

## REVIEW

By Elizabeth Evans

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RAINBOW MURRAY, *Parties, Gender Quotas and Candidate Selection in France*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, ISBN: 978-0-230-24253-1, 2010

Women make up just 19 per cent of Parliaments around the world.<sup>1</sup> This is a constant source of frustration for those who wish to see Parliaments resemble the populations they seek to represent. The under-representation of women crosses regional and sub-regional boundaries, this is particularly true of Europe: for instance, women do relatively well in the Nordic countries and Germany, but are less successful in France, the UK and Italy. Moreover, the under-representation of women permeates all electoral and party systems, with proportional representation no longer considered to be a panacea for increasing the number of women elected. One way in which political parties and governments have sought to address the problem has been through the implementation of sex quotas to guarantee women's representation: either through the use of reserved seats for women, legislative quotas or party quotas.<sup>2</sup> Quotas are usually contested mechanisms, calling into question concepts of merit and equality, and often result in polarised opinion, inter-party differences and intra-party tension. Despite their prescriptive nature quotas do not always have the desired effect, namely to increase the number of women elected, this is certainly true of France.

Responding in part to pressure from women's movements, but also to broader debates concerning the modernisation of French politics, France introduced a bold legislative quota, known as 'parity' in 2000. This new gender quota required political parties to ensure that 50 per cent of their candidates fielded at local, regional and European levels were women. Parties that did not comply with the legislation would face financial penalties, this was calculated by parties losing a percentage of state funding equal to half the difference in their percentages of male and female candidates.<sup>3</sup> However, the parity legislation has not to date yielded the results that many hoped for. Rainbow Murray's monograph provides a rich case study analysis of how French political parties responded to the introduction of parity. By focussing on the interaction between parties and quotas, both in terms of ideology and implementation, this book raises new and interesting questions regarding the motivations of parties to engage with the wider project to increase women's representation.

There exists a wealth of literature exploring the implementation of quotas in France and many have highlighted the numerous faults that lie in the original parity legislation: the focus was on the percentage of women candidates rather than percentage of women elected; 'soft' financial penalties which the larger parties could withstand; and the omission regarding the placement of women in winnable seats.<sup>4</sup> Where Murray's book differs is in the explicit focus on the motivations, reactions and choices made by the political parties themselves. It is this emphasis, which underpins the originality of the text. Whereas comparative studies have focussed on the roles played by individual political parties in the selection and election of women candidates, notably Kittilson, this has tended to result in a broad-brush approach.<sup>5</sup> In short, covering parties from a range of countries can mean that none are really covered in any in-depth way. Additionally, Murray's book makes a point of engaging with the party literature, again this is beneficial and allows the reader to gain a better sense of intra-party tensions and intra-party democracy regarding the candidate selection process.

France is a particularly insightful and important site of analysis for those interested in exploring gender quotas. Indeed, the adoption of the seemingly confident 50 per cent quota initially suggested an impressive commitment to increasing the number of women elected. Why it has not worked is important and Murray's book offers a critical analysis of the debates surrounding implementation. Although the extant literature has at times noted the importance of cross-national analysis of quotas, as Krook has argued,

Research on candidate gender quotas... [in the main] focuses on single cases and reflects little awareness of developments in other countries around the world. As a result, the findings in one case are often contradicted in other studies, revealing few clear patterns with regard to the origins and outcomes of gender quota policies.<sup>6</sup>

Murray's book, and indeed other works, which focus on a single case, is of particular scholarly significance. In truth, there is a need for broader comparative analysis alongside more detailed and in-depth case studies. Additionally, a single case study provides both a greater exploration of internal party cultures within a given country and a substantial point of reference for both area studies and party scholars.

There are a number of important findings highlighted in the book, which are of value not just for those interested in quotas, but also for those concerned with the dynamics of French political parties and the wider debates concerning gender parity. One of the key findings is the idea that the centralisation of the candidate selection process is a facilitator rather than guarantor of women's representation. As such, Murray states that quotas are 'no panacea' to solving the problem of women's under-representation (p. 3). Here, the book contributes an

important perspective on the global quota debates, which have recently been dominated by a focus on ‘fast track’ options for redressing sex imbalance.<sup>7</sup> Although the research implicitly supports the parity legislation the author is not afraid to go beyond critiquing the substance of the legislation. By adopting a party focussed approach the book offers an engaging and fresh perspective on parity in France.

In order to analyse why women remain under represented in France, despite the arguably high parity legislation, Murray adopts a rational choice perspective to explore the response of the parties to gender quotas. This approach, more commonly seen in research exploring party behaviour rather than gender quotas, is largely successful. Indeed, acknowledging and exploring the *realpolitik* of electoral choices in determining the political parties’ implementation of the gender quota seems obvious, although as Murray notes, ‘The effects of quotas on parties (and vice versa) may be profound, but are heavily under-theorised’ (p. 4). This point is critical and underpins the overall direction of the research. The book adopts three approaches, ideological, electoral competition and institutional, to identify which, if any, best explain the responses of the parties to parity. Unsurprisingly Murray concludes that none of the three approaches alone are satisfactory explanations for party responses to gender quotas. The limitations of the approaches are flagged in the book’s introduction

It is a central hypothesis of this book that reasons why parties do not select more female candidates for legislative elections are currently over-simplified and are in fact numerous, complex and diverse. (p. 17)

The individual chapters explore each of the parties in turn by rigorously applying the models; for the most part this approach works well, particularly the chapter on ideology a theme often missing in previous explorations of political parties responses to gender quotas.<sup>8</sup>

Despite focussing on a rational choice approach, which might rank ideology as being less important than electoral competition, Murray notes that the specifics of the French political system ensures that parties have to remain fairly close to their ideals in order not just to govern alone but also to influence policy through coalitions (p. 129). In exploring the impact of ideology, Murray highlights the somewhat counter-intuitive conclusion that ideology has a limited capacity to explain the extent to which parties implement the parity law. For instance the far right party FN implemented parity contra to their policy stance on gender equality, driven more by a desire to avoid the financial penalty. This chapter draws upon the extant gender and politics literature to explore the idea that left wing parties tend to be more favourable to gender equality than right wing parties.<sup>9</sup> Although Murray substantiates that finding, she also notes that there is ‘no perfect correlation between ideological support for gender equality and the implementation of parity’ (p. 135).

The conclusions of the chapter assessing the impact of electoral competition, the idea that parties are driven by a desire to win as many votes as possible, are also compelling, specifically the finding that party competition is not determining candidate selection (p. 102). Moreover, the electoral competition approach develops the narrative of indirect and direct discrimination against women candidates with the research highlighting a ‘lack of evidence to suggest that men and incumbents bring an electoral bonus to parties’ (p. 102). In this Murray suggests that parties are not clear, or are guessing, exactly what the electorate want and which types of candidates will improve their electoral fortunes. Although data on turnout are missing from the analysis, Murray concludes that there is no evidence to suggest that the sex of the candidate had any impact on electoral performance (p. 99).

The chapter which explores the institutional approach, the idea that party behaviour is influenced by the external political context, also engages with some interesting and relevant ideas. In particular the comparative analysis of the impact of various systemic factors, such as electoral system, size of district and implementation of parity legislation, across election types within France. Looking not just at the national but also at local elections, Murray is able to provide a comprehensive picture of exactly what is, and perhaps more importantly, what is not, affecting women’s representation at each level of election. Drawing important distinctions between the size of the parties, Murray also draws attention to the differences in resources and motivations that can underpin the way in which a party implements the parity legislation.

Of the three approaches outlined above, the chapter on institutionalism has perhaps the greatest scope for development. Although the book makes clear that the approaches adopted are bound within a rationality framework, it is a shame that this chapter in particular did not seek to engage with feminist institutionalism. This relatively new approach combines a feminist approach to gender institutions with new institutional theory, and has highlighted the chasm between institutionalist scholars and feminist work on institutions.<sup>10</sup> Such an approach would facilitate the assessment of the formal and informal rules, structures, codes and culture of the parties in order to identify the creation and recreation of gendered norms. Although Murray makes a strong case for analysing the parties’ responses to gender quotas within a specific rational choice framework this could surely be an area for future consideration.

Perhaps the book’s most important contribution is the new model developed for assessing the behaviour of political parties, the party priorities model. Drawing upon a combination of the ideological, electoral competition and institutional approaches, Murray develops a ‘hybrid’ model that, ‘takes into account the different needs and priorities of each party when selecting candidates and deciding whether or not to

implement parity' (p. 158). This model potentially has significant implications for scholars interested in studying how parties respond to the demands of gender quotas. Although it does require scholars to make value judgments, regarding the relative importance of electoral motivations, party motivations and ideological motivations, when based upon empirical analysis of the attitudes say of both party members and senior party officials, the model offers a potentially robust way of assessing and predicting party behaviour.

The party priorities model allows for a far more flexible approach to understanding party behaviour. That it allows for interaction between the three theoretical approaches is key. Candidate selection and gender quotas in particular remain hotly contested issues for many parties and tap into a number of different issues for parties that cross electoral, ideological and institutional boundaries. This model is recognition of the fact that decision-making processes regarding gender quotas cannot be understood solely through the prism of one of these explanatory theories. Murray successfully argues that 'the key to understanding whether and when parties will implement parity lies in locating parity within the wider context of party beliefs, priorities and opportunities' (p. 164). As Murray notes of the model there is 'much potential for the future theoretical development' (p. 165). This development will be critical to its longevity and usefulness within the scholarship on political parties. Also an awareness of the fluidity of political parties is necessary as parties are far from monolithic static institutions.

The utility of the model, above and beyond explaining party responses to gender quotas in France, to explain party behaviour in response to other group-based claims for representation is clear. However, the extent to which in its current format it could be applied to political parties in other countries is perhaps less obvious. The model in its current format is tailored to the French example, for instance party motivations are framed within the context of whether or not the party can bear the financial penalty for failing to implement parity. Likewise, the ideology strand specifically focuses on whether or not the party is pro-parity (here it refers to the specific legislation). However, the potential adaptability of the model to make it applicable to other countries is self-evident, especially given its combination of ideological, electoral competition and party motivation approaches, although feminist scholars might also wish to consider the gendered implications of each of these.

One of the central tenets of the book is 'to end the false dichotomy between research on gender and research on political parties' (p. 7). To this end, the research builds upon the ideas of Joni Lovenduski's 2005 *Feminizing Politics* in which she argued that 'any study of political parties that fail to take account of gender effects will be inadequate'.<sup>11</sup> Murray expertly assesses the motivations and choices made by the main French parties, although the book stops short of explicitly

identifying parties as gendered institutions. In many respects the gendered nature of the political parties is an idea implicit throughout the book, however, in order to fully end the ‘false dichotomy’ between research on gender and studies of political parties greater analysis of the ‘gender effects’ of other areas such as institutional organisation is needed. Engaging with broader debates within the feminist scholarship of institutions would undoubtedly be of use here.

The importance of women’s groups within political parties is an area not explored by the book but would have proved a useful addition, particularly in the light of work undertaken by Lisa Young among others.<sup>12</sup> Although the book explores the internal debates within the political parties and at times identifies the roles played by individuals, notably the party leadership, internal women’s groups are largely ignored. This is a shame given that previous research has identified that up until the 1990s it was women’s groups within French political parties who undertook most of the campaigning work to increase women’s under-representation.<sup>13</sup>

The overarching conclusion of the book remains that the parity law has not had the consequences that gender equality activists had hoped for. Indeed, the noted interaction between ideological opposition, electoral calculations and party motivation as explanation for the limited impact of parity only make for a more depressing conclusion for those interested in seeing the legislative quota work. The failure of France to live up to the expected hype surrounding the introduction of the quota is only intensified when comparisons are made with other countries that have successfully implemented quotas.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly the book notes, as has previous research, that quotas, like PR, are no universal remedy to curing women’s under-representation.

Women’s continued under-representation has led scholars to further increase their analysis of political recruitment. Research has ranged from initial explorations of why women remain under-represented, to questions of democratic legitimacy. Rainbow Murray’s book is an important contribution to that literature. The book is successful where it engages with the party models literature and with traditional explanations of party behaviour. However, greater attention to the scholarship surrounding feminist institutionalism and the role of women’s groups in particular would have enabled the author to fully harmonise the difference between those two approaches.

*Parties, Gender Quotas and Candidate Selection in France* is a significant book: it is based upon detailed empirical analysis; it offers an original approach to the study of political parties’ responses to the demands of gender quotas; and it provides a new theoretical model to kick-start future research into how and why parties respond to gender quotas. Convincing and well argued this monograph will have widespread appeal among party analysts and gender and politics scholars alike. It also has important lessons beyond academia for those

interested in the application of legislative quotas, reinforcing the necessity of fully engaging political parties in any strategies to increase the number of women legislators.

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- 4 See for instance K. Opello, *Gender Quotas, Party Reform and Political Parties in France*, Lexington Books, 2006; Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009.
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- 13 Krook, 2009, p. 183.
- 14 Krook, 2009, see chapter 6.