

‘Is the Mere Presence of a Strong Female Candidate Enough to Increase the Substantive Representation of Women?’¹

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ABSTRACT

This article posits that the mere presence of a strong female candidate may increase the substantive representation of women. Using the case study of Ségolène Royal in the 2007 French presidential elections, this article argues that if being female appears to confer an electoral advantage, this might lead to a ‘policy contagion’ effect, with male rivals feminising their own agendas in order to compete with a woman. This hypothesis is tested on candidate manifestos to see if Royal’s candidacy has led to the increased substantive representation of women. If so, a conclusion can be drawn that women’s presence can have a positive effect on the substantive representation of women, regardless of whether or not women succeed in winning office.

SUBSTANTIVE representation is usually linked, both conceptually and in the more empirical literature, to descriptive representation. Studies tend to focus on the acts of women in office to determine whether these women act in the interests of other women. More recent research has started to move towards the idea that it is not a critical mass of women that determines the possibility of achieving women’s substantive representation so much as the actions of certain individuals, described as ‘critical actors’, who are able to influence the policy process and mobilise other actors into representing women’s substantive interests.² It is argued here that critical actors do not necessarily have to hold electoral office as long as they are able to fulfil this influential and mobilising role. This article considers the particular example of presidential electoral candidates, arguing that a woman candidate may have a contagion effect on the policies of her male competitors, who may feminise their policy proposals in order to compete electorally with her. This feminisation of policy agendas would result in the increased substantive representation of women’s interests, regardless of whether or not the woman candidate was successful in winning the election. Women’s participation in electoral politics may result in

increased potential for substantive representation for women even if descriptive representation is not ultimately achieved.

The article is organised as follows. First, the concepts of substantive representation are explored more thoroughly, and the hypothesis mentioned before is mapped out in greater detail. The article then uses France's presidential elections of 2007 as a case study to test the hypothesis. These elections have featured, through Ségolène Royal, France's first ever serious woman candidate, and there has been significant emphasis placed on Royal's status as a woman. After explaining the utility of France as a case study, the article considers whether there is any evidence that the male candidates in this election might be motivated to feminise their policy agendas. In particular, the question is examined of whether being a woman appeared to confer any electoral advantage upon Royal that might motivate male opponents to try to offset this advantage through appealing to women and feminist electorates through their policies.³ The theory is then put to the test through an examination of the manifestos of the leading candidates to explore how well the substantive interests of women are being represented. Differences in policy proposals are measured between Royal and her male rivals, and also between the leading candidates in 2007 and the equivalent candidates of 2002 to see if there is any evidence of feminisation of the policy agenda. The findings are something of a curate's egg, with some evidence of an increase in substantive representation, but also evidence to suggest that male candidates adopted far less women-friendly tactics in their attempts to compete with Royal. These tactics and the motivations behind them are explored before offering conclusions on how well the theory holds up in practice.

Substantive representation and 'critical actors'

Most research on substantive representation focuses on actors that are already in a position of authority, e.g. as elected members of Parliament, and is closely linked to the concept of descriptive representation.⁴ However, it is not necessarily the power invested in these actors as office-holders that enables them to act for women, as this power is often limited and compromised by various institutional and party political factors. Rather, it is their ability to mobilise others and to influence others that results in women's substantive representation. Developing the theory of 'critical actors', this article argues that it might not be necessary for women to be in elected office to have this effect, provided they have sufficient resources for influence and mobilisation. Lovenduski⁵ explores the role of 'State Feminists' such as women's policy agencies, and their co-operation with women's movements in helping to achieve feminist goals. This research is valuable in highlighting the influence and capacity for representation of actors located outside the traditional forum of Parliament. This article takes a

slightly different tack and considers the influence of electoral candidates in presidential elections. In this respect, the focus is on the feminisation of the political agenda rather than the feminisation of legislation.⁶ Presidential elections confer a great emphasis on individual candidates rather than on parties and offer a programmatic role to individuals that can allow these critical actors to influence the policy agenda in a way that is not normally possible for electoral candidates. As the next section explains, France is a particularly rich case study for exploring this hypothesis. Before exploring this case study, the hypothesis is explained in greater detail.

In elections where the candidates create rather than follow policy agendas—that is to say, elections where the individuals are the figureheads of their party, such as presidential elections—the mere presence of a woman candidate may have a significant bearing on the policy proposals adopted not only by herself but also by her male competitors. In such an election, the descriptive characteristics of the candidates will be very salient, and the presence of a woman candidate, especially if for the first time, will be conspicuous. If the male candidates in the election perceive that there is any electoral advantage to be had by being a woman candidate, e.g. through appealing to the female electorate, then they may try to offset this advantage by feminising their own policy agendas. If this were the case, the woman candidate would serve as a critical actor by forcing women's issues onto the political agenda and feminising the policy proposals of all candidates, resulting in the increased substantive representation of women regardless of which candidate actually got elected. In the event that the woman candidate lost the election to a male rival, she might still have served the interests of women citizens by feminising the election campaign and forcing other candidates to take an interest in women's issues. Electoral promises made to woo women voters and compete with a woman candidate might then leave a lasting legacy which could provide women's movements and organisations with the opportunity to place prolonged pressure on the successful candidate to honour these promises. This would increase the potential for the substantive representation of women.

Certain conditions need to be met in order for the above premise to work. First, the sex of the woman candidate needs to be of salience to the election. Second, the men candidates need to feel electorally threatened by the woman candidate. The hypothesis is strengthened when these two factors come together, that is to say when it is the fact that the woman candidate is a woman that creates or heightens her electoral threat to her male competitors. Third, the individual candidates need to be of sufficient status and profile that they can control their own policy agendas; ideally they should be leaders or figureheads within their parties that set rather than follow the party's agenda. When united, these conditions would provide candidates with the means and

the motivation to offer women-friendly policies. France provides an ideal case study that meets these conditions because of its presidentialised political regime. As well as being the head of state and having numerous powers over the government, 'the president is also the nation's chief policy-maker' and the government's policy agenda is determined by the programme offered by the victorious presidential candidate.⁷ Candidates also enjoy a certain degree of autonomy from their political parties—they lead rather than follow the policy agenda. As a consequence, election time is the ideal time for activists to try to secure promises and policy offers from the competing candidates, and women's movements have capitalised on this in the past.⁸ Eager to be elected, candidates are responsive to political and electoral pressures.

In 2006–2007, a new form of electoral pressure emerged. Ségolène Royal surprised political commentators and her fellow politicians alike by snowballing in popularity throughout the Socialist primary and going on to win the party's nomination as their presidential candidate. Royal provides a useful case study to test the hypothesis that an electoral candidate can increase the substantive representation of women. First, her position as a serious presidential candidate in France conferred on her significant influence. Second, her status as the first ever serious woman candidate created the opportunity to compare the policy proposals of candidates competing with her to those of the candidates in an all-male field five years ago to measure whether she did, in fact, have a positive effect on the representation of women's interests. Third, as will be explored next, her success in the Socialist primary was largely attributed to the fact that she was a woman, suggesting that other candidates would be threatened by her and feel the need to compete with her on 'women's issues'.

When Royal first expressed an interest in being the Socialist nominee for the presidency, she was very much seen as the outsider, with several male contenders being seen as more likely to succeed. Her opponents made derisory comments about her; e.g. Laurent Fabius infamously asked the question of, if she were elected, 'who would look after the children?' Royal played her sex to her advantage in a number of ways. First, her campaign initially benefited from support and mobilisation by the media, not least because Royal is an attractive woman who boosted sales when placed on the front cover. Her popularity grew much more rapidly outside the party apparatus than within it, with party members mobilising behind her while party colleagues shook their heads in disapproval. This links to the second advantage conferred on Royal of being a woman, namely that she came to be seen as a beacon of political renewal within a France that had become utterly disillusioned with its political leaders. Tens of thousands of new members joined the Socialist party prior to the primary, most of them energised by her candidacy and eager to show her their support (*Le Monde* 1 June 2006). Many new members saw her differences to

her male opponents as an advantage; e.g. one claimed that ‘we need someone who embodies a different way of doing politics. Who else but her?’ while another argued that ‘she is not the best, but she is the most likely to win. The French want change’ (*Le Monde* 31 May 2006). The third way in which she benefited from being a woman was by discrediting her opponents through accusing them of sexism just days before the primary election. Rather than being damaged by their sexist comments, she turned these to her advantage by throwing them back in the faces of her opponents and winning the sympathy of the many people insulted by such remarks. As a result, she went in the space of less than a year from being the outside candidate with little chance of winning to taking more than 60% of the vote in a primary election that saw her defeat two male candidates considered more senior and experienced than her.

For all these reasons, there were genuine grounds to argue that Royal enjoyed an electoral advantage as a result of being a woman. This should, in theory, motivate her male opponents in the presidential election to try to offset this advantage in whatever way they could. Indeed, at the height of Royal’s popularity in October 2006, one of the leading women on the right, Michèle Alliot-Marie, declared that she should be selected as the UMP⁹ candidate as she could ‘neutralise the female advantage’ of Royal and as such would be ‘the only candidate able to beat Ségolène Royal’ (<http://mamblog.free.fr>). Meanwhile, a male colleague within the same party said of Royal’s selection, ‘competing against a woman is a problem we will have to resolve’ (*Le Monde* 19 November 2006).

If Royal’s male opponents felt threatened by the fact that she was a woman, the question then becomes one of measuring how they reacted to that threat. The next section explores whether Royal managed to induce a ‘policy contagion’ effect, whereby her male candidates sought to offset her appeal as a woman candidate by making themselves more attractive to women voters through women-friendly policies.

Did a gendered campaign increase the likelihood of women’s substantive representation?

There is no doubt that gender has played a key role in this presidential election campaign. Royal herself has made no attempt to play down the fact that she is a woman. She has done a number of things throughout her campaign that play on both her sex and her gender.¹⁰ For example, she has frequently drawn on her experience and interests as a mother (she has four children), such as when launching her manifesto and when making a landmark appearance on the French television show ‘J’ai une question à vous poser’, leading journalists to refer to her as the ‘mummy candidate’ (*Le Monde* 21 February 2007; *FT* 23 April

2007). She made it widely known that her first act upon election would be to strengthen the law on domestic violence. Women's issues featured frequently in her discourse and her policy proposals. Only occasionally, however, did she directly appeal to women voters to support her as a fellow woman, and the first time was not until a few days before the tense first round of the election. Threatened by the prospect of being defeated by the (male) centrist candidate, she made the following appeal: 'I would like to address the women out there, I need women's votes... it is time to put an end to centuries of injustice, exclusion, senseless prejudice' (*Le Monde* 16 April 2007). She then went on in the same speech to claim that she saw being a woman as an advantage. She repeated this tactic in the second round of the election, notably encouraging France to elect a woman in her closing speech of the landmark televised debate between the two candidates. Clearly, then, she did her best to use her sex to her advantage. She was also an advocate of women's issues. She gave several women-friendly policies a high profile, including demands for gender equality at work, tougher laws against domestic violence and free contraception for women under the age of 25.

Did her attempts to appeal to the female electorate have a knock-on effect for her rivals? If a 'policy contagion' effect had taken place, there ought to be a visible feminisation of the policy proposals of her two leading male rivals, Nicolas Sarkozy (of the leading party of the right, the UMP) and François Bayrou (of the centrist/centre-right UDF party). The policies of the three candidates are tested here against each other, and also against the policies of the equivalent candidates fielded by the same parties in 2002, to see if there is any evidence of a contagion effect. One methodological obstacle is that French candidates do not tend to produce codified manifestos. Rather, they make a series of claims and statements that together constitute a policy programme that may or may not be 'launched' at some point during their campaign. To facilitate comparison, this article uses manifestos compiled by media commentators based on the various policy claims put forward by each candidate rather than relying on the candidates' own (unreliable) manifestos. For 2002, the article uses detailed programme overviews for all candidates supplied by Yahoo France.¹¹ For 2007, a similar service provided by *Le Monde* is used. Neither source is ideal but using a single source for all three candidates in each election facilitates comparison.

A detailed examination of the manifestos of the three candidates in 2007 reveals little evidence of a contagion effect. Royal had the most feminised manifesto, with the women-friendly policies listed before. In addition, she had several policies that would be of indirect benefit to women. These included raising the minimum wage (which would disproportionately benefit women as women are heavily over-represented amongst those earning the minimum wage), and offering equal rights

to same-sex couples. She also proposed two institutional reforms that would facilitate the entry of women into politics (although she did not explicitly market them as such, their benefits to women are well known and have often featured in the political debates surrounding these reforms). The first was the proposed ban on the 'cumul des mandats' or the practice of holding multiple electoral offices simultaneously (such as mayor, deputy and regional councillor). This practice has enabled the concentration of political power in the hands of men and has limited the opportunities available to women, and as such has been seen as a factor obstructing women's entry into politics. A second reform was the introduction of a form of proportional representation for legislative elections. Women tend to fare better under proportional electoral systems, in France as elsewhere, and this would also facilitate the implementation of France's parity law. This law requires French parties to field an equal number of men and women candidates, and has been implemented relatively effectively in elections using party lists, but does not work well in the single-member districts currently used for legislative elections.

Sarkozy, in contrast, had no concrete proposals whatsoever for women amongst his policies. Bayrou did not fare much better. He had some women-friendly policies in the manifesto on his website (www.bayrou.fr), but these featured so little in his campaign discourse that most of them were not included in the comparative manifesto featured in *Le Monde*. The one policy that did make the headlines was his promise to increase the resources to protect women against domestic violence. His discourse on this topic was more paternalist than that of Royal, with his argument focusing more on protection of women victims and the funding of shelters, while her policies focused more on the penalisation and enforced distancing of violent men.

Not only did the two male candidates offer fewer women-friendly policies than Royal, but there was also no notable feminisation of their policies compared with their equivalent candidates in 2002. Bayrou was the UDF candidate in 2002 as well as 2007, and was concerned then as now with proportional representation, primarily for partisan reasons, as his small party would receive more seats under a proportional system. (His personal manifesto does briefly mention using proportional lists to ensure 50% representation for women in legislative elections, although his party only fielded 36.9% women in the ensuing legislative elections, so this may have been an insincere attempt to make his calls for proportional representation appear less self-interested.) He called for an increase in the minimum wage (which would primarily benefit women) in 2002 but not in 2007. The only significant evidence of feminisation since 2002 has been his policy on domestic violence, perhaps to compete with Royal who has placed a large emphasis on this policy area. Meanwhile, Jacques Chirac—the UMP candidate in 2002—offered a number of policies that could be

deemed to be representing the substantive interests of women. These included policies on equality in the workplace, domestic violence, provision of childcare and an independent administrative body charged with equality issues. Lionel Jospin, the (male) Socialist candidate in 2002, offered a similar range of women-friendly policies, including parental leave, childcare, equality in the workplace and domestic violence. Indeed, the emphasis placed by the Socialist candidate in 2002 as in 2007 on women's issues suggests that this may be a partisan effect as well as a consequence of the candidate's sex, with the left traditionally being more feminist in their policies than the right in France.¹² The offerings of Chirac for women in 2002 may be a sign of contagion from the left rather than a response to the sex of his opponent.

These initial findings suggest, therefore, that there is no evidence to support the theory that an influential woman candidate will result in an increase in the substantive representation of women. If anything, women's interests appear to have played less of a role in the policies of the male candidates in 2007 than in 2002. Reasons for this are considered in the next section. First, an important caveat has to be noted. Two significant events took place during the campaign that were not evident from the manifestos featured in *Le Monde* (although these were updated on 24 April 2007, after the events that follow had taken place), and which cannot be ignored in a discussion of the substantive representation of women in this election.

The first key event was the annual celebration of International Women's Day on 8 March. This was a surprisingly low-key event by French standards in 2007. Sarkozy used this date to declare publicly that he was being supported by Simone Veil. This was a clever and strategic move in two respects. First, Veil is a centrist who might have been expected to support Bayrou, so this was a coup for Sarkozy. Second and more significantly, Veil is also a celebrated feminist who is best known for introducing legalised abortion to France whilst the health minister in the 1970s. Her support instantly gave credibility to Sarkozy as a champion of women's rights, and he continued to take advantage of this later in the campaign.

On 5 April, *Elle* magazine organised a conference entitled 'What women want', held at the prestigious *Institut d'Etudes Politiques* (Sciences Po), at which the eight leading candidates were invited to discuss their policies in favour of women. Bayrou appeared uncomfortable, unable to offer women much more than the promise of a government composed of an equal number of men and women and the threat of sanctions for businesses that discriminated against women. Royal, in contrast, was in her element, elaborating on her women-friendly policies and claiming that 'women's time has come'. Sarkozy, in his characteristic aggressive style, launched a range of policies including legal sanctions against discrimination in the workplace, childcare, a

parity government and offering mothers the choice to stay at home with their children or to work.

The most significant thing about this forum was that it forced the candidates to consider and then take a stance on women-friendly policies. Given the earlier observation that elections are the best time to achieve policy promises, this forum was an effective way of forcing women's issues onto the agenda. With women comprising 53% of the French electorate, candidates will always take such events seriously. Indeed, it could be argued that this event did more to place women's issues on the agenda than Royal's candidature had done, given the emphasis placed on Royal as an emblem of the descriptive more than substantive representation of women. As such, it can be argued that *Elle* magazine was a critical actor here, which would invite further research on the role of the media in influencing the agenda and encouraging pledges concerning the substantive representation of women.

Having been forced to commit to some women-friendly policies, Sarkozy then sought to capitalise on the promises he had made and maximise their electoral purchase. The very next day, he held a press conference where he reiterated and expanded on these promises. On one side of him stood Françoise de Panafieu, one of the leading women within the UMP and someone who has worked with Sarkozy in increasing the role for women within the party.¹³ On the other stood Simone Veil, who personally guaranteed that Sarkozy's promises to women would be met (*Le Monde* 7 April 2007). Sarkozy thus profited both from maximum publicity for his women-friendly policies and from the credibility with women voters that his alliance with Veil had afforded him.

These developments in the latter stages of the campaign can be interpreted in one of two ways. On the one hand, it could be argued that male candidates were beginning to feel under pressure and were forced to revise their original strategies in light of their female competitor. On the other hand, it is more likely that they simply responded to the opportunity created by *Elle* magazine to score some points with women voters, as they would have done in any other election or on any other issue where the opportunity arose. That they did not offer many policies for women until prompted by an external source suggests that it was not a campaign priority.

On the whole, then, the evidence refutes the theory that influential women candidates can increase the substantive representation of women through policy contagion effects. The male candidates did not offer many women-friendly policies until forced to take a stance on women's issues by a magazine. That is not to say that they were indifferent to the fact that they were competing with a woman candidate. Rather, as the next section shows, they chose to deploy different strategies to compete with Royal.

Alternative explanations

There are two key and interlinked reasons why male candidates did not choose to compete directly with Royal for women's votes. The first of these is the idea of 'issue ownership'. This concept, espoused by Budge *et al.*,¹⁴ argues that certain parties 'own' certain issues and that any attempts by other parties to muscle in on these areas will only serve to favour the original party. When applied to the French elections, this theory implies that Royal, as a woman candidate and also as a socialist, would have natural ownership of 'women's issues'. Any attempts by other candidates to compete with her on this turf would only remind the electorate that she, not the other candidates, was the strongest in this area. The best strategy for her rivals would not be to seek to compete with her, as they would not succeed, but rather to avoid the issue as much as possible and prioritise keeping their own strong points on the agenda instead.

Indeed, they were quick to learn that they were best served by advancing an agenda on issues traditionally perceived as 'masculine', such as foreign policy, law and order and immigration that worked more to their advantage than to hers. The preferred strategy of Sarkozy and Bayrou was to discredit Royal and turn her being a woman from an asset to a liability. Assisted by a press that was tired of building Royal up and eager to knock her down, they achieved this with remarkable success. Royal made the mistake of wandering onto policy areas in which Sarkozy was perceived as the stronger and more experienced candidate, including national identity and foreign policy. If anything, policy contagion seemed to go from Sarkozy to Royal rather than vice versa, suggesting that he was more adept at setting the agenda. This led to a 'masculinisation' rather than feminisation of the policy agenda. Throughout the month of January, Royal made a series of gaffes on foreign policy issues for which she was derided by her opponents and vilified by the media. Some of these were traps; e.g. she made an off-the-record comment about the tense issue of Corsica to a journalist posing as a Canadian diplomat that was then widely publicised and used to embarrass her. She was also criticised for failing to respond to an inflammatory comment whilst on a diplomatic mission to the Middle East when her explanation for her non-response was simply that she had not heard it. Other gaffes were more clear indications of Royal's weakness on foreign policy, such as her praise for the Chinese judicial system on the grounds that it was swift! These mishaps were all very costly in electoral terms. By the end of January, Royal's poll ratings had plummeted from a high of 34%¹⁵ to the mid-twenties, from which they never recovered.

Although these errors were costly in themselves, there is no doubt that they were compounded by thinly veiled sexism in the form of attacks on Royal. Her opponents, and sometimes even people within

her own party that resented her success, repeatedly questioned her competence and ability. Despite her impeccable academic pedigree (she is a graduate of the elite ENA) and her tenacious, if at times unpredictable, campaign, she was portrayed as an ignorant and incompetent woman who lacked the stature of a leader and did not have what it took to govern effectively. Her abilities were undermined in a way that would not have been credible with an equivalent male candidate, feeding into historical negative attitudes in France towards women leaders and reminiscent to some extent of the attacks on Edith Cresson, the only French woman to be prime minister.¹⁶ These personal attacks against Royal became embedded in the collective consciousness of the French electorate, with many voters claiming by the first round either that they would not vote for her because she was incompetent, or that they were voting for her because she was a Socialist despite their disapproval of her as a candidate. When compared with her very enthusiastic endorsement by Socialist party members only a few months earlier, this demonstrates the effectiveness of the attempts to discredit her. They were coupled with an undue emphasis on her appearance and disparaging comments about her political style that barely concealed their sexist undertones, such as the claim by the UDF (displayed as a large headline on their website) that 'politics should be about conviction, not seduction', in which they implied that Royal was a pretty face with no concrete ideas (www.udf.org). Indeed, some women were so outraged by the continuous jibes against Royal that they set up their own online petition as a form of protest (www.1milliondefemmessenervent.org). The petition states:

We feel, as women, humiliated by what has been said about [Royal]. I am shocked to see this woman endlessly criticised about her personal qualities and appearance . . . Everything that is said about her, about her voice, her hair, her earrings, her choice of words, . . . her sense of compassion or her harshness, is intended to discredit her, to demonstrate that she does not have a place at the head of the state.

One of the most pernicious consequences of these attempts to discredit Royal was the growing belief that she would not succeed in qualifying to the second round of the election. Despite never falling below second place in the polls and often having a convincing lead over the third placed candidate, she had to endure a long period of questioning whether she could qualify. Part of this was doubtlessly soul-searching by the Socialists following their failure to qualify to the second round in 2002, with Jospin losing to the far-right candidate Le Pen, but these doubts were fuelled by criticisms of Royal and questioning of her ability as a candidate. Bayrou was quick to muscle in on this and began to portray himself as the most credible alternative to Sarkozy, who was as loathed by some parts of the electorate as he was loved by others. A catch-phrase of the election was *le vote utile*, referring to the

idea of voting tactically to ensure that the leading candidates would qualify to the second round rather than voting for one of the many minority candidates. The purpose of the *vote utile* was initially to rally left-wing voters around a unified candidate in the first round and thus avoid a repeat of 2002, where a split left-wing vote amongst a range of candidates was blamed for Jospin's first-round defeat. This should therefore have worked in Royal's favour. However, repeated criticisms and doubts cast over Royal led to a growing number of voters believing that Bayrou might actually be a more strategic option. This was based on the double premise that Bayrou might be more likely to qualify to the second round, and that if he were to do so, he would be more likely than Royal to defeat Sarkozy in the second round. The resulting scenario saw large numbers of left-wing voters believing that they would be better off voting for a centre-right man than a centre-left woman. The initial belief that only a woman could defeat Royal had been turned on its head and people now believed that only a man could defeat Sarkozy. In the absence of a male socialist candidate, many voters turned to Bayrou, leading to his trebling his score in 2007 compared with 2002.

The evidence suggests, then, that rather than trying to compete with Royal by feminising their policy agendas, the male candidates actually shied away from the topic as much as possible and instead pursued an effective strategy of discrediting Royal and turning her sex from an asset into a liability. This does not bode well either for women's descriptive or substantive representation, and disproves the theory of policy contagion, in this case study at least.

The story is not entirely negative, however. Although Royal lost the election, she performed well in the first round and her second round score was comparable with previous Socialist performances. It is likely that she performed as well as any candidate of her party could have hoped given the declining left-wing electorate and the socialist party's long-term state of disarray. Her positive performance may in part be due to the fact that, in both rounds of the election, Royal benefited from a gender gap of two to three percentage points. Although Sarkozy received more votes overall from both men and women, Royal received a higher proportion of her vote share from women (especially younger women), while the majority of Sarkozy's voters were men. This exceeds partisan gender gaps and shows that Royal did succeed in appealing to women voters. Another potential positive to be drawn is the dramatically increased level of turnout, which almost equalled the French record in the first round. Some of this is no doubt a result of the exciting and closely-fought contest, and a wish to avoid once more letting Le Pen in through the back door by not bothering to vote until the second round. However, an additional explanation may be the presence of a woman candidate. Royal certainly had a mobilising effect in the Socialist primary, with many people joining the party purely in

order to vote for her. Research conducted in Britain found that voters were significantly more likely to turn out in elections where there was a woman MP.¹⁷ This suggests that Royal's presence in the election may have been a contributory factor to the high levels of turnout. Royal's candidature may therefore be a good thing for French democracy even if it has been a mixed blessing for French women.

This article has argued that it might be possible for women candidates to effect the substantive representation of women through their mere presence in the electoral arena regardless of whether or not they are elected, by forcing women's issues onto the agenda at election time and forcing male opponents to feminise their policy proposals. In order for policy contagion to take effect, the woman candidate would need to be in a position of influence and able to mobilise others, and would need to be perceived as a serious electoral threat by her male opponents, with part of this threat being linked to her being a woman. France appeared to offer the ideal case study to test this hypothesis, with the presidential elections conferring a great deal of policy influence on the candidates, and Royal entering the main campaign as a very strong candidate who was clearly benefiting electorally from being a woman.

However, the example of France did not support the hypothesis, and in fact refuted it. Instead of trying to compete with Royal, her male opponents sought (somewhat successfully) to discredit her. Being a woman was effectively transformed from an electoral advantage to a liability. Meanwhile, perhaps in line with the issue ownership argument, male candidates mostly avoided any mention of women-friendly policies, and only did so once the issue was forced onto the agenda by a woman's magazine. The campaign agenda was largely dominated by issues perceived to be 'masculine', such as foreign policy, and when Royal spoke about women, her rivals for the most part chose not to follow suit. Sarkozy did, however, use a feminist figurehead to spearhead the women-focused aspects of his campaign, perhaps recognising that Veil would be a more credible opponent to Royal on these issues than himself.

Obviously, this is only one case study and it would be useful to see if similar findings occurred elsewhere, for instance in the United States, where the status of the election is similar and Hillary Rodham Clinton is following Royal's footsteps. For now, the French example suggests that women candidates may only be able to represent women substantively if they succeed in winning their election and hence representing them descriptively; the 'policy contagion' hypothesis was not borne out by the evidence. The potential for the substantive representation of women may not be increased and may actually be reduced by an unsuccessful woman candidate if her presence dissuades her opponents from broaching gendered issues. Women candidates may have beneficial qualities in other ways, such as mobilising female electorates,

but other critical actors such as the media may be more influential in persuading male candidates to consider questions concerning the substantive representation of women.

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- 2 S. Childs and M.L. Krook, 'The Substantive Representation of Women: Rethinking the "Critical Mass" Debate', presented at the Annual Meeting of the Political Studies Association, 2006.
- 3 It is acknowledged that not all women are feminists and not all feminists are men.
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- 5 J. Lovenduski, *State Feminism and Political Representation*, CUP, 2005.
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- 7 A. Knapp and V. Wright, *The Government and Politics of France*, Routledge, 2006, p. 111. This is less the case in *cohabitation*, i.e. when the President and Prime Minister are from different parties, in which case the government has a lot more autonomy. However, the electoral system was redesigned in 2002 to bring the presidential and legislative elections into sync with the presidential elections directly preceding the legislative elections, the aim being to give the president a parliamentary majority in order to avoid further periods of *cohabitation*.
- 8 J. Mossuz-Lavau, *Femmes/Hommes pour la parité*, Presses de Sciences Po, 1998, p. 51. For example, pressure on candidates in the 1995 election resulted in the parity legislation of 1999.
- 9 The UMP is the main party of the centre-right; the PS (socialists) are the main party of the centre-left.
- 10 There is no room to offer a detailed discussion of the sex/gender distinction, but this distinction is based on the idea that sex is the biological difference between men and women while gender is the socially constructed difference between male and female.
- 11 These can be found here: <http://cr.middlebury.edu/public/french/Lexique/Elections/fr.news.yahoo.com/presidentielle/Yahoo.htm>
- 12 K. Opello, *Gender Quotas, Parity Reform and Political Parties in France*, Lexington, 2006.
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