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**Parity Democracy**  
Women's Political Representation  
in Fifth Republic France



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# Abbreviations

CNRS	Conseil National de la Recherche Scientifique
CLEF	Coordination française pour le Lobby Européen des Femmes
LEF	Lobby Européen des Femmes
MDF	Mouvement démocratique féminin
MLF	Mouvement de libération des femmes
NGO	non-governmental organizations
PCF	Parti communiste français
PACS	pacte civil de solidarité
PS	Parti socialiste
PR	proportional representation
RPR	Rassemblement pour la République
SFIO	Section française de l'Internationale ouvrière
UDF	Union pour la Démocratie Française
UFCS	Union féminine civique et sociale
UMP	Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle/Union pour un Mouvement Populaire

# Introduction

Although the French Revolution placed France in the vanguard of countries that adopted liberal representative democracy, the country has been a laggard when it comes to women's political rights.<sup>1</sup> For instance, French women were officially awarded the political right to vote and run for office by an Order-in-Council of General Charles de Gaulle in 1944 – that is, quite late compared to Western nations such as Finland (1906), New Zealand (1919), the United States (1920), Sweden (1921), and the United Kingdom (1928).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, French women have been severely under-represented in all elected assemblies, especially the National Assembly and the Senate. After achieving a high of 6.8 percent (42/618) in November 1946, women's share of seats in the National Assembly hovered around 5 percent throughout the postwar period. The proportion of women in the National Assembly did not reach 10 percent until 1997. Women's presence in the Senate followed a similar pattern. After achieving a high of 7 percent (22/314) in 1947, women's share of seats was less than 5 percent throughout the postwar period and did not increase to 10 percent until 2001. As of April 2010, women hold 18.9 percent (109/577) of seats in the National Assembly, a statistic that places France in sixty-sixth place in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's rankings, and 21.9 percent (75/343) of seats in the Senate.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, French women have had tremendous difficulties exercising their right of eligibility.

Why did women's representation in France's two national chambers suddenly double in the 1990s and 2000s? One key reason is that women's, feminist, and parity associations mobilized throughout the 1990s around the idea of gender parity to increase women's presence in elected assemblies. Françoise Gaspard – a parity advocate (or paritarist) and one of the authors of the 1992 manifesto *Au pouvoir, citoyennes! Liberté, égalité, parité* – defines gender parity in electoral politics as “perfect equality

in democratic representation,” meaning that all elected assemblies should include an equal number of women and men.<sup>4</sup> First launched and put in practice by German and French environmentalist and feminist groups in the 1980s, the concepts of gender parity in politics and parity democracy – a democracy in which elected assemblies have gender balance and in which power is shared equally by women and men – were examined and publicized at a seminar organized in 1989 by the Council of Europe. Published three years later, *Au pouvoir, citoyennes!* – which was co-authored by Claude Servan-Schreiber and Anne Le Gall – presented and opened debates on gender parity as a founding principle of French democracy on par with liberty and equality. Realizing that gender parity could help to end French women’s perennial under-representation in politics, women’s, feminist, and parity associations began demanding that political parties and elected officials recruit more women and support reforms for greater gender balance in elected assemblies. These activities and more focused proposals to achieve gender parity sparked a lively debate, especially among feminists who discussed whether gender parity would undermine French universalism or correct its male bias.

Following the victory of the Left in the 1997 legislative elections and the appointment of Socialist Lionel Jospin as prime minister, two bills, one constitutional and the other ordinary, were adopted to enhance women’s access to elected assemblies. On 28 June 1999, the National Assembly and Senate gathered in Congress in Versailles and agreed that Article 3 of the Constitution would now state that “the law favours women’s and men’s equal access to elected office” and that Article 4 would specify that political parties were “required to implement this principle.”<sup>5</sup> One year later, on 6 June 2000, a bill detailing the implementation of women’s and men’s equal access to elected office was passed. According to this law, political parties were to present gender-balanced candidate lists in elections conducted according to proportional representation (PR). More precisely, they were to alternate women’s and men’s names in European and some senatorial elections within each consecutive set of six candidates, meaning that parties listing only men as the first three candidates had to then list three women as their next three candidates in regional elections and municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 residents. In legislative elections, which are conducted according to a two-round majoritarian system, the new law required political parties to present an equal number of women and men candidates. If a party failed to do so, the funds it would normally receive

from the state would be reduced proportionally. Stricter provisions were adopted in April 2003 and January 2007. As a result, regional and municipal (in towns with more than 3,500 residents) party lists must strictly alternate women's and men's names, municipal and regional executives must be gender balanced, and parties that fail to present an equal number of women and men candidates in the 2012 legislative elections will face an even greater reduction in state funding.

These gender parity reforms have vaulted France into a leadership position in institutional efforts to increase women's representation in political office.<sup>6</sup> France was the first country to adopt groundbreaking constitutional *and* legislative reforms to feminize its elected assemblies.<sup>7</sup> While the 1944 Order-in-Council rendered French women eligible for political office and granted them the right to vote, the 1999 and 2000 gender parity reforms were designed to enable women to fully exercise their eligibility for office. Thus, one can conclude that these reforms, which represent an important milestone in French women's long-term struggle to gain *and* exercise political rights, are as historically significant as the 1944 Order-in-Council.

Soon after the release of *Au pouvoir, citoyennes!* there was an explosion of writings on gender parity in the study of women in French politics.<sup>8</sup> For instance, the feminist debate about the need (or lack thereof) for gender parity reforms led the editors of the journal *Nouvelles Questions Féministes* to publish two special issues, "La parité 'pour'" in 1994 and "La parité 'contre'" in 1995.<sup>9</sup> Four years later, Michèle Amar gathered thirty-nine newspaper and magazine articles critical of gender parity into a collection titled *Le Piège de la parité: Arguments pour un débat*.<sup>10</sup> In 1994, 1997, and 1998, the proceedings of three conferences devoted to gender parity in politics were published in books edited by Gisèle Halimi's association, Choisir la cause des femmes; Françoise Gaspard; and Jacqueline Martin, respectively.<sup>11</sup> By the late 1990s, Janine Mossuz-Lavau had written *Femmes/hommes pour la parité*, in which she made the case for gender parity in politics and the various possible constitutional and legislative reforms to implement it, and Philippe Bataille and Françoise Gaspard had completed an empirical study of Socialist women candidates and, more precisely, their party's efforts to respond to the parity demand as it prepared for the 1997 legislative elections.<sup>12</sup> Around the same time, two reports on gender parity, one authored by Gisèle Halimi and the other by Dominique Gillot, were released.<sup>13</sup> Up until 2000, with the exception of Danielle Haase-Dubosc's and Jill Lovecy's

articles and Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia's final chapter of *Women in Politics in France, 1958-2000*, the bulk of works on gender parity were written in French.<sup>14</sup>

Following the passage of the constitutional and legislative reforms on women's equal access to elected office, a number of scholarly articles and books began to appear in English. The works published since 2000 tend to focus either on the extra-parliamentary mobilization for gender parity that led up to the reforms or the impact of the reforms on the number of women in elected office. In the case of the former, including explorations of the debates that gender parity triggered among intellectuals and elected representatives, are books by Katherine Opello and Joan Wallach Scott and articles by Amy Mazur, Karen Bird, Sandrine Dauphin and Jocelyne Praud, Françoise Picq, Manon Tremblay, Claudie Baudino, Laure Bereni, and Mona Lena Krook.<sup>15</sup> Since the 2001 municipal elections, the first elections conducted according to the new parity rules, scholars such as Sandrine Dauphin, Karen Bird, Jane Freedman, Rainbow Murray, Priscilla Southwell and Courtney Smith, and Mariette Sineau have provided statistical analyses of local and national elections that invariably point to the limited impact and, in some cases, failure of the reforms.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, within this body of literature, the works of Raylene Ramsay and Mona Lena Krook stand out because of their original approach. In her literary and historical analysis of autobiographical, academic, and journalistic texts by and about high-profile women politicians, Ramsay, who also relies on interviews with political women, shows how these writings have shaped the parity debate and its outcome.<sup>17</sup> While most of the sources mentioned above draw almost exclusively on France's domestic context, Krook highlights external influences – in particular, the Council of Europe and the green movement – on the French parity movement, an important insight that is also made in recent French-language works by Eléonore Lépinard and Réjane Sénac-Slawinski.<sup>18</sup>

Although both Krook and Drude Dahlerup equate France's parity reforms to candidate gender quotas, their comparative studies of gender quotas in different parts of the world – namely, Dahlerup's edited volume *Women, Quotas and Politics* and Krook's *Quotas for Women in Politics* – suggest intriguing directions for future French research on parity.<sup>19</sup> More specifically, these studies highlight the need for more research that adopts a comparative perspective and explores external influences on the adoption of parity reforms and their impact.<sup>20</sup>



The literature on gender parity in French politics therefore comprises French and English writings that rely on secondary and primary sources to explain the movement for gender parity, the adoption of the parity reforms, and the impact of these reforms on women's representation in elected assemblies. The primary sources used have primarily been statistics available on the websites of the Observatoire de la parité (France's watchdog on gender parity) and the National Assembly, the parliamentary debates on the two parity bills, and numerous articles in the press by advocates and opponents of parity.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, with the exception of Ramsay's *French Women in Politics*, none of the works draw on in-depth interviews with parity advocates and detractors.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence, the perspectives of the women who have been involved in this historical fight to exercise their right of political eligibility have remained largely absent from the literature on gender parity in French politics.

To highlight the different perspectives of parity advocates and detractors and the pivotal roles that various European and French actors and associations played in the adoption, implementation, and extension of French parity reforms, this book employs both qualitative and quantitative primary sources. The qualitative sources include open-ended interviews conducted in the early 2000s in Paris. There are two sets of interviews, the first conducted in the early 2000s (used only in Part 1) and the second in the late 2000s (used only in the essay) with nine women from both the Left and the Right who were active in the movement for and debates about parity.<sup>23</sup> We also explore eight key European and French documents that articulate the demand for gender parity in politics, the legal provisions for its implementation in the electoral sphere, and the more recent extension of parity to other spheres. To provide a more rounded assessment of the reforms' impact, our analysis draws on extensive statistical data on French women's share of European, national, and subnational seats and supplementary interviews with citizens, politicians, and intellectuals conducted in the late 2000s in Paris and Nantes. Finally, our analysis and findings have been informed by participant observation that Sandrine Dauphin conducted between 1997 and 2000 in the first parity association, Parité, and the networks of parity associations, Demain la Parité and Femmes et hommes pour la parité.<sup>24</sup>

*Parity Democracy* is divided into a historical and interpretive essay and two parts. Chapter 1, "French Women's Struggle for Political Rights and Parity," situates the parity movement and subsequent reforms in the

context of French women's long-term struggle to obtain *and* exercise political rights. The chapter puts forward two arguments. First, although the women's movement only pushed for political rights during two short periods – from 1909 to 1939 and from 1992 to 2000 – it has had a significant impact on women's political representation. Second, even though their impact on women's numerical representation has been somewhat mixed, the gender parity reforms adopted by France in 1999 and 2000 are a groundbreaking achievement for French women, one that is comparable to the attainment of political rights. To help readers understand the historical roots of the parity reforms, we include a chronology of French women's struggle to obtain and exercise political rights since the French Revolution in Appendix A.

Part 1 is composed of nine interviews with women who were actively involved in the parity movement and debates.<sup>25</sup> To reflect the diverse backgrounds and arguments of both parity proponents and foes, we interviewed three parity activists, three current and former deputies and ministers from the Right and the Left, and three intellectuals. Six of the women supported gender parity from the outset, while one was initially opposed. Two of the women were quite critical of parity and reluctant to endorse it. The interviews present these women's diverse perspectives on the nature and goal of gender parity, how it emerged as a demand, whether there is a relationship between the gender parity and feminist movements, the potential influence of the reforms, and the arguments for and against gender parity in politics. The questions asked during the interviews are listed in Appendix B. Taken together, the grounded, detailed, and nuanced insights of parity advocates and opponents flesh out and complement our overview of the history of gender parity in French politics.

Part 2 contains translations of eight key documents cited in Chapter 1 and the interviews. The first two were launched by women officials who attended European Union summits on women in politics and society. The two manifestos in favour of parity democracy that follow were initiated by French paritarists, and the last four are legal documents. These documents are important markers in the ongoing history of gender parity in French politics. They reveal how the arguments of various European and French actors led France to establish the Observatoire de la parité entre les femmes et les hommes, ratify gender parity reforms for the electoral realm, and even extend parity to other realms.

The historical analysis in Chapter 1 is complemented by the interviews and documents presented in Parts 1 and 2, but each section brings to

light distinct aspects of the history of parity reform. For instance, the interviews and texts flesh out two of Chapter 1's main themes: (1) that the close ties and frequent interactions among European, especially French, individuals and institutions led to the fairly rapid adoption of the parity reforms; and (2) that a gap existed between the paritarists' view of parity as the equal presence of women and men in elected office and the legislators' definition of parity as women's and men's equal access to elected office. Chapter 1, however, specifically assesses the reforms' effect on women's numerical representation and France's political culture, while the interviews convey the diversity of arguments advanced in favour of and against parity reform. Whereas the interviews in Part 1 reveal that French feminists were uneasy about essentialist arguments in favour of gender parity that emphasized women's difference and potential to improve politics, the documents in Part 2 focus on parity's advocates. The interviews and documents, which were endorsed by women politicians, reveal that gender parity was not so much a demand made by feminists on behalf of French women but rather a demand made primarily by women politicians to overcome the structural obstacles they themselves faced. Parity reforms, in turn, triggered dynamic change.

By pairing in-depth analysis with interviews and translations of key European and French documents, *Parity Democracy* offers students, scholars, policy makers, and activists a well-rounded perspective on the pros and cons of gender parity reforms and their effect on women and politics in France. France's adoption of groundbreaking gender parity reforms indicates that this country, which has been a long-term laggard in terms of women's political rights and representation, may take the lead in the establishment of parity democracy. Indeed, France's gender parity reforms appear to have influenced Belgium and Italy to change their constitutions in 2002 and 2003, respectively, to favour women's and men's equal access to elected office. Portugal and Spain might have been similarly influenced to adopt gender quota and parity laws in 2006 and 2007. Thus far, France's reforms have been more effective in enhancing women's numerical representation at the municipal, regional, and European levels than at the national level, particularly in the National Assembly. Nonetheless, they have broken the deadlock on French women's equal access to and representation in political office and have set in motion a process of feminization within the electoral sphere that bodes well for the future of parity democracy.



# 1

## French Women's Struggle for Political Rights and Equality

History books often stress France's leading role in the emergence and establishment of representative liberal democracy. In 1792, the country's liberal revolution overthrew the monarchical regime and the system of inherited privilege on which it was based and replaced it with a republic. The First Republic (1792-1804) declared that all men were born free and enjoyed equal rights, and it allowed non-nobles to participate in public affairs. Tax-paying and property-owning men of twenty-five years of age could vote for representatives and run for elected office. Fifty years later, following the Revolution of 1848, the Second Republic (1848-1852) was established. A decree of 5 March 1848 instituted direct universal suffrage for all men twenty-one years of age or older.<sup>1</sup>

Although France has been a leader in the establishment of representative liberal democracy, it has been slow to extend its privileges and responsibilities to women. Women were excluded from political citizenship in the early days of the French Revolution. Furthermore, the 1848 decree did not truly institute universal suffrage since it did not extend to women. Women had to wait ninety-six years before they received the same rights to vote and be eligible for political office enjoyed by men. To a certain extent, French women's tardy acquisition of political rights helps to explain why they have had tremendous difficulties exercising their right of eligibility.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, until the 1997 legislative elections, less than 10 percent of deputies in the National Assembly were women.

But recent events suggest that France may be on the verge of shedding its reputation as a laggard when it comes to promoting women's presence in political institutions. In 1999 and 2000, the French government responded to the demands of women's associations for gender parity in politics by passing a constitutional bill and an ordinary bill to "favour

women's and men's equal access to elected office." The adoption of these two gender parity reforms, especially the constitutional bill, signals that France may be assuming a leadership role in the movement towards parity democracy. France is the first country in the world that has altered its Constitution *and* passed new legislation to ensure women's and men's equal access to elected office. In other words, France was the first country to adopt measures that compel political parties to reserve half of their candidacies for women. France's unique and groundbreaking reforms have also influenced neighbouring countries to debate the idea of gender parity in politics and adopt similar reforms.<sup>3</sup>

Although the campaign for women's political rights in France was confined to two short periods – 1909-1939 and 1992-2000 – it has had a significant impact on women's political representation. It has drawn attention to issues of concern to women and helped women to gain political rights and exercise their right of eligibility. Members of the women's movement had demanded various civil rights through the late nineteenth century but focused on political rights in the thirty-year period before the Second World War. Although radical feminists had no desire to get involved in electoral politics, mainstream feminists and their reformist counterparts prompted political institutions (including political parties, legislatures, and governments) to make room for women and their concerns in the 1960s and 1970s. Mobilization around the idea of gender parity in politics in the 1990s has, of course, led the French government to adopt gender parity reforms. In this chapter we argue that the French women's movement has, throughout its history, had a significant impact on women's political representation. We also contend that the adoption of gender parity reforms constitutes an important achievement for women, one that is comparable to their acquisition of political rights.

## **The Struggle for Women's Political Rights**

### **From the French Revolution to the Second World War**

The clubs that women formed in the late eighteenth century to safeguard the Revolution were the first to demand political rights for women. However, despite the plea of philosopher Nicolas de Condorcet and the texts of Olympe de Gouges, who published her "Declaration of the Rights of Woman" in 1791, the revolutionaries refused to grant women the right to vote and forbade them from engaging in politics. These actions set a precedent for women's exclusion in the new republic.<sup>4</sup>

During the debate on universal suffrage, which was eventually adopted in 1848, only a few women's associations mobilized around the issue of women's political rights. For instance, a minority of women followed the example of Jeanne Deroin from *La Voix des Femmes* and attempted to run in legislative elections. In fact, the first feminist groups demanding women's access to the political sphere did not appear until the Third Republic (1875-1940).

Historians Laurence Klejman and Florence Rochefort identify three periods in the struggle for women's political rights in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> The first period stretches from 1870 until 1909 and constitutes an era when the demand for political rights barely existed. The women's associations that emerged at the close of the nineteenth century focused mainly on the right to education and, more generally, civil rights. At that time, only two feminist activists, Hubertine Auclert and Julie-Victoire Daubié, demanded political rights for women. Auclert, the founder of *Le Droit des Femmes* (which became *Suffrage des Femmes* in 1884), in the 13 February 1881 issue of her paper *La Citoyenne*, was the first to stress that "for women, political rights are the key to all other rights."<sup>6</sup> Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, members of the women's movement came to the conclusion that it would be difficult to obtain new civil rights for women. At the same time, a number of developments – including the separation of church and state in 1905, a law to facilitate the creation of associations in 1901, the suffrage movement sweeping through Western countries, and women's participation in the First World War – suggested that political rights could be more easily achieved. That is the moment when the women's movement began to take up Auclert's argument. Consequently, the second period identified by Klejman and Rochefort stretches from 1909 until 1919. During this period, women's associations campaigned for political rights and attempted to open a dialogue with parliamentarians. Many new associations were created to press for political rights for women. Two of the most important were the *Union française pour le suffrage des femmes*, founded in 1909, and the *Ligue nationale pour le vote des femmes*, founded in 1914. In the third period, from 1919 until 1939, the suffrage associations' various actions and leaders clashed more frequently as the question of women's rights was referred regularly to Parliament.

The women's movement in this third period was divided between radical suffragettes, who used spectacular gestures and demanded the

right to vote in all elections, and the suffragists, who tried to build alliances and proposed an incremental right to vote.<sup>7</sup> For the suffragists, local elections could be a first step towards enfranchisement. As French feminist Cécile Brunschvicg maintained, “We are confident about women voting at the municipal level. However, we need to be cautious about women voting at higher levels.”<sup>8</sup> In each election, these feminists, suffragettes and suffragists, broke the law by running as candidates and receiving votes. However, apart from the Parti communiste français (PCF), political parties did not want anything to do with women candidates. For example, in the municipal elections of 1925, on the initiative of the PCF, a woman named Joséphine Pencalet was elected, but the State Council, one of France’s highest courts, immediately invalidated her election. Regardless of whether they were radical or moderate, these feminists were truly reformist. Because of them, the women’s movement endorsed the view that political rights were a means to achieve participation in decision making, not to contest the political system, which radical feminists would later identify as patriarchal.

Realizing that they needed to create ties with political parties if they hoped to gain political rights, women, including some high-profile suffrage activists, joined political parties in the interwar years. For instance, Madeleine Pelletier joined the Section française de l’Internationale ouvrière (SFIO) and the PCF after the Congress of Tours in 1920; Cécile Brunschvicg became a member of the Parti Radical, which was opposed to women’s right to vote; and Louise Saumoneau joined the SFIO. The modest presence of women activists led political parties to establish the first women’s party committees in the 1920s and 1930s. Overall, however, the suffragettes’ and suffragists’ strategy of forming links with political parties was generally a failure.<sup>9</sup> In the end, only a few men politicians and only one party, the PCF, came out in support of women’s political rights.

Thanks to Léon Blum and his new Popular Front government, women were able to hold government positions even though they were not eligible. On 4 June 1936, Blum appointed Irène Joliot-Curie as state secretary for scientific research and Suzanne Lacore and Cécile Brunschvicg as under-state secretaries respectively for the protection of children and national education.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, feminists were disappointed when the new government did not address women’s political rights, in part because of the rising threat of war in Europe.

Although some countries gave women the right to vote before the Second World War, French legislation did not come until the end of the



war. Given that suffrage associations never stopped fighting for women's political rights during the first four decades of the twentieth century, they cannot be held responsible for the tardy enfranchisement of French women. Indeed, between 1901 and 1937, Parliament heard sixty bills, proposals, reports, and resolutions on women's right to vote.<sup>11</sup> As soon as the war ended, the National Assembly expressed its support for women's political rights, but the Senate, dominated by the Parti Radical, which was ideologically committed to secularism and republican universalism, was systematically opposed. According to members of the Parti Radical, women's specific traits precluded them from being neutral individuals; therefore, they could not represent others.

Faced with these arguments, members of the women's movement began to emphasize the gains that would come from women's political rights. For example, Hubertine Auclert and Marguerite Durand argued that women's pacifism would put an end to wars. In Klejman and Rochefort's words, "the internal contradiction of most feminist arguments, which demanded both equality and preferential treatment on the grounds of universalism and gender specificity, was puzzling."<sup>12</sup> Cécile Brunschvicg even drew a parallel between household management and state management.<sup>13</sup> Most feminists advanced the idea of gender complementarity in politics and asserted that women's perceptions of public affairs differed from those of men. In sum, as far as members of the women's movement of that time were concerned, once women obtained political rights, they would change politics and bring it closer to the daily lives of voters.

These arguments did not prevail in March 1944, when the Consultative Assembly of Algiers – the body set up in 1943 in Algiers to advise the French Provisional Government headed by General Charles de Gaulle, the leader of the Free French Forces, during the occupation of France by the Germans – finally awarded voting and eligibility rights to women. In fact, the Consultative Assembly of Algiers decided to grant political rights to women primarily as a reward to those women who had joined the Resistance, taken up arms, and, very often, died while defending the French nation. Heroines such as Lucie Aubrac, Danièle Casanova, Berty Aulbrecht, and Suzanne Buisson were celebrated even as most of the medals went to men. In other words, women were awarded political rights only after they had proved they were men's equal on the battlefield.<sup>14</sup>

It is revealing that women's new political rights were not confirmed by a law passed in Parliament but rather by an Order-in-Council of

*Table 1***Women deputies during the Fourth and Fifth Republics**

Year	Number of seats	Seats held by women	Women as percent of total
1945	586	32	5.5
June 1946	586	30	5.1
November 1946	619	42	6.8
1951	627	22	3.5
1956	627	19	3.2
1958	579	8	1.4
1962	482	8	1.7
1967	487	11	2.3
1968	487	8	1.6
1973	490	8	1.6
1978	491	20	4.1
1981	491	26	5.3
1986	577	34	5.9
1988	577	33	5.7
1993	577	35	6.1
1997	577	63	10.9
<i>2002</i>	<i>577</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>12.3</i>
<i>2007</i>	<i>577</i>	<i>107</i>	<i>18.5</i>

Source: France, Observatoire de la parité, "Données statistiques: Elections législatives 2007, les petits pas de la parité," Observatoire de la parité, <http://www.observatoire-parite.gouv.fr>.

Note: Elections that took place after France's parity reforms are in italics.

General de Gaulle – that is, the law came directly from the executive branch of government. The political context of the time – a new state and its institutions still remained to be built – perhaps account for this. However, laws passed as Orders-in-Council tend to have less legitimacy than laws passed by representatives of the people. In a sense, the adoption of women's rights in this manner helps to explain why French women have had tremendous difficulty getting elected. As for the feminists of the period, quite certain that women's new right to vote would enable them to access the political sphere, they did not think about different ways to promote women's eligibility. In the end, the right to vote did not open the doors of elected assemblies to women.

### **New Feminist Demands, 1945-1980**

As Tables 1 and 2 reveal, women's new political rights did not upset France's political landscape. In the first legislative elections of 1946, only 5.1 percent (30/586) of the National Assembly's new deputies were

Table 2

Women senators during the Fourth and Fifth Republics			
Year	Number of seats	Seats held by women	Women as percent of total
1947	314	22	7.0
1949	317	12	3.8
1952	317	9	2.8
1954	317	9	2.8
1956	317	9	2.8
1958	314	6	1.9
1960	307	5	1.6
1962	271	5	1.9
1964	273	5	1.8
1966	274	5	1.8
1968	283	5	1.8
1971	282	4	1.4
1974	283	7	2.5
1977	295	5	1.7
1980	304	7	2.3
1983	317	9	2.8
1986	319	9	2.8
1989	321	10	3.1
1992	321	16	5.0
1995	321	18	5.6
1998	321	17	5.6
<i>2001</i>	<i>321</i>	<i>34</i>	<i>10.6</i>
<i>2004</i>	<i>331</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>16.9</i>
<i>2008</i>	<i>343</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>21.9</i>

Source: Marie-Jo Zimmermann, "Note de synthèse: Elections sénatoriales, au-delà des apparences, seulement 15,8% de sénatrices élues en 2008," 20 September 2008, [http://www.observatoire-parite.gouv.fr/espace\\_presse/communiqués/pdf/OPFH\\_NS\\_Senatoriales2008.pdf](http://www.observatoire-parite.gouv.fr/espace_presse/communiqués/pdf/OPFH_NS_Senatoriales2008.pdf).

Note: Elections that took place after France's parity reforms are in italics.

women. Some suffragists ran for election but without success, and lists of women candidates only received a small proportion of votes. After the war, political parties only recruited widows and women who had been involved in the Resistance as candidates. Consequently, until the mid-1960s, women deputies tended to be former Resistance fighters.<sup>15</sup> The proportion of women in the National Assembly also decreased from 3.5 percent (22/627) in 1951 to 3.2 percent (19/596) in 1956. In 1958, with the advent of the Fifth Republic and a new electoral system, women's representation in the National Assembly dropped even further to 1.4 percent (8/579). This drop was due in large part to the move from

a PR system to a two-round majoritarian system, which reinforced the power of local notables. Women's representation in the Senate followed a similar, albeit more dramatic, pattern. Women's representation reached a high of 7 percent (22/314) in 1947 but fell to 3.8 percent (12/317) in 1949 and remained under 3 percent until 1993. Throughout the 1970s, women, who constituted 53 percent of the electorate, on average held only about 2 percent of the seats in the two chambers of Parliament. As Mariette Sineau notes, the establishment of the Fifth Republic hampered women's access to Parliament for a number of reasons, including the introduction of the single-member majoritarian electoral system, the strengthening of executive power, and the increased recruitment of technocrats to top government positions.<sup>16</sup>

Women's associations were not galvanized into action by women's decreasing presence in Parliament. After the government granted women political rights, feminists no longer focused on the issue of women's representation in Parliament. In *Les années Beauvoir (1945-1970)*, historian Sylvie Chaperon argues that following the postwar baby boom, when women's role as homemaker was constantly emphasized, women's associations became less active and visible. At the time Simone de Beauvoir published *Le deuxième sexe*, the general sentiment of French feminists was that paid employment, not electoral politics, would emancipate women. In her seminal book, de Beauvoir also analyzed the internal dynamics of the private sphere, women's traditional realm, thereby foreshadowing women's demands, a decade later, for contraception.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the creation in 1956 of the association *Maternité heureuse*, which became the *Mouvement français pour le planning familial* in the 1960s, brought the question of women's reproductive freedom to the fore. Women's issues gradually came to be viewed not only as social issues but also as political issues because of the importance of the female vote. The dramatic cultural change triggered by the arrival of women in the workforce during the labour shortage of the 1960s led the Gaullist government to adopt two symbolic laws: a law that allowed married women to exercise a profession without the consent of their husbands (1965) and the so-called Neuwirth law, which legalized the contraceptive pill (1967).

It was, however, the events of May 1968 that triggered the women's liberation movement of the 1970s.<sup>18</sup> The May movement denounced the established moral order and proposed a real counterculture based on sexual liberation. Although many women were active in various streams of the movement, the spokespersons tended to be men. Women

challenged the groups they were involved in, particularly the restrictions they put on women's freedom of expression. Just like their comrades of 1968, radical feminists viewed political power as authoritarian and rejected it. In the 1970s, their struggle against the patriarchal system and insistence on women-only meetings contributed to further remove women from political representation.<sup>19</sup> In Françoise Picq's words, "even though the feminist movement had forced the traditional political sphere to pay attention to women's issues, the demand for men's and women's equal representation did not really fit into its political agenda or into its reflections on women's identity ... for the feminist movement, the most important changes were to come from the social movement itself, not from the increased presence of women in a patriarchal system of representation it was fighting against."<sup>20</sup> Radical feminists preferred to focus on sexual issues: abortion, contraception, maternity, homosexuality, rape, and the relationship between men and women. Because they believed that the private is political, they voluntarily excluded themselves from traditional political institutions (elections, parties, legislatures, and governments). As Simone de Beauvoir stressed, "because they are not locked in any party and they are not blinded by any ideology, they can justly appreciate the subversive value of feminist activism."<sup>21</sup> In short, in the 1970s, radical feminists generally refused to participate in institutional politics.

Nevertheless, some feminists did resist this trend. For instance, Gisèle Halimi (interviewed in Chapter 2), a high-profile feminist who played a key role in the fight for the right to abortion, adopted a different position. In the 1978 elections, *Choisir la cause des femmes* (or *Choisir*), the association Halimi co-founded in 1973 to defend women's right to abortion and has chaired ever since, presented seventy-five feminist candidates throughout France to ensure the presence of feminists in law-making institutions. Unfortunately, most of the association's candidates were eliminated in the first round. At the same time, traditional reformist associations that had not disappeared (the *Ligue du Droit des Femmes*, the *Conseil national des femmes françaises*, and so on) and that were uncomfortable with the issues raised by the *Mouvement de libération des femmes* (MLF) decided to target political parties and Parliament and demand that women be better represented within political institutions, just as suffragists had done at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>22</sup> They also pointed out the contradiction between society's growing interest in women's issues on the one hand and the absence of women from political institutions on the other.

Regardless of whether self-exclusion was total (MLF) or partial (traditional women's associations), the broader women's movement influenced women's political representation, particularly women's presence in political institutions and the attention paid to women's rights. The movement indirectly influenced political parties – especially the new ones that emerged in the 1970s, such as the Parti socialiste unifié (1972), the Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF, 1974), and the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR, 1976) – to set up their own women's committees.<sup>23</sup> In 1977 (that is, three years after its adoption of a 10 percent quota for women in its governing structures), the Parti socialiste (PS, 1971) agreed to establish a women's committee. Throughout the 1970s, feminists not linked to the MLF and active in leftist parties also tried to convince their parties to take their needs into account. Although long-time PS activist Yvette Roudy (interviewed in Chapter 7) was never involved in the MLF, nobody can doubt her feminism. From the time she joined Colette Audry and Marie-Thérèse Eyquem's Mouvement démocratique féminin (MDF) and became a close associate of François Mitterrand in the mid-1960s, she has been able to reconcile her feminist and socialist ideals. From 1977 to 1979, she was in charge of the PS's women's committee. After her election to the European Parliament, she was actively involved in the establishment of a women's rights commission, which she chaired.

The PS held a national convention on women in 1978. As Philippe Bataille and Françoise Gaspard note, “such an initiative highlighted the pressure exercised at that time by the feminist movement as well as the support it had among women, which the PS could not ignore.”<sup>24</sup> Shortly thereafter, PS feminists, including Françoise Gaspard, formed a feminist cohort within the party and demanded that an equal number of women and men candidates be on the PS list for the 1979 European elections. This cohort failed to obtain a sufficient number of votes and never became an official part of the party. Nonetheless, pressured by Roudy, the party used a 30 percent quota for its women candidates in the 1979 European elections. The PS was not the only party affected by the women's movement. Indeed, feminists from the PCF published an article in *Le Monde* on 11-12 June 1978 that strongly criticized their party's position on the MLF.

The women's movement also influenced the feminization of elected assemblies and the government in the 1970s. For instance, the proportion of women municipal councillors doubled from 4.4 percent in 1971

to 8.3 percent in 1977.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, the number of women senators nearly doubled in 1974 from four to seven but decreased again in 1977 (see Table 2). Women, however, made the most gains in the first 1979 European elections, when women were elected to 22.2 percent (18/81) of the seats. Of special interest is the fact that Louise Weiss, a suffragette famous in the 1930s, ran successfully on the UDF list led by Simone Veil, the woman who had introduced the 1975 bill to legalize abortion.<sup>26</sup> The government of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1974-1981) included three times as many women as the governments of Presidents Charles de Gaulle and Georges Pompidou: four women in 1974 and as many as six women in 1978.<sup>27</sup> Giscard d'Estaing also created the State Secretariat for Women's Condition in 1974. At the time, feminists denounced the existence of such a body because, to them, the goal was to overcome women's condition, not improve it. In any event, the creation of the secretariat signalled that the issue of women's rights was finally being taken into consideration at the highest levels of the French state.<sup>28</sup>

A number of important bills were also passed during the 1970s. Paternal authority was replaced with parental authority in 1970. Two years later, a law introduced the concept of equal pay for equal work. The law of 11 July 1975 asserted men's and women's economic equality and outlawed the refusal to hire persons based on their sex or family situation. The most important laws, however, were those that legalized abortion (1975) and redefined rape (1980).

The history of the French women's movement highlights the important influence it has had on women's political representation. In the early years, its members raised a variety of issues of interest to women, but they focused on women's political rights in the early twentieth century. Then, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the general discourse and activities of radical and reform feminists prompted political institutions to make room for women and their concerns, even though radical feminists were not interested in electoral politics.

## **The Movement for Gender Parity in Politics**

### **The 1980s**

In 1981, when the Left finally came to power, the women's movement was in decline. As Françoise Ducrocq notes, the "movement ... seemed particularly divided, atomized."<sup>29</sup> Several divisions had occurred in the 1970s among feminists involved in political parties and unions on the one hand and feminists who preferred to remain outside these

institutions on the other. In the fall of 1979, the feminist group *Psychanalyse et Politique* (or *Psych et Po*), founded by Antoinette Fouque, established itself as the *Mouvement de libération des Femmes* (MLF) and registered the logo “MLF” as a trademark for its publishing house, *Editions des Femmes*.<sup>30</sup> Many feminist groups accused *Psych et Po* of taking over the movement. Since then, *Psych et Po* has been called the *MLF déposé* (registered), while the other radical feminist groups have been called the *MLF non-déposé* (non-registered).<sup>31</sup> The adoption of laws on abortion and rape made it difficult for the movement to identify goals to mobilize the majority of feminist groups. Nevertheless, during the presidential election of 1981, feminists resolved to support leftist candidate François Mitterrand.

Mitterrand had lost the presidential elections of 1965 and 1974, in part because women voters preferred his opponents from the Right.<sup>32</sup> Mitterrand therefore tried to appeal to them in 1981. Among his “101 Propositions pour la France” were ten propositions of concern to women. In the break between the two rounds of the 1981 presidential election, Gisèle Halimi and Choisir invited Mitterrand and his opponent, President Giscard d’Estaing, to participate in a debate on women’s issues.<sup>33</sup> Only Mitterrand accepted the invitation. During this debate, which was titled “Quel président pour les femmes?”, he promised to create a ministry in charge of women’s issues and to allow women’s groups to associate themselves with the public prosecutor in court actions. In the end, this meeting was decisive, for it earned the leftist candidate the support of both the *MLF non-déposé* and the *MLF déposé*. Mitterrand’s promises convinced women voters. In May 1981, Mitterrand became the first presidential candidate from the Left to earn the majority of women’s votes.<sup>34</sup>

Following the Left’s victory in the presidential and legislative elections of 1981, the new government established the Ministry for Woman’s Rights and appointed Yvette Roudy as its head. This decision was not well received by all feminists. Although several did not hesitate to support it, others were more skeptical. After several years of opposition to various governments from the Right, they did not know what attitude to adopt towards a government that was more open to them and a ministry that had a budget and could help to fund women’s associations. In the 1980s, as the ministry launched several initiatives on professional equality, contraception, sexism, and so on, the women’s movement became less visible than it had been in the 1970s, leading feminists such



as Françoise Picq to conclude that the ministry had taken over the women's movement.<sup>35</sup>

The question of women's access to the political sphere was not raised by the ministry, but by Halimi. In 1982, one year after her election as a deputy affiliated with the PS, Halimi proposed an amendment to the law on the electoral system for municipal elections. She proposed that party lists for municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 residents should no longer include more than 75 percent of candidates from the same sex. Despite the adoption of this amendment by the two houses, the Constitutional Council, for the first time in its history, took it upon itself to examine the amendment and declare it unconstitutional. According to the council's members, the amendment infringed on the principle of the indivisibility of the republic established in Article 3 of the Constitution of the Fifth Republic and Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man.<sup>36</sup> One wonders whether a more visible women's movement, one united and interested in the promotion of women in politics, would have been able to stop the abrogation of this amendment.

In 1989, when France was about to celebrate the bicentennial of the Revolution and, thus, the advent of democracy, women still had not reached the 10 percent mark in the National Assembly and Senate (see Tables 1 and 2). Many – including Françoise Gaspard, Claude Servan-Schreiber, and Anne Le Gall in their book *Au pouvoir, citoyennes!* – noted the blatant contradiction. Changes that took place in the 1990s – notably, mobilization among women's associations in favour of gender parity in politics, the openness of the French political class to this question, and the return of the Left to power – paved the way for reform.

### **The 1990s and the Adoption of Parity Reforms**

In their comparative works on the international adoption of gender quotas, Drude Dahlerup and Mona Lena Krook present France's gender parity reforms as one manifestation of a larger trend rather than as a phenomenon unique to France.<sup>37</sup> Students and scholars of the French case need to acknowledge both the internal and external factors that led France to adopt the reforms. As Krook highlights in "National Solution or Model from Abroad," both the green movement and the Council of Europe helped to disseminate the idea of gender parity in France.

Between 1986 and 1988, inspired in part by the practices of their German comrades, environmentalist and feminist activists involved in

the Arc-en-Ciel movement decided to function along parity lines. Women and men were equally involved in decision making, and they took turns speaking at meetings. After the Arc-en-Ciel movement dissolved in 1988, many of its activists joined the new environmentalist party, Les Verts. Like its European counterparts, Les Verts included the principle of gender parity in its statutes.<sup>38</sup> One year after the inception of Les Verts, the Council of Europe organized a seminar on parity democracy.

Women such as Françoise Gaspard immediately saw parity not simply as a means to increase the proportion of women in elected assemblies but also as a founding principle of democracy on par with liberty and equality.<sup>39</sup> The fourteen European women politicians, including France's former prime minister Edith Cresson, who signed the Declaration of Athens at the end of the first European summit on "Women in Power" in November 1992, endorsed this conception of parity. Indeed, they identified women's under-representation in the decision-making bodies of Europe's member states as a democratic deficit and emphasized that "equality requires gender parity in the representation and administration of nations." They concluded by launching a "campaign of mobilization ... to ensure a balanced participation of women and men in decision making" (see Chapter 11). The Charter of Rome, which several European women ministers signed on 18 May 1996 at the European summit on "Women for the Renewal of Politics and Society," reiterated these ideas (see Chapter 14). In the end, European institutions and actors not only publicized the ideas of gender parity in politics and parity democracy, they also influenced high-profile French feminists such as Gaspard, Roudy, Fouque, and Halimi and their less well-known peers to mobilize around it.

In 1992 – the same year that Gaspard, Servan-Schreiber, and Le Gall's book and the Declaration of Athens came out – several associations formed to put pressure on the French authorities. Various women's associations immediately and publicly backed the new parity associations.<sup>40</sup> These new associations were composed mainly of women close to political parties, especially the PS. The first parity association was founded in March 1992 by Régine Saint-Criq, a woman who had been active in the PS for several years. Disappointed with the minute number of women Socialist candidates contesting the 1992 regional and cantonal elections, Saint-Criq left the party and established the non-partisan association *Parité*. This association has a mandate to pressure all political parties to present more women candidates, and it educates the public about the need for gender parity in politics. Shortly after the establishment of

Parité, Socialist Yvette Roudy launched another association, *L'Assemblée des femmes*. On 23 and 24 April 1994, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of French women's suffrage, *L'Assemblée des femmes* and thirty other groups organized an Estates General on women and politics. Founded in 1989 by Antoinette Fouque to feminize and democratize the French state and society, the Alliance des Femmes pour la Démocratie announced its support for the parity project by creating Club Parité 2000. More than one hundred women's and feminist associations – including the Conseil national des femmes françaises, the Union féminine civique et sociale (UFCS), and Choisir – at once joined the parity movement. On 10 November 1993, the network Femmes pour la parité organized the first symbolic act of the campaign: the publication of the “Manifesto of the 577 for Parity Democracy” in *Le Monde* (see Chapter 12). Signed by 289 women and 288 men (the total number of deputies in the National Assembly), the manifesto demanded the adoption of an organic law on parity.<sup>41</sup>

As for how to bring about gender parity in politics, some paritarists proposed the adoption of an ordinary law, while others proposed inserting the principle in the Constitution. An ordinary parity law, some argued, by requiring an equal number of women and men in elected assemblies, would oblige political parties to present more women candidates and ensure their election. Other paritarists insisted on the need to modify the Constitution because of the 1982 abrogation of Halimi's proposed amendment. To these paritarists, only the inclusion of parity in the Constitution would prevent the Constitutional Council from abrogating future parity laws. The idea of constitutional change was not, however, uniformly accepted by paritarists. Françoise Gaspard, for instance, was not in favour of this proposal, which she considered heavy-handed and ineffectual.<sup>42</sup> In any event, the majority of French citizens were in favour of parity in principle.<sup>43</sup>

In an effort to project a more modern image, political parties endorsed parity. For example, leftist parties presented parity lists in the 1994 European elections and endeavoured to increase the number of women candidates in the elections that followed. During the 1995 presidential election, all candidates, except those from the far right, came out in support of parity. Jacques Chirac, the candidate for the Gaullist RPR, even promised to establish an Observatoire de la parité to take stock of women's place in state and society and, more specifically, to produce studies, disseminate information, enlighten decision makers, and make recommendations for reform (see Article 2 in Chapter 13). In October

1995, a few months after his election (and one month before eight of the twelve women appointed to the new government were sacked), Prime Minister Alain Juppé announced the creation of the Observatoire de la parité. He appointed Roselyne Bachelot-Narquin as the general reporter (*rapporteur général*) of the Observatoire and Gisèle Halimi as the reporter (*rapporteur*) of the Observatoire's political commission (see Chapter 6).<sup>44</sup> At the beginning of 1997, Bachelot-Narquin submitted the Observatoire's first report, *La parité dans la vie publique*, to Prime Minister Juppé. The report recommended the inclusion of parity in the Constitution and the submission of the issue to a referendum.<sup>45</sup> At that time, at the request of its leader, Lionel Jospin, the PS had undertaken to recruit women to fill 30 percent of its candidacies for the 1997 legislative elections. The record number of women candidates that the PS presented (133 women or 27.8 percent) in these elections, along with its victory, increased women's representation in the National Assembly from 6.1 percent (35/577) to 10.9 percent (63/577).<sup>46</sup>

Soon after his election as prime minister in 1997, Lionel Jospin worked hard to show that his commitment to the feminization of the political sphere was real. He included eight women in his government of twenty-six members (30.7 percent), and his government introduced a constitutional bill on gender parity in politics. In June 1998, Justice Minister Elisabeth Guigou presented a bill to add "the law favours women's and men's equal access to elected office" to Article 3 of the Constitution. As Joan Wallach Scott notes, the term "*parité*" had been replaced by the phrase "women's and men's equal access to elected office" to secure President Chirac's support for the constitutional reform.<sup>47</sup> Following the introduction of the constitutional bill, a new network of pro-parity associations, Femmes et hommes pour la parité, lobbied the National Assembly and Senate to support the bill and even proposed to substitute a more constraining verb in place of "favour" when it appeared before the Assembly's law commission.<sup>48</sup> In a sense, the National Assembly echoed the proposal of the network and used the verb "determine" instead of "favour." As for the Senate (dominated by the Right), it rejected the version adopted by the Assembly (dominated by the Left) and proposed to modify Article 4 (rather than Article 3) to stipulate that political parties (rather than the law) favour women's and men's equal access to elected office. After several weeks of discussions and negotiations, the Senate, and then the National Assembly, adopted a constitutional bill that stated in Article 3 that "the law favours women's and men's equal access to elected office" and in Article 4 that political parties "are required

to implement this principle." Finally, on 28 June 1999, the two houses gathered in Congress in Versailles and approved these two modifications of the Constitution.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, even after the bill was adopted, associations continued to denounce the use of the verb "favour" and the absence of the term "parity."

At the close of 1999, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, minister of the interior, introduced an ordinary bill on women's and men's equal access to elected office that required political parties to present an equal number of women and men candidates in most elections. The law of 6 June 2000, which is summarized in Figure 1, applied to municipal, regional, legislative, European, and some senatorial elections. For elections within the two-round PR system (regional elections and municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 residents), parties now had to include an equal number of women and men in sets of six candidates. For elections within the one-round PR system (European and some senatorial elections), parties now had to strictly alternate the names of women and men candidates. The law also stipulated that lists that did not conform to these rules would be invalidated. As for legislative elections, which took place within a two-round majoritarian system, parties unable to present an equal number of women and men candidates would incur a reduction in the funding they normally received from the state.<sup>50</sup>

These two bills, especially the constitutional bill, triggered a lively debate about gender parity in politics not only among French parliamentarians but also among French feminists. While the parliamentary debate mainly concerned which articles of the Constitution to revise and whether to use the verb "favour" or "determine," the feminist debate dealt broadly with arguments for or against gender parity in politics and its positive or negative implications.<sup>51</sup> More specifically, parity advocates invoked either equality or difference to justify gender parity. For instance, Françoise Gaspard and Geneviève Fraisse argued that gender parity should simply enhance equality between the sexes and foster justice and democracy. By contrast, Antoinette Fouque and Sylviane Agacinski pointed out that women representatives would represent the specific interests of women in gender-balanced assemblies. Overall, however, paritarists tended to rely on differentialist arguments.<sup>52</sup> Parity advocates maintained that parity would incorporate women into the idea of French universalism and finally correct the concept's male bias. On the other hand, opponents argued that gender parity would undermine French universalism and leave the door open to North American communitarianism. Nonetheless, as the interviews of the nine parity advocates and

Figure 1

Type of election, electoral systems, and parity reforms in France

Type of election	Type of electoral system	Law of 6 June 2000	Law of 31 January 2007
Municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 residents <sup>1</sup> (every six years)	Two-round PR system	Party lists must include an equal number of women and men in sets of six candidates.	Party lists must strictly alternate women and men. Municipal executives must include an equal number of women and men.
Regional elections (every six years)	Two-round PR system	Party lists <sup>2</sup> must include an equal number of women and men in sets of six candidates.	Regional executives must include an equal number of women and men.
Cantonal elections (every three years for half of the general councillors)	Two-round single-member majoritarian system	Exempt from the law.	Candidates must select someone from the opposite sex as their substitute.
European elections (every five years)	One-round PR system	Party lists must strictly alternate women and men.	No additional provisions.
Senatorial elections <sup>3</sup> (every three years for half of the senators)	One-round PR system for some seats and single-member majoritarian system for others	Party lists must strictly alternate women and men in departments with three or more senators who are to be elected via PR. <sup>4</sup>	No additional provisions.

Legislative elections (every five years)	Two-round single-member majoritarian system	If the difference between the number of women and men candidates a party presents exceeds 2% of its total number of candidates, the party's state funding will be cut by a percentage equal to half of the difference.	If the difference between the number of women and men candidates a party presents exceeds 2% of its total number of candidates, the party's state funding will be cut by a percentage equal to three-quarters of the difference.
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*Source:* Compiled from information in France, Observatoire de la parité, "Les modes de scrutin et la parité entre les femmes et les hommes," Observatoire de la parité, <http://observatoire-parite.gouv.fr>.

*Notes:*

- 1 Municipal elections that take place in towns with fewer than 3,500 residents are exempt from the law.
- 2 Since the law of 11 April 2003, regional party lists must strictly alternate the names of women and men candidates.
- 3 Since the law of 30 July 2003, senators are elected for six years (instead of nine), and one-half (instead of one-third) are up for re-election every three years.
- 4 While the 10 July 2000 law required departments with three or more Senate seats (or two thirds of the Senate) to use PR – and, thus, to strictly alternate women and men candidates on party lists – the 30 July 2003 law changed the requirement to departments with four or more seats (or half of the Senate).

opponents in Part 1 make clear, the feminist debate on gender parity was incredibly rich and multi-faceted.

Even though the constitutional modification of 28 June 1999 and the law of 6 June 2000 fell short of what paritarists had hoped for, they are an important achievement. Indeed, on the whole, these two reforms favour the equal access of women and men to elected office; they do not ensure the election of an equal number of men and women. Even after the adoption of the laws of 11 April 2003 and 31 January 2007 (see Figure 1), which contain stricter provisions, the type of equality favoured by the Constitution and the law is an equality of access rather than a more constraining equality of results. The law of 11 April 2003 requires regional party lists to strictly alternate women and men candidates. As for the law of 31 January 2007, it states that, in municipalities with more than 3,500 residents, party lists must strictly alternate women and men-candidates. In addition, both municipal and regional executives must include an equal number of women and men.<sup>53</sup> Although political parties can still grant a disproportionate share of their legislative candidacies to one sex, they face a greater reduction in state funding as of 1 January 2008. Finally, since 2007, cantonal candidates must appoint a substitute (or *suppléant*) from the opposite sex who will take his or her place in case of death or resignation. In other words, in France today, parity means equal access, not equal representation. It is not surprising, then, that the feminization of elected assemblies triggered by the parity reforms, particularly the laws of 6 June 2000 and 31 January 2007, has been slower at some levels than others.

### **The Influence of Parity Reforms on Women's Numerical Representation**

The results of the various subnational, national, and European elections that took place between 2001 and 2009 (see Table 3) reveal a number of trends. The parity reforms have forced political parties to present more women candidates, especially in elections conducted according to PR. For instance, since 2001, all parties have presented gender-balanced lists in the municipal, regional, senatorial, and European elections. During the 2002 and 2007 legislative elections, however, the two main parties – namely, the PS and, above all, the more conservative UMP, which won both elections – opted for a greater number of men candidacies and, thus, a reduction in the state funding they received.<sup>54</sup> Lastly, the parity laws have not had an affect on elections that do not fall under their rubric.



Table 3

<b>Women's numerical gains after the parity reforms</b>				
Elected positions	Before parity reforms		After parity reforms	
	Year	% of women	Year	% of women
Municipal councillors (fewer than 3,500 residents)	1995	21.0	2001 2008	30.0 32.2
<i>Municipal councillors (more than 3,500 residents)</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>25.7</i>	<i>2001 2008</i>	<i>47.5 48.5</i>
Mayors	1995	8.0	2001 2008	10.8 13.8
General councillors	1998	8.6	2001 2004 2008	9.8 10.9 12.3
<i>Regional councillors</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>27.5</i>	<i>2004 2010</i>	<i>47.6 48.0</i>
Regional presidents	1998	11.5	2004 2010	3.8 7.7
<i>Deputies</i>	<i>1997</i>	<i>10.9</i>	<i>2002 2007</i>	<i>12.3 18.5</i>
<i>Senators</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>5.9</i>	<i>2001 2004 2008</i>	<i>10.9 16.9 21.9</i>
<i>Members of the European Parliament</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>40.2</i>	<i>2004 2009</i>	<i>43.6 45.8</i>

*Source:* Adapted from information in France, Observatoire de la parité, "Les modes de scrutin, % de Femmes au Parlement européen" and "Proportions de femmes élues conseillères régionales en 1998, 2004 et 2010 par région," Observatoire de la parité, <http://www.observatoire-parite.gouv.fr>.

*Note:* Positions and statistics in italics indicate elections in which the parity laws have been applied.

### Subnational and European Elections

The 2001 and 2008 municipal elections illustrate these trends. In municipalities with more than 3,500 residents, all parties presented gender-balanced lists, and the proportion of women councillors almost doubled from 25.7 percent in 1995 to 47.5 percent in 2001. It can be argued that the women councillors of these towns and cities reached parity in 2008, when they filled 48.5 percent of the positions. On the other hand, in municipalities with fewer than 3,500 residents, which are exempt from the law, progress has not been quite as dramatic: the proportion of women

on councils was 21 percent in 1995, 30 percent in 2001, and 32.2 percent in 2008. As for the more prestigious position of mayor, which is not embraced by the law, women's gains have not been impressive. Indeed, the proportion of women mayors in all municipalities only increased from 8 percent in 1995 to 10.8 percent in 2001 to 13.8 percent in 2008. The thirty-eight cities with more than one hundred thousand residents elected only six women mayors (four from the PS, one from Les Verts, and one from the UMP). The fact that mayoral candidates head party lists and that the law does not require parties to place women at the top of their list helps to explain this slow progress. Statistics from cantonal elections also indicate that progress has been slower when parties are not required to present an equal number of women and men candidates. Indeed, the slight increase in the proportion of women general councillors from 9.8 percent in 2001 to 10.9 percent in 2004 to 12.3 percent in 2008 is not surprising given that a minority of cantonal candidates (around 20 percent) were women in 2004 and 2008 and that the majority of substitutes (almost 80 percent) were women in 2008.<sup>55</sup>

The legislative reforms of 6 June 2000 and 11 April 2003, which require the strict alternation of women and men on European and regional party lists, gave a considerable boost to women's representation, especially at the regional level. The proportion of women regional councillors improved considerably from 27.5 percent in 1998 to 47.6 percent in 2004. The March 2010 regional elections returned almost the same percentage of women councillors, 48 percent. On the other hand, only one woman, Socialist Ségolène Royal, was elected president of a region, Poitou-Charentes in 2004. As of 2010, there are two women regional presidents: Royal, who was reelected and Socialist Marie-Guite Dufay, who ran in the Franche-Comté region. But this is not surprising given that a minority of women led the party lists. Since 2004, women hold 37.3 percent (126/265) of regional vice-presidencies compared to only 15.1 percent (40/265) in 1998. The provision from the law of 31 January 2007 that requires regional executives to be gender-balanced will likely enhance their feminization following the 2010 elections. At the European level, it should be noted that even prior to the adoption of the parity reforms women held 40.2 percent (35/87) of France's seats in the European Parliament. With 43.6 percent (34/78) of seats in the hands of women as of 2004, France's delegation was one of the most feminized.<sup>56</sup> On the other hand, following the 2009 elections, which returned a slightly higher proportion of women (33/72 or 45.8 percent) to the European

Parliament, the Observatoire de la parité noted the reluctance of political parties to have women head their lists.<sup>57</sup>

### Senatorial and Legislative Elections

The senatorial elections of 2001, 2004, and 2008 also demonstrate that women made few gains in cases where the parity laws did not apply. In 2001, in the departments (*départements*) where the elections were conducted according to PR and where the law applied (i.e., two-thirds of departments at the time), the proportion of women senators went from five to twenty (20/74 or 20.3 percent). In the departments where elections were conducted according to the single-member majoritarian system and where the law did not apply, the proportion of women senators remained at two (2/28 or 7.1 percent). This trend was repeated in 2004, when twenty-nine women (29/83 or 34.9 percent) were elected in departments with PR (now half of departments), while only two women (2/45 or 4.4 percent) were elected in the other departments. The 2008 elections bore similar results: eleven women were elected in departments with PR (11/40 or 27.5 percent), while seven women (7/74 or 9.5 percent) were elected in the other departments. Thirteen were from the Left, and five were from the Right. To boost women's share of seats in the Senate, the Observatoire de la parité has recommended that the PR system be reinstated in two-thirds of the departments, as was the case for the 2001 elections, rather than in half of departments, as has been the case since 2003.<sup>58</sup> If some senators were to stop the use of tactics such as party proliferation to circumvent the law, the steady but slow feminization of the Senate evident since 2001 (5.9 percent in 1998, 16.9 percent in 2004, and 21.9 percent in 2008) would likely accelerate (see Table 3).<sup>59</sup>

Although a large proportion of the candidates in the 2002 and 2007 legislative elections were women (38.9 percent and 41.6 percent, respectively), only a handful were elected: women held 12.3 percent (71/577) of seats in the National Assembly in 2002 and 18.5 percent (107/577) in 2007. The reluctance of the PS and, especially, the UMP to select an equal number of women and men candidates helps to account for this discrepancy. In 2002, and again in 2007, the UMP had the lowest proportion of women candidates – 19.9 percent and 26.6 percent, respectively. Although the PS did better than the UMP with 34.6 percent women candidates in 2002 and 46.5 percent in 2007, it did not reach parity. As statistics on the proportion of women among the UMP and PS deputies elected in 2002 and 2007 indicate, the two parties likely set aside few