



How a High Proportion of *Candidates* Becomes a Low Proportion of *Députées*: A New Model to Forecast Women's Electoral Performance in French Legislative Elections

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Since France introduced the 'parity' law, the percentage of women candidates has increased significantly while the percentage of women elected has trailed behind. This makes it hard for the electorate to know how women candidates will translate into women elected, or to judge which party is most likely to honour its commitments to parity. This is particularly the case as parties often field women in the most challenging seats. This paper introduces a model to forecast how many women would be elected to the National Assembly under a variety of potential electoral outcomes. Using the example of the 2007 elections, the paper demonstrates how the conversion of candidates to seats can be forecast prior to the election in order to give a clearer indication of party behaviour towards women, as well as illuminating what the outcome would have been under a left-wing victory. *French Politics* (2008) 6, 152–165. doi:10.1057/fp.2008.4

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Introduction

A variety of techniques exists for forecasting elections, but one thing that these techniques tend to have in common is their intended outcome — to predict, based on variables such as economic and polling data, which party or individual candidate will win an election. In the case of French elections, forecasts tend to focus on the victorious presidential candidate, as it is likely that whoever wins the presidential election will go on to win a comfortable parliamentary majority. This paper deviates from this general pattern in two ways. Firstly, the focus of the paper is not the presidential but the legislative elections. Secondly, the main focus is not to establish which party would emerge victorious, but to determine how many women would win seats under different electoral scenarios. As such, the paper does not attempt to forecast how many seats would be won by each party in the legislative elections, but



rather to illustrate how many women would be elected under different outcomes. In other forecasting techniques, known data (such as popularity scores or economic variables) are used to predict unknown data (voter choices and electoral outcomes). This technique, by contrast, combines known data (the sex of candidates and the previous performance of parties in each seat) with unknown data (electoral outcomes) to model how many women would be likely to win seats under a range of different electoral scenarios. Indeed, this paper breaks the tradition of electoral forecasting in that it uses a conditional model where the unknown condition is the electoral outcome itself (Lewis-Beck, 2005, 146).

If this paper does not actually forecast the victor of an election, can it really be considered electoral forecasting? Furthermore, what is the point of producing models for multiple electoral scenarios, only one of which would end up corresponding to reality? Why not just wait until after the election to calculate the number of women elected? The answer to these questions lies in the topical, and often deceptive, way in which French parties field women candidates. Although obliged by the 'parity' law to field an equal number of men and women candidates, the larger parties opted in 2002 to pay substantial financial penalties rather than respect this obligation (Zimmerman, 2003).¹ Parties also placed women disproportionately in difficult or unwinnable seats, as the law specifies only the required number of women candidates without any provision for how many women will be elected. This led to a significant disparity between the percentage of women candidates and the percentage of women elected. As a result, it is almost impossible to predict how many women are likely to be elected based solely on the percentage of women candidates. Although parties of the left tend to field more women candidates than parties of the right, there is such variation between all parties in the proportions of women candidates that actually get elected that this is of limited utility in forecasting party performance or the likely number of women to be elected. For example, in 2002, the UMP and UDF each put forward just under 20% women candidates, but this resulted in 10.1% women elected for the UMP compared to only 3.4% (one woman) for the UDF (Zimmerman, 2003, 47). It is also difficult to determine whether women perform badly in elections because they are poor candidates or because they are in difficult seats. Finally, it is difficult to distinguish between a party that is offering genuine opportunities for women and one that is merely paying lip-service to the law by fielding large numbers of women candidates in unwinnable seats.

Modelling how percentages of women candidates might translate into percentages of women elected under different electoral scenarios thus serves three purposes. Firstly, it allows voters an advance idea of how well parties are actually performing for women. With women voters comprising more than half the electorate, parties might receive an electoral penalty from women voters if



it were revealed that their high proportions of women candidates concealed an underlying tendency to place women in unwinnable seats. This, in turn, might provide an electoral incentive to parties to make a greater effort to select women in winnable seats. Secondly, the models illustrate differences between parties more clearly than a simple post-election model, for — as explained below — the vulnerability of women candidates means that a small difference in a party's performance can have an exaggerated effect on the proportion of women elected. Thirdly, the models illustrate how women candidates might perform, based on the party's strength in their seat and its performance at the election, independent of candidate effects. The closer the actual result is to the predicted result, the less likely it is that candidate effects (and notably candidate sex) might have swayed the outcome. Conversely, a large deviation from the predicted score might indicate that voters were influenced by a candidate's sex.

This paper begins with a more detailed explanation of the techniques used to produce the forecasting models. The models are then discussed and used to illustrate the questions raised above, such as discrepancies between percentages of candidates and seats, differences between parties, and any differences between the predicted and actual outcomes. As this is the first time that such a technique has been applied, it is also important to consider the limitations of the model and potential for refinements and further developments. This forecasting technique may have wider implications for studies of candidate selection, political renewal and women in politics.

Forecasting How Many Women Will be Elected

When trying to estimate how many women will be elected, it is not sufficient to look at the levels of women candidates, as these tend to be much higher than the levels of women elected due to the tendency by French parties to place women disproportionately in unwinnable seats. This is partly a reflection of the high levels of male incumbents (and, in some cases, former incumbents)² who occupy the most winnable positions, although this paper will demonstrate that men also get the lion's share of new opportunities. It is thus necessary to consider the winnability of the seats in which women candidates are standing in order to measure their likelihood of electoral success.

This paper uses the previous electoral history of each seat to determine the likely swing required to overturn the seat in 2007. The sex of the candidate most likely to win from the left and from the right in each seat is also noted. It is then possible to determine, based on the predicted level of swing from right to left, whether the winning candidate will be of the right or the left, and hence what this candidate's sex will be. The sum of these candidates then provides an



overall forecast of how many women would be elected at each forecast level of swing. This is a fairly straightforward forecasting technique; the dependent variable is the level of swing, with other variables being stable. Rather than attempting to predict the level of swing, five alternative models are offered to illustrate how different performances by parties would result in different outcomes for women.

A major unknown variable at the time of forecasting was the outcome of the Presidential election. Since the harmonization of the presidential and legislative election cycles, and the inversion of the electoral calendar so that the presidential elections precede the legislative elections, the latter have become dominated by the former. The successful candidate in the presidential elections can reasonably hope to go on to achieve a parliamentary majority; indeed, Chirac explicitly sought this in 2002 and created the UMP party as a vehicle for a parliamentary majority.³ As a consequence, the most significant variable in predicting the outcome of the legislative elections would be the result of the presidential elections. A victory for Sarkozy would be likely to result in victory for the UMP two months later; conversely, a victory for Royal might have induced another *vague rose* for the PS. A small difference in vote scores at the presidential elections might be converted into a substantial lead for the party of the successful candidate. In the face of this uncertainty, five different possible outcomes were modelled. As is explained below, these models also offer theoretical insights, demonstrating the tactics deployed by different parties.

Given the landslide majority achieved by the Right in 2002, and the subsequent unpopularity of the incumbent government, a further swing to the right seemed unlikely at the time that the forecasts were made. The lowest forecast is therefore made at a swing of 0% to the left. This swing assumes a resurgence of popularity for the UMP following a victory for Sarkozy in the presidential election, allowing them to maintain the majority obtained in 2002. This model illustrates how many women would be elected if parties won the same seats in 2007 as in 2002. Under such a scenario, male incumbency would be expected to pose a problem, with limited prospects for political renewal, although any increase in the levels of women from 2002 to 2007 would be indicative of an effort made by parties to replace male incumbents with women candidates.

The second model uses a swing of 3% to the left. This might occur in a scenario where Sarkozy achieved a modest victory that was sufficient to carry the UMP through to victory (a 3% swing to the left would leave the UMP with a majority of 31 seats), but without repeating the emphatic victory of 2002. Even a significantly reduced majority would represent a considerable achievement for the UMP, as it would be the first party to win two successive elections since the 1970s.



In the event of a victory for Royal, a majority for the PS in the legislative elections would be a more likely outcome. In the previous four elections, the victorious party achieved an average swing of between 5 and 8% in their favour. So models are provided at swings of 5 and 8% to the left to illustrate how women would perform under a modest or a landslide victory for the left.

Finally, an additional model is provided at a swing of 10% to the left. This is a hypothetical model of purely theoretical value; a swing of 10% was never a realistic or achievable outcome. Rather, the purpose of this model was to demonstrate how many women candidates were placed in seats that were unwinnable in any realistic electoral scenario. Any seat requiring a swing of greater than 8% could be considered almost completely unwinnable for the challenging candidate.

Before proceeding to the findings, a caveat should be noted. At the time that the original forecasts were made in March 2007, parties had not yet provided complete and final candidate lists. The most complete list was provided by the UMP. Scant data were available for the UDF and PCF, and the split of the UDF into the Nouveau Centre and MoDem had not yet taken place. The list of candidates for the Verts was incomplete and did not contain details of the candidates in several of the seats in which the Verts perform best. Information about the PS candidates was more readily available, and this along with the UMP data enabled forecasts to be made as these two parties between them filled the majority of the seats in the National Assembly. The PS lists were not complete, however, partly due to ongoing bargaining with potential coalition partners such as the PRG. The forecasts were therefore made with incomplete data, and this may have hampered their accuracy slightly, although the number of cases affected was sufficiently low that it did not change the overall picture.⁴

Findings: More Women, But Not Parity

The first stage of the study looked at the percentage of women candidates fielded by each party. Despite arguing above that this is not a good indicator of the percentage of women to be elected, it is still a valuable indicator of how party performance has changed, and hence of the general direction in which each party was headed. It is also revealing to see whether there were any differences between the claims made by parties of how many women they would put forward, and the final result.

In the case of the UMP, they originally claimed that they would have at least 30% women candidates (author's interview with M. Zimmerman, 2005; *Le Monde* 05.07.06, 19.05.07). This represented an improvement on their previous performance but a far cry from the legal requirement of 50%. By March 2007



Table 1 PS candidates in target seats

<i>Sex of candidate</i>	<i>Total winnable seats</i>	<i>Candidate type</i>	
		<i>Former incumbents</i>	<i>New candidates</i>
Male	57	26	31
Female	47	7	40
Total	104	34	71

These are seats won by the PS in 1997 but not in 2002. ‘Former incumbents’ are defined here as candidates who held the seat from 1997 to 2002 and then lost it in the 2002 election.

this figure had fallen to 27.8%, and the final total was only 26.6% (OPFH, 2007)⁵. This suggests that women candidates were discarded in favour of men in the run-up to the election. The PS performed better, with their promise of parity almost achieved; by March 2007 they had selected 45.5% women and the final figure actually rose to 46.5% women. This was largely achieved through a system of reserving seats for women. Nearly 25% of the seats won in 2002 were reserved for women in 2007 (compared to 16.2% in 2002), suggesting that the PS prioritized women in seats where the incumbent had stood down, and may also have encouraged incumbents to stand down to make way for women. An additional area of interest for the PS was their target seats — seats that they had won in 1997 but lost in 2002, as these would be the seats that they would be most likely to hope to regain in 2007. These seats had the additional advantage of not having a Socialist incumbent, and hence side-stepping the problem of male incumbency that has inhibited women’s entry into politics. Given the fact that many winnable seats were occupied by a male incumbent, these target seats would be the ideal opportunity to compensate for this through fielding a majority of women. Table 1 reveals that this is not in fact the case. This is partly due to the problem of former incumbents, namely candidates who lost their seats in 2002 and were hoping to regain them in 2007, a majority of whom were men. Women did form the majority of candidates in the target seats without former incumbents, but not at levels high enough to redress gender imbalances elsewhere.

Table 2 Seats won where the winning candidate was not the incumbent

<i>Party</i>	<i>UMP</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>PCF</i>	<i>Verts</i>
Men	35 (80%)	35 (60%)	4 (80%)	1 (100%)
Women	9 (20%)	23 (40%)	1 (20%)	0
Total	44	58	5	1



The post-election results revealed that the PS was not the only party failing to offer sufficient new opportunities to women. As Table 2 reveals, all parties gave the majority of their new opportunities — that is to say, seats won where the candidate was not the incumbent — to men. In fact, the PS compared favourably to other parties in this regard. This therefore served to compound, rather than compensate for, the problem of male incumbency.

Not only did parties give the lion's share of good seats to men, they also gave a disproportionate amount of difficult seats to women. Research on previous elections has indicated that French parties are strategic in placing women candidates in tough seats (Zimmerman, 2003; Sineau and Tiberj, 2007), and that this practice varies depending on whether they are 'attacking' or 'defending' (Murray, 2008). A party is deemed to be attacking if it is out of government and hoping to increase its seat share at the next election. A party is deemed to be defending if it is currently in government and seeking to preserve its majority. As the Right won in 2002, they were defending in 2007, with the Left attacking. The significance of this for women candidates is as follows. When a party is defending, the most advantageous seats are those requiring the largest swing in order to be overturned — the 'safest' seats. By contrast, when a party is attacking, the most desirable seats are those marginal seats requiring the smallest swing. Table 3 shows where right-wing and left-wing candidates were fielded in the seats that were won by the Right in 2002, as these include the seats most likely to change hands in the 2007 election.

Table 3 reveals that there are clear differences in the way seats were allocated to men and women. Within the UMP, 46.5% of women candidates were in the

Table 3 Placement of candidates in seats held by the right prior to the election

<i>Safety of seat^a</i>	<i>Right-wing candidates (defending)</i>		<i>Left-wing candidates (attacking)</i>	
	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
Very safe	23 (8.5%)	5 (11.6%)	10 (6.8%)	14 (9.6%)
Fairly safe	86 (31.9%)	10 (23.3%)	35 (25%)	51 (34.9%)
Could swing	56 (20.7%)	8 (18.6%)	32 (22.9%)	32 (21.9%)
Vulnerable	58 (21.5%)	12 (27.9%)	32 (22.9%)	30 (20.5%)
Marginal	47 (17.4%)	8 (18.6%)	31 (22.1%)	19 (13.0%)
Total	270 (100%)	43 (100%)	140 (100%)	146 (100%)

Right-wing candidates were based on the UMP candidates plus a few UDF candidates in seats considered likely to be won by the UDF. Left-wing candidates were based on the candidates fielded by the party most likely to win in that seat based on performance in the 2002 election, subject to the availability of data.

^aSafety of seat is defined as follows: very safe = >15% lead; fairly safe = 8–15% lead; could swing = 5–8% lead; vulnerable = 2–5% lead; marginal = <2% lead.



two categories of seat that would be overturned with a swing of less than 5%, compared to 38.9% of men. Meanwhile 40.4% of men were in the seats with a margin of more than 8%, compared to 34.9% of women. To put this in perspective, France had an average swing over the preceding three elections of between 4.9 and 8.5%, demonstrating that women were disproportionately on the front line.

The same can be said of women in the PS, although the data need to be read the other way round. In this case, the more marginal the seat, the better. Nearly half (45%) of men were in the two most winnable categories compared to only 33.5% of women. Conversely, 44.5% of women were in the most unwinnable seats, compared to 31.8% of men. As none of these seats was held by an incumbent this cannot be used as an explanatory variable, suggesting a conscious decision by parties to field women in seats they were not likely to win.

So how did the placement of women in difficult seats translate into electoral outcomes? The models referred to above were used to produce the results in Table 4.

Table 4 demonstrates that whatever the swing forecast, the percentage of women elected would have increased substantially from the 2002 score of 12.3%. The worst case scenario would have seen the levels of women rise to 17.1%, and a modest swing of 3% to the left would have seen this figure rise to the early 20s, which would have raised France considerably in international league tables for women's representation, above Britain for example (which has 19.7% women in its Parliament (www.ipu.org)). In the event of a swing of 8% to the left — similar to that achieved in 1997 — the percentage of women elected would have exceeded 28%.⁶

Table 4 Forecasts of how candidates would translate into seats under different swing scenarios

<i>Swing to left</i>	0%		3%		5%		8%		10%	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
<i>Men women</i>										
Right-wing	332 (87.1)	49 (12.9)	246 (86.9)	37 (13.1)	212 (88)	29 (12)	155 (88.1)	21 (11.9)	118 (88.1)	16 (11.9)
Left-wing	120 (74.1)	42 (25.9)	146 (66.7)	73 (33.3)	184 (66.7)	92 (33.3)	216 (64)	124 (36)	233 (62)	143 (38)
Total	442 (82.9)	91 (17.1)	413 (79)	110 (21)	396 (76.6)	121 (23.4)	371 (71.9)	145 (28.1)	351 (68.8)	159 (31.2)
<i>N</i>	533		523		517		516		510	

Percentages are in parentheses. The percentages are by row for each swing category. For example at 0% swing, women comprised 25.9% of all left-wing candidates. The total number of seats in the National Assembly is 577 but the actual *N* varied according to the availability of the data.



This potential rise in women was very largely attributable to parties of the left, who came much closer than parties of the right to achieving parity. Indeed, right-wing parties were very consistent in their poor performance, with the total proportion of women elected under different scenarios never varying by much more than a percentage point. Women did fare slightly worse in the more unfavourable scenarios for the right, suggesting that they may have been in the most vulnerable seats, but the differences between best and worst case scenario were only slight. In all cases the outcome was a far cry from parity. This was mainly a reflection of the fact that the UMP were defending in 2007, and as such were unlikely to win any new seats. The battlegrounds were located in those seats won by the Right in 2002, the vast majority of which were being defended by the male incumbent. By contrast, the Left were attacking and were therefore able to place women in winnable seats where they did not have an incumbent. A modest swing of 3% would have allowed them to achieve and exceed their promise of 30% women elected. This reflects the fact that they made some space for women in the target seats that they were seeking to win back. In the scenario of an 8% swing to the left (beyond which there are unlikely to be any former incumbents), the percentage of women reached 36%. As this figure included the high levels of male incumbents, a disproportionate number of women must have been present in other seats to redress the balance. Indeed, of the 84 extra seats that the Socialists would win at a swing of 8% rather than 5%, 52 (61.9%) would go to women. This reinforces the finding that women are predominantly located in the seats that are harder to win, and confirms Mateo Diaz's finding that women fare best when their party's performance exceeds expectations (Mateo Diaz, 2002). Nonetheless, the overall picture suggested that good progress was made, in the PS at least. The superior performance of left-wing parties in this regard, even in seats where there were incumbents, reinforces Caul's finding that left-wing parties are more favourable to women's representation than right-wing parties (Caul, 1999).

How did the forecasted results compare to the actual results? The actual election saw Sarkozy take the presidential election, and for a while he looked set to win the legislative elections with an even greater majority than in 2002. In the week between the two rounds of the legislative elections, a scandal over VAT caused a dip in the UMP's popularity that resulted in a more modest victory than expected for the right. The final score was 320 seats for the UMP, compared to 365 seats in 2002, while the PS increased their seat share from 149 seats in 2002 to 189 seats in 2007. In total, this represented a swing of c. 1% to the left. This fell between the first model (0%) and second model (3%) swing. Similarly, the total number of women elected was 107, or 18.5%. This falls between the figure predicted by the first model of 17.1%, and the second model of 21%. Just as the total swing was closer in line to the first model, so was the level of women elected. This suggests that the forecasts offered a fairly accurate



indication of how many women would be elected under different scenarios. A breakdown of the actual results by party is offered in Table 5.

The breakdown of the results by party reveals one slight inaccuracy in the forecasts; the UMP actually elected slightly more women than expected (14.2% instead of 13%), although this had little bearing on the overall result as the PS did not do quite as well as expected (26% instead of 28–29%). This might be explained by the fact that the swing was not uniform across the country, with some left-wing seats falling to the right as well as *vice versa*, meaning that the UMP may have made some unexpected gains in seats contested by women, while the PS may have lost seats held by women that they were expected to win.

Significance of the Findings

Earlier in this paper it was argued that forecasting how many women would be elected would serve three purposes: to demonstrate in advance how percentages of candidates will actually translate into percentages of women elected; to illustrate the real differences between parties, and how this varies depending on the outcome; and to measure whether women are performing in line with expectations. This section will revisit these claims in light of the findings.

Table 5 reveals that the percentages of women candidates remain very elevated compared to the percentages of women elected. The total percentage of women candidates across all seats and parties was 41.6%, but this translated into only 18.5% of seats. Having been duped in the past by promises of parity that failed to result in significant change to the composition of the National Assembly, voters may have been more cynical this time and more aware of the fact that the headline candidate figures would not bear much resemblance to the percentages of women elected. In fact, the electorate may even have underestimated how many more women would be elected in 2007 than in 2002, as the rise in candidates from 2002 was 2.7 percentage points, whereas the rise in women elected was 6.2 percentage points. In either case, these forecasts would allow the electorate to evaluate the claims of parties more accurately and, if

Table 5 Actual performance of women in 2007 election, by party

<i>Party</i>	<i>% Women candidates</i>	<i>% Women elected</i>
PCF	46.5	16.7
Verts	50.4	25
PS	45.5	26
MoDem	36.9	0
Nouveau centre	27.9	0
UMP	26.5	14.2



appropriate, penalize them for making grandiose claims that were not borne out by reality (or indeed reward them for making genuine efforts). For example, the claims made by the UDF that they would achieve a parity of candidates proved to be far less credible than the similar claim made by the PCF, and in both cases these claims were misleading when applied to the number of women elected. Even prior to the UDF's split into two parties, very few of its women candidates were fielded in seats that had any hope of being won. By contrast, the forecasts revealed that the PS were reasonably close to their promises of 50% women candidates with 30% in winnable seats.

This leads into the second insight provided by the forecasts, which was the significant difference between parties. It is not a new phenomenon for parties of the left to show greater commitment to gender parity than parties of the right; the same was true in 2002, and in the law's introduction and passage. What was less evident was the extent to which the election outcome might make a difference for women's representation, as a single election result provides only a snapshot of what might have been. These results demonstrate clearly that women would have fared much better under a left-wing victory than the right-wing victory that actually took place. This is partly due to the fact that a swing to the left would have resulted in seats changing hands, and just as incumbency is a barrier to women's presence, so political renewal facilitates women's entry into politics. The percentage of Socialist women that would have been elected increased in line with the margin of victory for the left, representing a proportional as well as absolute increase in levels of women on the left. This is also a partisan effect; in 2002, the right were attacking and had the opportunity to place women in winnable target seats. Despite the large swing to the right in 2002, the total percentage of women elected by the UMP in 2002 was only 10.3%, and even this figure was achieved only as a result of the scale of the victory, with many of the women who were elected being in difficult seats that they had not been expected to win. By contrast, even though they were defending in 2002, and hence were more affected than the right by the problem of male incumbency, the PS out-performed the UMP in 2002 with 16.2% women elected. If the 2002 result had seen the PS conserve their majority, women would have been elected in greater numbers despite the reduced potential for political renewal (Murray, 2004). With right-wing majorities in both 2002 and 2007, the extent to which women would have fared better under a left-wing victory cannot be seen simply by looking at the actual results. Examining alternative electoral scenarios is therefore a useful tool in illustrating differences between parties, and demonstrating the distinct and cumulative outcomes of partisan and renewal effects.

Finally, the forecasts illustrate whether women are performing in line with expectations, given the performance of their party and the seats in which they were located. A disparity between the forecast and actual outcome might be



suggestive of one of two things; firstly, the forecast may have been unreliable; but secondly, candidates may have performed better or less well than a neutral measure of their likely performance would suggest, and this might be an indication of electoral bias towards women candidates. As the only unknown variable in the forecasts was the swing, and the final outcome corroborated the forecasts, these findings appear to confirm previous studies that suggest that the electorate do not discriminate against women candidates.⁷ All candidates performed reasonably in line with expectations. This is an important point, as one of the reasons why parties were initially reluctant to field more women candidates was due to a fear that they would perform less well than men at the polls (*L'Express* 16.08.02; *Le Monde* 10.05.02; *Le Figaro* 06.01.06; Pionchon and Derville, 2004).

Overall, the models achieved the purposes for which they were created. They provided a reasonably accurate indicator of how candidate levels would translate into electoral outcomes, and how this would vary from one party to the next. They also provided an insight into alternative electoral scenarios and how these would have affected women. Above all, they provided further proof that parties are not placing enough women in winnable seats, especially on the right but also on the left, and it is this that explains the relatively low proportions of women candidates that go on to be elected.

Conclusions: Refining and Expanding the Models

The forecasting technique used in this paper was fairly satisfactory both in terms of its accuracy and its utility. That is not to say that there is no room for improvement. The model suffers from two key deficiencies, one of which is easier to remedy than the other. The first deficiency is that the model uses a single, national measure of swing. This is a rather crude measure that fails to take into account the significant regional variations in swing and party performance around the country. A model that took these variations into account and provided more sensitive forecasts measured first at the regional and then at the national level would be likely to provide more accurate outcomes. The second deficiency is that the models were based, as mentioned above, on incomplete candidate data. This appears to be an unavoidable hazard of forecasting; as with other forecasts, the closer to the election, the easier it is to obtain accurate information, whereas forecasts made several months in advance (in this case, 3 months prior to the election) will be hindered by the limited availability of the data. The increasingly two-party composition of the National Assembly may help in this regard, as the UMP and the PS had provided fairly complete lists by March, but a stronger performance by the parties that had not yet finalized their lists at the time of the forecasts would



potentially have skewed the results. As Whiteley (2005) warns, forecasts are also vulnerable to unexpected developments: in this case, the split of the UDF into two parties was unforeseen at the time of forecasting.

These caveats notwithstanding, the model proved a useful tool for obtaining an advance insight into the gendered composition of the National Assembly. The simplicity and accuracy of the models means that their reproduction in other scenarios and future elections should be possible, although they are particularly suited to the French electoral system, with its tendency towards left-right stand-offs in the second round. An interesting development would be to see whether more complex versions of the model could be devised to account for multi-directional swing, for example in the UK. The forecasts could then be used to expose underlying trends in party behaviour and illustrate to the electorate which parties were really delivering for women and which were merely placing token women candidates in hopeless seats. This would enable campaigners to exert electoral pressure on parties to improve their performance which, in turn, might motivate parties to provide more genuine opportunities for women candidates.

Notes

- 1 This is a consequence of the relatively lenient penalties for non-implementation of the law, whereby the penalty is a reduction in the state subsidy of parties in proportion to their distance from the parity target. Small parties are more constrained by the law but less likely to win seats; larger parties can offset the financial loss through winning more seats.
- 2 Former incumbents are candidates who have won that seat in a previous election but not in the most recent election. This is a fairly common phenomenon due to the volatility of the French electorate, with every election from 1981 to 2002 inclusive featuring a change of government.
- 3 Indeed, the initials UMP initially stood for *Union pour une Majorité Présidentielle* (Union for a presidential majority). The party has since changed its name to *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*.
- 4 The data used have been collected from a variety of sources. Data on the UMP were taken from <http://www.ump-legislatives2007.org/files/ump-investitures2007.pdf>. Data on the PS were primarily collected from http://arnal2007.typepad.fr/legislative/candidats_ps2007.pdf and supplemented with information from www.wikipedia.fr, which was also the main source used for PCF candidates. Data on the Verts were obtained from their official list at http://lesverts.fr/rubrique.php?id_rubrique=125. The data on the final, actual results were taken from the Ministry of the Interior and from the Observatoire de la Parité (OPFH).
- 5 OPFH stands for Observatoire de la Parité entre les Femmes et les Hommes, the official government body set up to consider the question of gender parity in French politics.
- 6 It should be noted that the swing of 7.9% to the left in 1997 followed an unusually high victory for the right in 1993, so it was known to be unlikely that the left would achieve such a score again in 2007.
- 7 Given the caveats about the methodology used, the inaccuracy of the forecasts cannot be ruled out with certainty, but the outcome does not appear to have been affected significantly.



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