

## **Progress But Still No *Présidente*: Women and the 2012 French Presidential Elections**

*Rainbow Murray, Queen Mary University of London*

**Published in *French Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 30, no. 3, Winter 2012, pp. 45-60**

### **Abstract**

Several women vied to be elected France's new president in 2012. These included Ségolène Royal, former Socialist presidential candidate in 2007, and Martine Aubry, Socialist party leader. Both these women were defeated by François Hollande in the Socialist primary. In the main election, Marine le Pen garnered many headlines as the new leader of the controversial far-right party, the Front National. This article considers the campaigns and the media coverage of these women, as well as highlighting the impact for women of the scandal surrounding disgraced politician Dominique Strauss-Kahn. The policy proposals of the different candidates are evaluated, before concluding with a discussion of the future prospects for women. There is some evidence of progress for women since the previous election, but women are still far from achieving full political equality in France.

---

Following Ségolène Royal's historic (albeit unsuccessful) campaign to become the first woman president of France in 2007, several women threw their hat into the ring for the 2012 presidential elections. Two strong women (Royal, and party leader Martine Aubry) contested the Socialist primary, while three women were candidates in the final election. Among these was Marine Le Pen, who had succeeded her father as the leader of the controversial far-right Front national (FN) in 2011. Royal performed badly in the primary, while Aubry was defeated in the second round by François Hollande, who went on to win the presidency. None of the three women in the main election qualified to the second round, but Le Pen

obtained a record vote for her party, finishing in a comfortable third place. Women's presence was therefore felt throughout this election, even if there was no chance of a woman being elected president this time around. Furthermore, the significance of gender in these elections goes far beyond counting the women candidates, and this article will highlight some of the key themes of the election for women.

One of the most notable events occurred before the elections had even begun, as the anticipated frontrunner for the Socialist primary, Dominique Strauss-Kahn (DSK), became embroiled in the first of a series of humiliating sex scandals that threw open the question of how sexual harassment and assault are handled within France. The exit of DSK provided the opportunity for Aubry to emerge as a candidate and allowed Royal to achieve greater prominence in the primary. Media coverage of the Socialist primary is analyzed here to see whether the widely documented patterns of gender stereotyping witnessed in 2007 were repeated in 2012.<sup>1</sup> As well as reinforcing negative images about women and power, these stereotypes can undermine the viability of a woman's presidential race.

In the main election, Nathalie Arthaud maintained a very low profile as the candidate for far-left party *Lutte ouvrière*, while Eva Joly produced a disappointing result as the candidate for the Green Party (*Europe Ecologie-Les Verts (EELV)*). Both these parties have previously put forward women presidential candidates (Arlette Laguiller for *Lutte ouvrière* and Dominique Voynet for the Greens). By contrast, having a woman candidate for the FN was unprecedented, as this party previously has been male-dominated both in its leadership and in its electorate. This article explores whether Le Pen was able to make strategic use of her gender to soften the hard image of the party and appeal to a broader and more feminized electorate.

Finally, I consider here what the main candidates offered women voters in terms of policy proposals and campaign teams, before discussing the future prospects for women. The

return of the Left, which has traditionally been the standard bearer for gender equality in France, affords new opportunities to advance women's rights in France. Yet the evidence thus far indicates that the battle for gender equality in France is far from won.

### **The Dominique Strauss-Kahn Affair**

In 2006, former finance minister DSK (along with Laurent Fabius) was convincingly beaten in the Socialist presidential primary by Ségolène Royal. He was subsequently nominated as the head of the International Monetary Fund. Although this role removed him from the domestic political scene, his ambitions to return and contest the 2012 presidential election were widely known, and were concealed only to the extent that protocol dictated, given his explicitly non-partisan role at the IMF. In 2008, Martine Aubry stood against Royal in the party leadership contest, and Aubry eventually emerged victorious after a bitterly contested battle that was riddled with accusations of corruption on both sides and was won by the narrowest of margins.<sup>2</sup> One of the keys to Aubry's success was a pact made with DSK, whereby he would support her leadership bid provided that she agree not to stand against him in the primary for the 2012 presidential election. Consequently, in 2011 Aubry was in the strange position of being the party leader but not the presumptive candidate. There is no guarantee that the leader (or "First Secretary") will become the presidential candidate—in the previous election, François Hollande, then First Secretary, did not contest the presidential primary. He had been expected to run, but declined to do so after his then-partner, Royal, who was leading him in the polls, launched her own campaign.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Aubry's quasi-exclusion from the primary was unusual.

DSK held a commanding lead in all opinion polls conducted in the long build-up to the Socialist primary. He was expected not only to defeat the other candidates in the primary, but also to win decisively against Sarkozy. He could not, however, formally declare himself

a candidate without resigning his position at the IMF, resulting in a controversial decision to push back the start of the primary campaign. Royal and Hollande both protested this decision, arguing that it would damage the prospects of whoever went on to become the party's candidate, as it would leave them too little time to establish themselves in the main election—a problem experienced directly by Royal in 2007.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, Royal and Hollande both announced their intention to contest the primary long before the race had officially begun. By contrast, Aubry held her cards close to her chest, ruling herself neither in nor out. Although her pact with DSK precluded her from running against him, she might have hoped that unfavorable polls or other circumstances might prevent DSK from entering the race. She even allowed a couple of (deliberate?) slips, such as her answer to a question about the core campaign themes, to which she replied, “I will tell you when I am the candidate,” before hastily adding, “*if* I’m the candidate.”<sup>5</sup> Aubry was not the only one doubting whether DSK would run; DSK himself was aware that his lead in the polls was unsustainable, and that several factors might cause his lead to evaporate once the race began in earnest. Prophetically, he said in April 2011 that his three greatest weaknesses would be “[his] wealth, Jewishness, and women.”<sup>6</sup>

It was the last that caused DSK’s infamous downfall only a month later, when he was accused of raping a chambermaid in a New York hotel. He was obliged to resign his position at the IMF and was subjected to public humiliation as his image was broadcast in handcuffs and doing the “perp walk.” Public response in France was initially one of shock and indignation; conspiracy theories were rife, with rumors circulating that DSK had been set up by various possible political enemies. In time, as the evidence appeared more incriminating, it seemed that the public was no longer surprised that DSK might have done such a thing, but rather that he should have been caught out. Insiders began to admit that they had long known that DSK had a problem with women.<sup>7</sup> A process of soul-searching began, whereby the

French asked themselves why the media had been complicit in concealing knowledge of DSK's sexual deviance. The culture of secrecy and of protecting the interests of powerful men against vulnerable women was condemned and contrasted with that of the USA, where a black immigrant chambermaid was taken seriously in her accusations against the head of the IMF. Gisèle Halimi, former deputy and women's rights lawyer, claimed that "if this incident had happened in France, we would have known nothing about it."<sup>8</sup> Women's groups called for more support for victims of sexual assault and for better conviction rates, while their helplines were inundated by women who felt emboldened to report incidences of sexual assault.<sup>9</sup>

A French journalist and author, Tristane Banon, added her voice to the chorus of condemnation of DSK. She had previously alluded during a televised program to an attempted rape by a powerful man, but her claims had aroused only mirth. This time, she declared explicitly that the perpetrator had been DSK, and that it had taken her nine years to break her silence due to pressure placed on her by members of the Socialist party ranging from her own family to the party leadership. The addition of her accusations to those of Nafissatou Diallo made it harder for conspiracy theorists to maintain their assertions of DSK's innocence. His position in opinion polls collapsed and his political career was effectively destroyed. Since then, he was cleared in the New York criminal case after doubts were cast about Diallo's reliability as a witness; however, she is now pursuing a civil case against him. He also escaped sentence in the case filed against him by Banon, even though he was not found entirely innocent.<sup>10</sup> More recently, he has become embroiled in a scandal involving a prostitution ring, where—in a characteristic protestation of innocence—he declared that he was not aware that the women with whom he had sexual relations at various parties were in fact prostitutes, alleging that it is difficult to tell the difference between a prostitute and any other naked woman.<sup>11</sup> The so-called Carlton affair, named after the hotel at

the center of the scandal, is an ongoing source of humiliation for DSK, ensuring that any hopes of a political comeback have been dashed.

The DSK affair temporarily raised the issue of sexual assault on the political agenda, although its longer term impact appears to be more muted. Another politician, Georges Tron, was forced to resign his position as minister of foreign affairs in the serving UMP government following accusations, emerging in late May 2011, of sexual assault and rape of two former employees. There was also widespread condemnation of the sexist discourse used to defend DSK shortly after the initial scandal broke. The philosopher Jean-François Kahn claimed that it was nothing more than a “troussage de domestique,” or lifting the skirt of a servant, indicating that men should be allowed to sexually assault servants with impunity. Socialist deputy and former minister Jack Lang likewise objected to DSK’s incarceration because “il n’y a pas mort d’homme” (translation: “no one died”).<sup>12</sup> Feminists decried this casual sexism and called for women to be respected and for victims of sexual assault to be taken more seriously.<sup>13</sup> The low reporting of sexual crimes and the even lower conviction rate garnered national attention in the hand-wringing that came in the wake of the DSK affair. Yet, once the furor had died down, there was little fundamental change. The Socialists were keen to move on from the affair as swiftly as possible in order to refocus on the presidential elections, and the UMP soon shifted their attention to the candidates still in the presidential race.

### **The Socialist Primary**

DSK’s sudden and decisive exit from the Socialist primary provided an unexpected opening for Martine Aubry. As he was removed from contention before he had ever declared himself a candidate, there was no conflict of interest preventing her from entering the race. She waited until shortly before the close of nominations to announce her candidacy, in order to

allow the DSK affair to settle a little and avoid the appearance of reveling in DSK's downfall. She did not, however, succeed in escaping his shadow. She was widely criticized as being a "default" candidate who was standing only as a substitute for DSK rather than as a credible candidate in her own right, despite her stature as the party leader. Nor was she able to benefit, as had Christine Lagarde (the UMP finance minister who became DSK's successor at the IMF), from the symbolic value of being a woman replacing a discredited man. Nonetheless, many of DSK's supporters flocked to Aubry, and she emerged as one of the most credible contenders. She was the most experienced candidate, having held high ministerial office, most notably as the minister of labor who introduced the notorious 35-hour working week. However, she was not the only candidate to emerge in the vacuum created by DSK's exit. Hollande and Royal, neither of whom had been seen as strong rivals to DSK, were taken seriously again in a race now seen as wide open. Hollande's campaign strengthened progressively throughout 2011; he was already narrowing DSK's lead before 15 May, and emerged as the strongest candidate after DSK's downfall. Meanwhile, Royal's campaign floundered in line with a steady decline in popularity since 2007. By the time the first round approached on 9 October, Royal was expected to place third behind Hollande and Aubry. In the end, she came in a humiliating fourth behind Arnaud Montebourg, polling far lower than expected with less than 7 percent of the final vote. She, Montebourg, and the other two candidates eliminated in the first round (Manuel Valls and Jean-Michel Baylet) all declared their support for François Hollande in the second round, enabling Hollande to secure a decisive victory over Aubry, 56.6 percent to 43.4 percent.

### **Gendered Media Coverage?**

One of the striking features of Royal's 2007 campaign was the gendered media coverage that she received. She was referred to by her first name far more frequently than her male

competitors, which had the effect of reducing her presidential stature and even infantilizing her.<sup>14</sup> Far more reference was made to her appearance, a trivial facet of her campaign, which objectified her and detracted from coverage of the core issues.<sup>15</sup> She was more likely to have her credentials and experience undervalued, and to have her competence brought into question. Coverage of her campaign emphasized her soft traits such as her emotions and her motherhood, while contrasting these with the strength and toughness of her male rivals. For all these reasons, she struggled to be taken as seriously as her male counterparts, and her campaign was undermined. Similar trends have been found elsewhere in coverage of women candidates in the media.<sup>16</sup> For example, Erica Falk found that women candidates in the US were less likely to be referred to by their professional title, such as “Senator,” and more likely to be referred to simply as “Ms” or by using their first name.<sup>17</sup> Women may also be framed as the “first woman” likely to become president, which may add an element of excitement to the campaign, but also risks presenting women as novelties and outsiders.<sup>18</sup> It is possible that these gender stereotypes are more easily applied when women candidates remain a visible minority with novelty status; as women candidates become more commonplace, we might expect the presence of gender stereotyping to subside. Here, I explore whether these stereotypes carried through into coverage of the 2011 Socialist primary. I also consider whether women suffered from less media exposure than their male counterparts, in line with findings in the US.<sup>19</sup>

I tested media coverage in three leading French daily newspapers: *Le Monde* (center-left), *Le Figaro* (right) and *Le Croix* (Catholic).<sup>20</sup> Media coverage was tested for the five main candidates<sup>21</sup> from 9 September to 9 October 2011, date of the first round of the primary (for Montebourg, Royal, and Valls), and 16 October, date of the second round (for Hollande and Aubry). All articles containing each candidate’s surname were included in the initial sample, with spurious cases excluded (for example, articles about royal palaces or the



Netherlands rather than Royal and Hollande). The remaining articles were tested using WordStat software to analyze the frequency of usage of each candidate's first name (in isolation), surname (in isolation), both names (in combination), and reference to the candidate by their professional position (for example, Mayor of Lille for Aubry). The findings are reported in Table one.

The analysis also tested for references to the candidates' families. Family ties have been identified by Farida Jalalzai as an important criterion for women having access to political office, although they can also be seen to undermine the independence and autonomy of a candidate.<sup>22</sup> Royal is the former partner of Hollande, and Aubry is the daughter of Jacques Delors. References to spouses and children may also occur more frequently in coverage of women candidates.<sup>23</sup> However, there were very few family references for any of the candidates in any of the newspapers sampled, indicating that these gendered frames were not present in 2011. The only notable pattern here was that reference to Hollande's family occurred several times in the context of his political relationship with Royal, "the mother of his four children." One article referred to Hollande and Aubry as the "spiritual son and biological daughter of Jacques Delors."<sup>24</sup> There was also no use of the "first woman" frame, perhaps because this frame had been applied widely to Royal in 2006 when her prospects of election looked brighter than those of either Aubry or Royal in 2011. However, Aubry herself stated on more than one occasion (including during the televised debate between the first and second round) that it was time for the Republic to have a woman president. Royal had made a similar appeal in 2007, but to no avail.

<<Table One about here>>

In terms of total media coverage, there is a clear gap between the two front-runners and the rest of the pack. This trend is unsurprising and does not appear to be gendered. For the candidates who did not qualify to the second round, the greater coverage of Royal is consistent with her higher profile as the former presidential candidate. There is, however, a surprising gap between the amount of coverage in *Le Figaro* of Hollande (982 articles) and Aubry (584 articles)—a finding not mirrored in the other two newspapers.

Regarding use of names, there is significant variation in the patterns among different newspapers. *Le Croix* tends to refer to all candidates primarily using both their names, whereas the other papers frequently use alternative forms of address. Both women candidates are referred to more frequently by their first names, especially in *Le Monde*, although the gap is not stark and indicates that this trend from 2006 has since declined. Where candidates were referred to using only their first name, this was often within a direct quotation from someone who knew the candidate well, rather than the journalist's own words. For example, one article in *Le Monde* quotes one of Aubry's supporters as saying "Martine is targeting the electorate of Montebourg and Ségolène."<sup>25</sup> While this phrase is clearly gendered, referring to the two women candidates by their first name and the male candidate by his surname, the attribution lies with the party member rather than with the journalist. Another common trend was to refer to followers of Hollande as "hollandais" and of Royal as "ségolénistes," with Daniel Cohn-Bendit claiming in *Le Monde* that "Hollande est en train de se ségoléniser" (Hollande is 'Ségolénising').<sup>26</sup>

Aubry is referred to by her job title rather than by her name much more than is either Hollande or Royal. This is particularly the case in *le Figaro*, which makes unparalleled use of Aubry's professional titles. She was more frequently referred to as the Mayor of Lille (84 mentions by *Le Monde*, 74 by *Le Figaro*) than as the First Secretary of the PS (respectively, 20 and 15 mentions). This finding supports a wider, encouraging trend whereby Aubry's

experience was recognized throughout the race. Unlike Hollande, who had no prior ministerial experience, and Royal, who had previously held relatively junior ministerial portfolios, Aubry had been one of the key players in the 1997–2002 government. The two female candidates were the two most experienced in the race, which was recognized in the coverage of their campaigns.

Despite these generally encouraging findings, a qualitative reading of the articles indicates that the statistical table may belie the presence of some sexism in the coverage. For example, Aubry was referred to as a “femme d’ autorité et autoritaire,”<sup>27</sup> reinforcing negative views of women in power. A journalist in *Le Monde* wrote of Royal that she had “dry eyes and a blue jacket... after the tearful Ségolène, the waterproof Ségolène,”<sup>28</sup> using classic gendered frames of reporting on a woman’s appearance and emotional state rather than her policies. For the most part, however, there appears to be far less use of gender stereotyping than was present in the coverage of Royal in the previous election. This supports the hypothesis that gendered stereotyping declines as the number of women candidates increases and women’s presence in presidential elections becomes normalized.

### **The Main Election: Strategic Use of Gender?**

As noted, there were three women (and seven men) contesting the main presidential election, including Nathalie Arthaud, Eva Joly, and Marine Le Pen. Arthaud’s campaign was notable primarily for its invisibility. She replaced the former candidate Arlette Laguiller, who had contested every previous election for Lutte ouvrière since the 1970s, and Arthaud struggled to establish herself as the new face of the party. Joly also struggled with internal opposition to her candidacy within the party and hostile media coverage. Both during the campaign and after obtaining a disappointing score of 2.23 percent, Joly complained that she had been the

victim of ageism, sexism, and xenophobia (she was 68 years old, was born and raised in Norway, and has dual French and Norwegian nationality).<sup>29</sup>

The main woman grabbing the headlines, however, was Marine Le Pen. She is the daughter of Jean-Marie Le Pen, who led the party from 1972 until 2011 as its quintessential far-Right leader who personified the party. Jean-Marie is also a controversial figure who has been prosecuted for Holocaust denial and whose unexpected break-through into the second round of the 2002 presidential election was referred to as an “earthquake.” His strong performance in the 2002 election was not repeated in 2007, where his vote share declined to 10.4 percent, with some commentators hypothesizing that the FN might be in terminal decline. It seems, however, that the retirement of Jean-Marie Le Pen and the succession of his daughter had afforded an opportunity to breathe new life into the party. As a woman in her forties, Marine Le Pen has capitalized on her softer and more modern image. She has moved away from the antisemitism of her father, instead targeting racist sentiment towards Muslims. She has also been uniquely positioned to move away from the chauvinist image of the FN, which has typically received two thirds of its votes from men. According to Sineau, in the 2002 election, Jean-Marie Le Pen would have been eliminated in the first round if only women had voted, whereas he would have come first (ahead of Chirac) if only men had voted.<sup>30</sup> Persuading more women to vote for the FN would therefore be an electoral coup for Marine Le Pen.

Marine Le Pen has certainly capitalized on the fact that she is a woman to increase the credibility of the FN on gender issues, even though their actual policies have barely changed. Studies in the US indicate that women are perceived by voters as being more liberal than men from the same party.<sup>31</sup> This can hurt women on the left, who may be seen as too left-wing, but may benefit women from the right, as it makes them appear more moderate and closer to the median voter. In addition, the symbolic value of a woman candidate can create the

impression of greater sympathy for women's issues. Although the link between descriptive and substantive representation of women is flawed at best, as not all women are willing or able to act for women's interests, the symbolism of a woman candidate still has some purchase in France. Despite the FN's regressive policies for women, 13 percent of respondents in a poll commissioned in February by the Laboratoire d'Égalité felt that Marine Le Pen was the best candidate to ensure gender equality.<sup>32</sup>

Perhaps the best indication of how Marine Le Pen sought to conquer women's votes is provided by an interview she gave on France 2 on 8 March 2012, which is widely celebrated in France as International Women's Day.<sup>33</sup> Asked why there was nothing on women's rights within the FN manifesto, she claimed that the laws required to achieve gender equality are already in place, and all that is lacking is the political will to implement them. In so doing, she allowed it to be assumed that, as a woman, she would demonstrate such will. She then defended the FN's support for a "parental salary," which would offer 80 percent of the minimum wage to mothers who choose to stay at home with their children. Although the term "parental salary" is gender-neutral, the policy is always framed in reference to mothers, and Marine Le Pen emphasized how it would give *women* the choice of whether or not to be full-time mothers. She argued that if women prefer to stay at home with their children, this choice should be supported financially. With no equivalent provision on offer for men, her discourse supported the traditional patriarchal notion that childcare was a woman's responsibility. Yet, by framing the parental salary as a "choice," rather than an inducement for women to abandon paid employment and stay in the home, she made the policy sound less regressive than it actually is. She further argued that women who wanted to work should be able to do so, but were often prevented from doing so because of the inadequate provision of crèches. Her solution would be to increase nursery provision, declaring herself to be "la présidente des crèches," in a direct appeal to women voters. The difficulty of financing

additional nursery places would surely be exacerbated by the cost of supporting parental salaries, so the two policies are somewhat contradictory, but both were presented with an emphasis on increasing the choices available to women.

Marine Le Pen is somewhat less pro-choice, however, when it comes to abortion. Although she did not challenge the right to a legal abortion in France, she suggested that some women were having multiple abortions as a casual method of contraception, and argued that these cases should no longer be reimbursed. She was skilled in spinning the story in a way that did not sound like an attack on women. She pointed out that doctors were refusing to carry out abortions due to exasperation with those who abused the system, leading to a shortage of availability for women in distress who really needed access to abortion. By indicating her wish to focus resources on “deserving” cases, she softened the paternalistic proposal of cutting funding for abortion. Her gender, combined with her skill as a politician, have enabled her to make quite regressive policies for women sound almost progressive. When it was put to her that her policies would force women back into the home, she dismissed this as absurd, saying “not me, not I who have worked all my life... I want to give women a choice.”

Tactics such as these served Marine Le Pen well. On election night, she obtained a record result for her party, with 17.9 percent of the vote. A YouGov poll conducted in the week leading up to the first round indicated that the gender gap among the FN’s electorate had reduced to just two points.<sup>34</sup> Nonna Mayer confirms this finding, with Marine Le Pen scoring 17 percent from women and 19 percent from male voters.<sup>35</sup> Marine Le Pen’s score from men was actually one point lower than the 20 percent male support that Jean-Marie Le Pen obtained in his historic 2002 result; the reason why her total score bettered his 17.8 percent overall score in 2002 was because of her ability to draw in more women voters. Consequently, she came third overall and was crowned the “third man” (*troisième homme*) of

the election, demonstrating the difficulty of the French language in adapting to the success of female politicians.

### **Women Within the Main Electoral Teams**

Aside from women candidates, what about the women involved in the two key presidential campaigns, those of Hollande and Sarkozy? Hollande faced criticism for a male-dominated campaign team, led by three men. The only woman to have a coveted office to herself within his campaign HQ was his partner, Valérie Trierweiler. The women occupying senior policy roles, Marisol Touraine and Aurélie Filippetti, were charged respectively with the traditionally feminized portfolios of social policy and culture. When confronted with the shortage of women in his team, he assured a journalist that “it would be good in principle to have as many men as women in the government,” before adding, “which is not to say that they will have the same responsibilities.”<sup>36</sup> These remarks, made on 8 March, proved to be rather prophetic, as Hollande went on to nominate a parity government following his election as president, but the key posts went almost exclusively to men, with women congregated in the less prestigious, “feminized” roles. Hollande has therefore been less of a pioneer of gender equality than the “parity” government might suggest.

Meanwhile, the main woman in Sarkozy’s team was Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet, one of the few women in Sarkozy’s first cabinet in 2007 who was still present in 2012. She resigned her cabinet post in order to become the spokesperson for the Sarkozy campaign. From the outset, she faced an ongoing barrage of sexism, focusing on her appearance and criticizing her glamorous and bourgeois image. For example, an article in *Le Monde* claims: “too elegant, too bobo,<sup>37</sup> too brilliant, too ‘personal,’ Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet has always antagonized within her camp.”<sup>38</sup> Referring to her repeatedly as a “young woman,” the article then quotes a man from Sarkozy’s entourage who claims that “she provides a good counter-

balance to the virile image of this campaign.” An article in *Le Monde*’s weekend magazine, referring to her in its title as a “chic” benefit for Sarkozy, begins: “Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet gets out of the water. Her hair, still wet, is pulled into a bun hastily tied back.” The article goes on to describe her bathing suit, then describes how she applies her make-up while being driven to her next engagement, before “launching her graceful silhouette into the crowd.”<sup>39</sup> The rest of the article continues in a similar vein, with the overall message being that her beauty and sophistication do not lend themselves well to populist politics. If the coverage of Royal and Aubry appeared to be somewhat less sexist in 2011 than in 2007, the coverage of Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet proves that negative gender stereotypes are still alive and well in 2012.

### **What Did the Candidates Offer Women?**

In terms of policies to reduce inequalities and promote gender parity, there were significant discrepancies between the different candidates’ offerings. Marine Le Pen, for all her attempts to portray herself as a defender of women’s rights, had nothing on these issues within her manifesto. Sarkozy’s only promise was to continue the efforts in this direction made during his first term. More concretely, the centrist candidate François Bayrou promised to create a Ministry for Equality, charged with addressing multiple sources of discrimination (including gender). He also sought to reinforce domestic violence legislation; to apply financial penalties to businesses not respecting equal pay laws; to combat the trend for women to be stuck in multiple part-time, short-term contracts; and to reform and modernize political life in a number of ways, including the strengthening of parity legislation. Similar policies were offered by far-left candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who proposed strengthening laws to protect women from violence, a tightening of the definition of sexual harassment, and a ministry for women’s rights and equality. Eva Joly (EELV) proposed a gender equality



ministry; legislation to protect women from violence; more places in women's shelters; tackling gender stereotypes; and a removal of public subsidies for any business that did not address the gender pay gap.

The candidate who was perceived by voters as being the strongest for gender equality was François Hollande, and this was reflected in his policy proposals (despite reservations about his willingness to allow women access to positions of real power, noted above). He promised a parity government; the reintroduction of a full women's rights ministry; the removal of all state funding for parties that do not respect the parity law; the suppression of national insurance credits for all large business that do not eliminate their gender pay gap within a year; an abortion clinic in every hospital, fully funded by the state; more shelters for victims of domestic violence; the teaching of gender equality in schools; and the promotion of secularism (*laïcité*) as a safeguard of gender equality. Some of these policies are not particularly innovative; for example, Royal also promised in 2007 to support victims of domestic violence, while legislation on the gender pay gap is already in place so Hollande is only proposing to increase the penalties for non-implementation. The proposal for strengthening the gender parity law, which has been reiterated since Hollande's election, is potentially transformative, as no party will be able to afford to lose all their funding and will therefore be compelled to field an equal number of men and women candidates in elections where the law applies. At the same time, this proposal does not address the tendency for parties to place women in unwinnable seats, so it will not be a total panacea to the problem of women's under-representation.

Important promises that Hollande has already fulfilled include the installation of a parity government, with women occupying an equal number of places both in cabinet and in the wider government. Despite concerns about women occupying the more junior posts, it was reassuring to see that women maintained their equal presence after the first cabinet

reshuffle that took place in the wake of the parliamentary elections in June 2012. Meanwhile, the resurrection of a full women's rights ministry is an excellent outcome for women. France has had a government portfolio bearing at least some responsibility for women in most governments since the early 1970s, but there has only previously been one full ministry dedicated to women, under the first Mitterrand government of 1981–86. Many advances for women were made during this period, spearheaded by the women's minister, Yvette Roudy. Her successor, Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, appears eager to maintain this noble tradition, although it is too early to judge her record.

### **Conclusion**

The 2012 elections have indicated some progress for French women, while also revealing ongoing difficulties. Media coverage of the Socialist primary avoided some of the gendered frames deployed in 2006, although there was still some evidence of ongoing sexism in media coverage of women, especially for Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet. The selection of a male Socialist candidate, despite the presence of two strong women in the primary, means that France is unlikely to see a woman president for at least another decade. Hollande will in all likelihood seek reelection in 2017, and there are few female *presidentiables* on the right (Nathalie Kosciusko-Morizet is an exception, although the media will need to treat her more respectfully if she is to reach the summit of politics). The nomination of so many women to cabinet posts will hopefully ensure a stronger future pipeline on the Socialist side, although only if these women are able to accede to the most heavyweight positions rather than being stuck in the “soft” portfolios.

The success of Marine Le Pen indicates that, while the Left have traditionally been the pioneer of gender equality, the Right and far-Right have much to gain from female leadership. Her ability to decontaminate (“dédiaboliser”) the party's image and to draw in

women voters are at least in part a product of her gender. Her inevitable association with her father was perhaps less damaging in a party with a quasi-monarchical approach to leadership. The important work of feminizing politics will take place predominantly through reforms initiated by the Left, such as gender parity and the new women's ministry. Yet it may well be the case that Marine Le Pen remains the most high-profile woman in French politics for the decade to come.

**Rainbow Murray** is Reader (Associate Professor) in politics at Queen Mary, University of London. She is the author of *Parties, Gender Quotas and Candidate Selection in France*. Her work has been published in journals including *Political Research Quarterly*, *West European Politics*, *Party Politics*, *French Politics*, *Modern and Contemporary France*, and *Politics & Gender*. She founded and convenes the international network on Women in French Politics. Her research interests include elections, legislatures, representation, and political parties, with particular focus on gender and France. She co-edits the *European Journal of Political Research Political Data Yearbook*.

**Table One: Media coverage of the candidates in the 2011 Socialist Primary**

		Hollande			Aubry			Royal			Montebourg			Valls		
		M <sup>1</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	C <sup>3</sup>	M <sup>1</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	C <sup>3</sup>	M <sup>1</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	C <sup>3</sup>	M <sup>1</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	C <sup>3</sup>	M <sup>1</sup>	F <sup>2</sup>	C <sup>3</sup>
First name and surname	N	341	517	113	345	290	93	127	177	27	96	79	12	78	60	14
	%	53.1	52.6	86.9	48.7	49.7	86.1	64.8	66.8	93.1	65.8	59.8	66.7	67.2	57.7	82.4
First name only	N	26	19	1	39	16	0	11	10	1	2	5	0	0	4	0
	%	4	1.9	0.8	5.5	2.7	0	5.6	3.8	3.4	1.4	3.8	0	0	3.85	0
Surname only	N	241	360	11	221	189	6	41	57	0	33	38	3	18	30	0
	%	37.5	36.7	8.4	31.2	32.3	5.5	20.9	21.5	0	22.6	28.8	16.7	15.5	28.8	0
Job title <sup>4</sup>	N	34	86	5	104	89	9	17	21	1	15	10	3	20	10	3
	%	5.3	8.8	3.8	14.7	15.2	8.3	8.7	7.9	3.4	10.3	7.6	16.7	17.2	9.6	17.6
Total mentions	N	642	982	130	709	584	108	196	265	29	146	132	18	116	104	17

<sup>1</sup> *Le Monde*

<sup>2</sup> *Le Figaro*

<sup>3</sup> *Le Croix*

<sup>4</sup> For Hollande, député de Correze or equivalent; for Aubry, maire de Lille and/or première secrétaire du PS; for Montebourg, député de Saone-et-Loire and/or président du conseil général de Saone-et-Loire; for Royal, présidente de Poitou-Charente and/or ancienne candidate aux présidentielles; for Valls, député d'Essonne and/or maire d'Evry.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Fabienne H. Baider, “Ségolène Royal dans la presse française: Deuxième sexe, ou second choix?” *Modern & Contemporary France* 18, 4 (2010): 475–89; Rainbow Murray, “Madonna and Four Children: Ségolène Royal,” in *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling: A Global Comparison of Women’s Campaigns for Executive Office*, ed. Rainbow Murray (California: Praeger, 2010), 49–68.

<sup>2</sup> *Le Monde*, 25 November 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Unknown to the French public, Royal’s decision to run at the expense of Hollande was linked not only to opinion polls but also to internal strains within the couple, who officially announced their separation in June 2007 after nearly thirty years together (*L’Express*, 20 June 2007).

<sup>4</sup> With hindsight, the delay in announcing nominations was a blessing, as DSK never formally joined the race and could therefore be disassociated from the party more easily.

<sup>5</sup> *Le Monde*, 6 April 2011 (my emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> *Le Huffington Post*, 16 May 2011.

<sup>7</sup> *Le Monde*, 18 May 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Gisèle Halimi, cited in *Le Monde*, 18 May 2011 (author’s translation).

<sup>9</sup> A chambermaid in a Parisian hotel reopened a complaint against the Prince of Qatar for sexual assault. Her initial complaint about the incident, alleged to have taken place in July 2010, had been filed without being followed up, but after the DSK affair she decided to pursue the complaint (*Le Monde*, 11 June 2011).

<sup>10</sup> It was recognized by the court that a sexual assault had taken place, but the timeframe for filing a charge of sexual assault is shorter and had expired so it was not possible to impose a

---

sentence. It was felt that there was not sufficient evidence to bring about a prosecution for attempted rape.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Point*, 11 January 2012.

<sup>12</sup> *Le Monde*, 23 May 2011. Lang's electorate responded by voting him out of office in the 2012 parliamentary elections.

<sup>13</sup> A petition to this effect was signed by women's groups including Osez le féminisme, La barbe and Parole de femmes (*Le Monde*, 21 May 2011). A rally was organized by Osez le féminisme on 22 May 2011 in Paris.

<sup>14</sup> Baider, "Royal dans la presse française"; Julian Barnes and Pierre Larrivée, "Arlette Laguiller: Does the Mainstay of the French Political Far-Left Enjoy Linguistic Parity with her Male Counterparts?" *Journal of Pragmatics* 43, 10 (2011): 2501–2508; Núria Fernández García, "Leader Media Construction: Ségolène Royal Media Treatment Analysis in Opinion Columns in *Le Figaro* and *Libération*" (presented at a conference entitled "Women, Power and the Media," Aston University, Birmingham, England, 15 September 2007); Eva-Marie Goepfert, "La presse People et le traitement de la différentiation sexuée des candidats à l'élection présidentielle" (presented at a conference on "La campagne présidentielle de 2007 au prisme du genre," University of Paris XII (Créteil), France, 14 March 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Murray, "Madonna and Four Children."

<sup>16</sup> Farida Jalalzai, "Women Candidates and the Media: 1992–2000 Elections," *Politics and Policy* 34, 3 (2006): 606–33; Kim Fridkin Kahn, "Does Gender Make a Difference? An Experimental Examination of Sex Stereotypes and Press Patterns in Statewide Campaigns," *American Journal of Political Science* 38 (1994): 162–95; Miki Caul Kittilson and Kim Fridkin, "Gender, Candidate Portrayals and Election Campaigns: A Comparative Perspective," *Politics & Gender* 4, 3 (2008): 385; Pippa Norris ed., *Women, Media and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

---

<sup>17</sup> Erica Falk, *Women for President: Media Bias in Eight Campaigns* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

<sup>18</sup> Falk, *Women for President*; Murray, *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling*.

<sup>19</sup> Caroline Heldman, Susan J. Carroll, and Stephanie Olson, “She Brought Only a Skirt: Print Media Coverage of Elizabeth Dole’s Bid for the Republican Presidential Nomination,”

*Political Communication* 22, 3 (2005): 315–35; Kim Fridkin Kahn, *The Political*

*Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Data was obtained using the Lexis Nexis search tool. No data was available for *Libération* (left).

<sup>21</sup> A sixth candidate, Jean-Michel Baylet, was not a Socialist but the leader of the Parti radical de gauche. He was a late entrant to the race and was never a serious contender, receiving less than 1 percent of the final vote. He has therefore been excluded from this analysis.

<sup>22</sup> Farida Jalalzai, “Women Rule: Shattering the Executive Glass Ceiling,” *Politics & Gender* 4, 2 (2008): 205–32.

<sup>23</sup> Rainbow Murray, “Introduction and Framework,” in *Cracking the Highest Glass Ceiling*, 14–15.

<sup>24</sup> *Le Figaro*, 15 October 2011.

<sup>25</sup> *Le Monde*, 16 October 2011.

<sup>26</sup> *Le Monde*, 15 November 2011.

<sup>27</sup> *Le Figaro*, 15 October 2011.

<sup>28</sup> *Le Monde*, 15 October 2011.

<sup>29</sup> Interview on Europe I, 8 March 2012; *Libération*, 25 April 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Mariette Sineau, *La Force du nombre: Femmes et démocratie présidentielle* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

---

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Koch, “Do Citizens Apply Gender Stereotypes to Infer Candidates’ Ideological Orientations?” *Journal of Politics* 62, 2 (2000): 414–29; Jeffrey Koch, “Gender Stereotypes and Citizens’ Impressions of House Candidates’ Ideological Orientations,” *American Journal of Political Science* 46, 2 (2002): 453–62.

<sup>32</sup> Press release by the Laboratoire de l’égalité, 23 February 2012. Based on a representative sample of 1,186 voters surveyed online between 6 and 10 February 2012.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.frontnational.com/videos/marine-le-pen-invitee-des-4-verites-sur-france-2-2/>, accessed 11 March 2012.

<sup>34</sup> YouGov survey 16–20 April, 2011.

<sup>35</sup> Nonna Mayer, “From Jean-Marie to Marine le Pen: Electoral Change on the Far Right,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 66, 1 (2013).

<sup>36</sup> *Le Monde*, 14 May 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Bobo stands for “bourgeois-bohème.”

<sup>38</sup> *Le Monde*, 8 March 2012.

<sup>39</sup> *Le Monde*, 3 February 2012.