

## **Chapter Two: A Feminist Institutional Approach to Parliamentary Representation**

This book is situated within, and contributes towards, the study of Feminist Institutionalism (FI). Drawing on the various strands of the New Institutionalism (NI), FI makes the case that institutions matter, and are gendered. FI has been of crucial assistance to feminist scholars of political institutions in helping us identify the rules of the game, how these distribute power, the ways the rules shape and are shaped by gender hierarchies, and the ways that actors work with the rules to effect or resist change. This framework will help to illuminate the institutional context within which this study is situated; the various rules, both formal and informal, by which French politics is played, and how gender parity interacts with these other rules; how these rules structure the incentives and behaviours of French politicians; and, crucially, how a FI approach can help us to understand the limited progress that has resulted from gender parity legislation. I begin this chapter by providing an overview of FI and the synthesised framework that I propose to use within this book, before expanding in more depth on the various analytical concepts deployed by FI and the ways in which they are applied within this case study.

FI has its origins within NI, which conceives of institutions as the rules of the game in which political actors are the players (North 1990). NI comprises four core strands: historical, sociological, discursive, and rational choice institutionalism. Historical institutionalism (HI) argues that historical context matters and that existing institutional arrangements shape and bind attempts at change and innovation. HI is useful for understanding how the past shapes the present and creates situations of *path dependence*, whereby all actions are bounded by the existing structures and norms in place. As such, HI struggles to account for change, with a tendency towards stasis and the idea that existing institutional arrangements are “sticky” and hard to alter. Sociological institutionalism (SI) situates institutions within broader societal constructs; political institutions can also influence behaviour by shaping individuals’ “values, norms, interests, identities and beliefs” (March and Olsen 1989: 17). SI can be quite useful for gender scholars as it can be used to explain how unequal gender relations within broader society can impact on gender relations within parliament. However, SI risks casting too wide a net; it is important to distinguish between contextual information and institutions. Discursive institutionalism (DI) places emphasis on the importance of ideas and discourse in structuring rules and behaviours, and explaining and legitimising political action (Hay 2008; Schmidt 2010). DI can be used in conjunction with HI to help us understand how ideas evolve and shape the parameters within which actors can operate. Finally, rational choice institutionalism (RCI) is an actor-centred approach which considers how institutions shape the incentives and priorities of actors. It argues that actors will respond to these incentives in ways that maximise their utility, but recognises that their agency is bounded by the institutional context (Peters 1999). Not all actors will be incentivised by an institutional context in the same way, and different actors may prioritise different things while still acting rationally (Ostrom 1986).

FI makes several important contributions to the study of institutions, including the central insight that institutions are gendered. Mackay et al (2010: 581) argue that “constructions of masculinity and femininity are intertwined in the daily life or logic of political institutions” rather than merely being embedded within the individuals who use the institution. Further contributions include an emphasis on the distinction between formal

and informal institutions (discussed in depth below); on continuity and change; on structure and agency; and on (gendered) power. FI argues that NI has underplayed the importance of informal institutions, and also struggled to explain change.

Many studies that use a FI framework have applied a gendered analysis in conjunction with one or more strands of NI. For example, Freidenvall and Krook (2011), Miller (2021) and Freidenvall (2021) use a DI approach, with Freidenvall combining HI and DI. Staab (2017) also uses HI, as does Erikson (2017), even though Erikson's focus is on ideational change concerning prostitution, looking at the "path dependency of ideas" (p.2), which would also lend itself to a DI approach. Chiva (2018) uses HI and the concept of path dependence to explain the implementation of gender quotas in Eastern Europe, focusing on their effectiveness in getting women into parliament rather than on what happens once women get elected.

While these studies are all extremely useful and advance the field of FI in various ways, there have also been calls for a more synthesised approach to FI that offers a unique perspective on understanding institutions (Mackay 2011; Waylen 2014). Mackay et al (2010) identify commonalities between the different strands of NI and show how each is gendered. Lowndes rejects the notion that the different strands of NI represent "fundamentally different ontological positions" and instead argues that "they reflect the mixed motivations to which political actors (including institutional designers) are subject" (2014: 688). She advocates for a more holistic understanding of how different modes of constraint (regulatory, normative and discursive) work together, arguing that it is the "combination of multiple modes of constraint that gives institutions their capacity to endure over time" (2019: 552).

Mergaert and Lombardo (2014: 6-7) draw on all four variants of NI to understand gendered resistance to change within the European parliament. They use HI to explain the legacy of gendered norms within an institution that impact how new (gender) initiatives are received; they use SI to explain the relationship between individuals and institutions; they use DI to understand "the clash between the rhetorical commitments to gender mainstreaming and the actual gender norms embedded within an institution that promote gender-unequal practices"; and they use RCI to address the agency of actors mobilising both for and against change. In so doing, they demonstrate the utility of a more holistic approach that demonstrates how all the strands of NI can contribute to a comprehensive gendered analysis of institutions. Bogaards (2022) also calls for greater inclusion of all four strands of NI within FI analysis. He argues that FI could become the fifth strand of NI, extending Schmidt's (2010) work on defining the different strands of NI. He argues that within FI, power is the logic of explanation; rules, norms and outcomes, both formal and informal, are the definition of an institution; and actors are the explanation of change.

I propose to develop this move towards a more synthesised approach by proposing an analytical framework that focuses on two core dimensions: the rules of the game, and how the game evolves. The rules of the game include the formal and informal rules, as well as their impact on the gendered distribution of power. An analysis of how the game evolves uses a combination of structure and agency to understand institutional continuity and change. It uses actors as the players of the game to understand how change is advanced or resisted, demonstrating how existing structures impact on the choices and motivations of actors and how those actors then seek to uphold or overturn those structures. This synthesised approach proposes to draw on all four strands of NI while situating them within

a broader FI framework, arguing that each provides its own piece of the puzzle. HI is useful for understanding the context of the rules, how they are embedded in existing structures, and how this shapes the capacity for change. SI is useful for better understanding the gendered nature of informal rules and how broader societal gender inequality takes on an institutional dimension. RCI is useful for understanding the motivations of the players of the game and the reasons why they uphold or challenge the status quo. DI is useful for understanding the normative dimensions of the rules and the ideas that underpin them, including how ideational shifts can lead to institutional change and/or the institutionalisation of new norms. These different strands can also be used for deepening our understanding of how gender intersects with other identities, an area which is ripe for expansion within FI analysis. For example, we could consider how norms and informal rules are not only gendered but also raced and classed; how ideational shifts in favour of greater gender equality might include (or, in some cases, exclude) broader diversity; and whether actors mobilising for/against gender equality see representation for other groups as complementary to or competing with their goals.

This book uses this synthesised approach to look at the long-term impacts of gender quotas on the French parliament. It will assess the rules of the game to show how both formal and informal rules have impacted on the feminisation of power. It will then look at how the game evolves, for which a longitudinal approach is essential. It will demonstrate the utility of working within a framework that, at the same time, promotes simplicity (two core dimensions) and embraces complexity (drawing on the range of approaches advanced within FI). It enables us to see how and why progress can be multi-layered, with advances in some areas while progress in other areas stalls.

The remainder of this chapter develops this framework as follows. The next section expands the first dimension (the rules of the game) through a detailed discussion of the many insights contributed to this analysis by existing FI scholarship, including an analysis of the distinctions and interactions between formal and informal institutions; the ways that these rules are gendered; and how the rules impact the distribution of power. I then apply this framework to the French case study, looking at the gendered rules of the game and how they result in a gendered distribution of power that goes beyond differences in numerical presence. In the second section, I outline FI scholarship on institutional change and continuity, and then look at actors and their role in advancing and resisting change. I support the growing trend within the literature to see change as largely incremental and evolving over time. I make the case that a longitudinal analysis is essential for capturing slow change and the cumulative impact of “small wins”, and introduce a “lagged effects” model to demonstrate how the impact of gender quotas can only be understood in the longer term. I then apply this part of the framework to France, looking at the different institutional forces and actors that have been instrumental both in hindering and promoting change. I conclude by demonstrating the utility of this approach both for understanding how gender quotas impact parliamentary representation over the longer term, and more broadly for a feminist analysis of the rules, players and outcomes of the political game.

## **2.1 The Rules of the Game**

One of the most important aspects of both NI and FI is the need to establish what is meant by an institution. Chappell and Mackay (2017) helpfully distinguish between the broad institutional settings within which politics takes place, such as legislatures or parties, which they term “institutional arenas”, and the institutions that comprise the rules of the game.

The main institutional arena of interest in this book is parliament; the focus here is on the rules of the game. Elinor Ostrom (1999: 38) distinguishes between the “rules-in-form” (the formal, codified rules), and the “rules-in-use”, with the latter showing the way that things are actually done (“the dos and don’ts that one learns on the ground”). Helmke and Levitsky extend this analysis to distinguish between formal and informal institutions. They define formal institutions as “rules and procedures that are created, communicated and enforced through channels widely accepted as official” and informal institutions as “socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels” (2004: 727).

This understanding of the rules, and in particular of the distinction between formal and informal rules, is pivotal to FI analysis, and FI scholars have therefore paid considerable attention to refining their definitions of the rules. Georgina Waylen argues that FI conceptualises institutions as “gendered rules, norms and processes that have both formal and informal guises and examines how these shape actors’ strategies and preferences” (2017: 2). This is a helpful definition, although it should be noted that the relationship with actors is dynamic; institutions can shape their preferences and behaviours, but actors can also shape institutions, as we will see below. I focus first on the distinction between formal and informal institutions, before elaborating on the ways in which the rules of the game are gendered.

#### *Formal and Informal Institutions*

Chappell and Mackay offer one of the most thorough and nuanced definitions of informal institutions as “*enduring* rules, norms and practices that shape *collective behaviour* that *may or may not be recognized by institutional actors*; have a *collective effect*; are usually *not codified*; [and] are *enforced* through sanctions and rewards from *within or outwith* an institutional arena” (2017: 41). The distinction between formal and informal rules is important in numerous ways. The formal rules, being consciously designed, visible and codified, are easily identifiable and are usually upheld with formal sanctions. In contrast, the informal rules can be much harder to identify, and their gendered impacts may be harder to recognise. Yet both types of rules are essential for understanding how the game is played, and both impact on the choice sets available to the players. While the sanctions for breaching informal rules may take the form of ridicule or ostracization rather than a more formal penalty, they are understood by the players as the “way that things are done around here” and are upheld and enforced (Lowndes 2014). One of the key distinctions is that formal rules are changed through formal political practices, such as enacting legislation, revising policies or reforming constitutions. The difference in the rules-in-form is instant and abrupt. Conversely, as informal rules are uncoded, they cannot easily be revised; changes to informal rules require more substantial shifts in norms, ideas and practices, which tend towards slow evolution over time. This means that informal rules tend to be “sticky” and tenacious, unless a change in the formal rules prompts a significant change in actors’ incentive structures that motivates them to modify practices “on the ground” (Chappell and Mackay 2017).

The relationship between formal and informal rules is complex. Helmke and Levitsky (2004) argue that the relationship of informal to formal institutions can be complementary, accommodating, substitutive or competing, depending on the level of acceptance of the formal rules of the game by its players as well as the extent of their ability to change the rules. Waylen (2014) offers a similar analysis, arguing that informal institutions can act in

ways that are completing, complementary, coordinating or distorting. Gatto and Wylie (2022: 728) reprise Helmke and Levitsky's typology and extend it to identify informal institutions that are "intentionally accommodating" (deliberately linked to efforts to increase women's representation) and "inadvertently competing" ("interact[ing] with gender equity rules unintentionally").

Informal rules are key to understanding how gender becomes embedded in the hidden wiring of institutional arenas. However, one of the challenges of researching informal institutions is that they can be hard to observe ((Kenny 2014; Gatto and Wylie 2022). Waylen notes that analysing "informal institutions and how they are gendered presents theoretical and methodological difficulties as both gender norms and informal institutions can be difficult to uncover. Gender norms and informal institutions often remain unperceived or unremarked as they are naturalized as part of the status quo" (2014: 216). The social sanctions for breaking informal rules mean that the rules are silently upheld to the point where they easily go unnoticed. Chappell and Mackay concur, stating that "the challenge for researchers is that these rules are often taken for granted – usually submerged and barely visible – and are therefore difficult to study. Finding the right methods to 'see' informal institutions is essential, especially as it is through these rules, norms and practices that wider particular arrangements and power asymmetries are naturalized and institutionalized, and sometimes resisted and discarded, across institutional arenas" (2017: 36).

#### *Gender and Power*

Central to an analysis of informal institutions is an understanding of how they contribute to the gendered distribution of power. Mackay et al claim that "the rules of the game... can be seen as gendered as they prescribe (as well as proscribe) 'acceptable' masculine and feminine forms of behaviour, rules and values for men and women within institutions" (2010: 581-2; see also Lowndes 2014: 687). March and Olson (1989) show how institutions determine the norms for appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, and Chappell (2006) builds on this to identify a "gendered logic of appropriateness" that shows how these behavioural norms are deeply gendered and distinct for men and women. Gender stereotypes, including the "appropriate" behaviours expected of women (constructions of femininity) and of men (constructions of masculinity), determine the unwritten rules of conduct by which both sexes are expected to abide. While stereotypes can be harmful to all genders, they can be particularly damaging to women within a political setting, because institutions are gendered to the masculine. Kantola (2013) acknowledges the hierarchy embedded within gendered institutions, with the masculine prioritised over the feminine. Lovenduski notes how political institutions are imbued with masculinity and highlights that "political practices including demagoguery, ruthlessness and aggression require qualities that are culturally accepted in men but not women" (2005: 54).

This masculine gendering of institutions has real implications for the distribution of power. Bjarnegård and Kenny note how "the privilege of (certain) men is sustained by some informal institutions" and call for more attention to the "informal institutions that continue to reinforce and reproduce male dominance" (2017: 203-5). Chappell and Mackay note that masculine traits, especially those associated with hegemonic masculinity, are systematically favoured over traits associated with women. They argue that gendered informal institutions, including those based on a gendered logic of appropriateness, "maintain hierarchies of status and domination, and...are central to shaping political

processes and outcomes, including who has access to political power and to material and symbolic resources” (2017: 36). They conclude that this leads to the maintenance of “dominant categories of men in powerful positions” (ibid: 45).

We thus see that informal institutions are central to understanding gendered power relations within politics, even though they can be difficult to observe. To help develop a research agenda on gendered institutions, Lowndes and Roberts (2013) distinguish between rules about gender; rules that have gendered effects; and actors that are gendered. While rules about gender are more self-evident, this typology is helpful for understanding how seemingly neutral rules may have gendered effects due to their interaction with informal institutions (Lowndes 2020). The third element of their typology – the role of actors in upholding, resisting and reforming these rules - is considered in greater depth later in this chapter.

This section has considered the rules of the game, including the distinction between formal and informal rules, their gendered dimensions, and the ways that the masculine bias inherent within many of the rules leads to a skewed distribution of power in favour of men. A final area to consider is the institutions that are of most relevance to the gendered study of legislatures. Susan Franceschet identifies the key informal institutions relating to the substantive representation of women as including “internal and cross-party dynamics, for example, how parties distribute committee assignments among their legislative caucuses and how participation in floor debates is allocated; and norms of appropriate parliamentary behaviour, for example, whether and how a combative or consensual style is encouraged” (2011: 62). These all form central components of my analysis. The second part of this section applies the framework outlined above to the French case study, analysing the key gendered rules of the game in France and illustrating how they contribute to an unequal gendered distribution of power within the French parliament.

#### The Rules of the Game Within France

In the following chapter of this book (Chapter Three), I set out the broad institutional context within France, including parliament as an institutional arena, the key formal institutions that define French politics (such as the electoral system and the semi-presidential system), and the key actors within the French political system. Chapter Three also offers a much more comprehensive account of the details and background of the French parity law. As such, Chapter Three provides the necessary contextual information to make sense of the following empirical chapters. The discussion here serves a different purpose. I am looking specifically at the *gendered* rules of the game, applying the above framework to demonstrate how the French parliament is a gendered institution which works to the detriment of women. The aim here is to “nail the bias” within the National Assembly as a gendered institutional arena (Lovenduski 2009; Chappell and Mackay 2017). I begin by demonstrating how a FI analysis helps us to make sense of the limited impacts of the French parity law. I then consider which other formal rules are gendered, and which have gendered effects. The main focus, however, is on illuminating the informal rules that permeate the French parliament. I demonstrate how the National Assembly is gendered to the masculine, and illuminate the hidden rules that impact how deputies access power, advance their careers and achieve their goals. Understanding these invisible, but deeply gendered, rules is key to understanding the gender gaps that are revealed in later chapters of this book.

Mazur et al argue that, despite the feminisation that parity legislation has helped to achieve, a closer examination “reveals the limits of the moderately punitive policy instrument and formal rules in the face of informal gender-biased norms and practices within the political parties” (2021: 29). They note research (including Murray and Sénac 2018) indicating that the limited success of parity in increasing descriptive representation has not translated into a comparable level of success in obtaining power within parliament. I demonstrate the utility of applying a FI framework to the application of the parity law, and then show how the gendered rules within parliament exacerbate the problem.

Several strands of NI theory are helpful for understanding the qualified success of parity in boosting descriptive representation, and I demonstrate below how they can each be woven into a FI analysis. Gender quotas had previously been deemed unconstitutional in France, forcing women’s movements to find a more creative solution. They settled on the concept of “parity” as recognising the natural division of the population into two sexes. Doing so required a discourse that openly rejected “communitarianism”, or identity politics, and instead promoted a form of descriptive representation that was “for women only” (Lépinard 2013). Inscripting parity within the law required a constitutional revision, and wrangling over the wording resulted in a compromise that weakened parity’s impact. The legislation itself was also filled with loopholes and workarounds that enabled parties to avoid implementing gender parity. Over the 25 years that have followed, various changes to the formal rules have strengthened and reinforced the legislation, as well as extending it to other arenas such as quotas for corporate boards, but certain loopholes have remained “baked in”. Consequently, French politics has feminised but remains some distance from full parity. Parties have continued to find ways to circumvent the legislation and prioritise men in winnable seats. The normative principle of parity has become widely accepted as part of French political discourse, to the extent that no mainstream politician would openly reject the principle, yet the practice has continued to lag behind, and the representation of other minoritized groups has been largely absent from public debate.

How can a FI framework help understand why parity’s success has been limited? Drawing on several strands of NI and applying a gendered lens offers the most comprehensive insights. A HI account favours a long-term analysis that situates parity within its broader institutional context. This demonstrates the path dependence of the legislation, with the rigidity of formal institutions such as the electoral system, along with the watered down wording of the constitutional amendment, impacting on the subsequent development and implementation of the law. Consequently, the critical junctures introduced by the passage of parity legislation and its subsequent revisions have each produced relatively small wins within a context that leans towards stasis. Meanwhile, a DI account helps us trace the discourse surrounding parity through initial hostility, reframing and gradual normalisation. While the implementation of parity still faces some resistance, the norm of parity now enjoys widespread acceptance, to the point that it has become institutionalised (Achin et al 2022; Freidenvall 2021). However, the discursive approaches required to achieve this acceptance came at the cost of excluding all other groups from claims to descriptive representation, resulting in the privileging of wealthy white women at the expense of ethnic minority and working-class groups.

The implementation of parity by French political parties lends itself well to a RCI approach to understand the motivations of the different actors involved and explain why some parties have embraced parity enthusiastically, some have respected it grudgingly through lack of choice, and others have paid lip service to the law while actively subverting its

implementation. My earlier work provides a detailed account of the competing incentive structures (ideological, electoral and pragmatic) which prompted each party to choose a distinct yet rational approach (Murray 2007, 2010). Finally, a SI account helps us to understand how the growing acceptance of parity comes within a context of (slowly) shifting gender norms and (limited) growing support for the broader principle of gender equality. The combined insights of the different strands of NI, with the additional benefits of a gendered lens and a longitudinal analysis, help us to understand the complex array of institutions that have helped to shape the formal rules regarding women's inclusion within politics.

While parity is the most obvious formal rule that is gendered, France has previously had several gendered rules that have had an exclusionary impact on women's presence within politics. The first of these is the formal dress code for parliament<sup>1</sup> which prohibited women from wearing trousers in parliament until 1980 (a non-trivial rule given that women have faced sexual harassment within parliament for wearing a dress (Lemahieu 2022)). The second is the language used to describe politicians. In the French language, all nouns are ascribed a gender; while many pronouns are arbitrary, the pronouns attributed to professions have often reflected gendered societal expectations. This is particularly the case for political roles, all of which were initially gendered masculine (*le ministre*; *le maire*; *le député*; *le président*). While many professions have been adapted to provide a masculine and feminine variant depending on the jobholder, the feminisation of political titles has been hard won. Women found themselves in the absurd situation of being titled "Mme *le député*" or "Mme *le ministre*". The formal rule was amended in 1998 to state that feminised job titles for female politicians were officially frowned upon but could be used at the insistence of the office-holder, although it was not until 2019 that the Académie Française, the (male-dominated) guardian of the French language, lifted its objection to the feminisation of political job titles. This remains a site of ongoing resistance, with some men refusing to accept the feminised form of women's job titles and insisting on the grammatical correctness of using a masculine pronoun (see below and Chapter Eight). Finally, France applied a policy of compulsory military service for men until 1997, while no such obligation applied to women. The political implications of this gendered rule are subtle but significant. It means that most male deputies born before 1975 have some form of military experience, while very few women do. As a consequence, women are heavily under-represented on the defence committee within parliament, a committee coveted by ambitious deputies due to its light workload (see Chapter Five). National defence is also part of the remit of the French president, a role that has only ever been held by men. While the three formal rules (dress codes, job titles and military service) have now been reformed, their legacy has a lagged effect that is still felt. In different ways, each has helped to define politics as an arena for men, where women do not belong.

Alongside formal gendered rules, France also has some formal rules that, while ostensibly neutral, have gendered effects. I consider two here. The first is the rule regarding *cumul des mandats*, or multiple office-holding. For many years it has been formally allowed, and informally expected, for deputies to combine their seat in parliament with at least one other elected office at the subnational level. This rule has allowed for an important concentration of male power not only within parliament but also within the various local executive roles

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<sup>1</sup> The dress code for parliament, as well as imposing gender stereotypical attire, has also been critiqued for its class and race biases, with the obligation for men to wear a suit and tie being challenged by communist deputies favouring working-class attire and a deputy from one of France's overseas territories wearing the traditional formal attire of his native Polynesia



that serve as springboards into parliament. Combining national and local offices also affords deputies a strong local power base, and the opportunity to make a future comeback in the event of losing one of their elections. The virtual monopoly by men of many forms of local executive office (to which the parity legislation does not apply) means that the *cumul des mandats*, while itself not overtly gendered, is a rule that strongly supports male dominance of politics at both the local and national levels. The reforms to this rule, and their gendered consequences, are considered in subsequent chapters of this book.

The second rule with gendered effects is *suppléants*, or reserve candidates, considered in more depth in Chapter Four. This rule requires each candidate for office to have a reserve candidate on the ticket, so that if they have to vacate the seat, their suppléant can take up the post without need for a by-election. This is particularly pertinent for the National Assembly, given that parliamentary and ministerial office are officially incompatible. Hence, any deputy promoted to the government must transfer their parliamentary seat to their suppléant. This rule has two notable gendered effects. First, it allows parties to “balance” the ticket by having a man and a woman on the same ticket, albeit with men more often being the candidate and women being the suppléante. There have consistently been more women at the bottom of the ticket than at the top. Second, deputies with a good chance of being promoted to government are more likely to have a male suppléant, irrespective of their own sex, meaning that the opportunity that the position affords to become a deputy favours more men than women.

While the formal rules considered above are important and inform the analysis in subsequent chapters, a core contribution of this book is to highlight the informal rules that underpin power relations within the French parliament and explain why men continue to enjoy greater power than women. Like many other parliaments, the National Assembly has what Galea and Gaweda (2018) label a “masculine blueprint” – a series of practices and discourses that sustain male dominance in all aspects of parliament as an institutional arena. The National Assembly has its own specific gender regime, related – but not identical – to the gender order of wider French society (Connell 2020). Chappell and Mackay (2017) develop Connell’s definition of gender regimes within an institutional arena and identify the following core features: gendered division of labour; gendered relations of power; gendered patterning of emotional labour; gendered culture and symbolism. Each of these can be observed to a greater or less extent within the National Assembly. Gendered divisions of labour feature in many of the core functions of parliament, including committees, debates and questions to the government. These divisions also reflect a gendered logic of appropriateness both internal and external to parliament, with women encouraged to pursue certain policy domains while areas more associated with prestige and power are also more readily associated with men. Gendered relations of power can be observed through access to prestigious committees and to various positions of responsibility. Gendered patterning of emotional labour is less visible but can be identified by the greater use of personal examples given by female deputies within parliamentary debates; patterns may also exist within constituency work, as has been found elsewhere (eg Crewe 2014), but this falls outside the scope of the present study. Finally, gendered culture and symbolism is indeed present; the use of women to lead on “feminine” policy areas in the highly visible questions to the government is one example, while the physical environment of parliament (with pictures of powerful men on display within the sites of formal decision making, while an image of a naked woman is on display in the parliamentary bar) is another.

I outline below four key sets of informal rules that pertain to the central ways in which power is obtained and wielded, namely: *access* to parliament; *external sources of power*; internal mechanisms of *career advancement*; and gendered *codes of conduct*.

*Access* to parliament is determined through party candidate selection procedures. The informal rules of candidate selection can be categorised as rules with gendered effects, as they do not explicitly discriminate against women, but nonetheless favour qualities more often found in men, including availability, prior experience of elected office, and being well networked within the party (Murray 2010). The impact of a change to these informal rules is considered later in this chapter and in Chapter Four.

*External sources of power* are the sources of power accumulated beyond parliament, both before and during a parliamentary career, which enhance the resources and status of a deputy within parliament. While none of these is a mandatory qualification for parliament, they all help to confer insider status which serves as an informal source of power. They are also, in various ways, gendered in favour of men. As such, accumulating these resources may be considered part of the informal rules that empower men within parliament at the expense of women. The first is attendance at specific elite educational institutions, including Sciences Po Paris and the Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA). These male-dominated institutions have served as a springboard into politics for many deputies, as well as a source of old-boys networks. For example, Emmanuel Macron graduated from the ENA in 2004 as part of a cohort of 134 students, of whom a further three (all men) became deputies in the same year that Macron became president. The second external source of power is to become a career politician, namely to enter politics-facing employment (including political aide, parliamentary assistant or senior civil servant) as a precursor to elected office. These roles, again held predominantly by men, give their holders a head-start when entering parliament as they already possess the insider knowledge and networks required to "hit the ground running". A third source of power is to develop a strong local power base within the constituency through the exercise of local executive office which, as noted above, is heavily male-dominated. Finally, deputies can build their external power through political parties. French parties are the main gatekeepers within parliament, not only through candidate selection but also through the allocation of various forms of responsibility and visibility, including committee membership, party spokesperson roles, and questions to the government. The leaders of each parliamentary party also sit on the powerful leadership team within parliament (the Bureau). Seniority within a party can thus be an important source of power, and it is again one held predominantly by men. These themes are explored in more depth in chapters Four and Five.

*Career advancement* within parliament can take many forms and requires deputies to play by a series of unwritten rules. The first is to find senior mentors who can guide you through the process and introduce you into their networks. This poses an immediate problem for women, as there are few senior women to mentor them: not only are there fewer women than men but, as demonstrated in Chapter Four, the parliamentary careers of women tend to be shorter than those of men, resulting in a scarcity of experienced women relative to a preponderance of newcomers. Men may also benefit from informal homosocial networks (Bjarnegård 2013), which impacts the second rule, namely networking in male-dominated social spaces, including the parliamentary bar ("la buvette") and the room for meeting journalists ("la Salle des Quatre Colonnes").

Many other forms of career advancement are based on more subtly gendered rules. Ambition, and the prioritising of advancement over other goals (such as serving constituents), requires an agentic rather than communal approach. Chapter Five considers how men are socialised and encouraged to behave in agentic ways, while women are expected to be more communal in their behaviour, with consequences for their careers (see also Sineau 2011: 148). This is reflected, for example, in the informal rule of eschewing laborious tasks in favour of activities that support career advancement. Certain parliamentary committees are favoured for their prestige or for their light workloads, and accessing the right committee can be another tool of career advancement. Chapter Five shows that men dominate the most prestigious committees, while women are concentrated in the committees with the lowest status and highest workloads. Leadership roles, within committees and within parliament itself, can be a further source of status and influence, and these too are disproportionately held by men. Finally, asking questions to the government can be an important source of self-promotion. The two televised sessions held each week, analysed in more depth in Chapters Six and Seven, are the most high profile activity undertaken by most deputies. They are an effective means of getting noticed by constituents and journalists, raising a deputy's profile within parliament and catching the attention of ministers and senior party figures. Men ask more questions on high-status issues such as the economy, foreign affairs, national security, and the coveted questions to the prime minister.

Last but not least, gendered *codes of conduct* form an important part of the masculine blueprint of the National Assembly. These manifest most visibly within parliamentary debates, analysed in depth in Chapter Eight. As in other legislatures (Lovenduski 2005), the norms of conduct in parliament are predicated on traits of hegemonic masculinity, including aggression, interruption, partisan point-scoring, personal attacks, and the use of condescension. These behaviours contravene the gendered logic of appropriateness for women, and are reproduced primarily by men within parliament. One way of identifying these behaviours as an informal institution – as opposed to the behaviours of individuals – is that they are specific to certain contexts. Debates held within parliamentary committees, which are shielded from public view but minuted, reveal a much more cordial style of politics, even though they feature the same actors, indicating that the aggressive behaviours observed in plenary debates are performative (Rai 2017; Spary 2010).

We thus see that there are many informal rules that contribute to a gendered distribution of power within parliament, from routes into parliament to networks, and from strategic choices to performative behaviours, with their cumulative effects meaning that women may be “seen but not heard” (Crewe et al 2022: 560). While all these rules have gendered effects, their gendered impacts may not be visible to all deputies, many of whom may simply view these rules as the “way that things are done around here” (Lowndes 2014). As such, to reprise Helmke and Levitsky's typology, many of these informal rules may be viewed, from a gendered perspective, as *competing* with the formal requirement of parity, as they undermine the goals of gender inclusion. Yet many political actors may simply see these informal rules as *complementary* to France's formal institutions. This invisibility of the gendered effects of informal institutions is considered in more detail later in the chapter when looking at accepting or challenging the status quo. First, having established the rules of the game, let us turn our attention to how the rules evolve over time.

## 2.2 How the Rules Evolve

**Commented [R1]:** It may be possible to add something here about the conduct of these debates; this analysis has not yet been undertaken so I am not sure whether there will be relevant findings here to include

**Commented [R2]:** I am also hoping to analyse the sessions on Questions to the Government in Chapter Seven but, as above, do not yet have the findings for this

Feminist institutionalism is normative in its approach to political science; if the rules of the game are skewed in favour of men, what is the solution for promoting better gender balance? We seek to understand how institutions change, and the role of actors in promoting or obstructing change, in order to chart a path towards a more inclusive and equitable society. This is why an analysis of “institutional change and stasis, including dynamics of institutional power relations, resistance and reproduction” is central to FI scholarship (Mackay et al 2010: 582). This section explores different theories of institutional change, including how informal institutions may hinder formal attempts at rule change. I then look at the role of actors in resisting and advancing change, and make the case for a longitudinal analysis that captures slow change over time. The second part of this section then applies the framework to France.

### *Theories of Institutional Change*

FI places a greater emphasis on the capacity for change than most strands of NI, but draws on insights from NI where helpful. Most FI analyses of change have found HI particularly insightful for understanding change (see below). Some recent studies have also drawn on DI to help understand the evolution of ideas and the framing of debates (Freidenvall and Krook 2011; Freidenvall 2021). Waylen (2014) argues that SI is not good at understanding change, although I would counter that it might be useful as part of a broader, synthesised framework. SI helps us to understand why change may be *lagged* (for example, the long-term societal forces that shape career paths prior to entry into parliament will not change immediately in the wake of a new quota rule). SI can also help to explain exogenous impetus for change (for example, if societal attitudes have evolved then politicians may become compelled to change the rules to reflect this). Finally, studies of how actors respond to and resist change lend themselves well to the application of RCI, even if this is seldom done explicitly. I develop this argument below when looking at actors as agents of change. A synthesised approach can thus offer us greater analytical power than any one strand in isolation.

HI argues that institutions tend towards stasis and change is hard to achieve. When change does occur it tends to be through *critical junctures*, specific acts or institutional changes that lead to a sudden change, followed by a renewed period of stasis. This model is referred to as punctuated equilibrium, with periods of stasis (equilibrium) punctuated by brief junctures of change. This model has been revised over the years by scholars such as Streeck and Thelen (2005) and Mahoney and Thelen (2010) to take account of more incremental change, recognising that some change happens through evolution rather than specific junctures. As HI recognises the limitations imposed by historical context, the incremental change model is one of bounded innovation, whereby new changes are bounded by the existing institutional arrangements to produce more gradual change. It is a core argument of this book that this is what we are seeing in France: the impact of parity, while ostensibly an institutional innovation that might produce a critical juncture by causing a sharp shock to existing arrangements, has in fact been bounded by those arrangements to produce more incremental change.

HI argues that change primarily benefits those who already have power and can thus initiate change if it serves them and veto any change that is not to their benefit. Mahoney and Thelen (2010) identify four types of institutional change: displacement (new rules replace old rules); layering (new rules are layered over existing rules without competing with them); drift (the impact of existing rules changes due to shifts in the environment/meaning

of the rules); and conversion (working within existing rules to get institutions to behave differently). They explain how different changes are the result of different balances of power between those seeking to effect change and those seeking to defend the status quo, with displacement showing greater power for those seeking change, followed by layering, and drift and conversion being slower forms of change when there is not enough power to force a rapid shift in the status quo. Waylen (2014) argues that this framework could be extended to take better account of informal rules. She claims that feminist attempts at rule-change are unlikely to succeed through displacement due to the veto power of those defending the status quo. Where new formal rules are created, ambiguity or contradiction may be built in as a concession to existing power and to distort their impact – something that has been widely observed with quota legislation, including in France (Krook 2009). Waylen also argues that drift is too slow-moving to be a successful strategy, and concludes that “layering and conversion are more likely gender equality strategies because they are gradual, endogenous and potentially more achievable when actors have sufficient power to create some new rules or use existing rules in creative ways but not enough to displace these existing rules” (Waylen 2014: 219; see also Waylen 2017). Waylen offers gender quotas as an example of layering, although with the critique that they cannot “fundamentally regender masculinist institutions” (2014: 219). This is where the FI emphasis on the importance of informal institutions becomes crucial to understanding the capacity for gendered institutional change.

Gatto and Wylie, who develop the concept of institutional layering, point out that “new formal institutions are layered upon not only prior formal rules but also a host of informal norms. It is precisely the informality of those institutions that makes them difficult to displace, which bears important implications for whether institutional reforms achieve their expected outcomes” (2022: 729). Waylen (2014) concurs, arguing that it is essential to include informal institutions in our analysis to help us understand why formal rule changes (such as quotas) may not produce the desired outcome and may instead be hindered or subverted. She points out that “reforming formal rules may end officially sanctioned gender bias but will not necessarily overcome all institutionalized forms of male bias as informal rules may undermine formal rule change” (Waylen 2014: 216). This may even be the unspoken intention of those who designed the formal rules – who in many cases are those in power and thus with a vested interest in upholding the status quo. A formal rule that is easily subverted by informal practices is a way of paying lip service to gender equality while ensuring that male dominance continues largely unchecked. The role of actors in securing or resisting institutional change is thus an essential part of the puzzle, and one to which we now turn.

#### *The Role of Actors in Advancing and Resisting Change*

Institutions are the rules of the game, but no game can be fully understood without also analysing its players. While HI is useful for understanding structure – how the institutional environment shapes the rules and their capacity to change – a rational choice approach (RCI) is more useful for understanding agency. RCI acknowledges the role of structure in shaping the choice set available to actors, but argues that actors will then exercise their agency to choose rationally from among the choices available to them in order to maximise their utility. Understanding actors’ motivations – their end goals, or what they perceive their utility to be – is crucial for understanding the path that they will choose. A dynamic approach to understanding how actors promote, support or resist change therefore needs to consider their underlying motivations and recognise that these may be complex and

conflicting. This illuminates why actors may introduce formal rules that they do not actually wish to implement, and also why actors might support change even when it appears ostensibly to go against their own interests.

Much FI scholarship that analyses the role of actors focuses on how men resist efforts to feminise politics. Men, as the beneficiaries of the status quo, are understood to have a vested interest in preserving that status quo. Gatto and Wylie argue that “when reforms stand to redistribute power, actors will resist change, and in the face of change, will develop mechanisms for attenuating their impact” (2022: 728). Chappell and Mackay offer the example of men “forgetting” new rules and “remembering” the old as an attempt to reassert the status quo (2017: 50). Mackay et al (2010: 583) argue that men who find themselves obliged to allow women increased access to political arenas will nonetheless find ways to circumvent women’s power, such as shifting the locus of power from formal to informal institutions or even to alternative institutional arenas. This is an example of subtle resistance; shifting international norms towards greater acceptance of women’s inclusion in public life have created an informal rule that makes it difficult to defy feminisation openly. Hence, Bergqvist et al argue that “resistance to feminism is often seemingly invisible and implicit, and it seldom manifests itself as such” (2013: 281). Even when actors wish to prevent a feminisation of politics, they may not feel able to do so directly and explicitly.

While this approach ascribes agency to men’s efforts to resist feminisation, there is also recognition that some resistance may be unconscious rather than a deliberate act of sabotage. Chappell and Mackay (2017) recognise that men may not perceive masculine advantage (cf Kimmel 2013). If informal institutions that preserve male dominance are accepted uncritically, without recognising the gender inequality embedded within them, then the need to change those institutions may not be recognised. Mergaert and Lombardo argue that resistance may be the inadvertent consequence of reproducing learned norms of gender inequality, and action to change the status quo requires more conscious thought than reproducing existing behaviours. They thus claim that agents for gendered change struggle because “their action requires swimming against the tide of the institutional inertia that maintains unequal gender norms” (2014: 9). Gatto and Wylie consider that resistance may be a combination of structure and agency, arguing that it results both from “the likely inadvertent effects of informal institutions employed for non-gendered motivations and party elites acting to preserve their own power” (2022: 728).

Josefsson recognises that it may be difficult to discern the difference between institutional context (the upholding, perhaps unconsciously, of institutions that are gendered to the masculine and favour men) and conscious strategies of resistance. She argues that we need to distinguish between institutional and ideational context, which – while they may uphold the male-dominated status quo and disadvantage women – are not acts of resistance; and active, embodied resistance by men. She builds on work by Bjarnegård (2018) to distinguish between “the mechanisms that constantly reinforce male dominance, and those more reactive, overt and conscious mechanisms that are activated to resist challenges and maintain power” (Josefsson forthcoming, p.29).

Josefsson also follows a RCI approach, although she does not do so explicitly. She argues that quotas threaten male power, dominance and autonomy and that these costs usually outweigh any benefits that quotas might bring to men (such as legitimacy or voter satisfaction), leaving many men with rational incentives to resist quota implementation.

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She also recognises that men's incentives may shift over time as the institutional and ideational context evolves, resulting in different strategies of resistance at different points in the policy process. Mackay (2011) similarly recognises that the agency of actors is bounded by institutional, cultural and discursive constraints. This may lead to "bounded rationality" whereby actors are forced to make the optimal choice within a suboptimal context. Annesley et al (2019) recognise that the preference for male actors to (re)select male incumbents for office is bounded by the wish not to be perceived by voters as being too exclusionary of women. Evolving social attitudes may create electoral pressure to be seen as more inclusionary of women and may also lead to some ideational shift among male actors, especially those ideologically disposed towards egalitarian arguments. Political actors are driven by multiple motivations in their pursuit of power; their willingness to support feminisation may be a complex interaction of their electoral incentives, ideological motivations, desire for party cohesion, and personal self-interest (Murray 2007; 2010). Effective engagement by critical actors in favour of change may thus depend on their ability to persuade those in power of their own interest in supporting change. This is much more likely to be effective if change agents have managed to mobilise public opinion (and hence voters) in favour of their cause; if their claims resonate with the ideology of the party in power; or if those in power are keen to respond to international pressures for change (cf. Krook 2009).

#### *Capturing Evolution and Lagged Effects*

Meryl Kenny promotes the merit of studying changes over time, noting that while new developments may be nested in old habits, "there is also the possibility that [institutions] can be 're-gendered' through ongoing processes of political contestation, opening up further possibilities for reform at a later point in time" (2014: 683; see also Kenny 2013). Freidenvall supports a longitudinal approach, and applies this in her own research. She offers an interesting development to Mackay's arguments about old rules being 'remembered' while new rules are 'forgotten', arguing that if we study gendered change in the longer term, new gendered institutions (such as gender quotas) will over time become old, and "affect institutional configurations by being remembered" (Freidenvall 2021: 62).

Various scholars have called for greater knowledge of gradual change and the role of informal institutions (Erikson 2017; Freidenvall 2021; Mackay and Waylen 2014; Waylen 2014). There is also a need for more research on quotas that looks at the entire process from adoption to implementation (Krook and Norris 2014; Lang, Meier and Sauer 2022). Josefsson (forthcoming) argues that we need a long-term perspective that captures the entire policy process in order to understand change, and specifically to identify the factors that stall, slow down or resist change. Staab (2017) uses HI to understand gradual institutional change, and while she acknowledges that policy legacies make change more difficult to achieve, she argues that limited short-term gains may lead to more substantial gains in the longer term – something that is best captured in a longer-term study. Chappell and Mackay (2017: 51) echo this, arguing that micro-shifts and 'small wins' can accumulate over time (see also Freidenvall 2021: 68). Mergaert and Lombardo argue that "in principle, less resistance to gender change should be encountered in institutions where power relations are more equal" (2014: 5). We might thus expect that the gains that women make, first through increased descriptive representation and then (more slowly) through increased empowerment, are cumulative and each step forward makes them better placed to take the next step: a longitudinal approach can thus test not only whether things improve

as women's numbers rise but also whether change accelerates as women become better implanted within parliament (a "snowball" effect).

I propose here that a longitudinal approach is essential for any study of the impact of quotas. Specifically, alongside the snowball effect noted above, I argue for a *lagged effects* model that recognises that empowerment for women within parliament will almost inevitably occur more slowly than a feminisation of personnel. The rationale for a lagged effects model is as follows:

1. Pre-parliamentary careers affect parliamentary careers, so inequality from the past will continue to shape the present. This is particularly the case when quotas are used as a "fast-track" to expedite feminisation and compensate for inequalities in the pathways towards parliament (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005). While quotas might remove some of the barriers that women face, they cannot undo the many gendered experiences and disadvantages that shape women's pathways into parliament. This creates an ongoing problem of path dependence for which quotas cannot provide a silver bullet.
2. Culture, practice and attitudes within parliament do not shift overnight (March and Olsen 1989). We have noted that cultural change takes time, and that informal institutions can be more "sticky" than formal institutions (Kenny 2011). A long-term approach is thus essential to monitor gradual attitudinal change and ideational shift (Freidenvall 2021).
3. Seniority and political capital are built up over the long term. Any notable increase in the proportion of women in parliament inevitably results from an influx of women elected for the first time. It takes multiple electoral cycles for these women to gain the seniority, status and experience to place them on a more equal footing with their male peers. Until this is achieved, women will remain at a disadvantage relative to many of the men around them. This is particularly the case if women's political careers are shorter than men's (Lazarus et al 2023), resulting in an ongoing male seniority advantage.
4. In the short term, a lack of senior women relative to the proportion of female newcomers means that junior women will have fewer opportunities to be mentored by other women. Conversely, junior men will have no shortage of prospective male mentors and homosocial networks to help them learn the ropes and advance their careers (Bjarnegård 2013). This problem will not be resolved fully until gender parity has been achieved both in terms of numbers and seniority – a scenario that has yet to be achieved anywhere.
5. It takes time for the old guard within politics to stand down and be replaced. While growing numbers of women requires a corresponding decrease in the proportion of men, parliament will continue to contain a majority of members who were first elected prior to the introduction of quotas, many of whom will remain attached to the old ways of doing things. Over a number of electoral cycles, not only the women but also the men in parliament will belong to a new, post-quota generation for whom the notion of women's political inclusion is more normalised.

The lagged effects model helps us to understand why the impact of gender quotas can only be understood over the longer term, and why increased descriptive representation for women is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's empowerment within parliament. This is crucial to understand, as the lack of immediate impact of gender quotas within parliament might easily be construed as policy failure rather than a premature assessment of something that inevitably takes time. We may also need to revise the concept



of quotas as a “fast-track” solution given that, even when quotas achieve rapid change in women’s *presence*, many of the changes required to increase women’s *power* are stuck on the slow-track. The core challenge for scholars and activists is how to ensure that initial gains in terms of descriptive representation can then be converted effectively into growing empowerment over a number of electoral cycles as women gain in experience and seniority.

Collectively, the FI literature provides many insights regarding whether, when and how institutions change, the tendency towards inertia and stasis, the motivations and strategies of actors seeking to resist change, and the tactics that feminist actors need to deploy to try to overcome these challenges. Drawing on the NI literature, HI is particularly useful for understanding obstacles to change, while SI and DI can provide insights into how change occurs. RCI is most useful for understanding the motivations of actors when faced with the prospect of institutional change. FI can therefore leverage the combined insights from the different strands of NI. I support a growing trend within FI to recognise the importance of long-term studies of feminisation within legislatures, and extend existing approaches by proposing the concepts of *snowball effects* and the *lagged effects* model. The remainder of this section illuminates these insights by applying the framework to the French case study.

#### Applying the Framework to France

We noted earlier in this chapter that the National Assembly as an institutional arena, and the informal institutions that regulate the distribution of power and the opportunities for career advancement within parliament, are all imbued with a heavy male bias. However, much of this masculine blueprint is not overtly gendered; rather, it is a cumulation of deeply ingrained practices within an institution that has long been male-dominated. Analysing how the rules evolve within France thus raises the questions of how much has evolved, when, and how. These questions will be asked continuously throughout this book and not all of the answers are considered here. Instead, the focus here is on two key areas. The first is the reasons why, despite prospective critical junctures, the trend in France has been more towards evolution than revolution. The second is to understand the role of actors both in resisting and promoting change. These themes will then be revisited throughout the book, and elaborated upon in Chapter 9, where I will also assess the presence of snowball effects in France.

#### *Evolution, Not Revolution*

At first glance, the French case study might be expected to offer an example of punctuated equilibrium, with two critical junctures: one in 2002, following the implementation of the parity law, and one in 2017, following the collapse of the mainstream parties and the entry en masse of En Marche!<sup>2</sup> into the French parliament. However, we have already established that the parity law did not achieve an immediate increase in the descriptive representation of women in 2002; rather, we have seen the numbers evolve more slowly over a twenty year period, with each election representing the next step in a long process rather than a sudden, radical change. 2017 does offer a more meaningful example of sudden institutional change, in two regards. The first is that the informal rules of candidate selection were changed significantly by En Marche!, who openly encouraged applications from candidates with no prior political or partisan experience, as well as inviting women to put themselves forward. While Chapter Four will demonstrate that the candidates elected in 2017 were not

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<sup>2</sup> En Marche! (complete with exclamation mark) is the name initially given to the party created to support Emmanuel Macron’s presidential run. Following their victory in 2017, the party was rebranded as La République en Marche (LREM), and since 2022 they have been rebranded again as Renaissance.

so very different from the politicians who came before, the lower level of political experience and the higher proportion of women within the governing party both contributed to the prospects of the second type of institutional change, namely the potential to alter the informal rules of the National Assembly discussed above. As these rules are uncodified, a change of personnel (with 75% of the deputies elected in 2017 not having served a previous term) afforded a meaningful opportunity to dispense with the old rules and create a new set of rules for “how things are done around here”. Indeed, many newly elected deputies did enter parliament with fresh perspectives and sincere intentions to create a new type of politics – one which broke down old hierarchies and placed greater emphasis on the legislative functions of parliament.

While in some respects 2017 has indeed served as a critical juncture, the reality has tended more towards “nested newness” (Mackay 2014). Studies of the 2017-22 parliament (not focused on gender) have found that the newcomers in parliament were swiftly forced to “forget” their aspirations for a new way of doing things, while the remaining old guard “remembered” and reimposed the old rules (Ollion 2021; Rescan 2019). There were many examples of institutional resistance, demonstrating that in most respects, the actors didn’t change the rules; rather, the rules changed the actors. While these analyses are neither gendered nor situated explicitly within an institutionalist framework, they are very illuminating of the capacity of French political institutions to resist change. In some respects, the inability of the newcomers to change how things worked was the result of naivety and an inadequate understanding of the nature of parliament; for example, their enthusiasm for presenteeism within parliamentary debates soon waned when they discovered that the more important opportunity to revise legislation occurred at the committee stage. Likewise, their preference for being in Paris rather than the constituency hit a reality check when they realised that greater visibility in the constituency was an expectation of voters and hence a requirement for re-election. But the mistakes of inexperience also dampened their enthusiasm for change and made them more willing (even if grudgingly) to follow the lead of their more experienced counterparts and accept the established rules. My own (gendered) analysis of the 2017 cohort paints a picture of limited change and significant continuity, consistent with Celis and Wauter’s finding that when more diverse groups enter parliament, they are more likely to adapt to parliamentary norms than to change them (2010).

Hence, France fits better within a model of bounded innovation rather than punctuated equilibrium. The innovation marked by the introduction of parity legislation has produced a gradual but notable feminisation of the population of parliament. The weaknesses of the parity law, explored in more depth in Chapter Three, explain why this change has been slow and bounded both by the rules themselves and by the actors responsible for implementing them. Meanwhile, the impact of feminisation within parliament has also been a story of evolution rather than revolution. The lagged effects model outlined above holds true for France, in ways that will be demonstrated throughout the book. The issue of seniority and experience is a recurring theme. I note in Chapter Four that female deputies experience more of a “revolving door” than their male counterparts, with few women lasting more than a couple of electoral cycles, meaning that the problem of newness has remained an enduring issue rather than one that has evolved over time. The critical juncture of 2017 has helped somewhat to mitigate this problem by precipitating an exodus of many senior politicians and ensuring that many men as well as women are also newcomers, but there are two caveats. The first is that among the incumbents re-elected in 2017, men were more experienced, on average, than women, and the second is that among those first elected

in 2017, women had less local and party experience than men. We see in Chapter Five how this lack of seniority impacts on the distribution of positions of power. But throughout the book I also note a gradual evolution in the informal institutions outlined earlier in this chapter, demonstrating that change does occur, albeit slowly.

#### *French Actors Resisting and Promoting Change*

The greatest resistance to feminisation within France has been displayed by political parties at the level of candidate selection, examined in more depth in Chapter Three (Murray 2010; Achin et al 2022). Parties have committed various acts of sabotage that fall clearly within what Josefsson terms “conscious resistance” – deliberate acts knowingly undertaken with the goal of defying a gender equality measure and preserving male dominance. Over time, there has been a reduction in these acts of defiance, for two reasons. First, the growing institutionalisation of the norm of parity has made it less politically acceptable for parties to engage in these behaviours (particularly when faced with “blame and shame” strategies by feminists) (Achin et al 2022; Mazur et al 2021). Second, the rules around parity have been tightened (also as a response to feminist activism) to make them harder for parties to defy. These caveats notwithstanding, parties continue to resist the full implementation of the parity law, especially with regards to executive office at the local level and winnable seats at the national level, and the 2022 election was the first since 1988 where the proportion of women in parliament actually went down rather than up.

Within the National Assembly itself, acts of visible resistance are more rare, although they do occur. Chapter Eight details incidences of sexism within parliamentary debates. One strategy of resistance relates to the old rule noted above of referring to female politicians using male job titles. Chapter Eight notes the efforts of certain male deputies to “forget” the new rule and “remember” the old one. However, most acts of resistance within parliament are more subtle, for two reasons. First, as above, is the ideational shift regarding parity that makes it less politically acceptable to engage in overt acts of hostility towards women in parliament (cf Erikson 2017; Freidenvall 2021). Second, and crucially, is that most of the preservation of male dominance within parliament is rendered invisible as it consists of upholding the gendered informal rules outlined earlier in this chapter. As the gendered nature of these informal rules passes unnoticed by many within parliament, and is completely imperceptible to the wider public, there is no sanction for upholding these rules. Indeed, it is perfectly possible that this perpetuation of male bias occurs unconsciously. Josefsson’s typology of resistance would categorise this form of gender discrimination as “institutional context” rather than *resistance* per se, while Mergaert and Lombardo (2014) would categorise it as “implicit resistance”.

Understanding the motivations of actors is therefore key to knowing whether the upholding of gender norms within parliament is a conscious strategy of resistance or an unconscious acceptance of informal rules whose gendered effects go unnoticed. An ethnographic study, more akin to the work undertaken by Miller (2021) or proposed by Crewe (Taylor Robinson et al, 2022), would provide a valuable complement to the analysis presented in this book. Ethnographic work has been undertaken previously within the French parliament (eg Abélès 2000), but there has been no recent work with a gendered focus that can address these questions fully. What we can observe here is the extent to which the informal rules of parliament have been challenged and revised as the result of feminisation. In particular, we can consider the positive catalysts for change that have helped to tackle the tendency towards institutional stasis.

**Commented [R5]:** I am hoping to incorporate a second wave of interviews for the book that might be able to provide some answers and, if so, I can revise this accordingly.

There have been numerous critical actors within and beyond the French parliament who have fought hard to secure advances for women's representation. Chapter Three details the activism and success of feminist politicians across the political spectrum in tightening the parity legislation and closing some of the loopholes that parties had exploited. These critical actors were supported by various women's policy agencies, as well as the parliamentary Delegation for Women's Rights. The activism of women in defending women's rights and challenging the status quo is highlighted throughout the book.

While most feminist activism come from women, we are also seeing growing engagement from men. This is sometimes tokenistic, such as the move towards parity in government by president Nicolas Sarkozy (2007-12), which nonetheless set a precedent that became institutionalised in what Annesley et al term a "concrete floor" (2019). In other words, the presence of women in government became normalised to the extent that it was then politically unacceptable to backtrack and revert to gender imbalanced governments. There have also been a growing number of instances where men have moved beyond token gestures and have served as critical actors to advance gender equality. Chapter Eight demonstrates a shift over time in the level of men's engagement with substantive representation for women in parliamentary debates, and identifies several men (all from left-wing parties) who were active in promoting gender equality. In 2016, the (male) president of the National Assembly proudly unveiled the first representations of women amongst the works of art in the National Assembly, including a bust of pioneering feminist Olympe de Gouges in the Salle des Quatre Colonnes. Even within parties of the right and far-right, whose ideology more frequently runs counter to gender equality, there have been attempts to pay lip service to gender equality, which reflects a rational response to evolving societal norms. Concessions have started to be made to include more women within positions of power. Chapter Five demonstrates that there is a growing proportion of women holding leadership roles and accessing the more powerful committees, even if gender gaps still persist. While all these changes are clearly small wins within a broader context of male dominance and institutional resistance, they are still important, and more rapid progress since 2022 is indicative of a snowball effect.

Alongside active efforts to change the formal rules of the game, women have also tackled the informal rules of the game through a strategy most akin to what Mahoney and Thelen (2010) term "conversion" or what I might term "playing the game a different way". Lowndes notes that "enacting formal and informal gendered rules may have a different meaning for women than for men" (2019: 557) and that "there are many instances where gendered actors work creatively with rules and, in so doing, disrupt and loosen their hold" (ibid: 559). Sineau notes the refusal of France's female politicians to accept and reproduce the masculine model of politics (2011: 148). Some women (not all) play the game their own way and interpret the rules differently. Women sometimes enter politics with a different set of motivations to those of men, with the substantive representation of women being a significant driver for a number of women, from some of the early critical actors noted in this book to some of the recent arrivals drawn in by Macron's appeal for more women in politics<sup>3</sup>. Motivated by communal (a desire to make a difference for women) rather than agentic (accumulation of power) goals, these women prioritise different things in their parliamentary work. Chapter Five notes that some women orient themselves

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<sup>3</sup> This claim is based on my interviews with deputies and public statements made by deputies on why they chose to run in 2017.

towards committees that make a difference on the issues they care about, without regard for the prestige of the committee. Chapters Six and Seven note that women prioritise asking questions that promote women's interests. Chapter Eight reveals that women prioritise attending debates on topics that are important to women (and eschew those that do not advance these goals). While these choices are undoubtedly gendered, they are not necessarily irrational; they reflect different motivations and priorities. And while playing by these different rules may not change the behaviour of others and may actually work to the detriment of the career progression of these women, it allows them to achieve their representational goals despite a hostile institutional context. These women sit alongside other women who are willing to play the more traditional game in order to access power. Until the rules change, both strategies are necessary: we need some women to win the existing game, while others challenge and seek to change the unwritten rules of the game. As women's numbers increase, their preferences may lead to greater desirability and competition for the behaviours and domains favoured by women, leading to drift and displacement of the old informal institutions and a shift towards new areas of prestige, visibility and advancement. The end goal is to enable women to win the game on their own terms.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has drawn on the insights of NI and especially FI to help us understand the gendered rules of the game within French politics, and the way that these rules have evolved over time. I have proposed a synthesised approach to FI that incorporates insights from each of the four strands of NI to provide a more holistic understanding of how institutions function. While the different strands of NI come from different normative standpoints, they can each be the most appropriate tool for understanding specific facets of representation. For example, HI provides the most useful account of institutional inertia and path dependence, while also helping us to understand the contexts in which institutions are able to evolve. SI helps us to place institutional arenas within a broader societal context, which is useful for understanding how wider social and electoral pressures shape the behaviour and careers of political actors. DI is helping for understanding the evolution of norms and ideas, particularly those pertaining to gender equality and quotas. RCI is most useful for understanding the competing motivations of the players of the game and how these translate into different strategies for upholding, resisting and changing the rules.

FI adds numerous insights that help us to advance beyond the four strands of NI. In particular, the focus within FI on the distinction between formal and informal rules is very insightful. While formal rules are the most frequent sites of contestation, informal rules are where much of the invisible reproduction of male dominance takes place. It is only by looking beyond the formal rules and understanding the way that things are actually done that we can truly make sense of all the ways in which institutional arenas are gendered.

I propose that a full understanding of the impact of gender quotas can only be achieved through a long-term, longitudinal analysis. I offer two new contributions to the study of gender quotas in the longer term. The first is to look at "snowball" effects, whereby the cumulative effect of small wins can lead to a growing momentum in favour of gender equality. The second is to understand lagged effects and recognise the multiple barriers to women's empowerment that can only be addressed slowly, even when a quota is intended to provide a "fast-track" solution to women's representation (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005).

The framework outlined in this chapter, with its emphasis on a synthesised approach, the importance of informal rules, and the significance of lagged effects, is applied throughout the remainder of this book. We start in the next chapter by analysing the gender parity legislation, looking at the motivations of the actors involved in its initial passage and subsequent revisions, the path dependence created by initial struggles with the wording, and the evolution of the discourse surrounding gender quotas from one of contestation to one of tacit acceptance.