional amendment to introduce affirmative action. In the same edition, *L’Express* revealed the results of a nation-wide poll showing that 71 percent of the French population — with no differences between women and men — would support a law or constitutional amendment establishing equal representation. The paper also included interviews of Juppé and Lionel Jospin, the leader of the Socialist Party, both of whom endorsed a



constitutional amendment and a referendum to establish measures to promote women in politics (*L'Express*, 6 June 1996).

In the run-up to elections in 1997, therefore, parity had 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. These patterns reflect the nature of arguments for parity, which seek to reconcile quotas for women in politics, a relatively radical demand, with the tenets of French republicanism, the widely accepted basis of the French political system. The conscious nature of this strategy is evident in even the early manifesto from 1992, which reconfigured two central slogans of the French Revolution: *aux armes citoyens* (to arms, citizens), the refrain of the French national anthem, and *liberté, égalité, fraternité* (liberty, equality, fraternity), the motto of the French republic. To accomplish this goal, advocates 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 entirely, they proposed reforming the constitution to provide for the equal representation of women and men in political life, 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, because 'sex' was the universal difference among human beings, a division that cut across all other groups, categories, and communities. Parity thus differed fundamentally from establishing quotas, because quotas implied special representation rights for minorities, while parity simply called for the equitable sharing of power between women and men, the two halves of the human race. As a consequence, the inclusion of women would provide for a more accurate reflection of the whole people and the common interest, not the representation of a distinct social category with viewpoints and interests consistently different from those of men. Inscripting parity in the constitution thus would not reverse the accomplishments of the French Revolution, but rather would finally fully realize them.¹

The concept of parity thus embodied a series of moves to reframe demands to promote women's political representation, consistent with several key features of French republicanism. Importantly, these formulations contained a number of ambiguities that accounted for the broad coalitions in favor of parity, as well as the particular groups opposed to including it in the constitution. For example, the argument that 'sex' is the universal difference presented advocates with a means to justify their focus on women while also reducing the impact of criticism that recognizing parity would escalate claim making by other under-represented groups. This solution appealed to those who sought measures to tackle gender discrimination, as well as those who feared that parity would open the way to multiculturalism and thus the erosion



of cultural assimilation at the heart of French republicanism (Millard and Ortiz, 1998; Bird, 2001).² Feminist critics of parity, however, argued that giving political value to sexual difference was invariably reactionary, not only because it reduced women to their ovaries, but also because essentializing and reifying sexual differences made it impossible to see the commonalities between women and men (Varikas, 1995; Badinter, 1996; Sallenave, 1997; Girard and Rayski, 1999). Various intellectuals and politicians, for their part, refused to accept the distinction between sex and other types of political cleavage and continued to insist that a concession for women would spur ‘differentialism’ and ‘communitarianism’ among other groups, with fatal consequences for the secular and universal republic. In their view, any shortcomings in the founding principles of the French republic were a legacy of their historical implementation, a situation that would evolve naturally over time until women and men were as equal in practice as they were in theory (Rosanvallon, 1992; Ozouf, 1995; Badinter, 1996).

In a similar vein, the claim that parity was not a quota enabled supporters to rationalize their pursuit of special measures to increase women’s representation. This argument was attractive to feminists and non-feminists who recognized the importance of taking action to promote women’s access to political office, but who rejected the negative connotations of quotas or recognized the need for a semantic shift to implement a measure that — for all intents and purposes — was functionally equivalent to a quota. Feminist opponents continually sought to demystify this distinction, asserting that parity was simply a stricter form of quota and, as such, threatened to turn women into victims who needed special help to succeed, reinforcing the same prejudices that misogynists had long used to keep women out of politics (Pisier, 1995; Trat, 1995; Badinter, 1999; Gauthier, 1999; Girard and Rayski, 1999). Other critics emphasized that exclusion was not simply about numbers and ridiculed attempts to institute quotas as a misplaced desire to imitate the United States, pointing out that the countries with the highest levels of female representation had never mandated such measures by law (Varikas, 1995; Badinter, 1996; Scott, 1998; Badinter, 1999; Gaspard, 2001).³

The focus of parity on policy-makers, rather than on the content of public policies, finally, allowed advocates to remain agnostic as to the expected policy outcomes of the parity provision. This position appealed to male politicians concerned that parity might benefit women at the expense of men, because women in office would represent women’s interests, and to feminists worried that parity falsely assumed essential differences between women and men, because not all women in office pursued women’s issues. Various feminists responded that supporting female candidates simply because they were women would draw attention away from substantive policy questions affecting women, as well as risk advancing women who were already coopted by male leaders,



thus increasing the distance between elite and regular women (Hirata *et al.*, 1995; Le Dœuff, 1995; Varikas, 1995). Other opponents asserted that politics should revolve around ideas, not around people, and that sexual differences had nothing to do with political ideology (Varikas, 1995; Badinter, 1996). Despite the many efforts to reduce the appeal of parity, however, 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). This led others to worry that not enough attention was being paid to the arguments against parity, preventing a truly democratic debate from taking place (Amar, 1999).

Parity as a National Solution

Demands for parity, crucially, did not emerge in a vacuum. While women have long been under-represented in French politics, various groups have sought to ameliorate this situation with little success. Before the 1990s, most of these efforts were concentrated inside the Socialist Party (PS), where party feminists first began to demand gender quotas in the early 1970s.⁴ Advocates argued that the adoption of quotas was consistent with party ideology and would demonstrate the party's commitment to achieving equality between women and men. In 1974, the national party convention approved a 10 percent quota for women in party leadership positions and as candidates for elections governed by proportional representation (PR) (Appleton and Mazur, 1993; Opello, 2006).⁵ This proportion was increased at subsequent party conventions: in 1977, delegates voted to raise the quota to 15 percent, and in 1979, they agreed to a 30 percent quota for women in European Parliament (EP) elections, a 20 percent quota for women in the party leadership, and the nomination of as many women as possible to 'winnable' districts in two-round majoritarian elections. However, when a proposal was made in 1981 to increase the quota to 30 percent for women in the party leadership and among the party's candidates in PR elections, as well as to extend the 30 percent quota to elections run by majoritarian vote, party leaders postponed its discussion to the next party convention, where it was never presented or voted on. All further suggestions to increase the existing quotas to 30 percent were rejected until 1990, when delegates finally voted to raise the quota to 30 percent, although with no provisions to extend such measures to majoritarian elections (Opello, 2006). All of these policies had very little effect, unfortunately, as the party rarely implemented any of these quotas to their fullest extent, in part because the party never established any enforcement mechanisms to ensure their application.



As these debates took place in the PS, several female members of parliament (MP) pursued a parallel strategy to increase women's political representation through quotas at the local level. In 1975, the Secretary of State for Women's Status, Françoise Giroud, proposed limited to 85 percent the percentage of candidates of the same sex who could appear on lists for municipal elections. In 1979, the new Minister of Women's Status and the Family, Monique Pelletier, changed this demand to 80 percent in an amendment to a bill on municipal election reform. This measure was approved almost unanimously in the National Assembly, but the measure never reached the Senate before the end of the legislative term, in part because the government preferred not to pursue such a controversial reform during the 1980–1981 presidential campaign (Gaspard, 1998; Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a; Bird, 2003). When the PS came to power, it decided against including quotas for women in a bill to introduce semi-PR in local elections. Nonetheless, in 1982, an independent deputy affiliated with the PS, Gisèle Halimi,⁶ proposed that lists of candidates not include more than 70 percent of candidates of the same sex, applied to every three positions on the list. The Socialist group in parliament succeeded in reducing her proposal to 75 percent with no restrictions on the ordering of male and female candidates, but the government remained unconvinced and argued publicly that the political parties, not the National Assembly, should decide the ratio of male and female candidates. During the parliamentary debates, the government 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). This suggestion fed rumors among the deputies that the court would indeed declare the quota unconstitutional (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a; Mazur, 2001), and after separating the quota provision from the main legislation, they voted nearly unanimously in favor of the measure. Several months later, as expected, the court reviewed the bill on municipal electoral reform. While the review initially focused on articles other than the one providing for quotas (Gaspard, 1998; Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a), the Council eventually 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, precluding all types of division of voters and candidates into categories for all types of political voting, including the election of municipal councilors (*Décision no 82-146 DC du 18 novembre 1982*).

While many feminists paid little attention to this verdict at the time (Gaspard, 1998) — partly because many women were uneasy with the idea of 25 percent quotas when women constituted more than 50 percent of the population (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a) — it had an enormous impact on future campaigns to increase women's political representation in France. Most notably, the decision reaffirmed an interpretation of the principle of equality as



equality before the law, precluding future attempts — particularly through law — to institute equality of outcomes through gender-specific means. By the end of the 1980s, however, this conception of equality came under greater scrutiny as feminist and non-feminist scholars began to engage in a more critical examination of the principles and goals underlying the theory and practice of democracy in France. In particular, the bicentennial of the French Revolution in 1989 inspired the publication of a number of books that attributed women's absence from politics and other spheres of power to the Revolution itself and, especially, its core principle of the universal citizen (Landes, 1988; Fraisse, 1989). As these researchers revived the history of French feminism, they focused on the exclusions inherent in French republicanism and rehabilitated work by earlier feminists calling for the equal representation of women and men in politics (Gaspard, 1994; Helft-Malz and Lévy, 2000; Giraud and Jenson, 2001). In this way, they sought to separate the historical practice of French republicanism from its theoretical potential to include women and men as equal partners in political life. In a speech opening the parliamentary debates over the proposed parity law, Minister of Justice Élisabeth Guigou stressed this distinction by arguing that reform of Article 3 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. Indeed, she criticized the 1982 Constitutional Council decision for ignoring the Preamble of the Constitution, which guarantees equal rights for men and women in all domains, and presented the parity bill not as redundant but as a means for giving concrete content to this principle of equality (Guigou, 1998).

Parity as a Model From Abroad

Arguments for parity based on the legacy of the French Revolution — that is, the goal of giving 'two sexes' to the 'universal citizen' — garnered both support and criticism based on their perceived resonance with existing principles of French republicanism. As such, the re-branding of 'quotas' as 'parity' — which, despite the best efforts of some advocates to argue otherwise, might be viewed as functionally equivalent measures⁷ — is deeply embedded in specifically French discourses (Allwood and Wadia, 2000; Scott, 2005). The impetus for this reformulation, however, was enabled by at least two other developments that emerged outside France. For several years following the 1982 Constitutional Council decision, little progress was made at either the party- or the national-level to promote women's representation. Although the decision did not affect party policies, efforts to increase — and, indeed, simply apply — quotas inside the PS lost crucial momentum, despite the party's willingness to improve the quota percentage several times over the



course of the 1970s (Opello, 2006). In 1986, feminists became more optimistic when the electoral system for parliamentary elections was changed from two-round majoritarian to proportional representation (PR), but they were soon disappointed when the percentage of women elected to the National Assembly rose only a fraction from 5.3 to 5.9 percent. While the PS nearly achieved its 20 percent party quota by nominating 18.9 percent female candidates, it succeeded in electing only 9.8 percent women to its parliamentary delegation, because party leaders had placed most women far down on the candidate lists (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a, 24–25).

These failures led various women and men to look for inspiration in movements outside the established parties and beyond their own national borders. Between 1986 and 1988, a small group became active in the *Arc-en-ciel* movement, which, as part of its creed, insisted on parity — or the equal involvement of women and men — in all group decision-making. This principle of parity extended even to the time allotted for men and women to speak at group meetings (Scott, 2005). When the group was dissolved in France in 1988, many adherents joined the Green party. Following the example of the German Greens, which some claim coined the term ‘parity’ to refer to equal representation between women and men (Scott, 2005), members mirrored other green movements in Europe in inscribing the principle of parity in the new party’s statutes (Frankland, 1989; Lipietz, 1994; Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a). The French Greens have since applied this principle to all party lists since the European Parliament elections in 1989, a point that was brought up several times over the course of subsequent parity debates (Guigou, 1998).

Around the same time, the Council of Europe (COE) initiated a series of debates on the deepening and strengthening of democracy in Europe. In 1986, it organized the first European Ministerial Conference on Equality Between Women and Men, where member states identified the increased presence and participation of women in public life as a central feature of democracy and a matter of social justice. Two years later, ministers signed the Declaration of Equality of Women and Men, which called on the COE to devise policies and strategies for integrating women into all levels of political life. To this end, the European Committee for Equality Between Women and Men (CEEG) convened a seminar of experts in Strasbourg in 1989 to share and develop mechanisms for promoting women’s access to political office. The two main contributions to these debates were papers by Marit Halvorsen, outlining Norwegian experiences in bringing more women into politics, and Élisabeth Sledziewski, a French academic, elaborating new normative arguments for increasing women’s political presence based on ontological differences between women and men (Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men, 1992, 17–27, 29–43). Although the debate reflected a wider array of positions on sexual difference, as well as a more diverse set of preferences regarding



party *vs* statutory quotas, most subsequent accounts of this meeting equate it with the first definitive statement on ‘parity democracy,’ not only as a new concept in European politics but also as a set of innovative arguments for justifying positive action to promote women in politics (Hoskyns, 1996; Guigou, 1998; Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a; Scott, 1998; Allwood and Wadia, 2000; Sineau, 2002).

Many of the ideas formulated by Sledziewski — universalism as a trap for democracy, the dual nature of the human race, and the need to redefine existing notions of equality — were soon picked up by other women in France. These groups perceived these arguments as a new way to overcome the effects of the 1982 Constitutional Council decision, at the same time that they recognized that COE support for parity democracy could lend important legitimacy to their efforts to increase women’s political representation. Over the next several years, women inside and outside the parties drew on comparisons with other European countries to bolster the case for parity reform. In 1989, women in the PS sought to strengthen their case for a 30 percent party quota by pointing to examples of quotas in other Socialist parties across Europe, particularly the 40 percent quota that had been adopted in 1988 by the German Social Democratic Party. In a similar fashion, Gaullist women made numerous comparisons with women’s situation in other conservative parties in Europe, most of whom selected a much higher proportion of female candidates than the French parties, with or without quota provisions (Opello, 2006). Further, as the European Union began to make ‘gender-balanced decision-making’ a core concern of EU gender equality policy in the early 1990s (Krook, 2002), French women participated in — and learned from — expert group meetings and EU summits focused on promoting ‘parity democracy’ in Europe (Allwood and Wadia, 2000). To draw attention to the ‘backwardness’ of France on this issue, they pointed to statistics showing that among EU member states France was second only to Greece in having the lowest percentage of women in its national parliament (Lovecy, 2000; Giraud and Jenson, 2001).

As the debate developed in France, parallel discussions began to take place in other countries as well. Despite claims that proposals for constitutional and legal reform were exceptional to France (Allwood and Wadia, 2000), similar provisions were proposed and passed in more than one hundred other countries around the world over the course of the 1990s and 2000s (Krook, 2006b). Aware of some of these measures, several feminists in France — as the bill for parity began to take shape in the late 1990s — pointed to the negative aspects of the quota law in Belgium, passed in 1994, which had led to a significant jump in the number of female candidates, but only a marginal increase in the number of women elected (Mossuz-Lavau, 1998a; cf. Carton, 2001). Discussions in France, in turn, began to inform other national quota



debates, particularly in neighboring countries like Spain and Italy (Guadagnini, 2005; Valiente, 2005). The global diffusion of quota measures during this time period, supported by a range of international organizations and spread through various kinds of cross-national learning (Krook, 2006b), indicates that the parity reforms in France are not unique, but rather part of a broader move internationally towards the adoption of candidate gender quotas.

Conclusions

The parity law in France has garnered a great deal of international attention in recent years among scholars, activists, and politicians interested in gender and political representation. Their fascination with parity springs not only from the demand for equal representation of women and men in political life, but also from the innovative set of theoretical arguments developed over the course of the parity campaign. A closer look at the origins of these reforms, however, indicates that they are not merely a French invention, but instead one manifestation of a wider global trend that emerged over the course of the 1990s and 2000s. Nonetheless, certain aspects of the French debate do bear features specific to the context in which they were introduced. Most notably, advocates of parity confronted a situation in which earlier attempts to institute quotas had failed (Krook, 2005a). This setback had two ramifications for efforts to promote women in politics in France. On the one hand, it precluded the use of ‘quotas’ on the grounds that they were unconstitutional. This presented an unusual challenge for those who sought to increase women’s political representation, because it did not allow them to press for measures that had proven successful in other countries, as many advocates had done elsewhere to great effect (Russell, 2005; Krook, 2006b). On the other hand, it pointed to a relatively clear — although difficult — solution focused on redefining ‘quotas’ and amending the constitution. The result was the formulation of the demand for parity based on core tenets of French republicanism, framed as a means for actualizing — rather than undermining — the goals of the French Revolution. While these ideas developed in dialogue with a number of international trends, therefore, they were deeply infused with traces of events and ideas peculiar to the French case, which not only limited but also suggested new avenues for reform.

Exclusive interest in the theoretical aspects of parity, however, overlooks at least two other important empirical insights generated by the reforms in France. First, the tendency to refer to the policy changes in 1999 and 2000 as the ‘parity reforms’ glosses over the fact that the word ‘parity’ in fact figures nowhere in the final legislation. Although Prime Minister Lionel Jospin had proposed inserting parity as an amendment to Article 1 of the Constitution,



which affirms the principles of the French Republic and guarantees equality before the law, President Jacques Chirac rejected the term ‘parity’ in favor of the term ‘equal access,’ and reform of Article 1 in favor of Article 34, which simply lists the policy areas in which the legislature may make law. The two leaders eventually compromised by agreeing to institute ‘equal access’ in Article 3, which outlines the basic rights of citizens in relation to national sovereignty (Giraud and Jenson, 2001; Sineau, 2001). Conservatives in the Senate then insisted that the verb ‘guarantees’ be replaced with ‘favors’ (*favoriser*) equal access, thus reducing the claim for equal representation of women and men to the milder goal of increasing the number of female candidates (Lenoir, 2001; Bird, 2003). Second, a focus only on the events leading up to policy adoption shifts attention away from actual patterns of policy implementation (Freedman, 2004). While calls for parity amount to a demand for equal representation, the law itself establishes distinct requirements for elections at various levels of government. As a result, women’s representation increased dramatically from 26 to 48 percent in local councils,⁸ with many parties exceeding the provisions of the law, but barely inched up from 11 to 12 percent in the National Assembly, due largely to decisions by the major parties not to implement the law (Murray, 2004). These variations stem at least in part to the fact that party lists that did not comply with the law at the local level were not eligible to contest the election, while those that did not comply at the national level were subject to a financial penalty that could be overcome by winning more seats (Sineau, 2001; Krook, 2005b).

The adoption and implementation of the parity reforms in France thus suggest at least three important insights for analyzing other quota campaigns around the world. First, the rapid spread of gender quotas over the course of the 1990s and 2000s indicates some type of global diffusion effect, linked most likely to the efforts of international and transnational actors to politicize the issue of women’s political representation while also facilitating various kinds of cross-national sharing of strategies and ideas. For this reason, scholars should avoid viewing quota debates in isolation from one another, exploring instead how national actors appropriate and transform lessons they learn through contacts with international and transnational actors (cf. Krook, 2006b).

Second, the ability to reformulate ‘quotas’ as ‘parity’ in France in the 1990s reveals that it is possible to overcome earlier failed attempts to promote women in politics. This provides hope for campaigns in those countries where quotas have been proposed but rejected — or, alternatively, adopted but declared illegal or unconstitutional — and points to some strategies for reframing demands for quotas in ways that resonate more strongly with local political contexts. Third, the varied impact of the parity law across levels of government highlights a potential disconnect between the debates preceding policy change and the outcomes of policy reform. While the same may be said of any kind of



public policy, it is especially relevant for quota campaigns, which pursue a very visible kind of policy impact, namely an increase in the proportion of women elected to political office. Without an effect on the number of female office-holders, the purpose of quota campaigns — regardless of their international or domestic origins — is grossly undermined.

Notes

- 1 The body of literature arguing in favor of parity, as well as surveying these contributions, is enormous. Central contributions include Gaspard *et al.* (1992), Gaspard (1994), Viennot (1994), Halimi (1997), Gaspard (1998), Scott (1998), Servan-Schreiber (1998), Agacinski (2001), Gaspard (2001), Sineau (2002), Scott (2005).
- 2 In this context, it is interesting to note that racism, but not sexism, is illegal in France (Millard and Ortiz, 1998; Siim, 2000).
- 3 This characterization of the United States is based on French perceptions of the extent of affirmative action in that country. The US, however, is actually quite unusual in that it is one of the few countries in the world where quotas for women in politics have never been proposed (Krook *et al.*, 2006, Krook, 2006a).
- 4 The party in France that has most consistently included a high proportion of women among its candidates and elected representatives is the Communist Party (PC), which has never formally applied gender quotas (Mazur, 2001). Besides the Socialists, the only other French political party today with quotas is the Green Party (Sineau, 2002).
- 5 The decision to apply quotas only to elections governed by PR importantly excluded elections to the National Assembly, which are decided by a two-round majoritarian vote.
- 6 Halimi was in fact elected to the National Assembly as part of the group Choisir, an abortion rights group, but was affiliated with the Socialist group for all practical purposes.
- 7 The assertion of functional equivalence is controversial. While some view parity as tantamount to a 50 percent quota (Krook, 2005b; <http://www.quotaproject.org>), others insist that the theoretical justifications for parity — as outlined by proponents — introduce a sharp distinction between quotas and parity (Allwood and Wadia, 2000; Mateo Diaz, 2005). I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for asking me to clarify this point.
- 8 The law did not apply to towns with fewer than 3500 inhabitants, due to the fact that these towns are governed by a different type of electoral system, which allows voters to strike candidates' names, change the order of candidates, and add new names to the list.

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