Data, Measures and Methods

How to become a députée – Lean to the left: Party differences and gender parity in the 2012 National Assembly elections

Priscilla Southwell

Department of Political Science, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403 USA.

Abstract This research centers on the effects of gender parity on elections to the French National Assembly elections in 2012, with particular attention to the party differential in the success rate of female candidates. Clearly parity laws have increased the number of successful female candidates since its inception, but that this effect has been muted within one major party, the UMP, the Union for a Presidential Majority. In contrast to the Socialist Party or other minor parties, female UMP candidates fared much worse than their male counterparts, especially among their incumbent party members.

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Introduction

Since 2000, France has had a ‘parité’ law, requiring all parties to present an equal number of female and male candidates on the party lists for upcoming elections. The goal of this research is assess the impact of this parity law on French politics over the previous decade, with special attention to the most recent 2012 election – to determine if parity increased the number of successful female candidates, whether there was any variation among the political parties and whether incumbency has helped or hurt female candidates.

The push for increased representation among women had been building for several decades in French politics. This drive was spurred, in part, by France’s relative low numbers of female politicians compared with most of its European neighbors (Dauphin and Praud, 2002; Murray, 2013)¹. The percentage of female and minority representatives in legislative bodies is deemed important to many in France, and elsewhere, who argue that the absence of these demographic groups in a legislative

body can have significant consequences for subsequent government policies (Jones, 1998). If members of a group are vastly underrepresented in terms of their proportion of the population, then important issues may receive little or no consideration during the policy-making process (Rule and Zimmerman, 1994). The assumption is that women legislators will be more likely to be aware of and responsive to issues that directly affect women – more extensive research on breast cancer, child-care issues, better pay for nurses and so on.

Previous Research

We approach this subject by focusing on the implementation of party list quotas for women, building on the previous research that has shown that such quotas do enhance women's representation in these countries (see also Dahlerup, 1988; Kolinsky, 1991; Murray, 2007; Phillips, 1991). We are assuming that the implementation of party list quotas for women does enhance women's representation in these countries, based on previous research (Dahlerup, 1988; Kolinsky, 1991; Phillips, 1991; Jones, 1996, 1998, 2004, 2009; Squires and Wickham-Jones, 2001; Lovenduski, 2005; Kittilson, 2006; Stockemer, 2008; Krook, 2009). Those countries in the Americas and Europe with the highest percentage of women in their national legislature typically have some type of quota provision, either in the form of a mandated percentage of each party's nominees or reserved seats. Jones's 1996, 1998 research analyzes Argentina's 'Law of Quotas', a National Law requiring all political parties to place a minimum quota of women on their party lists for the election of national deputies. These studies conclude that the Argentine Law has been extremely successful in its initial goal of increasing the number of women deputies in the Argentine Chamber. (In 1995, post-Ley de Cupos, 25.7 per cent of the Chamber was female.) In addition, initial evidence from Jones's studies points to an increased emphasis on laws that will affect women and an increase in the number of legislative projects related to women, children and families.

In addition, an important explanation for the representation of women is the role of the political party in fulfilling, or subverting, the implementation of candidate gender quotas (Krook, 2006). A lack of will among political party elites to apply quota provisions can be crucial. In some cases, elites simply do not comply with the quota (Appleton and Mazur, 1993; Htun and Jones, 2002); in others, they expend a great deal of time circumventing the spirit of the law, often by creating new political institutions to which the quota does not apply or by expanding the restrictions on the application of the law (Jimenez Polanco, 2001).

Much of the previous research on the impact of parity in France has centered on the 2002 and 2007 elections to the National Assembly (Murray, 2004, 2008a, b; Baudino, 2005; Southwell and Smith, 2007; Fréchette *et al.*, 2008). In plurality districts, the factors that have been also deemed to have hindered the election of

female candidates include: (i) incumbency advantage (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005); (ii) the party strategy of nominating female candidates in marginally unsafe districts (Murray, 2008a, 2013); and (iii) membership in a center-right party (Caul, 1999, 2001; Sineau, 2002; Kittilson, 2006; Opello, 2006; Murray, 2007).

Female Candidates in the 2012 National Assembly Elections

From the standpoint of gender parity, the 2012 elections were a modest success. As shown in the figure, the percentage of females elected as deputies to the National Assembly rose from 19.6 per cent in 2007 to 26.5 per cent in 2012. These elections raised France to 38th place in international league tables for female representation – an improvement from their former 84th ranking (Murray, 2013). Although this percentage is much lower than many other European nations, this increase is consistent with the steady increases in female representation in both the National Assembly and Senate elections since the parity law was implemented in 2001.²

Furthermore, the success rate of female candidates was 45 per cent in the decisive, second-round contests. In addition, 82.1 per cent of female incumbents were reelected, nearly identical to the 81.3 per cent figure for male incumbents (Figure 1).

However, these 2012 results also reveal certain developments or patterns that may prove discouraging to supporters of gender parity. First, only 55.9 per cent of these second-round contests (303 out of 542) included any female candidate in the race.

Figure 1: Per cent of women elected to French parliament 1997–2012.

Note: On the basis of electoral results from each district (circonscription); some deputies were changed because of ministerial replacements (suppléants).

Female candidates either fared poorly at the initial round of elections, or the major two parties were willing to pay the fines if they do not abide by the 50 per cent requirement (Rosenblum, 2006; Murray, 2013).

An additional aspect of this election is the differences between the two major French parties, and the success rate of their female candidates, as shown in Table 1.

The UMP fielded relatively fewer female candidates in the second round. Of the 429 second-round UMP candidates, only 69 (16.9 per cent) were female UMP members, as opposed to the 45.8 per cent figure for the Socialist Party. While it is not surprising that very few of these female UMP candidates were elected, given the overall Socialist success in this particular election, the important comparison is between the genders *within* each of these two major parties. Only 27 per cent of the female UMP candidates were elected, as compared with 46.8 per cent of male UMP candidates. For the Socialist Party, the corresponding figure was 45.8 for female candidates and 54.2 per cent for male candidates.³

Clearly, incumbency advantage could have been a factor in explaining these differences. Despite the high reelection rate of incumbent female candidates, as mentioned above, there were simply a lot fewer female incumbents running for reelection (78 versus 348). As such, it could be expected that a higher percentage of male UMP candidates would be elected than female UMP candidates, simply because many more of the males were incumbents. However, the third column of Table 1 suggests that even female incumbent UMP candidates fared much worse than male incumbents within this party. Only 58.1 per cent of these female UMP incumbents were reelected, as compared with 72.9 per cent of male UMP incumbents. The rightmost column of this table shows relatively equal success rates between the sexes in open seats in both parties. Murray (2013) has suggested that these uneven results in the UMP are consistent with the pattern of putting female candidates in unwinnable races. She shows that no fewer than 50 per cent of UMP female candidates were placed in races where Socialist presidential candidate, François Hollande, had his best showing in April 2012 (that is, where the UMP

Table 1: Party differentials on success rates of female candidates French National Assembly elections 2012

	<i>Percentage of second-round candidates from party</i>	<i>Percentage of candidates elected</i>	<i>Percentage of reelected if incumbent</i>	<i>Mean vote percentage (open seats)</i>
Female UMP	16.9	27.0	58.1	47.2
Male UMP	83.1	46.8	72.9	47.4
Female Socialist	45.8	87.3	100	55.6
Male Socialist	54.2	71.7	100	58.3

Source: French Ministry of the Interior, 2012.

candidate would have the weakest chances in the National Assembly elections 2 months later), as compared with less than 25 per cent of UMP candidates.

Multivariate Analysis

Of course, other factors could have affected these bivariate relationships, so we now turn to multivariate analysis. This analysis is also confined to those contests in which a female candidate was present in the second round (303 out of 542 races). Table 2 examines the 96 second-round contests where there was at least one female candidate *and* no incumbent was running for reelection. These coefficients show the effect of one's gender and party on the per cent of the vote received as compared with the excluded, or contrast, category, a male UMP candidate.

The results suggest that a female UMP candidate was likely to receive approximately 20 *fewer* percentage points in vote share as compared with a male UMP candidate. This result underscores the disadvantage for female UMP candidates, *even* in open seats. A male Socialist candidate could be expected to receive approximately 21 per cent points more in his vote share, as compared with a male UMP candidate – not surprising, given the size of Socialist victories nationwide in these 2012 elections. The coefficient for a female Socialist candidate is insignificant, but it is worth noting the contrast between such candidates and their male counterparts within the Socialist Party.

In Table 3, we examine those 233 contests in which an incumbent was among the candidates. As such, we now include a male incumbency dummy variable. These coefficients show the effect of one's gender, party and incumbency on the per cent of the vote received as compared with the excluded, or contrast, category, a male non-incumbent UMP candidate. The results suggest that a female UMP candidate, either an incumbent or not, was likely to receive approximately 10 fewer percentage points

Table 2: Multivariate analysis of gender and partisanship effects on vote per cent: French National Assembly elections 2012, open seats^a

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Female Socialist candidate	–9.316 (5.759)
Female UMP candidate	–20.546*** (4.211)
Male Socialist candidate	21.120** (6.339)
Constant	46.270*** (5.459)

^aIncluding at least one female candidate.

** $P < 0.01$; *** $P < 0.001$.

Dependent variable = percentage of vote.

$N = 96$; $R^2 = 0.354$.

Source: French Ministry of the Interior, 2012.

Table 3: Multivariate analysis of gender, partisanship and incumbency on vote per cent: French National Assembly elections 2012, all seats with an incumbent^a

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Coefficient (SE)</i>
Female Socialist candidate	-4.176* (2.105)
Female UMP candidate	-10.805*** (2.264)
Male Socialist candidate	16.529*** (2.691)
Male incumbent	21.451*** (1.886)
Constant	32.514*** (2.441)

^aIncluding at least one female candidate.

* $P < 0.05$; *** $P < 0.001$.

Dependent variable = percentage of vote.

$N = 233$; $R^2 = 0.591$.

Source: French Ministry of the Interior, 2012.

of the vote share than a non-incumbent male UMP candidate. Again, this attests to the disadvantage that such female UMP candidates experienced in this election. Male incumbents, of both parties, enjoyed a much higher percentage of the vote, as did male non-incumbent Socialist candidates – again, not a surprising finding, given the context of the election and incumbency advantage in general. As with Table 2, the coefficient for female Socialist candidates is insignificant, but this is a bit surprising, as this is a comparison with a non-incumbent male UMP member.

Conclusions

This preliminary analysis of France's most recent National Assembly election suggests that the parity requirement continued to increase in the number of female deputies elected to the French National Assembly. Yet, party differences may have muted the successes of female candidates, as female UMP candidates fared much more poorly in this election than would be expected. The multivariate analysis suggests that even Socialist female candidates lagged slightly behind their male counterparts. It is beyond the scope of this article to probe the reasons for this relatively weak showing by female UMP candidates, especially among incumbents. Did their party abandon them, or did the Socialists specifically target them? Did the voters show a bias against female candidates?

Although there will be an increase in the number of female incumbents running in future elections, and thus an expected increase in the number of female députées in the National Assembly, our findings suggest that this incumbency advantage is less apparent for UMP female incumbents. Our findings suggest, in general, that the Socialist Party was more effective in both fielding female candidates and somehow getting them elected or reelected than did the UMP. As Murray (2013, p. 198)

concludes, ‘... parties of the right continue to drag their heels in this regard’.⁴ Our findings suggest that changing party fortunes in future National Assembly elections may be an important determinant of the number of elected women to that body, perhaps more important than incumbent status.

Notes

- 1 For an analysis of the history of the French parity movement, see Bereni (2007), Lépinard (2006), Lépinard (2007), Mazur (2001) and Ramsay (2008).
- 2 The variation in female representation in the French Senate elections has been analyzed by Fréchette *et al* (2008) and Southwell (2013).
- 3 Also interesting is the high number of districts in which a UMP female candidate was running against a Socialist female candidate, with rather dismal results for the UMP candidate. Given that only 89 female UMP candidates survived to the second round, it is somewhat surprising that 28 (40.5 per cent) of them were running against a female opponent. Of course, this may have been a strategic move on the part of the Socialist Party as well.
- 4 Murray (2013) suggests that the hefty fines incurred by the UMP in 2012, about €4 million, may have an effect, in addition to President Hollande’s campaign promise to remove all party funding for not respecting parity.

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