



Data, Measures and Methods:

Why Didn't Parity Work? A Closer Examination of the 2002 Election Results

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This paper examines the failed application of France's 'parity' law to the general election of 2002. It challenges the claims of French parties that the low level of women elected was a consequence of the unusual political circumstances surrounding the elections. I posit that the primary cause of parity's failure was actually the attitudes of political parties towards women. A closer inspection of the election results substantiates this argument on a number of fronts. Firstly, the election results are replayed to reveal whether more women would have been elected if the Left had won the election. Various candidate attributes are then evaluated to test whether or not men and women were on a level playing field. The significance of factors such as sex and incumbency status in determining electoral success is brought into question. Finally, the research is extended towards *suppléants* as a further test of party attitudes towards female politicians. The findings cast grave doubts on the underlying good will of parties to implement parity, and suggest that blaming the unusual circumstances of 2002 may just be a convenient excuse for what is actually a deep-rooted problem.

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Introduction

France generated great interest amongst scholars specializing in women and politics when the so-called 'parity' law was ratified in 2000.¹ This law, which stipulates that 50 per cent of candidates to all elections must be female, generated high hopes for the feminization of France's political institutions, which had thus far resisted the trend across Europe for rising levels of female politicians. Authors such as Mossuz-Lavau (1998), Gaspard *et al.* (1992), Gaspard and Servan-Schreiber (1997) and Bataille and Gaspard (1999) expressed great enthusiasm for parity, seeing it as a vital tool towards guaranteeing the substantive representation of women's interests. However, despite the apparent success of parity in the 2001 local elections, closer scrutiny of the composition of local assemblies cast the first shadows of doubt over whether parties were really observing the spirit of parity (Troupel, 2002; Bird,



2003). It was the 2002 elections to France's National Assembly, however, which provided the most visible example of parity's failure, and it is on these elections that this paper shall concentrate.

In the aftermath of the 2002 election, which saw the number of women in France's lower chamber rise from 10.9 per cent to just 12.3 per cent, a number of theories emerged as to why parity did not succeed. The Observatoire de la Parité criticized the relatively lenient penalty for failing to respect the law (a financial sanction which was easily compensated for by larger parties) (Observatoire de la Parité, 2003, 35). Parties, meanwhile, focused on the specific context of 2002 to justify their failure to implement parity. Arguments included the landslide victory of the Right, the reluctance of parties to take risks in such an uncertain political climate, and the shortage of suitable female candidates. It is the contention of this paper that, although these circumstantial factors cannot be ignored, they serve to mask the true cause of parity's failure, which was the attitudes of French parties towards women. This paper therefore puts these claims to the test by conducting an in-depth analysis of the election results, and the underlying messages that they convey about the behaviour of French parties.

Exceptional Circumstances or Convenient Excuses?

The political circumstances surrounding the 2002 elections are well documented elsewhere, and therefore require only brief discussion here.² The legislative elections of June were preceded by presidential elections in April 2002. The surprise first-round elimination of the main candidate of the left, Lionel Jospin, assured the victory of the main candidate of the right, Jacques Chirac, in the second and decisive round. Given the French tendency towards *alternance* (the changing of government at each election), and their dislike of cohabitation (whereby a President of one coalition shares power with a government of the other coalition), the victory of the right in 2002 was unsurprising. However, as parties of the left fielded a higher proportion of female candidates than parties of the right, it was argued that the landslide victory of Chirac's UMP party in June was unfavourable for women (*L'Express*, 20.06.02).

The destabilizing effects of the presidential elections, which saw the far-right leader Le Pen qualifying to the second round, were also blamed by parties for the shortage of women (Bird and Dubesset, 2003, 289; *Le Monde* 13.07.02; Zimmerman, 2003, 9). Given the political uncertainty in the aftermath of the April election, parties were not in the mood for taking risks when the June election came around. The idea of replacing a well-known male candidate, especially if he was an incumbent, with a lesser known female candidate did not appeal to most parties. Moreover, the penalty for failing to implement parity was



financial rather than political, and its effects were insufficient to deter the largest parties from fielding the candidate they considered to be most likely to win.

The difficulties of candidate selection were exacerbated by the need to balance the interests of local party selectorates with the demands of national party policy. Such was the case with the Communist Party, for example, who complained that it would not be possible to ensure perfect gender parity of their candidates without infringing on the rights of members to select local candidates.³ These difficulties were further compounded by the fact that many parties had to work within a wider left or right coalition, and most parties were constrained by the limited number of seats in which they would field candidates.

A final problem with the 2002 elections was the fact that parity was still relatively new, and some parties claimed that they had had difficulty in recruiting enough well-qualified women to field as parliamentary candidates (*Le Monde* 25.11.01). The women elected into local politics in 2001 thanks to the parity law were not yet ready for national office. Moreover, given the shortage of women in previous parliaments, the vast majority of candidates seeking to retain their seat or regain a seat lost at the previous election were men. The number of women benefiting from the experience and public exposure of previous parliamentary office was very limited. Parties therefore claimed that the deficit of female candidates was due to insufficient numbers of suitably qualified women, rather than deliberate exclusion of women by the parties concerned.

If all these factors are accepted, then the low number of women elected in 2002 can be explained by the victory of the right, the reluctance of parties to take risks by fielding women, and the shortage of good female candidates. However, these explanations are neither satisfactory nor sufficient, as they do not disprove that parties were discriminating against women. Parties of the left may have fielded more female candidates than parties of the right, but these women may have been disproportionately placed in unwinnable seats. Parties may have been nervous about fielding female candidates after the presidential election results, but most candidates were selected before April 2002. Moreover, the claims about there being a shortage of suitably qualified women, and the perceived need to prioritize (predominantly male) incumbents, may have been nothing more than a convenient excuse to justify discriminatory practices against women.

This paper therefore tests the claims of the parties by conducting a series of statistical analyses of the election results, with a view to better understanding the attitudes of different parties towards women.⁴ In particular, four main research questions need to be addressed. The first of these is whether party makes a difference, or whether women would have fared just as badly had the left been victorious. The second is whether candidates make a difference, and whether there is any justification for preferring an incumbent to a new



candidate, or a man to a woman. Thirdly, the characteristics of deputies (such as age, profession and political experience) will be compared to see whether the shortage of women was a problem of supply or demand. The fourth and final question is whether or not the principle of parity was extended to *suppléants* (substitute deputies). The overall aim is to determine whether the 2002 results were genuinely exceptional, or merely indicative of deep-rooted sexism within the French political system.

Does Party Make a Difference?

If it is true that fewer women were elected as a result of the landslide victory of the right, then it can be inferred that a victory for the left would have resulted in a higher proportion of women elected. As Table 1 demonstrates,⁵ the two main parties of the left fielded significantly more female candidates than the two main parties of the right. This supports the contention that 'New Left values...enhance the likelihood that gender-related candidate rules will be implemented' (Caul 1999, 79). However, this table also demonstrates that the proportion of female candidates fielded by parties exceeded the proportion of women elected, suggesting that women were disproportionately placed in unwinnable seats. There is no guarantee, therefore, that the higher number of female candidates fielded by parties of the left would have translated into more women being elected.

In order to test whether party would have made a difference, I replayed the 1997 election results using the candidates fielded in 2002. In effect, I assumed that each party won the same seats as in 1997, but using the candidates fielded in those seats in 2002. As the 1997 election was won by a left-wing coalition, the replayed results demonstrate what the National Assembly would have looked like had the left won the same seats in 2002.

Table 1 Percentages of women candidates and women elected, by party

<i>Political party</i>	<i>% female candidates^a</i>	<i>% women elected</i>	<i>% difference^b</i>
UMP	19.93 (7.7)	10.7	9.23
UDF	19.68 (8.9)	6.9	12.78
PS	36.13 (27.8)	16.2	19.93
PCF	43.95 (26.8)	18.2	25.75

The UMP and UDF are parties of the right; the PS and PCF are parties of the left.

^aFigures within parentheses represent the percentages for the 1997 election. The 1997 equivalent of the UMP is the figure for the RPR.

^bThis represents the percentage of female candidates minus the percentage of women elected.

Source: Ministère de l'Intérieur, 2002 (taken from www.observatoire-parite.gouv.fr); www.assemblee-nationale.fr.



The results of Table 2 are very revealing. They demonstrate that the proportion of women who would have won for parties of the left (20.5 per cent for the PS, for example) was twice as high as the results actually obtained by parties of the right in 2002 (10.7 per cent for the UMP). In spite of this, the total proportion of women would have risen only slightly, from 12.3 per cent to 13.9 per cent. There are a number of reasons for the similarity of results. The first is that the scale of victory was smaller for the left in 1997 than for the right in 2002. The impact of the low proportion of women in right-wing parties is therefore still felt in the replayed results. The second reason is that the proportion of women elected by each party varied depending on how many seats they won. Had the UMP won the same seats in 2002 as in 1997, it would have elected only 6.6 per cent women, even lower than the 10.7 per cent which it actually achieved. This suggests that women were particularly under-represented in safe constituencies, and that it was only due to the extent of the party's success that they achieved even the low levels of presence obtained in 2002. This reinforces the argument of Mateo Diaz, who argues that women are placed in 'fighting positions' [in France's case, swing seats] and therefore depend on their party doing better than expected in order to obtain seats (Mateo Diaz, 2002). The reverse appears to be true for the Communist Party, however. Although the replayed election awarded them 13 extra seats — more than a 50 per cent increase — not one of these would have been won by a woman.

Table 2 Actual and replayed results of 2002 election

<i>Political party</i>	<i>Sex of winning candidate</i>			
	<i>Actual result</i>		<i>Replayed result</i>	
	<i>Total seats</i>	<i>% women</i>	<i>Total seats</i>	<i>% women</i>
UMP	366	10.7	228	6.6
UDF	29	6.9	24	12.5
DVD	3	0	3	0
PS	148	16.2	264	20.5
PCF	22	18.2	35	11.4
Verts	3	33.3	6	50
DVG	5	20	15	6.7
Other	1	0	2	0
Total	577	12.3	577	13.9

The top section contains parties of the right; the middle section contains parties of the left.



The results in Tables 3(a) and 3(b) confirm the theory that parties are less likely to place women in winnable (safe or swing) seats. A 'safe' seat in this context has been defined as a seat won in both 1997 and 2002, while a swing seat is a seat that changed hands between the elections. This assumes that the seats won by the right in 1997 represent their core support, while those won in 2002 represent the core support of the left. This definition is imperfect as it does not consider long-term trends in seat volatility; however, only seven seats out of 577 (1.2 per cent) swung from right to left, suggesting that the vast majority of seats either remain loyal or shift with the political tide.

Left-wing parties were more likely than their right-wing counterparts to place women in safe seats (17.1 per cent compared to 7.3 per cent). Nonetheless, whereas women are very much the minority in safe and swing seats (and as candidates overall), they are rather better represented in unwinnable seats, with more than half of the PS candidates standing in unwinnable seats being female.

To summarize, the replayed results demonstrate that party does make a slight difference, with parties of the left electing a greater proportion of women than parties of the right. However, all of the four main parties (UMP, UDF,

Table 3a Sex of winning candidates in safe and swing seats

<i>Safety of seat</i>	<i>Political party</i>	<i>Sex of winning candidate</i>				<i>Total</i>
		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		
		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	
Safe right	UMP	208	92.9	16	7.1	224
	UDF	19	90.5	2	9.5	21
	Total	227	92.7	18	7.3	245
Safe left	PS	118	83.1	24	16.9	142
	PCF	18	81.8	4	18.2	22
	Total	136	82.9	28	17.1	164
Left-right swing	UMP	119	84.4	22	15.6	141
	UDF	8	100	0	0	8
	Total	127	85.2	22	14.8	149
Right-left swing	PS	6	85.7	1	14.3	7
	Total	6	85.7	1	14.3	7

**Table 3b** Sex of losing candidates in unwinnable and swing seats

<i>Safety of seat</i>	<i>Political party</i>	<i>Sex of runner up</i>				<i>Total</i>
		<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>		
		<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	
Safe right	UMP	3	100	0	0	3
	UDF	2	100	0	0	2
	PS	74	46.8	84	53.2	158
	PCF	3	100	0	0	3
	Total	82	49.4	84	50.6	166
Safe left	UMP	80	59.7	54	40.3	134
	UDF	13	86.7	2	13.3	15
	PS	2	66.7	1	33.3	3
	PCF	1	100	0	0	1
	Total	96	62.7	57	37.3	153
Left-right swing	UMP	3	100	0	0	3
	PS	84	73	31	27	115
	PCF	11	100	0	0	11
	Total	98	76	31	24	129
Right-left swing	UMP	8	88.9	1	11.1	9
	Total	8	88.9	1	11.1	9

PS and PCF) failed to implement parity. Even more significantly, every party failed to field women in winnable seats in equal proportions to men. The proportion of women elected was thus consistently lower than the proportion of female candidates. As a consequence, even if the 2002 elections had been won by a left-wing coalition, there would only have been a handful of extra women in the National Assembly.

Do Candidates Make a Difference?

The second question which emerges is *why* parties are so reluctant to field women in winnable seats. One of the main reasons for this reluctance is that parties normally give priority to the outgoing incumbent. There are obvious reasons for doing so. An incumbent will have acquired a reputation in the constituency, especially if he or she has served more than one term. Incumbents



can also claim to be strong candidates due to their previous success. Furthermore, parties will be unwilling to offend a loyal deputy by showing them the door. For all these reasons, 496 incumbents (86 per cent) stood again in 2002.

Is there any justification, however, for the assumption that incumbents will fare better in the polls than 'inheritors'? (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, 24).⁶ Studies such as Norris, Vallance and Lovenduski indicate that the 'personal vote' does have some worth, although this effect is only significant where the seat is marginal (Norris *et al.*, 1992). However, since 1981 every election in France has led to a change of government, and as a result a fair number of incumbents lose their seats at each election. Closer examination of the performance of incumbents revealed that 2002 was no exception.

More than 150 incumbents lost their seats in 2002, representing a success rate for incumbents of 69.6 per cent. The success rate for female incumbents was slightly lower, at 57.9 per cent. However, it cannot automatically be inferred from this figure that female incumbents were weaker candidates; rather, many of them were women in vulnerable seats who had benefited from the '*vague rose*' of 1997 but were the first to lose when France veered back towards the right.

By contrast, 73.4 per cent of seats where the incumbent did not stand (or did not qualify for the second round) were won by the same party as in 1997 or by a coalition partner. Inheritors therefore performed marginally better than incumbents. This suggests that safety of seat and party voting were more important factors than incumbency. In total, some 60 per cent of seats saw the incumbent re-elected.

It should be noted that all but seven of the incumbents who lost their seats belonged to the defeated left-wing coalition. The success rate of incumbents for the PS was therefore lower, at 54.4 per cent. While there is insufficient data to prove conclusively whether or not incumbents perform better than inheritors at the polls, the results do cast doubt on the wisdom of always giving priority to incumbents.

The preference for incumbents, the vast majority of whom were male, is still not sufficient to explain the deficit of women. Out of the 232 seats that were not won by incumbents, only 16.4 per cent were taken by women. The question remains of whether parties incur an electoral penalty for fielding women. If so, this would explain parties' reluctance to field women as candidates.

Literature based on British candidates suggests that the sex of candidates has, at most, a negligible effect (Norris *et al.*, 1992; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, chapter 12). To test whether this is also true for France, I compared the percentage lead of successful male and female candidates over their opponents to see if women performed as well as men at the polls. (The percentage lead is calculated as the percentage of the vote obtained by the winning candidate minus the percentage of the vote obtained by the runner up). To compensate for the fact that women were disproportionately placed in swing seats, the



results control for safety of seat, and also consider the sex of the opponent. The results are displayed in Table 4.

The results for safe seats (which were shown by a test of analysis of variance to be highly significant) imply that, while the lead of a male candidate over another male candidate is broadly similar to that of a female candidate over another female candidate (17.32 per cent and 17.03 per cent, respectively), men standing against women appear to do particularly well while women standing against men win with narrower margins (21.02 per cent compared to 10.95 per cent). The results for swing seats are harder to interpret and are less reliable, given the small number of cases and the differing volatility of each seat.

While these results imply that men outperform women at the polls in safe seats, it should be noted that these results do not indicate causality. In other words, it is not clear whether these results are a true reflection of women's performance at the polls, or whether they simply reflect the fact that women are more likely to be placed in 'difficult' seats. Indeed, in the seats acknowledged to be difficult (the swing seats), women actually appear to perform better than men. Clearly more research is required in this area before any firm conclusions can be drawn.

If it is true that women suffer a slight electoral disadvantage when stood against a male candidate, parties could neutralize this disadvantage by fielding female candidates against each other in the same seat. In addition to eliminating the risk of discrimination by parties against female candidates for fear of suffering an electoral penalty, the creation of all-women constituencies would guarantee the election of women to the National Assembly. While no provisions for such a system exist under the parity law (and nor are they likely to), it is theoretically possible for parties to come to an informal arrangement between themselves to pair female candidates together in certain constituencies.⁷ However, given the problems stated above of balancing local and national interests within the party, and of balancing the demands of different coalition partners, such a system is unlikely to appear without the use of statute.

Table 4 Average percentage lead of winner over runner up

Runner up	<i>Winner</i>			
	<i>Safe Seat</i>		<i>Swing Seat</i>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Male	17.32	10.95	6.36	6.00
Female	21.02	17.03	9.22	15.73
Total	18.78	13.66	6.98	8.44

A one-way ANOVA test found the results to be significant to $P \leq 0.001$.



A Problem of Supply, or of Demand?

Another reason proffered by parties for selecting male candidates is that there are not enough suitable female candidates available. This leads to the third question to be addressed, namely: is the shortage of women a question of supply, or demand? The 'supply and demand model' drawn up by Norris and Lovenduski defines problems of 'demand' as being a rejection of candidates on the grounds of a certain characteristic such as sex, usually expressed through direct or imputed discrimination. By contrast, 'supply-side' explanations result from an insufficient number of suitably qualified candidates coming forward (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, 14–15). The difference between the two explanations is not always clear-cut, however. For example, if party selectors favour qualities which are more often found in men, then they may believe that the absence of 'suitable' women is a supply-side problem, when in fact it is the result of subtle gender-bias in the definition of 'suitable'.

An examination of some of the characteristics of deputies reveals that there are subtle differences between the sexes. The criteria tested include age, profession and political experience. In terms of age, the mean age of men (53.34 years) is slightly higher than that of women (51.84 years). However, these figures are misleading, as they do not take into account the number of terms that people have served. After controlling for this, it emerges that women tend to start their political career later than men and retire earlier, with the majority of women (58 per cent) being concentrated in the 50–59 age group. This is consistent with findings in the literature, which suggest that women start their political careers later in life after having a family, leaving them less time to climb the political ladder (Dewavrin, 1994, 131; Sineau, 2001, 215–216).

Men also tend to have more political experience than women, with 69.4 per cent of men elected in 2002 having previous parliamentary experience, compared to just 47.1 per cent of women. The average male deputy has served nearly three times as many terms as the average female deputy. Again, this is not surprising, given the results above and the fact that the previous numbers of women in the National Assembly have been very low.

In terms of profession, female deputies are less likely than their male counterparts to come from the top socio-economic categories, with a greater proportion being drawn from public sector jobs including the civil service, and office-based work. As Figure 1 demonstrates, the largest category for women is 'other', which includes women who have retired or do not engage in paid work.⁸ This is consistent with the finding by Allwood and Wadia that women 'are still vastly under-represented in the disciplines and professions which are socially valued and which lead to political office' (Allwood and Wadia, 2000, 142).

So far, then, the results suggest that women tend to enter politics later, accumulating less political experience en route, and are drawn from slightly less

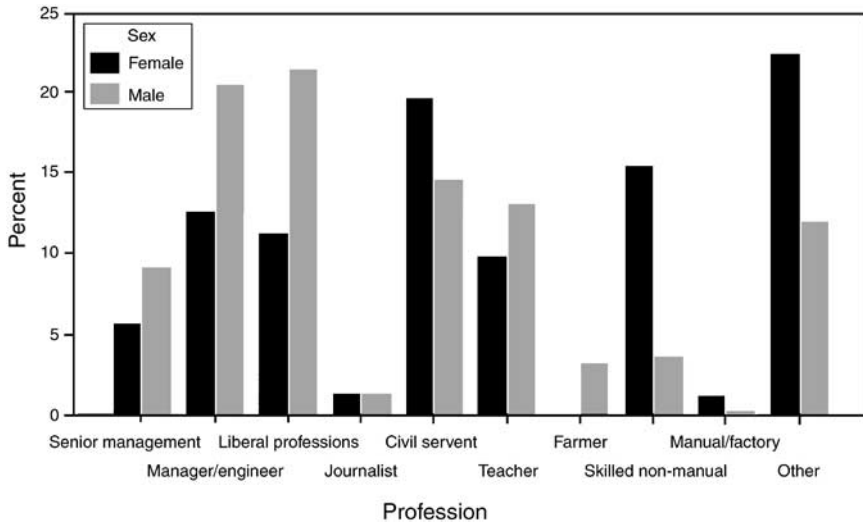


Figure 1 Profession of deputies, by sex.

Table 5 Sex and political experience of candidates who were not incumbents

Sex		All levels ^a	Parliament and local	Local only	None	Total
Male	N	9	43	133	8	193
	% of men	4.7	22.3	68.9	4.1	100
Female	N	1	3	30	4	38
	% of women	2.6	7.9	78.9	10.5	100.0
Total	N	10	46	163	12	231
	Women as % of total	10	6.5	18.4	33.3	16.4

^aThat is, Government, Parliament and local.

A two-sided Pearson's χ^2 found the results to be significant to <0.1 .

privileged socio-economic backgrounds (although female deputies still represent an elite group in comparison to the rest of the population). The one result that is particularly striking, however, is an examination of the winning candidates in 2002 who were not incumbents. In theory, freed from the constraints of incumbency and prompted by parity, parties had an ideal opportunity to engage in political renewal and invest female candidates. The results, as Table 5 demonstrates, reveal a different story.

Due to the French tendency of *alternance* (see above), nearly a quarter of these candidates had already served in the National Assembly and regained a



seat lost in a previous election. A sizeable majority, however, were newcomers drawn from local politics, with 12 new deputies having no prior political experience whatsoever. Given the tendency for women to have lower levels of political experience than men, it would be logical for parties either to prioritize male candidates with political experience, or to actively recruit female candidates in the seats offered to newcomers. However, Table 5 reveals that, although parties did field a fair proportion of candidates with relatively low political experience, they did not make the most of this opportunity to recruit women. The figure for candidates with no political experience is particularly revealing, with two-thirds of the 12 candidates in this category being male. This suggests that the shortage of women is a demand-side problem. If political experience were a pre-requisite for being a deputy, parties might be able to argue that there were not enough well-qualified women (although this argument itself should decline over time as the effects of parity take hold at local level). However, these results suggest that it is possible to become a deputy even without having held office at a local level — yet even in the category most accessible to women, the odds are tilted in favour of men.⁹

Françoise Gaspard suggests a reason for this apparent preference for male candidates in her description of the problems facing the PS's attempts to introduce all-women shortlists for the 1997 general election (Gaspard and Servan-Schreiber 1997, 4):

The constituencies where there was a socialist deputy were to some extent 'frozen': reserving these seats for a female candidate was out of the question unless the incumbent was female (which was a rarity). In the majority of seats lost in 1993, the former deputy wanted revenge. Finally, it was rare to find a constituency, even amongst those which were 'difficult' for the PS, where there weren't already potential candidates. Usually men.

While the above quote is referring to the PS in 1997, the problems described are comparable to those faced by all major parties in 2002.

Bad Candidates or Bad Seats?

Several factors which are potentially influential on electoral outcomes have been discussed so far in this paper. These include the candidate's sex, age, profession, political experience and incumbency status. Although we have seen some evidence to suggest that sex and incumbency status do not have a large bearing on a candidate's electoral success, there remains the question of whether women's poor performance in certain seats was because they were bad candidates or because they were placed in particularly difficult seats. The above five factors were therefore run through a regression analysis to determine the degree to which each of these factors influenced the winning candidate's



electoral performance. In order to allow these candidate-specific variables to be assessed independent of the effects of party and safety of seat, these two factors are included as control variables. The results are reported in Table 6.¹⁰

These results clearly refute the claims that sex, incumbency status or any other personal qualities of the candidate are major factors in determining how well a candidate performs at the polls. Only the candidate's party and the safety of seat were significant factors, showing that the success of female candidates at the polls relies upon the good will of parties to place women in winnable seats. The responsibility for the sharp decrease between the percentage of women candidates and the percentage of women elected therefore lies squarely at the feet of political parties.

Does Parity Extend to *Suppléants*?

The final area to be explored is that of *suppléants*. A *suppléant* is a substitute deputy, elected at the same time as the effective deputy. Due to the incompatibility of parliamentary and executive office, *suppléants* remove the need for by-elections every time a government is formed or re-shuffled. They also step in if the effective deputy dies or retires for non-political reasons such as ill-health. A fair number of *suppléants* will therefore be sitting in the National Assembly at any one time; in August 2003, 4.2 per cent of deputies were *suppléants*, and a further 9.5 per cent of deputies had served as *suppléants* in the past. Being a *suppléant* can thus be an effective route into the National Assembly. As such, the gender balance of *suppléants* can be used as an indicator of the long-term attitude of parties towards female politicians.

In 2002, women comprised just over 30 per cent of *suppléants*, which compares well to the percentage of women in the National Assembly but still

Table 6 Influencing factors on the winner's margin of victory¹¹

<i>Influencing factors</i>	<i>Unstandardized coefficients, beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
(Constant)	2.015 (0.330)	6.113	0.000
Left/right coalition	0.876 (0.091)	9.668	0.000**
Safety of seat	-1.139 (0.128)	-8.877	0.000**
Sex of winning candidate	-2.21E-02 (1.21)	-0.182	0.855
Age (grouped)	2.831E-02 (0.048)	0.596	0.552
Political experience	2.520E-02 (0.076)	0.330	0.741
Profession	5.822E-02 (0.058)	1.001	0.317
Incumbency status	-0.131 (0.134)	-0.972	0.332

Dependent variable: Margin of victory (percentage lead of winner over runner up). $R^2 = 0.330$, ** $P \leq 0.01$ * $P \leq 0.05$.

Unstandardized coefficients; standard errors in parentheses.



falls some way short of parity. Despite the relatively high number of female *suppléantes*, the majority of deputies nominated to the government have been replaced with men. Only four out of the 20 male ministers have been replaced with female *suppléantes*, and each of the four female ministers has been replaced by a man. As the female deputy for Yvelines (3) stood down in late 2002 and was replaced by a man¹², the total number of women in the National Assembly actually went *down* and for more than a year stood at 70, or 12.1 per cent (this figure has subsequently returned to its June 2002 level of 71 women, or 12.3 per cent, only due to the unexpected death of an deputy and his replacement with a female *suppléante*).¹³ It would seem, then, that the opportunity of using *suppléantes* to bolster the number of women in the National Assembly has been wasted in France. As the electoral success of the UMP was widely expected, and the composition of the government contained few surprises,¹⁴ it is no accident that the majority of *suppléants* who have taken up office are male. Even in the world of substitute deputies, women have been relegated to the sidelines.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the findings discussed in this paper do not bode well for parity. There is evidence that women would fare little better under a left-wing majority than they have done under the current right-wing coalition. Parties have failed not only to implement parity in terms of number of candidacies, but also have tended to place women disproportionately in difficult or unwinnable seats, causing the proportion of women to drop even further between selection and election. This creates the false impression that women do not perform well at the ballot box, as the General Secretary of the Observatoire de la Parité explains: 'The argument that men make better candidates is an argument *a posteriori*; women are often fielded in the toughest constituencies'.¹⁵

The emphasis on incumbents also seems surprising given the heavy losses sustained by incumbents at each election as the French swing from the right to the left and back again. Even where candidates are not incumbents, parties have prioritized male candidates. The sex of a candidate appears to be more important to parties than the candidate's age, profession or political experience, implying that the selection process remains biased against women. This bias carries through into the choice of *suppléants*. This is despite the fact that sex does not appear to have a significant bearing on election results.

In conclusion, these results therefore imply that the problems for parity have roots which go far beyond the circumstantial factors surrounding the 2002 elections. If party behaviour does not change before the next legislative election, the poor performance of 2002 may well be repeated. The events of 2002 may not have been helpful for women, but even had the circumstances



been more favourable — a stronger performance by parties of the left, greater accumulation of experience by women in local politics, more time to implement parity — the results might not have been very different. The excuses provided by parties as justification for the low number of women elected are thus proven to be inadequate. This suggests that a ‘quick-fix’ solution such as parity may not be sufficient to resolve the deep-rooted reluctance of parties to open the doors to female politicians. If gender equality is to be achieved in French politics, a radical rethink of the current ‘parity’ law is required.

Notes

- 1 I would like to offer a very big thank you to Rosie Campbell, Peter John and Joni Lovenduski for their time, support and encouragement, and for all their helpful comments.
- 2 See, for example, the special edition of *Revue Politique et Parlementaire* no. 1020-1021, Sept–Oct/Nov–Dec 2002.
- 3 Private correspondence from the Parti Communiste Français.
- 4 The primary source of data for this article was the official website of the National Assembly: www.assemblee-nationale.fr. Information about individual deputies was collected from each deputy's homepage within this site and then coded and collated. Deputies' professions were ranked using the same ranking system as was used on the website. Election data were also obtained through this site; the vote percentages are for valid votes cast. The age of candidates is calculated from their date of birth and is their age on 16 June 2002, the date of the second round of the election. The political experience measure takes into account whether they have held office at government, parliamentary and/or local office. Parliamentary office includes a seat in either chamber of Parliament; local office includes any mandate at regional level or below.
- 5 These results also indicate that, although no major party achieved parity, they all selected substantially more female candidates in 2002 than in 1997, demonstrating that parity did still have a significant effect.
- 6 This term is used by Norris and Lovenduski to denote ‘candidates selected for an open seat previously held by their own party, where the previous MP retired’ (Norris and Lovenduski, 1995, 24).
- 7 There are some cases in Britain where this has been known to happen, but only at a very informal and non-systematic level, usually when a female opponent stands against a female incumbent. However, no formal deals are known to have taken place between parties to this effect.
- 8 The categories of profession used for Figure 1 are based on the French model of classification employed by the National Assembly. For the sake of consistency, I have adhered to the classification which they use, which can be obtained from www.assemblee-nationale.fr/12/tribun/csp2.asp.
- 9 To test this theory more conclusively would require information about the pool of candidates for each seat to explain why party selectors made the choices that they did. In the absence of this information the results are speculative rather than conclusive.
- 10 When conducting the regression, profession was ranked into three categories according to status. Political experience was ranked into four categories: candidates with experience at all levels (governmental, parliamentary and local); candidates who have held parliamentary and local office; candidates who have only held local office; and candidates with no previous electoral mandate. Age was grouped.
- 11 A Breusch–Pagan–Godfrey (BPG) test indicated the presence of heteroscedasticity in the regression. This was greatly reduced, but not completely eliminated, by logging the dependent variable (BPG score was 22.239, compared to a critical χ^2 of 18.55 at $P \leq 0.005$).



- 12 www.assemblee-nationale.fr. The man in question was elected in a by-election rather than being a suppléant.
- 13 Accurate as of March 2004.
- 14 The government was largely based on a government put into place prior to the election, following the resignation of the socialist Prime Minister (Lionel Jospin) after his defeat in the presidential election two months earlier
- 15 Mme Sénac-Slawinski, quoted in *Le Monde* 13.07.02

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