French Politics, **2003**, **1**, (5–38)

www.palgrave-journals.com/fp

Articles

Who are the Women? Where are the Women? And What Difference Can They Make? Effects of Gender Parity in French Municipal Elections

Karen Bird
Department of Political Science, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada L8S 4M4
E-mail: kbird@mcmaster.ca

In June 2000, France passed a new law requiring 'parity' — an equal number of male and female candidates — for most elections. The law was applied to municipal elections in March 2001, Senate elections in September 2001, and legislative elections in June 2002. This article describes the sources of resistance to parity, and its eventual passage into law, before examining the effectiveness of the law in terms of women's place in politics. It focuses on local elections, where the parity law has had the greatest impact. Using an original sample survey of candidates, it examines the characteristics of the women and men who ran for office under parity. Despite achieving virtually identical levels of representation in local councils in France, this research points to lingering marginalization of women to lower and traditionally 'feminine' areas of political responsibility. And while there are some important demographic differences between the men and women who ran for local election under parity rules, the findings show that female candidates were at least as likely as male candidates to be recruited from among local elites. Nevertheless, female and male candidates appear to hold a distinctive set of perspectives on politics, suggesting that parity holds some promise for democratic renewal and policy change, at least at the local level. A key factor shaping women's distinctive political perspectives is the priority they place on family responsibilities. Women's previous exclusion from the public sphere, as well as their hesitancy to make a career out of politics, may explain their higher level of support for greater socio-cultural diversification among political actors.
French Politics (2003) **1,** 5–38. doi:10.1057/palgrave.fp.8200014

Keywords: parity; elections; Municipal politics; gender differences; France

---

In media reports leading up to the first round of French municipal elections on 11 March 2001, all eyes turned to the new parity law requiring for the first time ever that electoral lists include an equal number of male and female candidates.[1] The important French daily *Le Monde* included a regular column

on women and the election, while popular weeklies such as *Le Point*, *L'Express*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, as well as 'women's' magazines like *Marie-Claire* and *Elle*, produced special dossiers on women in politics and profiled selected female candidates. The media attention reached its pinnacle just 3 days before the election, on 8 March (International Women's Day), with most French dailies devoting several pages to the analyses of women's place in the political, business, and domestic spheres today, and to the chronology of the women's movement.

This level of attention to women in politics was unprecedented in France before parity. Historically, at least until they received the right to vote in 1944, French women who dared to enter political life have been more often criticized than celebrated (Landes, 1988; Perrot, 1997). Moreover, until very recently, the French preferred *not* to acknowledge whether their elected representatives were male or female — although in fact over 95 per cent of them since 1944 have been men[2]— addressing men and women indiscriminately as 'Monsieur le ministre' and 'Monsieur le maire.'[3] With the dust settled and the media attention subsided, it is important now to assess the initial results of France's first nationwide experiment with gender parity in electoral politics.

A full assessment of parity in French municipal elections is even more critical, in light of the law's relative ineffectiveness in elections to the National Assembly (9 and 16 June 2002). Undeterred by financial penalties, major parties on the right and left failed to uphold the spirit of parity. The right wing Union pour la Majorité Présidentielle, which formed the government following these elections, nominated women to fewer than 20 per cent of the districts where it ran a candidate, while the Socialists nominated women in just 36 per cent of its contests. The results of the election were discouraging for women. The National Assembly now includes just 71 women among its 576 members (12.3 per cent), a small increase from elections in 1997 — before the constitution was amended and the parity law passed — when 62 women (10.9 per cent) were elected to the national parliament. As this article explains, the results of parity at the municipal level were much more positive. Among the most significant changes, women now hold almost half (47.5 per cent) of the seats on municipal councils, up from just a quarter (25.7 per cent) in previous elections.

Despite these disappointing results for women in the first legislative elections run under parity rules, it remains important that we look to the *local* level to understand the broader effects of parity in French politics, and this for at least two reasons. First, the recruitment and training of a critical mass of women at the local level is essential to any significant increase over time in the number of women elected to national politics. Given that some of these locally elected women will percolate up to the national level, it will prove useful to assemble a profile of the large class of women elected to local politics under parity rules. Second, some feminist scholars (Phillips, 1993; Lister, 1997) argue that an

influx of women can serve to introduce alternative ideas and more democratic approaches to politics. The logical *first* place to look for such transformative capacity is at the local level — where the boundaries between the public and private spheres that have traditionally excluded women from politics are most porous, where women's patterns of involvement in the associations and social life of the community are most likely to translate into political capital, and where (especially in smaller towns) lower levels of party discipline should allow women to exercise greater autonomy in their representative function. If women do not demonstrate a different way of doing politics at the local level, there is little to suggest that they will transform the political process at the national level.

This article begins by describing the history of the parity movement and the development of the law. The focus here is on the difficulties encountered in achieving legal change, and the reluctance towards parity within the corridors of political power. Following this historical review, the article then examines from two perspectives the application of parity at the local level. The first perspective considers the results of the municipal elections of March 2001, focusing on the effects of parity in securing women's access to different levels of municipal government. The second perspective draws upon an original large sample survey of candidates, to describe the differences between the men and women who ran for and were elected to local office under parity rules.

History of the Parity Law

There are a number of countries in which political parties have voluntarily introduced quotas for women candidates, and a few (e.g. Belgium, India, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, South Africa, Malaysia) where national laws require a minimum percentage (e.g. 30 per cent) of female candidates or representatives at various electoral levels. France is the first country in the world to require by law an *equal* number of male and female candidates for *virtually all* elections.

The parity law was promulgated on 6 June 2000.[4] It followed a constitutional revision, adopted on 28 June 1999. Whereas the constitution had previously been interpreted as forbidding any preferential treatment of candidates on the basis of gender or any other category, it now states (Article 3, paragraph v) that 'the law favours the equal access of men and women to all electoral mandates and elective functions,' and (Article 4, paragraph ii) that political parties 'contribute to the application of this principle through conditions determined by the law.'

How the parity law came to be is a story in itself. Some accounts of the parity law in France suggest that this measure was adopted easily, and that the advocates of the measure were themselves surprised by how quickly their cause

was taken up by the government. The story recounted here makes a very different argument. The parity movement began not in the 1990s, but in the early 1970s. Political resistance to parity remained strong through the 1980s and early 1990s. First and foremost, there was reluctance within the political class (both the left and right) to measures that might ultimately cost a sitting member his seat. There was the old philosophical division among feminists themselves about whether women should be treated differently or identically to men, and whether measures to enhance women's representation humiliated women by admitting that they needed special help to get elected. There was also the classic French republican problem that it is not possible to grant benefits or legal status on sexual, ethnic, or cultural grounds, as such measures would undermine the republican project of equality and universality of treatment.

Pre-parity movement: 1970s–1980s

While the 1990s was the decisive decade for the parity movement, the seeds of this movement were planted as early as 1975 under the centrist government of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (Union pour la Démocratie Française). It was in that year that Françoise Giroud, the first Secretary of State for the Condition of Women, presented a list of '100 measures for women,' including limiting the number of candidates of the same sex who may appear on a party's list for municipal elections. A proposal for a ceiling of 80 per cent was introduced to Parliament in 1980 by Monique Pelletier, the new Secretary of State for the Condition of Women. On first reading in the National Assembly (19–20 November 1980) the proposal was adopted by 439 votes to 3. Yet the government, facing pressures of a coming election, felt it wiser not to pursue such a controversial reform and the bill never made it to the agenda in the Senate.

Two years later, a law *was* passed limiting to 75 per cent the number of candidates of the same sex who may appear on the lists for municipal election. Yet this law was never applied or promulgated. Rather, it was reviewed by the Constitutional Council and declared incompatible with the terms of the Constitution, particularly with those articles guaranteeing equality and non-discrimination in access to public office, and the non-divisibility of the sovereign authority of the body politic.[5]

While the Constitutional Council stands as the most imposing obstacle to parity during this period, a close reading of the parliamentary debates at this time reveals that the Socialist Party was itself responsible for the failure of this pre-parity measure. Despite campaign promises, the government of President François Mitterrand did not intend to establish a quota for women. The quota measure was brought to Parliament not by the Minister for Women's Rights Yvette Roudy, but through an amendment offered by an independent member

of Parliament, Gisèle Halimi,[6] to a government bill that would introduce semi-proportional representation for elections at the municipal level. The Socialist group in Parliament succeeded in replacing Halimi's proposed amendment with a milder one.[7] However, even this measure was greeted coolly by the Government. Speaking for the Government during these debates, the Minister of the Interior, Gaston Defferre, effectively paved the way for the Constitutional Council's censure of the law. Defferre reminded the deputies that, as concerns the ratio of male and female candidates, 'the Government considers that it falls to the parties to decide on the matter.'[8] However, in the event that Parliament should approve this amendment, he made a request that would stand as a beacon call to the members of the Assembly and to the judges of the Constitutional council:

> 'I wish, if the measure that is proposed is adopted, that it appear within a separate article so that, in the event that the Constitutional Council should annul it, the law may nevertheless be applied.'[9]

In what French political scholar Lochak (1983, 181) called an 'edifying lesson in hypocrisy' the deputies voted nearly unanimously for the quota amendment (476 votes to 4, with 3 abstentions), after taking care to separate it from the main legislation. Undoubtedly, it was with relief that French parliamentarians greeted the Court's invalidation of the law.

Parity movement: 1990s–2000s

The parity movement was renewed and radicalized in the early 1990s. A decisive factor was the verdict of the Constitutional Council which, in closing off the option of quotas, forced the advocates of reform to develop a more fundamental criticism of sexual inequality within the representative system. If a quota was not acceptable to the Court, neither was it adequate for women themselves who — the paritaristes argued — represented half of the population and therefore merited fully half of all representative seats.

Another significant factor was growing attention at the international and European level to the problem of women's absence in positions of political power. Through a series of European and international initiatives on women's place in politics (including the Beijing platform and resolutions passed by the Council of Europe), attention became focused on the fact that French women remained in a fundamentally backward position in politics, both in comparison to other domains where they had made progress, and in comparison to women in other European countries.[10] The figures showed that France fell well behind other European members (ahead of only Greece) for the numbers of women elected to national government. On 1 January 1997, women occupied 35 of the 576 seats (6.1 per cent) in the French National Assembly and 18 of the 321

seats (5.6 per cent) in the Senate. Women's access was no better than in 1945, the first year they were eligible to vote and run for national office! Never before the legislative elections of May–June 1997 had women held more than 7 per cent of seats in the French parliament.[11]

The publication by Gaspard *et al.* of the book '*Au pouvoir citoyennes! Liberté, parité*' (1992) was a significant milestone in the movement. Gaspard and her co-authors advocated a referendum and a constitutional amendment on parity. The book was followed in 1993 by the publication of the 'Manifeste des 577,'[12] and the creation between 1992 and 1994 of several associations dedicated to parity reform.[13] The activists of this movement, most of them well connected to the Socialist party,[14] brought parity and the question of a constitutional amendment to the forefront of political debates during the 1995 presidential election. All three main presidential candidates included parity within their campaign platforms. Following the elections, Jacques Chirac's Prime Minister Alain Juppé (both of the right-wing Rassemblement pour la République) commissioned the 'Observatoire de la parité,' and charged it with reporting every 2 years on the conditions of women's access to politics, and with making recommendations for legal change. Even more significant, in June 1996 10 prominent female politicians from across the ideological spectrum stepped across rigid party boundaries to sign a public manifesto 'Pour la parité' demanding constitutional reform.[15] When the Observatoire de la parité presented its first report to Parliament in December 1996, it recommended a constitutional revision to allow for parity legislation.

The government was beginning to take note. In March 1997, in a speech to the National Assembly on 'Women's place in public life,' Prime Minister Juppé declared his 'personal' support for the principle of parity: 'After long reflection, and after long intellectual progress, I am today convinced that the institution of some measure of positive discrimination is necessary.' The election just 3 months later of a left-wing alliance government under Prime Minister Lionel Jospin (Socialist) was the final significant step toward the realization of parity. The Socialist party already required that its own list of candidates include at least 30 per cent women,[16] while the Green party required fully 50 per cent. Moreover, Jospin was one of the few men in French politics who was personally convinced that parity was philosophically and politically appropriate. An undoubtable influence in his thinking was his wife, the feminist philosopher Sylviane Agacinski (1996, 1998, 1999a), who had written and would continue to write in favour of parity. Immediately after the election, Jospin affirmed that his government would introduce a plan to amend the Constitution, and set out to force his reluctant deputies (ever wary of preserving their parliamentary seats) to support the reform.[17] In June 1998, the

Minister of Justice Elisabeth Gigou presented the government's project for a constitutional amendment.

President Jacques Chirac was initially somewhat cool to the constitutional reform, but he understood that parity was a popular idea. There was a widespread sense of embarrassment that France, the cradle of modern democracy, could rank second-to-last in Europe for the percentage of women in political office. Polls showed that ordinary men and women favoured parity (although there was no popular mobilization of citizens either for or against the project). Finally, parity was viewed as a measure that would renew the political class and help to modernize French politics. Chirac rallied his deputies to support the constitutional amendment, although some resistance was mounted in the right-dominated Senate, which forced a few concessions on the new language to be included in the Constitution. On 28 June 1999, a joint congress of the two legislative chambers ratified an amendment to Articles 3 and 4 of the French Constitution. Within a year, on 6 June 2000, the parity law received final assent (on third reading) in the National Assembly.[18]

Sources of resistance

Despite its relatively easy passage,[19] there were two distinct sources of resistance to parity. One was philosophical and widely publicized, while the other was pragmatic and occult. We deal with these in turn.

Parity laid bare a philosophical cleavage not between men and women, nor between political parties (all of whom publicly supported parity and differed only in the details of the law), but between the proponents of parity and the defenders of a republican universalism opposed to any law that would distinguish between citizens or elected representatives on the basis of their sex. This cleavage was especially apparent among French intellectuals, including feminists. A particularly important pair of actors in this debate was Sylviane Agacinski (for '*la démocratie paritaire*') and Elisabeth Badinter (against parity and for '*l'égalité universelle*'), whose arguments were frequently presented in facing columns of the printed press (Agacinski, 1996, 1999a, b; Badinter, 1996, 1999; Badinter *et al.* 1999). The Agacinski–Badinter exchanges are revealing, both in terms of the ideas presented, and in terms of the relationships among the main participants in the political debates over parity. These two public intellectuals, feminists both, were each married to a leading protagonist in the political debates over parity — Agacinski to Lionel Jospin, and Badinter to the former Socialist minister Robert Badinter who led the opposition against the constitutional revision from his seat in Senate. The two women assumed such undeniable influence in the parity debates that observers came to refer to '*Le projet Jospin-Agacinski*' and to '*l'opposition du couple*

Badinter.' These debates reveal (again) that support for and opposition to parity was rarely organized along party lines. Also, the level of complicity between militant advocates/opponents of parity and political actors exemplifies how the public debate over parity in France was restricted to a small circle of elite actors.

This philosophical divide was the focus of considerable media and political attention. In the course of this very public debate, the advocates of parity effectively clothed themselves in the legitimating fabric of French republicanism, arguing that parity was not a departure from the principles of civic unity and non-recognition of particular social categories.[20] They argued that women are not a social category like racial or religious groups. This quasi-universalist formulation of parity proved particularly appealing during legislative debates. It satisfied most moderate French republicans[21] by reducing two of the most apparent risks of group-based representation: the risk of over-politicizing group differences and disrupting social cohesion, and the risk of undermining deliberative processes aimed at identifying general interests and shared concerns.

While politically appealing, this quasi-universalist formulation of parity *is* problematic. Because of the need to identify the sexual difference as the only universally, objectively valid difference among humanity, the advocates of parity in some instances descended dangerously close to arguments of biological determinism.[22] For only if there is an *essential*, *permanent*, and *universal* difference between men and women — a difference more significant than the mere social constructions that distinguish ethnic, racial, and religious categories — can parity be defended within a republican framework. Furthermore, while parity runs the risk of inflating sexual differences, it tends to deflate and render virtually invisible other differences among men and women that have generated social and political exclusion. Parity takes no account and denies any remedy for the almost complete exclusion of people of non-European immigrant origin from national politics. Also, by asserting the significance and universality of the sexual difference between men and women, parity tends to counter homosexuals' demands for legal recognition of marriage and adoption rights. Finally, the quasi-universalist formulation of parity weakens the rationale for increasing women's presence in elected legislative assemblies. For, if elected representatives are supposed to represent the collective interests of the nation and not narrow sectarian interests, then it matters less *who* does the representing.[23]

While the theory of representation may already be 'a muddle' (Phillips, 1995 41), the republican articulation of parity as a measure to enhance representative equality produces even further incoherence. Ultimately, the problem posed by Perrot (1995, 51), 'Au nom de quoi, la parité? de l'équité individuelle? ou de la différence des sexes?' was never resolved over the course of the parity debates. This makes it difficult to evaluate whether parity should

produce better substantive representation of women's interests, or whether it is simply a means for ensuring that more women may take their place alongside men in elite institutions (Millard and Ortiz, 1998).

Surprisingly, the philosophical opposition to parity evaporated after the passage of the constitutional amendment. What replaced it was a more pragmatic, more occult, and ultimately more effective form of opposition among the seated deputies in the National Assembly and the political elite of the major French parties.

While deputies were beholden to support parity in principle, it is no accident that in the passage from principle to law, parity would yield to the fundamental pragmatic interest in maintaining political power. Not surprisingly, it is at the locus of political power in France (the National Assembly) where the parity law is least effective. Although quotas are most effective when elections are run using a proportional/list system, every major French party stood resolutely opposed to any reform of the existing single-member plurality system of election to the National Assembly.[24] Clearly, a proportional or semi-proportional system of election would benefit women, but would also reward minor parties at the expense of larger ones. Finally, sitting deputies (89 per cent of them men) simply loathed the thought of having their candidacy passed over by a party forced to nominate an equal number of women and men. As a result, a more supple approach to parity would be applied to legislative elections than that applied to elections using proportional/list methods. Parties that do not present an equal number of male and female candidates for legislative elections will have a portion of their public subsidy withheld, but remain eligible to contest the election. The national elections of 2002 revealed that this financial incentive was effective for small parties with few seated members and limited sources of alternative funding, but ineffective for larger parties (Bird, forthcoming.) Also, because the law considers only the proportion of men and women presented as candidates, parties face no disincentive to placing their female candidates in unwinnable constituencies. In elections held on 9 and 16 June 2002, the centre-right formation the Union pour la Majorité Presidentielle (UMP) that formed the new government nominated women to fewer than 20 per cent of the districts where it ran a candidate, while the Socialists nominated women to just 36 per cent of its contests. The result: a nominal increase from 62 to 71 women seated in the 576-member assembly.

Parity Applied: Municipal Elections 2001

The parity law applies to most, but not all, elections in France. It applies to municipal elections in towns of at least 3,500 inhabitants, legislative elections, regional elections, Senate elections (in larger departments where three or more Senators are elected by proportional-list methods), elections of representatives

to the European Parliament, and elections to an assortment of legislative councils in overseas French territories. The law does not apply to presidential elections, or to cantonal elections in which voters elect representatives to their departmental assemblies (*Conseils généraux*), or to Senate elections in smaller departments (where elections are run under single-member plurality rules). In functional terms, the law applies differently depending upon the voting methods used for each type of election.

For municipal elections — decided by a semi-proportional list system over two rounds of voting — parties must present lists composed of an equal number of men and women, allowing for one more male or female candidate when the number of seats being contested is uneven. The law does not impose strict alternation between male and female candidates throughout the list.[25] Rather, parties must present three men and three women in any order for every six candidates listed. Any list that does not conform to parity rules is declared ineligible and will not be presented to voters.

While the application of the parity law to municipal elections is fairly strict, there remain a number of shortcomings. Most noteworthy, the law does not apply to municipal elections in towns of fewer than 3,500 inhabitants, although it is the latter that constitute the vast majority of municipalities in France. To wit, in the 2001 elections, the parity law applied to just 2,624 of over 36,500 municipalities (about 7 per cent) and affected just 76,000 of over 500,000 locally elected councillors (roughly 15 per cent),[26] In effect, parity was rendered impossible in these small municipalities by a semi-direct method of election, which allows voters in towns under the 3,500 threshold to cross candidates' names from the list, to change the order of names on the list, or to add new names to the list. Imposing parity on a wider scale would have required legislative changes to voting methods, which the government had promised it would not impose.

A second important shortcoming of the law is that it does not apply to the selection of the mayor. French mayors are elected indirectly, as the first order of business facing the newly invested city council. Almost invariably it is the person holding the first position on the winning list who is the elected mayor. The law includes no incentive or requirement concerning the gender of the so-called *tête de liste* and, in 2001 as in previous elections, that person was almost always male.

Nor is parity required in the selection of the mayor's cabinet. The real power in municipal politics is held by the mayor, along with his *premier adjoint* (adjunct-mayor) and a variable number of lesser adjuncts, each heading a particular subcommittee of the council. Adjuncts are nominated by the mayor from among elected councillors, and then elected by the council as a whole. (It is generally a foregone conclusion that the adjuncts will be selected from the winning list.) The long-standing practice has been that the order of candidates

on the winning list would also be the order of nomination to the mayor's executive. The second candidate on the winning list becomes the *premier adjoint* (adjunct-mayor), the third becomes the *deuxiéme adjoint*, and so on. Because there must be an equal number of men and women among the first six names on the list, parity is not entirely irrelevant to the constitution of the cabinet. Nevertheless, there is no legal requirement that women be represented at the executive level of local government.

Finally, still at the municipal level, parity rules do not apply in naming the governing members of amalgamated cities. These Public Intercommunal Cooperative Establishments (EPCIs) are responsible for infrastructure, economic planning, and the harmonization and consolidation of public programmes and tax systems across contiguous towns. According to most observers, they have become the locus of power in municipal government. The representatives to these intercommunal structures are appointed by member cities, usually from among the mayors' adjuncts.

Parity results

There are two central conclusions to be drawn from the results of the 2001 municipal elections in France. The first is that the parity law was effective — where it applied — in bringing women into politics. Where they were required to do so, parties proved highly adept at recruiting women into politics. The law's detractors, especially those who complained about the shortage of women qualified or interested enough to enter politics, were simply wrong. There appear to have been no major difficulties (and certainly none that were intractable) in composing lists containing the same number of candidates of each sex. There was no party that proved incapable of achieving parity on its lists. According to a survey of 600 *têtes de liste*, 78 per cent considered that it was 'easy' to apply the parity law in selecting candidates for their lists.[27] Certainly, the most delicate problem facing mayors running for re-election was to dislodge male incumbents in order to make room for new female candidates. Yet even in this respect, the parity requirement was a welcome pretext for mayors wishing to eliminate their least favoured councillors and to present a rejuvenated list.

The second conclusion is equally clear. Political leaders (mostly men) are not likely to cede power to newcomers unless the law requires them to do so; and, the greater the power at stake, the less likely it is to be ceded voluntarily. Because the parity law does not apply at the centre of municipal power — the mayor's office and cabinet — it makes more visible than before the stratified nature of men's and women's access to politics. There remains a 'glass-ceiling' effect that severely limits women's access to the most important and influential position in local politics, and parity has done little in the short term to help women break through this ceiling.

Where are the women?

With the introduction of parity, more than 39,000 women joined their local city councils (in towns with over 3,500 inhabitants), almost double their numbers in the councils sitting before March 2001. In cities having over 3,500 inhabitants, the percentage of women elected to council increased to 47.5 per cent, from just 25.7 per cent in 1995. There was little variation in these numbers across France.

There was also an increase — albeit less spectacular — in the number of female councillors and mayors in towns under the 3,500 threshold (where parity rules do not apply). Today, women comprise 30.05 per cent of town councils in small villages, up from 21 per cent in 1995. They also make up 11.2 per cent of small-town mayors, compared to 7.8 per cent in 1995.[28] But there are wide regional variations in the number of women elected in small towns across France. For example, across these smaller towns, just 23 per cent of councillors were women in the Doubs (eastern France), compared to 32 per cent Isère (south-east), and 31 per cent in Hérault (south).[29]

In cities having above 3,500 inhabitants, parity applied to the composition of candidate lists, but not to the election of the executive. The result is that, overall, women remain the minority participants in local executives. Just 6.7 per cent of the mayors elected in March 2001 were women, compared to 4.4 per cent in 1995. Among adjunct-mayors an estimated 26.3 per cent are women; among all adjuncts an estimated 36.5 per cent are women. Women's presence in local executives tends to be strongest within the largest cities. However, here again there is significant variation across different cities. For example, in Lyon, just 24 per cent of the city executives are female, compared to 53 per cent in Paris (although both cities are led by Socialist governments). Overall, four of France's 35 largest cities now have a female mayor (compared to one before parity), while 11 have a woman as adjunct-mayor.

While the parity law has led to a significant increase in the number of women elected to local politics, there is still much room for improvement. Power in local government is sexually stratified with men maintaining their dominance in the most important offices (Table 1). At other electoral levels, it is also clear that where parity is not applied in the strictest terms, women remain largely absent from political office.[30]

Representative Roles of Women and Men: Identical or Different?

Getting women into elected office is one thing. Now that they hold a fairer share of seats in local assemblies in France, we need to ask whether elected women are different from men, whether they approach politics differently, and whether they are more likely than men to advance issues of importance to women. These questions point to the complex problem of women's and men's

Table 1 Women within French Local Government (2001)

	Percentage women			
Size of municipality	*Mayor*	*Adjunct-mayor*	*All adjuncts*	*Council*
Less than 3,500	11.2	18.5[a]	23.2[a]	30.1
3,500–8,999	6.2	23.0[a]	35.4[a]	47.4
9,000–29,999	7.1	32.0[a]	37.0[a]	47.3
30,000–99,999	8.2	30.0[a]	42.5	47.8
100,000 or more	11.1	30.6	39.5	48.6
District councils (Paris, Marseille, Lyon)	24.3	27.0	46.4	48.4
Total 3,500+	6.7	26.3[a]	36.5[a]	47.5

[a]Where indicated, figures are the author's estimates based on analysis of a sample ($n = 1567$) of city councils from across France. Other figures represent the whole population of councils for towns of a given size. There are 36,565 municipalities within metropolitan France (excluding overseas territories), each with its own mayor and town council.

representative role under the French parity law. From a theoretical perspective, it is difficult to evaluate whether parity should produce better substantive representation of women's interests. The parity law is not *intended* to depart from the republican tradition of civic unity and non-recognition of particular social categories, suggesting, in theory at least, that women elected under the law are not expected to provide substantive representation for women as a group.[31] But in practice, it seems likely that the surge of female newcomers may produce significant changes in French local politics.

We think that a useful starting point for considering these questions is to examine differences between the women and men who ran as *candidates* in these elections. Many of the women running for local election in March 2001 were first-time candidates. We expect these women to be quite different — in terms of their background characteristics and their ideas about politics and the representative role of women — both in comparison to men and in comparison to women with previous experience (before the introduction of parity rules) in male-dominated councils. A clearer picture of the nature of these differences is important, for while we know that more women were recruited into politics under parity, we know very little about the kinds of women who come forward under such rules. Additionally, a survey of female candidates' ideas can serve as an important benchmark for evaluating the nature and extent of future policy change that might be attributed to women's increased presence in local councils.

In the following sections, we discuss the results of a survey of candidates running in French local elections in March 2001 (see note 1). The purpose of this survey was to compare the men and women who ran for election, both in cities where the parity law applied and in small towns where the law was not

applied.[32] In addition to personal background data, candidates provided information about their previous political experience and that of their family members, their reasons for running and their experiences during the campaign, and their views on various political issues and on the representative role of elected women.

Work, family, and politics

The findings of this survey suggest significant socio-demographic differences between the women and men who ran for local office in 2001. Table 2 presents a general comparison of male and female candidates who ran in local elections in small towns where the parity law did not apply, and in larger cities where the law was applied. We see that in both types of election, female candidates were younger than male candidates: about 5 years difference in small towns and 3 years difference in larger cities. In part because of their youth (as well as other reasons discussed below), female candidates had significantly more children still living at home. This evidence suggests quite different patterns of political involvement among French women than among US women, who are more likely than men to wait until their children are grown before making their first bids for political office (Carroll and Strimling, 1983, 27–28).

Female candidates were far less likely than male candidates to be working full-time (fewer than half of all candidates did so, compared to between two-thirds and three-quarters of men), and much more likely to be employed part-time (about one-quarter of women) or to be home-makers. About 13 per cent of female candidates were retired, compared to about 20 per cent of male candidates.

A further difference in their work experience is that female candidates were far more likely than male candidates (as well as more likely than women in the general population) to be employed in or retired from the public sector. French governments have long used the public sector as a policy instrument for influencing employment and increasing France's low natality rate, and these policies have tended to make public sector work especially attractive to women with families (Jenson and Sineau, 2001). For example, female civil servants (including teachers) with three or more children may take retirement once they have accumulated 15 years of service. Beyond encouraging them to have larger families and easing them out of the workforce, public sector jobs may also encourage and ease women's entry into political life. Public sector jobs, along with some kinds of professional situations, have been called 'brokerage occupations' and have been posited as a key supply-side explanation of both men's and women's entry into political life (Norris and Lovenduski, 1993). They facilitate entry into politics by allowing flexible time-management,

Table 2 Profile and campaign experiences of female and male candidates

	Small Towns (under 3,500 inhabitants)			*Large Towns (3,500 or more inhabitants)*		
	Women	*Men*	*Sig.*	*Women*	*Men*	*Sig.*
Mean age	44.7	49.4	***	47.2	50.1	***
Children at home	1.57	1.44	***	1.50	1.10	***
Work (%)			***			***
Full time	45.9	75.0		43.8	67.7	
Part time	24.0	1.3		24.5	5.6	
Retired	13.3	20.0		12.5	19.7	
Home-maker	8.7	0		8.2	0.3	
Other	8.1	3.7		10.9	6.6	
Employment sector (%)			NS			***
Public	45.4	36.8		49.8	35.8	
Private	54.6	63.2		50.2	64.2	
Education (%)			NS			NS
Less than high school	9.5	10.3		6.5	7.1	
Professional diploma	23.3	29.3		14.6	18.6	
High school baccalaureate	21.7	14.1		16.8	14.6	
University degree (2–4 years)	37.6	29.5		43.6	31.7	
Masters, doctorate	7.9	16.7		18.5	28.0	
Monthly household income (%)			***			NS
Under 10,000F	15.2	5.3		13.7	10.4	
10,000–15,000F	23.6	17.1		20.4	17.9	
15,000–20,000F	24.2	27.6		20.1	19.2	
20,000–30,000F	30.9	23.7		26.5	32.6	
Over 30,000F	6.2	26.3		19.4	19.9	
One or more in family has held mandate	34.7	29.6	NS	33.1	30.1	NS
Member of a political party	8.2	17.3	*	34.1	44.5	***
Hesitated before running	62.2	50.0	NS	51.9	27.4	***
Spouse very favourable	39.9	20.0	***	44.5	28.4	***
Kids very favourable	39.6	24.6	NS	35.0	31.9	NS
Will certainly run again (municipal)	20.5	17.9	NS	24.7	35.0	**
Will certainly run again (other levels)	7.2	10.1	NS	9.3	16.0	*
Gender was an advantage	34.8	12.6	***	53.7	6.3	***
Women's issues evoked during campaign	37.8	30.3	NS	56.5	70.3	***

Results of tests of significance: ***$p < 0.005$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$; NS = non-significant.

generous vacations and career interruptions, financial security, professional independence, public networks, and social status, as well as expertise and skills that are all complementary to the pursuit of political office. These occupational advantages may be especially important for French women in at least two respects. First, French society remains relatively traditional with respect to the division of household labour and child-rearing responsibilities (Sineau, 1999, Krémer, 2001, Méda, 2001). Given that most French women *do* hold down a

job and the household, running for and holding local and unpaid (except in the very largest cities) political office must seem an impossible option for many of them. Public sector work, then, offers important advantages that make it possible for women to run for and assume elected office without having to sacrifice professional or family life. Second, having worked in the public sector, women may be more likely to develop a taste and aptitude for politics. Among women who work in the public sector, many of whom work part-time and retire young, there appears to be a natural transition to community work and eventually local politics.

Local élites

Traditionally, French municipal politics have been dominated by local 'notables.' These have been, almost invariably, *men* of influence and status within the community (doctors, lawyers, shop owners, etc.), usually from among the highest social categories. The predominance of local notables is a function of a political system that has been described as a '*monarchie municipale*' (Malibeau, 1995), and that continues to be marked by the personification of leadership and concentration of authority in the office of the mayor. To what extent has parity altered this system? We compared women and men on three indicators of elite status: household revenue, education, and whether a candidate has family members who have served in political office.

In terms of their household income levels, we found that for elections run under parity rules (i.e. in towns of 3,500 inhabitants or more) female and male candidates are virtually indistinguishable. Within these larger towns, women who have already served in political office actually reported slightly *higher* family revenues than men who had a previous office, while among novice candidates women reported slightly lower revenues than men. In contrast, in the smallest towns (where parity rules do not apply), there was a large and statistically significant difference in men's and women's household income levels. In these towns, for both politically experienced candidates and novices, women reported significantly lower household revenue than men. These findings suggest that female candidates recruited under parity rules tend to be drawn from the same pool of wealthy local notables that has traditionally been the source of male candidates. Matters are very different in smaller villages, possibly because there are fewer female notables in the countryside, and that women there (but not men) attain a level of public recognition suitable for candidacy through simpler kinds of functions: for example, volunteering on the local parent–teacher council or helping to organize a town festival. In larger towns, there may be more professional women for parties to draw upon, while

parties in such towns appear to demand a higher level of public standing for both female and male candidates.

In terms of education, there are no significant differences between male and female candidates, even after controlling for the size of the city and the political experience of the candidates. Men and women are equally likely to have university degrees, although men hold graduate degrees more often than women.

Clearly, an important route to politics for many individuals is through family connections. Indeed, where political access is otherwise difficult for women, they may be more likely than men to attain elite political positions through such connections. If parity democratizes politics by opening it to a broader range of women, we should see that women running for election for the first time under parity rules would have fewer family members with political experience than women who had already served in political office prior to the elections of March 2001. We might also expect that women running under parity rules would have fewer family connections to politics than men.

Our findings do not support this hypothesis (Figure 1). Overall, it appears that novice and experienced female candidates and experienced male candidates had largely similar kinds of family connections to politics, with the caveat that women were more likely to have inherited their political career from their spouse, while men were more likely to have inherited it from their father. The family political histories of politically experienced *vs* novice female candidates are largely indistinguishable. Women without previous political experience were slightly *more* likely than those who had previously held a mandate to have a father, mother, or grandparent who had held political office before them, but slightly *less* likely to have a spouse who had served in political office. While there was little difference in the family political experiences of novice *vs* previously elected women, there were large and significant differences between novice and previously elected men. Novice men were the least politically 'connected' of any candidates. Likewise, we found large and significant differences between the family political experiences of novice male *vs* novice female candidates. Novice women were significantly more likely than novice men to have had a spouse, father, mother, or grandparent who had held a political office.

These findings suggest different recruitment patterns for men and women under parity rules. Faced with the need to recruit a large number of politically inexperienced women, parties passed over anonymous party members and turned instead toward women from civil society with name recognition and strong family connections to politics. In a significant number of cases, parties achieved parity on their lists by replacing previously elected men with their female relatives.[33] Where men were concerned, parties were faced with a

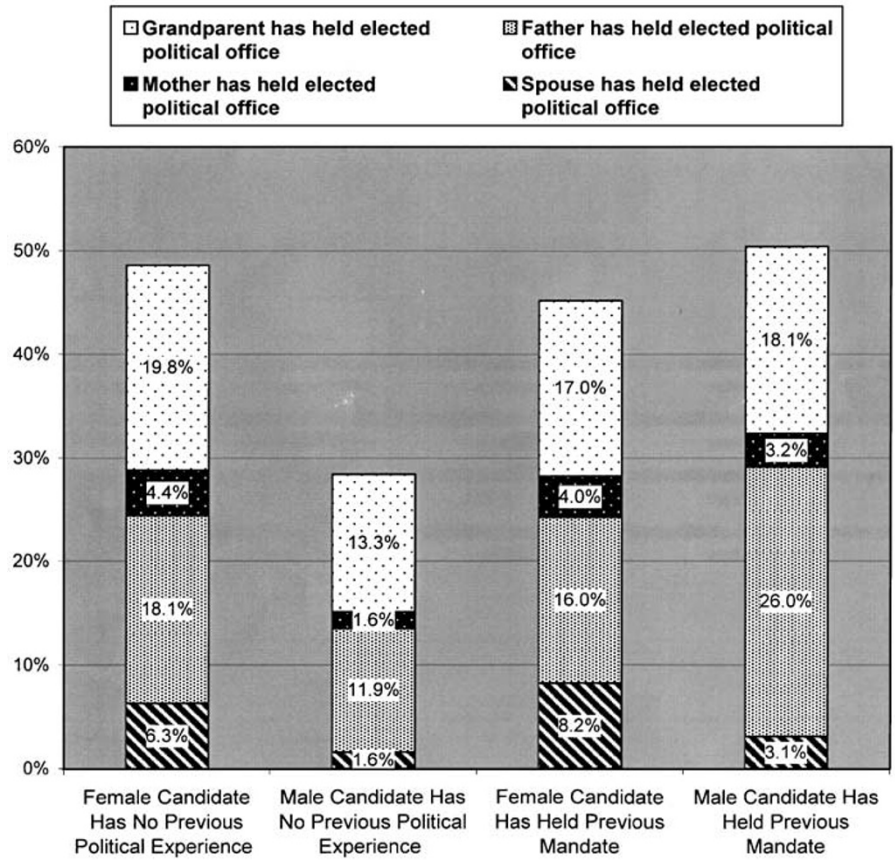

Figure 1 Family connections to politics among male and female candidates.

surplus of potential candidates. They maintained an important number of local notables, but also chose new male candidates from well outside established political families. These patterns of political recruitment might be characterized as *risk reduction* for new female candidates and *risk taking* for new male candidates. In general, where parity was required, parties appear to have applied the traditional system of recruiting among local notables. They solicited women endowed with social resources — notably wealth, education, and social connections — and enjoying a certain level of status and recognition within their communities. Far from representing a broader cross-section of the population, our findings suggest that novice female candidates were more likely than novice men to be drawn from families with established political connections.

Gender and the campaign experience

We asked candidates a number of questions concerning their decision to enter this election, and their experiences during the campaign. Far more than men, women who ran in this election reported serious hesitations before doing so (see Table 2). Women were *persistently* more likely than men to report hesitations, even when they had similar levels of political experience. 'Family reasons' were the second most frequent causes for hesitation (after 'lack of experience') among first-time female candidates and the *most* frequent cause for hesitation among those who had run before. Where family matters are concerned, spousal support appears to be a much more important factor in women's decision to enter the campaign than in men's. More women than men who entered the campaign told us that their spouse offered strong support for their candidacy. We interpret this to mean that many women who considered running for election, but whose husbands did not offer strong support, ultimately decided against it, and that fewer men with limited support from their wives likewise declined from running.[34] The level of children's support for their candidacy did not influence men and women differently.

Further analysis reveals that the size of a city has quite different implications for women than for men in their considerations about whether to run for election. After controlling statistically for a number of known differences between male and female candidates (age, previous political experience, the number of children living at home, employment sector, and household revenue), we found that for women there was a *positive* relationship between city size and the number of hesitations reported in the decision to run for municipal election (that is, the larger the city, the more the hesitations reported), while for men there was a *negative* relationship (the larger the city, the fewer hesitations).[35] This finding suggests two very different kinds of logic at work in men's and women's decisions about entering political life. For men, it may be that larger cities are more attractive because they provide greater opportunities for power and political advancement. For women, these characteristics may be less important. Instead, small towns (especially those under 9,000 inhabitants) may be especially desirable to women, both because women are less likely to doubt their capacities to serve elected office in such an environment, and because the physical space of such towns makes it easier for them to weave together public responsibilities with family and professional ones.[36]

Concerning the possibility of running in another municipal election, there is a 10-point gap between the percentage of men and women who say they will certainly do so, and this difference persists for men and women who were elected, as well as for those who were not. It appears, especially in larger cities, that women are less likely than men to enter politics with the idea of staying.

We asked men and women directly about the role of gender in this campaign. We expected that female candidates in larger cities would report that their gender provided them with an advantage. However, we were surprised to find that women in *small* towns — where parity does not apply — were also significantly more likely than men to report that their gender was an advantage to them. It is true that in some small towns (particularly those around the 2,500 – 3,499 range) voluntarily measures were adopted to include more women on the lists, and it is true that women did fare marginally better in small towns in 2001 than in previous elections. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that women's access to elected office in small towns remains severely limited. Consequently, we are not sure why women in these towns felt advantaged by their gender.

We were also surprised to find that, in larger towns, male candidates were more likely than female candidates to report that 'problems of particular concern to women' were touched on 'frequently' or 'occasionally' during the course of the election campaign. We think this is a promising result. It suggests that women's increased presence in politics has led to more public debate concerning women's issues than male politicians are accustomed to hearing. Heightened awareness of women's issues among men is usually a good thing.

Gender differences on political issues

We also discovered differences in women's and men's attitudes across a range of political issues (Table 3). Women are more likely than men to criticize present democratic arrangements, which they see as insufficiently representative. Women see themselves as having a more open and transparent approach to politics than men. Also, it is female candidates, more than male candidates, who perceive women as having a special capacity for representing other women. These differences persist, even after controlling for levels of prior political experience. Based on these observations, it appears that French women are moving against the traditional republican model of representation in which elected representatives are supposed to represent the collective interests of the nation and not any particular interests. For women in politics, more than for men, it *does* matter who does the representing; furthermore, women tend to see themselves as *better* representatives than men.

Surveys of the French *public* have consistently shown no difference between the favourability ratings of men and women toward gender parity. Our findings show that among men and women who are personally affected by the law, attitudes toward parity are quite different. In cities where the law was applied, there is a 15-point gap between the percentage of male and female candidates who say they are 'very favourable' toward the parity law. In these large cities, 24.1 per cent of men say they are opposed or strongly opposed to

Table 3 Political opinions of female and male candidates

	Small towns (under 3,500 inhabitants)			*Large towns (3,500 or more inhabitants)*		
	Women	*Men*	*Sig.*	*Women*	*Men*	*Sig.*
Political class not in touch with ordinary citizens. (% strongly agree)	45.9	45.7	NS	43.4	34.9	***
Renew representatives after 1 or 2 mandates. (% strongly agree)	20.6	27.2	NS	36.6	28.6	**
Women have more open, transparent approach than men (% strongly agree)	31.9	7.6	***	40.1	8.7	***
Few women in politics because less motivated than men (% strongly disagree)	21.4	13.6	***	29.3	9.4	***
Presence of women in great numbers may hurt quality of debate (% strongly disagree)	58.7	48.1	*	75.9	50.3	***
Women face more difficulties than men accessing positions of responsibility (% strongly agree)	36.4	22.2	NS	48.3	22.3	***
Normal for women in politics to accord particular attention to women's issues (% strongly agree)	18.7	11.1	NS	16.6	9.1	***
Women better placed than men on family, education issues (% strongly agree)	29.4	13.6	*	16.2	9.4	***
Parity (% very favourable)	37.8	29.5	*	49.0	34.3	***
Share domestic tasks equally when both work (% strongly agree)	79.0	48.1	***	77.6	53.3	***

Results of tests of significance: ***$p<0.005$; **$p<0.01$; *$p<0.05$; NS = non-significant.

parity, compared to 11.7 per cent of women. In small towns, 29.5 per cent of men are opposed or strongly opposed, compared to 19.7 per cent of women. Note that the highest level of opposition (35.3 per cent opposed or strongly opposed) toward parity was observed in small towns, among *women* with previous political experience.

Female candidates insist strongly that when both spouses work, household and family-related tasks should be shared equally. Men support this idea, but in a much less energetic manner. This confirms our finding on the importance of family responsibilities in most women's decisions to enter politics. For a married woman, spousal support — perhaps especially his assistance in holding down house and home — is of utmost importance in her choice to engage in political life. Furthermore we found that for women, *not* having a spouse appears to be a relative advantage for staying in politics, while for men *having* a spouse is an advantage. Among candidates with some previous political experience, women are far more likely than men to be single, widowed, or divorced. Among women who had run in a previous election, 26.7 per cent were unmarried and not living according to common law, compared to just 11 per cent of men. Among first-time candidates, there was no significant difference in the martial status of men and women.

Gender stratification in municipal responsibilities

Our next step in this analysis was to examine the responsibilities held by men and women within their city councils. One of the concerns expressed by some observers of the French parity law has been that women would end up holding minor responsibilities within municipal governments and that they would be marginalized into traditional 'women's' sectors such as education and social affairs. Our findings tend to confirm this hypothesis, but with an important caveat.

First, there is evidence of systematic discrimination against women in the assignment of responsibilities on council (Figure 2). We asked all candidates whether they had expressed a preference for a particular subcommittee or delegation prior to the election and, if elected, whether they received such an assignment. Women and men were equally likely to answer that they had expressed a preference for a committee assignment before the election. Among those with no previous political experience, 65.9 per cent of women and 67.2 per cent of men had expressed an interest in receiving a committee assignment. And among candidates with a previous political mandate, 74.4 per cent of women and 70.4 per cent of men had requested a committee assignment prior to the election. However, following the election, novice women were significantly less likely than novice men to be given a committee assignment. Among survey respondents with no previous mandate, and who were actually

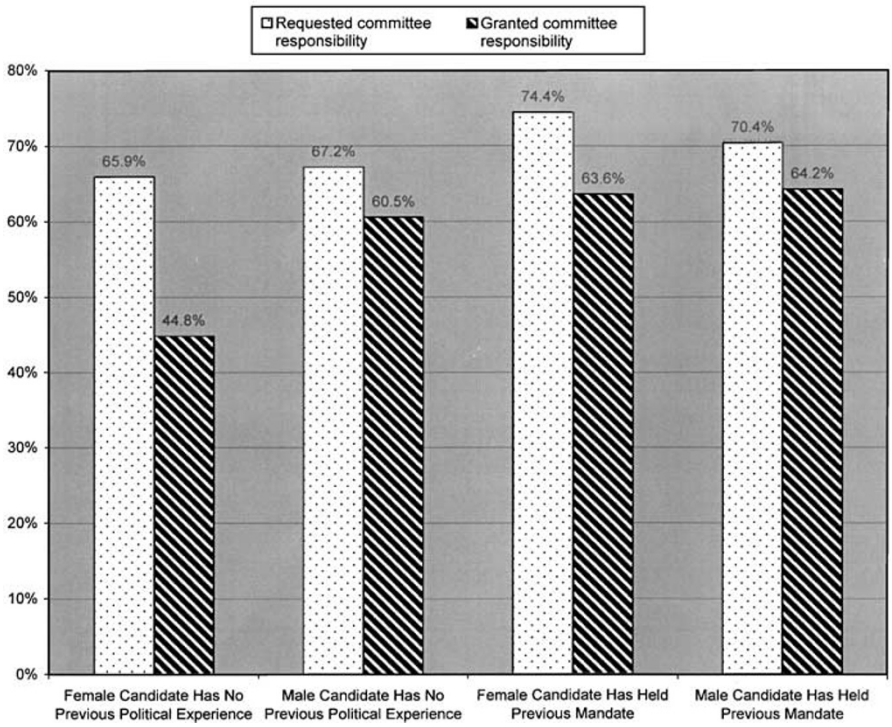

Figure 2 Assignment of committee responsibilities to male and female councillors.

elected in 2001, just 44.8 per cent of women compared to 60.5 per cent of men were given a role as adjunct or assigned to a municipal subcommittee or delegation. Among women and men who held a previous mandate, there was no significant difference in the responsibilities assigned to them (63.6 per cent of women were assigned responsibilities compared to 64.2 per cent of men). In short, it appears that mayors are less willing to assign novice women as adjuncts and committee members than to assign novice men. Moreover, this discrepancy is not a result of any reluctance on the part of women to assume significant responsibilities on the council.

We were also interested to see what *kinds* of responsibilities women tend to be assigned. Candidates who had expressed an interest in assuming committee responsibilities were asked to specify which subcommittee or delegation they preferred and, if elected, what assignment they were given. As shown in Figure 3, the expressed pre-election preferences of men and women are remarkably different. Where women overwhelmingly preferred committee responsibilities related to social assistance, education, and children, men's

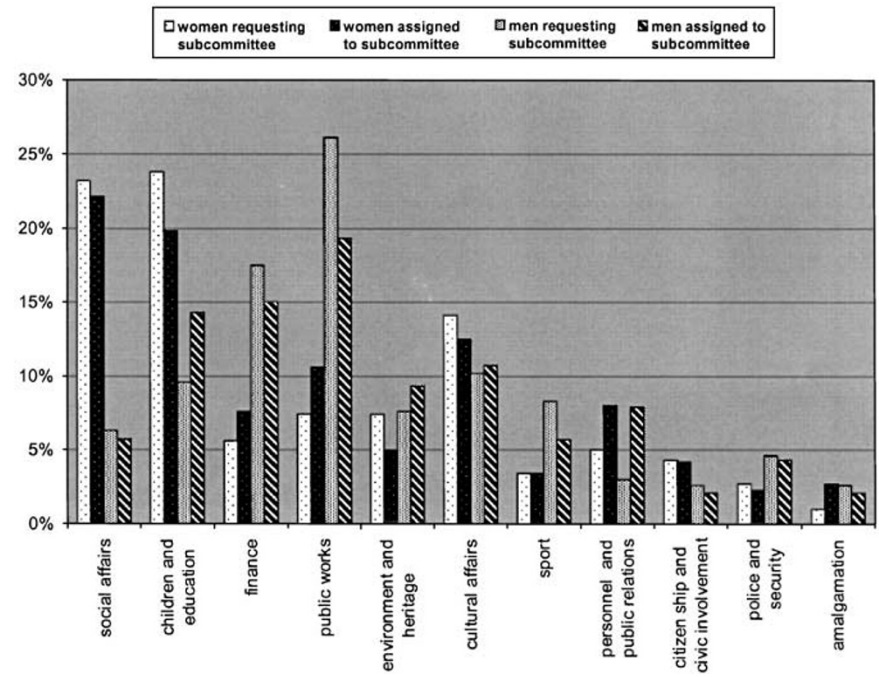

Figure 3 Sexual stratification in municipal subcommittees.

preferences ran more heavily toward finance and public works. Figure 3 also presents the actual subcommittees to which elected women and men were assigned. Certainly candidates' preferences weigh heavily in allocating areas of responsibility. Nevertheless councils achieved a more even gender balance on almost every delegation than would have been achieved had candidates simply been granted their preferences. These findings suggest that novice women councillors in France face some degree of discrimination in seeking positions of responsibility in local government, but also that women contribute to their marginalization by their reluctance to seek responsibility outside traditionally 'feminine' sectors like education and social affairs.

Including other marginalized groups

Finally, we explore the possibility that parity and women's increased presence in politics may have broader implications for the inclusion of other marginalized groups. We remind the reader that this is a sensitive and difficult subject in France (Bird, 2001). The advocates of parity went to exceptional lengths to

assure legislators that the introduction of positive measures to enhance women's representation in legislative assemblies would *not* speed the republic down a slippery slope toward multicultural and group-based rights. Women, they argued, are not a simple category (like Beurs, Blacks, Muslims, homosexuals, and so on). Categorization by gender would not violate the principle of republican unity because, according to Guy Carcassone, 'these are universal, quantitatively equal, and perfectly objective categories, and are limited to two, which is not the case for social situations, religious situations, or so-called ethnic or racial situations' (Mossuz-Lavau 1998, 84). Furthermore, as the results reported above suggest, the women elected to political office under parity rules are not necessarily part of a disadvantaged class. It is therefore doubtful that they would be more likely than men to prioritize the political inclusion of socially or economically marginalized groups. Despite these problems, our analysis suggests that support for parity *is* related to support for political inclusion for other politically marginalized groups. It also appears that the presence of more women in legislative assemblies *enhances* the likelihood of measures to promote the political inclusion of diverse social categories.

We asked respondents four questions that we believed would tap into attitudes toward 'inclusion of diversity:' Do you favour better representation of diverse social categories among those elected in our country? Do you favour giving foreignors from non-EU countries the right to vote in local elections? Do you believe that the presence of immigrants in France is a source of cultural enrichment? Do you believe that wearing an Islamic headscarf in school should be prohibited? The first three of these items combined to form an index with reasonably high scale reliability ($\alpha = 0.67$). The fourth item did not scale well with the others, and was removed from the analysis.

In Table 4, we present the results of a regression analysis with 'inclusion of diversity' as the dependent variable. Scores on this variable range from 1 to 10,

Table 4 The impact of gender parity on support for inclusion of social diversity

	β	*B*	*Sig.*
Sex (female)	0.006	0.292	0.005
City size	0.098	0.188	0.000
Previous political experience	−0.026	−0.111	0.292
Age	0.009	0.002	0.703
Political ideology (right wing)	−0.638	−1.139	0.000
Opposed to parity	−0.121	−0.315	0.000
Constant	9.67		
Adjusted R^2	0.496		

with a mean of 7.02 and a standard deviation of 2.12. A high score represents support for inclusion of diverse social categories. Our explanatory variables are candidates' sex, city size (under 3,500; 3,500–8,999; 9,000–29,999; 30,000 or more inhabitants), age, previous political experience (have never or have run in a previous election), left–right ideological position (a 5-point scale), and support for parity (a 4-point scale). The results show that this model explains half of the variability in attitudes toward 'inclusion of diversity' (adjusted $R^2 = 0.496$). Most important, we find that women are more likely than men, and candidates who favour gender parity more likely than opponents, to support 'inclusion of diversity.' This remains true even after controlling for their political ideology, level of political experience, age, and the size of their city.

Conclusion: Women in Politics in France

Women's access to politics at the local level has been understudied. Yet if, as some feminist scholars argue, the presence of women in the political sphere can serve to legitimize alternative and more democratic modes of political organization, then the logical *first* place to look for such transformative capacity is at the local level.

In the case of France, the implications of women's presence in local politics may be especially important. Historically, French municipal elections have held a pivotal role within the national political structure and, while local in form, they are in fact quite national in scope.[37] Furthermore, these elections implicate an enormous number of people. Traditionally, voter turnout is higher for local elections than for any other level of election in France, and more people are elected to local government in France than in any other country of comparable size.[38] With the application of parity to the 2001 municipal elections in France, more than 39,000 women joined their local city councils (in towns over 3,500 inhabitants), almost double their numbers in the councils sitting before 18 March 2001. The effect of this mass of women entering the political sphere, across the country, and at a level where they are visible and accessible to ordinary citizens is undoubtedly more significant than the election of 71 women to the National Assembly. Certainly, the question of whether parity and the arrival of a critical mass of women can transform representative arrangements and policy directions at the local and other levels necessitates a broader and longer-term project than the one reported here. Nevertheless, the results of this study carry implications for understanding the effects of parity and the role of women in politics, in France and elsewhere.

At the most basic level, the application of the parity law to municipal elections can be understood as a test case, and can help us predict outcomes

and foresee problems for future elections in which parity will apply. Our findings show that the law can have a residual effect on increasing the number of women in elected office, even where it does not apply in the strictest of terms. This residual effect is undoubtedly stronger in small-town municipal elections than in legislative districts with strong party competition. Nevertheless, there may be a general contagion effect of female nominations — including in highly competitive legislative elections — as it becomes clearer to parties that there is no electoral penalty associated with female candidates, and as female candidates, mayors, and councillors become a more common fixture in important cities across France (Matland and Studlar, 1996).

Second, this study suggests that French women have significantly different ideas than men on many political matters. Despite the fact that female candidates (like their male counterparts) tend to be drawn from within the elite stratum of society, they appear nevertheless to hold a distinctive set of perspectives on politics. In most cases, these differences are not attributable merely to women's lack of previous political experience: rather, they are differences with 'staying power.' Among the factors shaping women's distinctive perspectives on political issues, clearly one of the most important is the priority they place on family responsibilities. Women's previous exclusion from the public sphere may also explain their higher level of support for greater socio-cultural diversification among political actors. These results suggest that women's presence on local councils, and especially in the local executive, is likely to make a difference with respect to policy directions.[39] While we have measured differences between male and female candidates at the individual level, it seems reasonable to assume that there will also be a separate sociological effect of women entering politics *en masse*, and that this may further enhance the speed and magnitude of change. Despite holding out some promise of democratic renewal, we have found that the novice women elected under parity rules face an uphill battle to prove their credibility and assume positions of responsibility on local councils.

The results of this study point to both institutional and cultural factors that interact with the parity law to produce rather unique effects on women's access to political office in France. The institutional structure of local politics in France offers two significant advantages to women. First and most obviously, through the application of a proportional-list system in municipal elections, parity translates into roughly 50 per cent women among elected councillors. Second, the municipal structure in France provides many more entry points to elected office than are available in other countries of comparable size, including entry opportunities in towns of reasonabley small size. Our study has shown that despite the parity law, French women remain more hesitant to enter politics in larger cities than in smaller ones. This suggests that, in countries where the trend has been toward the amalgamation of local

governments, the opportunities for political engagement among women may be especially limited.

In other respects however, the structure of local politics in France continues to pose important obstacles to women. The indirect election of French mayors and adjuncts, the concentration and personification of authority in the mayoral office, and the widespread practice of holding multiple simultaneous mandates contribute heavily toward the continuing dominance of men within the upper levels of the local executive. In recruiting new women into politics, French parties have continued to rely upon networks of local notables. Like the men before them, the women who enter politics under parity rules tend to be drawn from an elite stratum of society. The wider dispersal of local power in France would almost certainly help women to achieve fairer representation within the executive level. It would also promote a culture of democratization that would lower the barriers of political entry, making it easier for ordinary people to run for political office.

It is also important to consider the set of culturally specific assumptions about the role of women in society, and the obstacles and advantages that these present in terms of women's access to political life. French women are overwhelmingly disadvantaged by the widespread assumption (largely shared by women themselves) that child-rearing and household responsibilities are women's responsibilities. These ideas are a remnant of the significant role played by the Catholic Church in French history, and the Church's reverence for the mother figure. However, such assumptions have been re-affirmed by a Republic which, despite erecting a wall of separation between the church and the state, has continued to implement natalist policies that serve to confine women to the private and domestic spheres. The assumption that women hold the primary responsibility for children and home makes women less disposed than men to enter political life, and may encourage a notion that men are naturally more 'fit' for public life. Yet, at the same time, this assumption has opened up a variety of workplace solutions intended to provide women with the flexibility to accommodate family responsibilities, and many women have used this flexibility to engage in public life. The cultural constraints faced by French women mean that, when women do enter political life, they often do so for different reasons and with different perspectives than men. For example, women still tend overwhelmingly to prefer committees and ministries associated with social affairs, education, and children. Also, the burden of family responsibilities makes it more difficult for women than for men to hold multiple mandates simultaneoulsy, and a result is that women are less likely than men to envision a political career for themselves.

In hindsight, it is clear that these institutional and cultural constraints posed significant obstacles for women's access to political office in France. Within this context, parity was an important and necessary step for increasing the

number of women in the political sphere. Yet there are important interaction effects between a parity law on the one hand, and electoral and institutional rules and cultural constraints on the other hand. In countries where the political sphere remains relatively inaccessible to women, parity and other measures to promote women's access to politics will interact in different ways with the institutional and cultural factors specific to that country. As we have seen in France, these factors play a significant role in determining what kind of women enter public life, what roles they play, what obstacles they face, and what ideas and aspirations they bring to politics.

Notes

1 This survey would not have been possible without the financial and logistical support of the Centre d'Informatisation des Données Socio-Politiques (CIDSP), of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Grenoble. I thank the Centrè's research director, Bruno Cautrès, for facilitating this project. My gratitude extends to all of the Centre's research team, and most particularly to Mathilde Dubesset, Vincent Tournier, Annie-Claude Solomon, Nadine Mandran and Valérie Rocchi for their sound advice on the construction of the questionnaire, and assistance in data management.

2 From November 1946 (the first elections in which women were eligible to vote and run as candidates) until the elections of June 1997, the percentage of seats in the French National Assembly held by women has ranged from a low of 1.6 per cent to a high of only 5.9 per cent. Since its creation in 1959 until the last pre-parity elections of 1998, women had never held more than 5.9 per cent of seats in the French Senate. In municipal elections from 1946 to 1997, women obtained between 2.4 per cent and 21.7 per cent of local council seats, but never more than 7.5 per cent of mayorships. Within the French departmental assemblies (*Conseils généraux*), from their creation in 1958 until the last pre-parity elections of 1998, women's share of seats ranged from 0.7 to 8.3 per cent. For detailed information on the share of seats won by women in French elections since the Fourth Republic, see Sineau (2001, 279–288).

3 In 1999, a governmental report was issued by an official committee on the French language which favoured the feminization of professional titles thus *allowing* women to be addressed, for example, as 'Madame la ministre.' See also Houdebine-Gravaud (1998).

4 Loi no. 2000-493 tendant à favoriser l' égal accès des femmes de des hommes aux mandats électoraux et fonctions électives.

5 According to Article 6 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, 'all citizens being equal' in the eyes of the law, '[all] are equally eligible for every public rank, seat and employment according to their abilities, and without any distinction but that based upon their virtues and talents.' Under Article 3 of the Constitution of 1958, 'no section of the people, nor any individual, may attribute to themselves or himself the exercise [of National sovereignty],' and suffrage 'is always universal, equal and secret.' The Court concluded that these constitutional principles guarantee 'the right to vote and to run for office under identical conditions' and that they 'oppose the division of voters or candidates by any category.' (Decision 82-146 DC, 18 November 1982).

6 Halimi was an independent member aligned with the parliamentary Socialist group. She was the founder and the president of the feminist association 'Choisir' and, in the course of a televised debate during the presidential campaign, Halimi had attained a public promise from Mitterrand

that he was in favour of adopting a minimum quota for female candidates. See Choisir la cause des femmes (1981).

7 Halimi's proposal was for a 70 per cent ceiling for any one sex, applied to every third of the list so as to prevent a party from relegating the women to the bottom of the list. The Socialist amendment proposed a higher ceiling (75 per cent) and included no restrictions on the order of presentation of male and female candidates.

8 Assemblée nationale, *Débats parlementaires*, *compte rendu intégral*, session of 27 July 1992, *Journal officiel*, 28 July 1992, 4913.

9 *Ibid.*, 4913.

10 Initiatives included the UN Convention of 1979 of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and resolutions passed in 1986 (Resolution 855 on Equality Between Men and Women) and 1995 (Recommendation 1269 on Achieving Real Progress in Women's Rights) by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The first European conference on parity was organized in 1989, by the European Council.

11 By comparison, in 1997: women held 11.3 per cent of the seats in the US House of Representatives and 9 per cent of the seats in the US Senate; in Canada women held 20.6 per cent of seats in the House of Commons and 30.5 per cent of seats in the Senate; on average, across all Europe-OSCE member countries, women held 14.1 per cent of seats in the lower and upper houses of parliament combined; the world average was 10.5 per cent; the top five countries remain Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, and the Netherlands, where women hold between 43 and 36 per cent of legislative seats. For a current overview of women's representation in world parliaments, see the 'Women in Parliament' report issued by the Inter-parliamentary Union (http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm).

12 The number of signatories for this declaration of support for parity (*Le monde*, 10 November 1993) is equivalent to the number of seats in the National Assembly. This manifesto was presented in the symbolic tradition of other feminist manifestos; it was modelled after the famous 'Manifeste des 343' women who, in their support for the liberalization of abortion law in France, gave public testament to having undergone clandestine abortions (*Le Nouvel Observateur*, 5 April 1971).

13 L'Assemblée des femmes, Réseau femme pour la parité, and Demain la parité are certainly the most important of the pro-parity associations founded in the 1990s.

14 Among the most active in the parity movement were three figures: Giséle Halimi, Yvette Roudy, and Françosie Gaspard. Other important figures include Janine Mossuz-Lavau and Geneviève Fraisse. All have held office, or have been active within the Socialist Party.

15 The manifesto was signed by Michèle Barzach, Frédérique Bredin, Edith Cresson, Hélène Gisserot, Catherine Lalumière, Véronique Neiertz, Monique Pelletier, Yvette Roudy, Catherine Tasca, and Simone Veil. *L'Express* (6–12 June 1996).

16 The Socialist Party passed this rule on 30 June 1996. Among the 555 Socialist candidates who contested seats in the 1997 legislative elections, 167 were women. Following those elections, the Socialists formed a governing majority in the National Assembly through a coalition with the Communist and Green Parties. Among the 246 legislative seats held by the Socialist party following the election, 42 (17.1 per cent) were held by women.

17 A survey of deputies and senators published in *Le Monde* prior to the introduction of the government project revealed little support for constitutional reform to allow parity. Le Monde (8 March 1997).

18 Most cite 6 June as the date of promulgation of the French parity law. There are in fact, *two* parity laws. The first law, voted on 3 May and promulgated on 6 June 2000, is the most significant in that it imposes parity throughout the French metropole. A second law, debated together with the first, concerns specifically the implementation of parity within the legislative assemblies of the overseas territories of French Polynesia, New Caledonia, and the islands of

Wallis-and-Futuna. The passage of this law (14 June 2001 with final assent on 4 July 2000) was delayed by disagreement between the National Assembly and the Senate over the idea of imposing a less constraining version of parity to certain overseas territories, in order to allow for their more traditional (i.e. paternalistic) cultures. The version preferred by the National Assembly, imposing parity in virtually identical terms throughout French territory, ultimately prevailed after four readings.

19 The constitutional amendment was passed by 741 votes to 43 (and 48 abstentions) in joint congress. A constitutional amendment requires a simple majority vote in both the National Assembly and Senate, plus ratification by three-fifths of the members of both houses assembled in a joint congress. The parity law was adopted just three votes short of unanimity on final reading in the National Assembly.

20 See, especially, Agacinski (1998, 1999b) and Mossuz-Lavau (1998).

21 On varieties of French republicanism, see Jennings (2000).

22 Sylviane Agacincksi (1999b) criticizes the American approach to women's rights, because it erases the *essential* difference of sex and fails to recognize its universal character: 'L'effacement 'américain' procède en noyant les femmes dans un particularisme généralisé où se retrouvent des minorités de toutes sortes (ethniques, religieuses, culturelles, etc.), et les deux sexes finissent par être considérés commes de pures 'constructions'....'

23 Though it may be that women's presence allows for the expression of a distinctive conception of the general interest.

24 In 1986, elections to the National Assembly were run using rules of proportional representation, but the law was changed and elections reverted back to single-member plurality rules in 1988.

25 The requirement for alternating male and female candidates is sometimes called the 'zipper system.' The French use the term *chabada*, a reference to the musical theme of the Claude Lelouche film *Un homme et une femme.* French law requires strict alternation between male and female candidates for elections that follow proportional methods and are decided in one round (Senate and European elections). This requirement was not imposed for two-round elections because it was considered important to allow parties adequate flexibility in forming coalition lists between rounds.

26 Alternatively, it must be pointed out that roughly two-thirds of French citizens live in communities whose town councils are elected according to parity rules.

27 Survey commissioned by the government's *Observatoire de la Parité*, conducted by l'Institut CSA, March 2001.

28 Statistics from Ministère de l'Intérieur, made available in the Rapport au Premier Ministre: *La parité entre les femmes et les hommes: Une avancée decisive pour la démocratie,* March 2002.

29 Statistics for Dous and Isère were collected by the author; statistics for Hérault were made available by the Assemblée des Femmes du Languedoc et du Roussillon, *Evaluation de la loi sur la parité*, September 2001.

30 In elections at three different levels, we have seen now that parity is ineffective unless the law applies strictly. This was revealed in legislative elections (discussed above), and also in elections to the French departmental assemblies (*Conseils généraux*) and to the Senate. In March 2001, in elections that were run simultaneously with municipal elections, French voters elected 1,932 representatives to their departmental assemblies. These elections are exempt from parity rules. The result: just 9.8 per cent of the *Conseillers généraux* elected last spring were women, compared to 8.3 per cent in 1998. Of all 101 departmental councils in France, a woman heads only one. For elections to the Senate, parity applies in departments electing three or more Senators (where a proportional-list system is used), but not in elections in smaller departments. Senate elections were held on 23 September 2001, in which one-third of the Senate was renewed. In first-past-the-post contests (those exempt from parity rules), there was no increase in the number of women elected: there are only two women among the 28 seats. But among the 74

Senate seats elected using PR, the number of women increased from 5 to 20. Of the 102 Senators elected in September 2001, 22 were women (21.6 per cent), bringing their total number in the Senate to 35 of 321 (10.9 per cent) compared to just 20 (6.2 percent) before parity. See Bird (forthcoming).

31 On the functions of substantive or 'descriptive' representation, see Mansbridge (2000).

32 Questionnaires were distributed by mail, between 15 May and 15 July 2001, to a stratified random sample of 3000 candidates in municipal elections across two departments (Doubs and Isère) and in one large city (Lyon). Women were sampled 2 to 1 over men, while candidates in towns over 3,500 inhabitants were sampled 4 to 1 over candidates in towns under 3,500. A total of 1216 completed questionnaires were returned, including 800 completed by female candidates and 403 completed by male candidates (13 respondents did not identify their sex), for a response rate of 40 among both women and men. Among the total respondents, 922 were candidates in towns with over 3,500 inhabitants, while 272 were candidates in smaller towns (20 respondents did not indicate the size of their town). A copy of the questionnaire may be obtained by writing to the author.

33 It is impossible to tell how widespread this strategy was in naming female candidates. Fabre (2001) has commented on its use in a number of municipal contests across France. In sampling party lists for our study, we encountered two cases where the parties spontaneously informed us that *every* female candidate was a relative of a male candidate, and we encountered many more instances where female candidates were clearly related to male candidates or previous office-holders.

34 Interviews with mayors and councillors who were involved in the recruitment process confirm this interpretation. It was, we were told, very difficult to recruit female candidates if the spouse was not favourable while spousal support was much less essential for the recruitment of male candidates.

35 Regression equation :$Y = 1.625–0.356x_1$ ($p<0.001$)$–0.339x_2$ ($p=0.250$)$+0.013x_3$ ($p=0.553$)$+0.096x_4$($p=0.028$)$–0.006x_5$ ($p=0.032$)$–0.115x_6$ ($p=0.002$)$+0.118x_7$ ($p=0.013$) $–0.197x_8$ ($p=0.023$)$+$ $0.198x_9$ ($p=0.066$)$+e$; where Y = number of hesitations reported; x_1 = have run in previous election ; x_2 = female; x_3 = household revenue; x_4 = number of children under 18 living at home; x_5 = age; x_6 = city size (under 3,500, 3,500–8,999, 9000–29,999, over 30,000 inhabitants); x_7 = interaction; female, city size; x_8 = employed in private sector; x_9 = interaction: female, private sector. Adjusted $R^2 = 0.140$; standard error of estimate = 0.7764.

36 In such communities, the town hall, school, bakery, butcher, grocery store, and quite possibly one's place of employment are often within steps of each other.

37 Municipal elections occur on the same day throughout the country, and are essentially viewed as national elections by the political parties. See Martin (2001).

38 The number of towns in France (36,565) is greater than the number of towns in all European member-states combined. In total, there are roughly 500,000 elected local representatives in France.

39 In several municipalities, it appears that the presence of women during the campaign and in the newly elected councils *has* served to re-define what are the fundamental issues of local politics. In Paris, most notably, the availability of public child-care facilities became a significant issue during the campaign. Since its election, the re-organization of municipal services whose principal clients are women and children (e.g. child-care, public transportation, health, school, and sporting services) has become a priority within the Paris city council. The adjunct-mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, is responsible for the municipal commission on Equality between Men and Women, as well as directing the city's new 'Bureau du Temps' charged with reorganizing public services with women and children in mind. A similar office exists in the city of Poitiers.

References

Agacinski-Jospin, S. (1996) 'Citoyennes, encore un effort...,' *Le Monde*, 18 June.
Agacinski, S. (1998) *Politique des sexes*, Paris, Seuil.
Agacinski, S. (1999a) 'Le droit d'être candidates', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 14–20 January, p. 85.
Agacinski, S. (1999b) 'Contre l'effacement des sexes', *Le Monde*, 6 February.
Badinter, E. (1996) 'Non aux quotas de femmes', *Le Monde*, 12 June.
Badinter, E. (1999) 'Un remède pire que le mal', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 14–20 January, p. 85.
Badinter, E., Pisier, E. and Sallenave, D. (1999) 'Trois arguments contre la parité', *L'Express*, 11 February.
Bird, K. (2001) '*Liberté, égalité, fraternité, parité*... and *diversité*? The difficult question of ethnic difference in the French parity debate', *Contemporary French Civilization* 25(2): 271–292.
Bird, K. (forthcoming) 'Who needs Women? Gender parity in French elections', in J. Gaffney (ed.). *The French Presidential and Legislative Elections of 2002*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
Carroll, S.J. and Strimling, W. (1983) *Women's Routes to Elective Office*, New Brunswick, NJ: Center for the American Woman and Politics.
Choisir la cause des femmes (1981) *Quel président pour les femmes? Réponses de François Mitterrand*, (Preface by Gisèle Halimi), Paris: Gallimard.
Fabre, C. (2001) 'Aux municipales, on joue aussi 'épouses et concubines', *Le Monde*, 24 February.
Gaspard, F., Le Gall, A. and Servan-Schreiber, C. (1992) *Au pouvoir citoyennes! Liberté, égalit parité*, Paris: Seuil.
Houdebine-Gravaud, A.-M. (1998) *La Féminisation des noms de métier, en français et dans d'autres langues*, Paris: L'Harmattan.
Jennings, J. (2000) 'Citizenship, republicanism and multiculturalism in contemporary France', *British Journal of Political Science* 30: 575–598.
Jenson, J. and Sineau, M. (2001) *Who Cares? Women's Work, Child Care and Welfare State Redesign*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Krémer, P. (2001) 'Le partage des tâches domestiques, noeud des inégalités hommes-femmes', *Le Monde*, 8 March.
Landes, J.B. (1988) *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Lister, R. (1997) *Citizenship: Feminist perspectives*, Washington Square: New York University Press.
Lochak, D. (1983) 'Les hommes politiques, les 'sages'(?)... et les femmes (à propos de la décision du Conseil constitutionnel du 18 novembre 1982)', *Droit Social*, 1983: 131.
Malibeau, A. (1995) 'De la monarchie municipale à la française', *Pouvoirs*, 73: 7–17.
Mansbridge, J. (2000) 'What does a representative do? Descriptive representation in communicative settings of distrust, uncrystallized interests, and historically denigrated status', in W. Kymlicka and W. Norman (eds.) *Citizenship in Diverse Societies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 99–123.
Martin, P. (2001) *Les élections municipales en France depuis 1945*, Paris: La Documentation Française.
Matland, R. and Studlar, D. (1996) 'The contagion of women candidates in single-member district and proportional representation electoral systems: Canada and Norway', *Journal of Politics* 58(3): 707–733.
Méda, D. (2001) *Le temps des femmes: Pour un nouveau partage des tâches*, Paris: Flammarion.
Millard, E. and Ortiz, L. (1998) 'Parité et représentations politiques', in J. Martin (ed). *Parité: Enjeux et mise en oeuvre*, Toulouse: Presses universitaires du Mirail, pp. 189–203.
Mossuz-Lavau, J. (1998) *Femmes/hommes pour la parité*, Paris: Presses de sciences po.

Norris, P. and Lovenduski, J. (1993) 'If only more candidates came forward': supply-side explanations of candidate selection in Britain', *British Journal of Political Science* 23: 373–408.
Perrot, M. (1995) 'Identité, égalité, différence. Le regard de l'histoire', in the collection Ephesia, *La place des femmes, Les enjeux de l'dentité et de l'égalité au regard des sciences sociales*, Paris: La Découverte, pp. 39–56.
Perrot, M. (1997) *Femmes publiques*, Paris: Textuel.
Phillips, A. (1993) *Democracy and difference*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
Phillips, A. (1995) *The Politics of Presence: The Political Representation of Gender, Ethnicity, and Race*, New York: Oxford.
Genisson, C. (2002). *La parité entre les femmes et les homes: Une avancée decisive pour la démocratie*, Paris: Observatoire de la Parité entre les Femmes et les Hommes.
Sineau, M. (1999) 'Pouvoir politique, pouvoir domestique: Les deux faces de la parité', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, December.
Sineau, M. (2001) *Profession femme politique: Sex et pouvoir sous la Cinquième République*, Paris: Presses de Sciences Po.