Conclusion and the ‘Party Priorities Model’

Introduction

This book has considered the various ways in which parties respond to a compulsory quota, using parity in France as a case study. This final, concluding chapter brings together the arguments made throughout the book and offers a new model for understanding the implementation of compulsory quotas. We have seen that each of the theoretical models explored in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 provides a partial but incomplete explanation of party behaviour, and they are most useful when considered collectively rather than independently of each other. The most useful insights into party choices when selecting candidates can be found in the interactions between the different approaches. To advance this argument, I develop a new theoretical model that I call the ‘party priorities model’. This model incorporates the insights of the three other approaches explored in this book and demonstrates how different parties will choose different paths of decision-making dependent on their overall priorities and goals. After laying out the theory behind the model I put it to the test by considering how well it explains the behaviour of the six French parties studied here. This model then leads to a broader discussion of the role of parties in quota implementation, and the potential insights of the model for a wider range of studies.

Overview of the key themes

In this section I revisit the key themes developed throughout the book and bring them together to offer some answers and conclusions. These themes include lessons from the literature; the motivations of parties
when introducing parity compared to their motivations in implementing it; the question of centralisation of candidate selection; and supply and demand factors when selecting candidates.

**Lessons from the literature**

Chapter 1 provided a summary of the various bodies of writing that are relevant to the study of sex and candidate selection in France. This includes works on political parties and candidate selection, the broad literature on gender and politics and the more specialist literature on parity within France. Many insights can be found from all of these areas of research, but one problem identified was that there was rather limited overlap between existing works on these different areas, even though they need to be considered collectively in order to address the question of gendered candidate selection in France. There are a few exceptions to this rule. For example, Lovenduski and Norris (1993) explicitly examine the relationship between gender and political parties, and lay some important theoretical foundations that are pursued in later works by both these authors. Opello (2006) goes one further and considers in detail the role of French parties in the development of parity. These works are very useful and have been highly influential in the development of the ideas explored here. Other works remain more isolationist and, whilst providing very useful insights, are of limited benefit to the research questions explored here except when examined more holistically and in conjunction with each other. For example, the literature on French parties has made rich contributions to the study of these parties in this book, but takes very little account of questions of gender. Meanwhile works on parity have provided a number of insights into the origins and implementation of the law on which this book has built, but pay little attention to the role of political parties as the key actors in parity’s implementation. At most, they have lamented parties’ failure to produce more women deputies without theorising in any depth why this is the case.

My argument is that parity has become a significant variable that French parties must take into account when selecting their election candidates. Parity has had wide repercussions for parties in a number of areas, including candidate selection but also internal organisation, party finance, promotion within the party, the party’s image and so on. It is no longer possible to offer a credible study of French parties that does not take the impact of parity into account. Similarly, the fundamental role of political parties as the implementers of parity and also, in their legislative function, as the only actors capable of