

and the many issues raised by it. The only way to do it justice is to read the book!

***Gender Quotas, Parity Reform, and Political Parties in France.*** By Katherine A. R. Opello. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. 2006. 179 pp. \$65.00 cloth, \$22.95 paper.

DOI: 10.1017/S1743923X07000190

Mona Lena Krook  
Washington University in St. Louis

Although France has a relatively low level of female parliamentary representation — 12.2%, compared to the current world average of 17.3% — it has attracted a great deal of scholarly and popular attention among those interested in learning about new ways of promoting women in politics. This curiosity stems from a novel set of theoretical arguments for “parity” that were developed over the course of the 1990s and culminated in reforms of the constitution in 1999 and the electoral law in 2000 that together require parties to nominate 50% women among their candidates for almost all political offices. Although a number of books have been published on women and politics in France (in English, see Gill Allwood and Khursheed Wadia, *Women and Politics in France 1958-2000*, 2000; Raylene L. Ramsay, *French Women in Politics: Writing Power, Paternal Legitimization, and Maternal Legacies*, 2003; Joan Wallach Scott, *Parité! Sex Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism*, 2005), this recent book brings significant new data and analysis to these debates.

In *Gender Quotas, Parity Reform, and Political Parties in France*, Katherine A. R. Opello expands the temporal lens on the parity movement by linking its concerns to earlier efforts to promote women’s representation in French political parties. In particular, she traces the shift in focus over time from quotas, viewed as temporary policies to ensure that women constitute a larger minority in elected assemblies, to parity, seen as a permanent measure to establish equality between women and men in politics. To examine the timing and nature of changes in party strategies toward women, Opello presents a detailed analysis of debates on women’s representation in the two major political groupings in France: the center-left Socialist Party (PS) and the center-right Rally for the Republic (RPR), now known as the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP). Integrating evidence from interviews and

archives, she analyzes the roles of party elites, women's movements, and women inside the political parties in shaping ideas about gender equality and the perception of electoral incentives to promote women in political life.

In short, Opello contends that the Socialists adopted quotas as early as the 1970s because their party ideology predisposed them to take progressive stands on women's issues and to espouse the use of affirmative action to achieve gender equality. In contrast, the Gaullists did not initially favor quotas because their party ideology tended toward more traditional gender roles and prioritized personal responsibility. Despite these differences, both parties ultimately came out in support of gender-based measures — the author stresses — only when they had electoral incentives to do so. More specifically, the Socialists adopted quotas, and the Socialists and the Gaullists embraced parity, when they faced particularly difficult elections, regarded women as a significant voting bloc, and viewed gender quotas as a means of attracting female voters to the party. Opello concludes that politicians' ideas about gender equality, combined with their desire to win elections, affect the timing and nature of the measures they implement to promote women in politics.

This study thus situates the parity movement within longer-term developments in French politics. Although Opello spends little time discussing the concept of parity itself, which is covered at length in publications by other authors, she draws on the move toward parity in France in order to offer a number of crucial contributions to the literature on gender and politics. First, she employs the shift from quotas to parity as a lens for theorizing the durable (i.e., ideational) and contingent (i.e., electoral) reasons that parties may support measures to promote women in politics. Second, she situates current policies in France in light of the measures that came before, revealing the theoretical and empirical benefits of expanding the time frame under consideration when analyzing campaigns to increase women's political representation. Third, she distinguishes among the roles played by party elites, women's movements, and women inside the political parties in defining — and cultivating — the ideas and electoral incentives that lead to greater attention to the selection of female candidates to political office.

Despite these excellent qualities, there are some shortcomings in Opello's analysis. Most crucially, her careful attention to the adoption of quotas and then parity is not matched by similar discussion of their implementation and impact. Although such a focus may have been beyond the scope of her book,

a closer look at these patterns casts doubt on the validity of her argument regarding ideational and electoral incentives for promoting quotas and parity. This is because while these reforms have resulted in the election of nearly 50% of women in local councils where parity applies, they have led to only a one-point increase in the proportion of women elected to the National Assembly, from 11% in 1997 to 12% in 2002.

On the one hand, these outcomes undermine the argument about ideas, because the actions of political parties — at least in national elections — do not seem to be connected to their political principles. At most, these patterns point to the *weakness* of their commitments to proportional or equal representation. On the other hand, the fact that parity involves constitutional and legal reforms renders the argument about electoral incentives somewhat problematic: Provisions for parity, once passed, bind the selection processes of *all political parties*. As such, parity is no longer a policy that allows parties to distinguish themselves from one another in the electoral arena. Further, the financial penalties associated with not implementing parity for national elections seems to create a *new set of electoral incentives*, whereby smaller parties are more likely than larger parties to implement the provision, simply because they cannot afford to lose their state funding. The dynamics of implementation thus complicate Opello's account that quotas and parity result from a specific combination of ideational and electoral factors.

Nonetheless, her solid scholarship on the case of France is likely to assume an important place in future research on gender quotas: In addition to providing new concepts for analyzing quota adoption, her work calls attention to the need to focus on multiple sets of actors and their fluctuating reasons for pursuing — or objecting to — the use of quotas to promote women in politics.