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French Gender Parity Acts: from equal numerical participation to equal opportunities between women (real equality)

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1. Description of the main elements of the policy

1.1. Background and general policy context

In France, women only won the right to vote in 1944 (Decree, 21 April 1944). The country was one of the last European countries to legalise women's right to vote, nearly one century after men gained the right to vote in 1848¹.

Nevertheless, the proportion of women as elected representatives did not increase substantially. After the Second World War, some women who fought against the Nazi occupation were elected to the Parliament. During the Fourth Republic (1945-1958), male members in the lower house of the Parliament were nearly 93% of the deputies. During the Fifth Republic (since 1958), the number of male members in the lower house of the Parliament increased further (between 95% and 99% of deputies). In the 1980's and 1990's, female representation in the lower house progressed. In 1997, for the first time, the proportion of female members in the lower house of the Parliament exceeded the symbolic level of 10% of deputies.

This was due to the fact that in the 1990's, women politicians and feminists had begun to claim equality between men and women in politics (Bereni, 2015). In 1992, some socialist activists denounced male lists of candidates in regional elections. They protested because the socialist party increased the women quota in internal elections but in the regional elections the representation of women was below this quota. They considered this as a "scandal". Three activists wrote a book about the necessity to increase women participation in French politics (see *Au pouvoir citoyenne ! Liberté, égalité parité*, Françoise Gaspard, Claudine Servan-Schreiber and Anne Le Gall). Moreover, European networks (especially the network "Women in political decision-making") supported the mobilisation: in 1992, the "*Declaration of Athens*" ratified by two French female politicians stimulated gender parity claims.

As the French political scientist Laure Bereni noted, gender parity legislation was instituted in only seven years (from 1992 to 1999, the date of the constitutional reform), a very short time compared to the fight for the female right to vote.

¹ The main official date in 1789 was only a selective suffrage for the male richest citizens.

1.2. The goals and target groups of the policy

During seven years (1992-1999), activists defended women in politics. First claims were in relation to women's underrepresentation in politics. Gradually, the reflexions drove a constitutional reform and gender parity acts in order to increase women participation in political decision-making.

1.2.1. Quotas or parity? French arguments in favour of women's political participation

In France, the legislation of women quotas was difficult because of the political past: in the 1980's, the government tried to institute quotas in local elections (town elections), but the Constitutional Council refused. The French Constitution of the Republic states that the law is universal (that is to say, for every citizens). Thus, it was argued, a legislation could not be only for women. That is why activists and feminists claimed gender parity instead of quotas. They argued that gender parity was not only in favour of women, but in favour of all citizens, in order to give them a better representation in politics (Lépinard, 2007). Activists defended the idea that elected women would be more able to take care of voters and listen to them than men. However, since the adoption of the gender parity reform, researches in political daily behaviours have not confirmed this claim. Caring and listening are not exclusively women's characteristics. These attitudes are shared more commonly by newly elected representatives, irrespective of their gender (Guionnet, 2002). Nevertheless, it remains a strong common opinion among locally elected representatives: research shows that the majority of them think that male and female behaviour in politics differs (Navarre, 2015a).

As explained before, in France, quotas were not easy to support because of the past. That is why, as soon as the book written by Françoise Gaspard and *al.* in 1992 was published, activists and female politicians claimed gender parity (50/50) instead. They denounced the historic male universality which excluded women and claimed that universality was consisting of 50/50 male and female citizens. They argued that since politicians represented citizens, gender parity (50/50) should be instituted in politics too.

1.2.2. How the activists won the “battle for gender parity²” in public opinion

Activists in favour of gender parity used many tools in order to be listened by political power. Main researches identify four tools in particular (Lépinard, 2007; Bereni, 2015):

- **Expertness** (statistics; surveys showing that the majority of the French population was in favour of a better participation of women in French politics; analyses explaining the inequalities between men and women in politics (for example, see research published in the end of the 1980's and in the 1990's: Sineau, 1988; Martin, 1998; Mossuz-Lavau, 1998). There were also many researches in history or political theory denouncing the historical male democracy (see for example Fauré, 1985).

² (Bereni, 2015).

- **Associations** (“Women too”/Elles aussi; Parity 2000; Women Assembly; ...) **and networking** (“Tomorrow parity”). These associations were created by female ex-ministers, female experts, political activists or major feminists. Activists initiated the movement in favour of gender parity using different tools in order to raise public awareness.
- **Media (and other forms of public communication).** Gender parity legislation could not be adopted without the support of the main national media (newspapers for example). It published testimonies and opinions in favour of gender parity (however, sometimes also against it). For example, it revealed some scandals like the so called “Juppette” affaire in 1996 (name given to the twelve female members of the first government of the then Prime Minister, Alain Juppé). After forming the most feminized government in the history of the Fifth Republic, Alain Juppé decided to dismiss eight of them. He argued that they were not competent enough. Some female politicians defended them arguing that these women had only minor power and responsibilities in the government. As they were not ministers, only secretaries of state, they could not work efficiently without the cooperation of the respective minister. Media raised public awareness of sexism and women’s underrepresentation. In addition, female ex-ministers or political activists wrote books in order to claim gender parity (see, for example, Elisabeth Guigou, *Being a woman in politics*, Plon, 1997 in which she talked about the insults that she had to face as a woman in the male dominated political sphere). Since the middle of the 1990's, many female politicians have published their testimony about sexism in the political domain. Today, books and newspapers contribute again to raising public awareness by revealing for instance the sexual harassment affairs of the deputy Denis Baupin in 2016 and Dominique Strauss Khan in 2011.
- **Lobbying of politicians.** Gradually, lobbying by the associations in favour of gender parity as well as media support obliged politicians to think about women’s participation in politics. Some political parties like the Socialists or Green Party decided to adopt gender parity lists (for example, as soon as 1994, in the European election). Activists in favour of gender parity used all the main elections as opportunities to lobby politicians. One of the most effective campaigns was the presidential election in 1995: activists organised a meeting with the main candidates (e. g. socialist candidate, future Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, and the main candidate of the right political scene, future President of the Republic, Jacques Chirac). Because of the competition and the public opinion in favour of women in politics, both of them declared that they wanted to increase women’s representation. Jacques Chirac announced to study the issue by creating a parity observatory, whereas Lionel Jospin declared that he was in favour of legislation.

1.2.3. From the lobbying to the legislation

In 1995, the main candidates to the Presidency of the Republic agreed that there was an underrepresentation of women in French politics. The new President, Jacques Chirac decided to create a parity observatory. That was not sufficient: feminists and female politicians continued to claim equality in politics, for example in national newspapers and called it “The Manifesto of the ten to gender parity” (1996). In this manifesto, ten female politicians (mainly ministers or ex-ministers) claimed government actions in favour of women. In 1997, the new Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, who supported gender parity acts, initiated a reflexion about legislation.

The Government acknowledged that this was a necessity because even though women could be elected since 1944, the number of women who were elected stagnated until 1997. In 1945, women represented only 5% of the National Assembly. Fifty years later, they still represented only 6% of the Assembly, while they constituted 53% of the voters. Following the elections in 1997, the percentage of women in the Assembly reached 10.4% for the first time. With the exception of Greece, however, France was the last country among the advanced European ones in terms of opening the political arena to women.

It was therefore necessary “to act so that our representative democracy would reflect as faithfully as possible the electoral body, so that our citizens, seeing persons like them in office, would feel closer to the elected, and so that our democracy, which has been profoundly renewed by feminisation, might gain in dynamism, vitality and imagination ”. (Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in his address before the Parliament on 28th June 1999).

Political representation was meant to help women assert their presence in high-level public positions in other fields such as business management, research, and universities.

A turning point was reached in modernising the political scene when Congress agreed, after much debate, to amend the Constitution on the 28th June 1999 in order to allow for gender parity in elected political bodies.

The Constitution mentions that “*La loi favorise l'égal accès des femmes et des hommes aux mandats électoraux et aux fonctions électives*” (The law promotes equal access of women and men to elected political bodies). Thus, France has been the first country to adopt legislation in favour of gender parity in politics, in 2000. Then, from 1999 to 2014, the main emphasis was on legislation.

During the 2000's, different acts have achieved the goal of increasing female participation in politics. The target was to reach the level of 50/50 (gender parity) in the candidate lists and more recently, in local elected representatives (departmental councils).

1.3. The legal and financial provisions to implement the policy

Act 2000 (6/6/2000) established the legal obligation of submitting gender equal lists of candidates for plurinominal polls and introduced a financial penalty (withholding part of the public financial support) for political parties whose list of parliamentary candidates does not comply with the parity obligation (the differential among both sexes shall not exceed more than 2 %).

This enabled the development of new laws concerning equal rights in regional, European, senatorial and legislative elections.

In 2000, the “parity laws” defined the parameters of these quotas which applied strictly to elections with an all list system (town councils with over 3500 inhabitants, regional, senatorial and European elections) and with financial penalties for non-compliance in legislative elections. Except for a set-back in 2003 and 2010 (two laws which reduced the scope of parity for senatorial and regional elections but

which were overturned in 2013), there has been consistent advancement through a series of legislations strengthening parity and partly extending it to indirectly elected bodies where political power has relocated (e.g. intercommunal structures).

In 2007, a new law applied parity to the executive bodies of town councils or regional councils.

In 2013, an electoral law changed rules of election for departmental councils. It introduced a “mixed ticket”, one man and one woman both elected representatives on equal terms and in the same district (French called “canton”). The Act also included gender parity requirement in cities over 1,000 inhabitants in the same mode of election as for cities over 3,500 inhabitants (a proportional list system allowing strict parity to be applied to candidate lists, a reform asked for by parity activists as early as 1999). Now, parity applies to all elections with a list system through a zipper system: alternation of one man/one woman.

In 2014, an important piece of legislation tightened the condition for elected representatives to hold several mandates at the same time, which should improve women’s presence in elected offices, and increased the financial penalties for non-compliance with the parity imperative for candidates to legislative elections.

Electoral Act 2013 (17/5/2013):

- Set up a two names list system (one woman and one man as paired candidates) for departmental elections;
- Expanded the rule of strict sex/gender alternation to local and intercommunal elections in order to reinforce gender parity in political scene: it shall apply on lists of candidates to local polls in cities above 1.000 inhabitants, as well as to intercommunal council elections.

Vallaud-Belkacem Act 2014 (4/8/2014):

- Doubled the financial penalties for political parties evading parity rules (lower house polls, National Assembly)
- Enlarging or accelerating the enforcement of the rule for a gender balanced representation in numerous public corporations, private companies or sports federations (board of directors and supervisory, board of public corporations and companies; chambers of trade and industry; economic, social and environmental regional councils; consultative bodies; board of directors of companies whose workforce ranges above 250 employees; sports federations and public institutions in the field of cultural cooperation).

Moreover, the 2008 Constitutional reform broadened the scope of gender parity beyond the field of politics, opening the door for new laws on gender equal access to professional and social responsibilities.

For instance the introduction of quotas for management positions in the public service: the law has set a target of 20% women designated to such positions by 2013, and 40% by 2017.

Women participation in Boards of Directors in large companies: the law has set an objective of 40 % by 2017 (9 % in 2008; 22 % in 2011; 34 % in 2015).

1.4. Institutional arrangements and procedures of implementation

Implementing provisions for parity rules by election and voting system:

	Elections	Candidacies	Executive Councils
List system	Town (less than 1,000 inhabitants – 74% of the number of towns) and intercommunal	No legal requirement	No legal requirement
	Town (above 1,000 inhabitants – 26% of the number of towns) and intercommunal	Zipper system (one man/one woman)	Chairman of the Town Council: no legal requirement; Deputy Mayors: equal number of women and men; Intercommunal President and Deputy Presidents: no legal requirement
Voting for a single candidate	Regional	Zipper system (one man/one woman)	Presidency: no legal requirement; Standing committee: strict alternation by gender; Vice-Presidencies: women-men equality
	European	Zipper system (one man/one woman)	No legal requirement
	Senate (upper house) - Departments returning 3 or more Senators (73 % of the number of Senators)	Zipper system (one man/one woman)	No legal requirement
	Senate (upper house) - Departments returning one or two Senators (27 %) ----- National Assembly (lower house of Parliament)	No legal requirement ----- Financial penalties e.g. withholding public support to non-compliant parties (number of candidacies by sex exceeding a 48/52 % range)	No legal requirement
Voting for gender paired candidates	Cantonal/Departmental	Paired candidates (woman and man) per canton	Presidency: No legal requirement; Standing Committee: Strict alternation by gender; Vice-Presidencies: women-men equality

1.5. Key results in relation to the baseline situation and to the goals and target groups

Proportion of men in local and national political Assemblies and in executive Councils, prior to and after the adoption of gender parity laws:

	Before 1999	After 1999
No legal requirement		
Presidents of Regional Councils	88.5 %	90.9 %
Presidents of Departmental Councils	99.0 %	90.1 %
Presidents of Intercommunal Councils	94.8 %	92.3 %
Deputy Presidents of Intercommunal Councils	-	80.1 %*
Chairman of the City Council (undifferentiated in terms of size)	92.5 %	84.0 %
Town Councillors in towns <3,500 inhabitants (2001) and <1 000 (2014)	79.0 %	65.1 %
Partial legal requirement or incentives		
Senators	94.7 %	75.0 %
Members of Parliament (lower house)	89.1 %	73.1 %
Strict legal requirement		
Members of the European Parliament	59.8 %	56.8 %
Regional Councillors	72.5 %	52.1 %
Vice-Presidents of Regional Councils	84.9 %	51.6 %
Departmental Councilors	90.8 %	49.9 %
Vice-Presidents of Departmental Councils	-	51.7 %
Deputies to the Chairman of the City Council >3,500 inhabitants (2001) and >1,000 (2014)	78.2 %	52.5 %
Town Councillors >3,500 inhabitants (2001) and >1,000 (2014)	78.3 %	51.8 %

Sources: Ministry of Home Affairs, High Council for Gender Equality (April 2015)

* Incomplete set of data (20 % of intercommunal Councils were not covered then)

2. Results of the policy and its impact on achieving gender equality

2.1. Key results in relation to the baseline situation and to the goals and target groups

The first goal in 1999 was to improve women participation in french political scene. This goal is partly achieved, almost reached in the local and international political scene, not reached in national institutions as Parliament. Indeed, when gender parity is a strict legal requirement, women are nearly 50%:

- towns more than 1.000 inhabitants;
- departmental councils;
- regional councils;
- French members to the European Parliament;
- executive teams of town councils with more than 1.000 inhabitants, departmental and regional councils (vice-presidencies and deputy mayors).

However, when gender parity is not required as in town councils with less than 1.000 inhabitants or when it is only a partial requirement as in upper and lower houses of the Parliament, the underrepresentation of women remains.

Furthermore, presidencies of all councils and the position of chairperson of city councils are excluded from the gender parity requirement. A strict requirement is necessary in those responsibilities too.

It must be quote that France does not have official statistics (or only partly, such as in the executive teams) of a main level where political power has recently relocated: intercommunal councils. This should be improved.

In conclusion, today, the French government respects gender parity (48% of ministers are women). Nevertheless, these results are only voluntary measures of political leaders. No legislation requires gender parity in the government. Gender parity is not secure at this main political level.

2.2. Challenges, obstacles and constraints encountered

2.2.1. Obstacles and constraints

At the beginning, gender parity was only for the candidates, not for elected representatives. Two new orientations were taken in 2007-2008:

- Observers noted that the management teams of local (and national) councils were in effect male. That's why in 2007, a new act imposed parity in management teams (between vice-presidents for example). Many councils have parity between elected representatives, but not in the management team.

- In 2008, the French Constitution (Act 3) was extended to social and professional responsibilities because observers noted that gender equality in political life had no effect on other responsibilities (professional and social). However, the constitutional reform was not applied before 2013 and 2014 (see section 1.3).

Today and since 2012, equal participation of women and men in the decision-making process is one of the priorities of the French government. It has improved the laws in order to develop equal rights for women and men in social, economic and political scenes.

Nevertheless, as in 2003 (see before, section 1.3) or in 2010, gender parity needs to be defended. In 2010, especially, the government wanted to change local elected representation: regional councils were to be elected by indirect votes (citizens would have elected departmental councillors and departmental councillors would have elected regional councillors, without any gender parity requirement). Gender parity might have declined because elections would have been based on departmental rules which had no gender parity requirements (at least before 2014, since then, gender parity applies also to them, see section 1.3). This reduction of the gender parity acts has been avoided thanks to reports by state institutions in favour of parity (Parity Observatory and Women Delegation in Senate which raised awareness and proposed alternatives). These recommendations have been included in the policy initiated since 2012, after the election of François Hollande and the installation of a left government.

Now, defending and developing gender parity politics is difficult because different laws are applied in each kind of political council (towns, intercommunal, departmental, regional, upper and lower houses, European, etc.). This requires to be attentive to changes in voting rules and to anticipate a potential decline of gender parity.

Furthermore, major issues are still at stake more than 15 years after the enforcement of the first gender parity acts:

- Obtaining the enforcement of gender parity in those decision-making bodies where it is not yet rooted (professional, economic and social bodies);
- Achieving a genuine power-sharing articulating both a “quantitative” and “qualitative” parity.

2.2.2. Achieving a quantitative power-sharing

The participation of women in politics could be increased in the institutions where women are underrepresented:

- In the smallest towns without gender parity requirements (towns with less than 1.000 inhabitants). A closed list system could be installed for elections, alternating one man and one woman on the list, as it is the case in the biggest cities. This closed list should also include a strict gender parity requirement for the intercommunal councillors who are selected from the list of candidates in town councils.

- In the councils elected using an individual system (e. g. in the lower house: National Assembly, and part of the upper house: Senate). One solution could be using gender paired candidates (one man and one woman both candidates in the same district), as it is the case in the departmental councils, in order to increase women's participation. Another solution could be to increase financial penalties when political parties do not respect gender parity requirements. However, the biggest and richest political parties would not be much affected since they do not depend on public finances. In addition, financial sanctions only apply to the lower house, not the upper house. Gender parity is more secure when a strong requirement is in place like the system of gender paired candidates.

2.2.3. Achieving a qualitative power-sharing

Beyond the 50/50 representative power-sharing among women and men, one must assess the effective roles and positions shared among women and men. Who is the President? Who holds the portfolio of Finance of Family Affairs in a Town council?

2.2.3.1. The presidencies

One challenge is to improve female presidencies in councils. Today, there is only 16% of city chairwomen, 10% of women presidents in departmental councils and 3 women presidents in the 18 regional councils. The Parliament (lower and upper house) has never been presided by a women. Different tools can change these facts:

- system of gender paired presidency (one man and one woman)
- strict requirement of alternation between president and first vice-president (if a man presides a council, female first vice-presidency is required and reciprocally)
- the promotion of women in political parties. Political parties often choose leaders for the election of their members of management teams. Promoting women in management teams of political parties can help them to be placed at the first place, thus heading the lists of candidates.

2.2.3.2. In the executive teams (portfolios)

From the local councils to the national government, including the Parliament, portfolios are gendered. Research suggests that schematically, women portfolios are often dedicated to family, school and education or also care affairs whereas men's portfolios are dedicated to buildings, finances, economy, land settlement, etc. (Navarre, 2015a; Achin and *al.*, 2007).

This unequal power-sharing show the necessity to work on fighting gender stereotypes, both on the side of council leaders who assign the portfolios, and on the side of the vice-presidents or members of the executive teams. For example, young elected women or newly elected women often claim portfolios linked with their jobs, their qualifications or their hobbies because they think that this way it is easier to achieve their political role (Navarre, 2015a). Women also feel more legitimate in these portfolios. However, achieving power-sharing in the local and national portfolios develops and diversifies women's competences. It can contribute to keeping women in politics.

3. Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the policy

France was the first country in Europe to use gender parity legislation. This was an innovation to improve women's participation in political decision-making. However, besides its strengths, this policy presents two main weaknesses.

3.1. Help women during and after their mandate

One weakness of this policy is that acts don't help women during and after their mandate. This is an important issue because research in local councils, especially in town councils, states that only 50% of women as elected representatives want to stay in politics after their first mandate, compared to 75 % of men (Navarre, 2015a).

Women are used as “shooting stars” in local politics: they are usually older than men when elected (after they have raised their children, on average they are nearly 50-55 years old). Political leaders consider them as assets to appeal to voters but this is often based on gender stereotypes. And women feel obliged to confirm these stereotypes to fulfil their role (Senac, 2015): if they show similar behaviour to that of men, women become usually less attractive for voters and political leaders.

Furthermore, recent research shows that women are less prepared to be elected representatives compared to men (Navarre, 2015). Indeed, political leaders prefer to select women who represent “civil society” or associations instead of political parties or professional organisations. Young and newly elected women are less familiar and “socialised” to the political sphere compared to men. For example, in town councils, elected women who are members of political parties and/or professional organisations are underrepresented compared to men (Achin, 2007; Navarre, 2015). Elected women are often less trained than men. They must learn it. It takes them time whereas men already know.

In addition, there is a male co-option/connivance. The best examples are the speaking slots in public meetings: men help each other (Navarre, 2015b). They don't judge other men as negatively as women if they make a mistake. Political debates are not equally shared between men and women. In local councils (regional, departmental and town councils), when two men speak, there is only one woman (33% of speakers are women). Speaking is not easier in mixed assemblies. In regional councils, for example, men speak more than women, even if these inequalities have been reduced. Women take part in discussions differently than men. They present political projects but they do not often take part in controversial debates.

Specific actions are needed in favour of women speaking in public meetings. Indeed, one of the most popular training chosen by elected women is “how to speak in public?” (Navarre, 2015a). Helping women to access training could be a tool to keep women in politics and encourage them to take higher responsibilities. **Developing rights to training is a challenge.**

Furthermore, political actors (colleagues, media, politicians and leaders of political parties, etc.) often doubt women's competences. There is clearly an undervaluation of elected women in local councils (Navarre, 2015a) and in the national political

sphere too, as shown for example by research on stereotypes in articles on male and female politicians published in national newspapers (Olivesi, 2012). Even if women have the same qualification as men, they think that they are less able to be elected. Some of elected women feel obliged to prove that they can achieve their political role. They try to be always “perfect”: they do not miss a meeting or a working group. That is why at the end of their mandate, some of them are tired of these requirements and prefer to exit politics.

Securing a professional position during and after a political mandate is also important to encourage the commitment of elected representatives. One main issue is to secure the professional job of women: making sure that they can go to a meeting without any blame by their boss or making sure that they will not miss a professional promotion due to their commitment in the political sphere.

Another way to encourage the participation of women in politics would be to develop the validation of the prior political experience. The acquired political competences and experiences could be more valued to improve the attractiveness of women who were elected representatives also for their professional life. In France, the salaries of women are 28% below that of men in the private sector and 18% below that of men in the public sector³, partially because of the interruption of careers by pregnancies. If women must work more in their professions in order to decrease the gender pay gap, they have less time to get involved in politics.

Furthermore, in France, women professional careers are ever often penalised by the unequal sharing of domestic and family responsibilities. They are more likely to hold part time jobs (79% of part time jobs are held by women⁴). If women must already reduce their working time because they must take care of their children, how can they have time to be elected?

3.2. Partnership with political parties

Another weakness of this policy is the lacking partnership with political parties. Actually even if the constitutional acts in 1999 mention that political parties shall contribute to gender equality, these organisations do not often respect this obligation. Government parties prefer to pay financial sanctions instead of promoting women in the lower house elections (National Assembly). Only the smallest parties respect the law. Despite the financial penalties, the most important French political parties prefer to present a majority of male candidates for the lower house elections. Moreover, women are often excluded from internal responsibilities in political parties. Some parties have voluntary measures to promote women with different tools such as quotas in the highest responsibilities or gender parity in the management team (Socialist, Green party, ...). However, other political parties do not adopt this internal system (The Republicans, National Front, ...).

One of the limits of the gender parity acts is that they do not include a strong requirement for political parties. To improve it, a tool could be to introduce internal party quotas by legislation, as for example the Vallaud-Belkacem act requires it for associations, the economy or the public service (see before, section 1.3). This act could be extended to include also political parties.

³ National Institute of Statistics and Economical Studies, 2010.

⁴ National Institute of Statistics and Economical Studies, 2014.

3.3. Strength

Fortunately, **other partnerships are a strength of the policy**: state institutions dealing with gender issues (Minister of Women, parliamentary committees for women, institutions like the High Council of Equality between women and men, etc.). These partners offer expertise and reports on gender parity to improve it in France.

As mentioned before, expertness helps to initiate gender parity support. Besides, expertness also helped in 2010, when a planned law was to repeal gender parity in regional council elections. State institutions in favour of women (women committee in the Senate and Parity Observatory) have published reports in which the percentage of women in regional councils was estimated after the subsequent elections (without a gender parity requirement for candidates) compared to before (with gender parity requirement; in 2010, 48%, under 20% after the subsequent elections). These were tools to inform and mobilize against parity decline. (See https://www.senat.fr/rap/r09-552/r09-552_mono.html#toc99; http://www.haut-conseil-egalite.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/OPFH_reforme_territoriale_180211.pdf)

3.4. Transferability

In theory, gender parity by using quotas is **transferable** to other countries. However, **in practice**, the electoral system of some countries could complicate the possibility of transfer.

The parity policy could be easier transferable and more successful if backed by effective requirements. Strict requirements (such as alternating lists by gender or system of gender paired candidates) are more effective than financial penalties (positive or negative) as demonstrated by the French local elections. Financial penalties in the French lower house have not brought strong results yet and financial penalties should be increased to achieve gender parity. Another means would be to institute strict requirements such as a system of gender paired candidates.

Finally, gender parity cannot be instituted without public support, activists and strong arguments. If voters had not agreed with the activist's arguments for gender parity in politics in order to "refresh" politics, politicians would never have accepted the reform of the Constitution. Politicians had an electoral interest in accepting gender parity: accepting women on lists of candidates symbolised their modernity towards voters. Thus, the French example could maybe help other countries. Public support has legitimated the activists' claims and helped them to convince politicians. First constitutional reform interrupted only seven years after the beginning of claims (see before 1.2). In France, gender parity mobilisation was a real success compared to the female right to vote which needed nearly one century before being legalised.

3.5. Sustainability

One of the limits of gender parity is that acts are not sufficient to change attitudes, especially gender stereotypes. Gender (especially sexism) remains a tool to discredit potential competitors. Nevertheless, since the 1990's, politicians have more difficulties to discredit a woman because of her sex (Achin and *al.*, 2007). Sexism still exists (for example, doubts concerning the competences, interruptions of women when they speak in public meetings, ...) but it is less explicit than before the gender parity acts. Gender parity acts have reduced the tolerance of sexism, which has become more subtle.

That is why training is important. In France, few women associations exist to help women to become elected representatives. For example, the network “local elected women” offers step by step training and good practices online. Women can ask questions about their mandate, answer to others or read online advice as “how to keep speaking when somebody tries to interrupt you.” (see more here: <http://elueslocales.fr>).

Another way to develop training for women in order to break stereotypes can be to institute personal coaching between newly elected representatives and experienced elected representatives. Experienced men or women could guide newly elected women to teach them how to achieve their political role. Each political council could decide to adopt this solution, independently of the others.

Finally, a challenge is to **give the same opportunities to be elected to all women**. One of the limits of gender parity acts is that these acts help women who have already time or amenities to be elected (independent workers, job in public institutions or pensioners). Young mothers in particular are excluded because of caring responsibilities. Indeed, local political meetings or ceremonies often begin after 5:00 p.m. or are on week-ends, when children are at home. Tools to address this challenge would be to expand the child care system (child care centres or financial assistance) and limit meetings in the evening.

Conclusion

To sum up, today, in France, the **first main challenge** to achieve real gender parity in political decision-making (50/50), **is to make gender parity a general requirement** (obligation, not incentive) **in all political councils and political executive teams**.

The second main challenge is to improve the status and rights of elected representatives in order to give the same opportunities to all women to participate in political decision-making. In particular:

- develop training rights and training tools (individual coaching for example);
- defend professional acknowledgment of the political mandate (the qualifications achieved through a political mandate should be more acknowledged and valued in professional life outside of politics, for example);
- and last but not least, legislation to improve the reconciliation of family and the political sphere.

This second challenge is common with countries where public opinion does not support gender parity or women quotas. **Improving the status of elected representatives is a tool to increase women’s participation in political decision-making with or without the adoption of quota legislation**.

These challenges concern the whole public scene (associations, professional organisations such as unions, political parties, etc.). The barriers for women are almost the same in the different areas of public life: they cannot take part in public life because most of the time they must reconcile job and family care.

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