Less but better ? The influence of gender on political activity

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EEA-ESEM - August 2023
Barcelona

Introduction

- Growing share of women elected at local and national levels in France ▸ Figure
- Key question : does this change has deteriorated or improved the quality of politicians and political decisions ?
- Gender differences could come from the pool of candidates or from behavioral differences
- 2 main challenges : identification + measurement
  - Identification : gender potentially correlated with other factors
  - Measurement : how to define quality ? Characteristics of politicians (e.g. Besley et al., 2017) ? Policies implemented (e.g. Bagues and Campa, 2021) ? Topics of bills/amendments authored (e.g. Lippmann, 2022) ?

This paper

- **Quality** of politicians measured **quantitatively** along 2 dimensions
  - Activity : elaboration of the legislation (amendments, bills and reports) and control of the government (questions for the government and interventions in plenary sessions)
  - Effectiveness : number/share of bills or amendments passed

Context

Parliamentary elections and representation of women in France

- Elections for the Lower House of the French parliament occur every 5 years
- 577 parliamentarians in 577 constituencies elected by direct universal suffrage (two-round plurality voting rule system)
- No quota directly affecting the representation of women in the Lower House. However, financial incentives introduced in 2002 to force political parties to nominate women as candidates

Data

Main source : Assemblée Nationale $\Rightarrow$ Rich data compared with most countries

- 6 *législatures* : 1993-1997, 1997-2002, 2002-2007, 2007-2012, 2012-2017, 2017-2022
- Characteristics of parliamentarians (gender, experience, political group, permanent commission, occupation, etc.)
- Other positions in parliament (presidence of political group/commission, friendship/study groups, etc.)
- Elections (Ministère de l'Intérieur)

Data - Variables

Activity

- Reports : annual number of reports authored by the parliamentarian
- Bills : annual number of bills authored by the parliamentarian
- Amendments : annual number of amendments authored by the parliamentarian
- Questions : annual number of oral questions to the government in plenary sessions
- Interventions : annual number of (long) oral interventions

Effectiveness

- Bills : number and share of passed bills
- Amendments : number and share of passed amendments

Empirical strategy

Two main specifications :

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 FemaleParliamentarian_{it} + \beta_2 X_{it} + u_{it} \qquad (1)$$

Where i is the subscript for the parliamentarian level and t for the term. The unit of observation is the parliamentarian-term level

X_{it} includes several sets of control variables : experience, political characteristics, parliamentary commission and occupation + term and constituency fixed-effects

Empirical strategy

RDD specification :

$$Y_{ct} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_{ct} + \beta_2 f(X_{ct}) + u_{ct} \quad (2)$$

where c is the subscript for the constituency level and t for the term. X_{ct} is our running variable, and D_{ct} is equal to 1 if a woman is elected

β_1 captures the local average treatment effect (LATE) of electing a woman instead of a man after a close election (bandwidth : Calonico (2014))

Internal validity : no manipulation around the threshold + continuity of the confounders :

Results - Activity

TABLE – Effect of the parliamentarian's gender on activity

	(1) Pooled	(2) Pooled	(3) Fixed-effects	(4) Any activity	(5) Mean activity if parl. active
	Panel A : Reports (% of ghosts = 31% / mean if active = 1.17)				
Female	0.006	-0.007	0.049	0.321**	-0.120
	(0.054)	(0.058)	(0.076)	(0.145)	(0.105)
				[0.057]	
N	2944	2944	2913	2944	2040
Spec	Poisson	Poisson	Poisson	Logit	OLS
	Panel B : Bills (% of ghosts = 35% / mean if active = 1.24)				
Female	-0.390***	-0.210***	-0.365***	-0.097	-0.476***
	(0.062)	(0.064)	(0.087)	(0.125)	(0.156)
				[-0.018]	
N	2944	2944	2896	2939	1906
Spec	Poisson	Poisson	Poisson	Logit	OLS
	Panel C : Amendments (% of ghosts = 10% / mean if active = 53.7)				
Female	-9.853*	-6.826	-4.009	0.247	-6.791
	(5.517)	(5.114)	(7.077)	(0.276)	(8.000)
				[0.017]	
N	1977	1977	1977	1956	1780
Spec	OLS	OLS	OLS	Logit	OLS

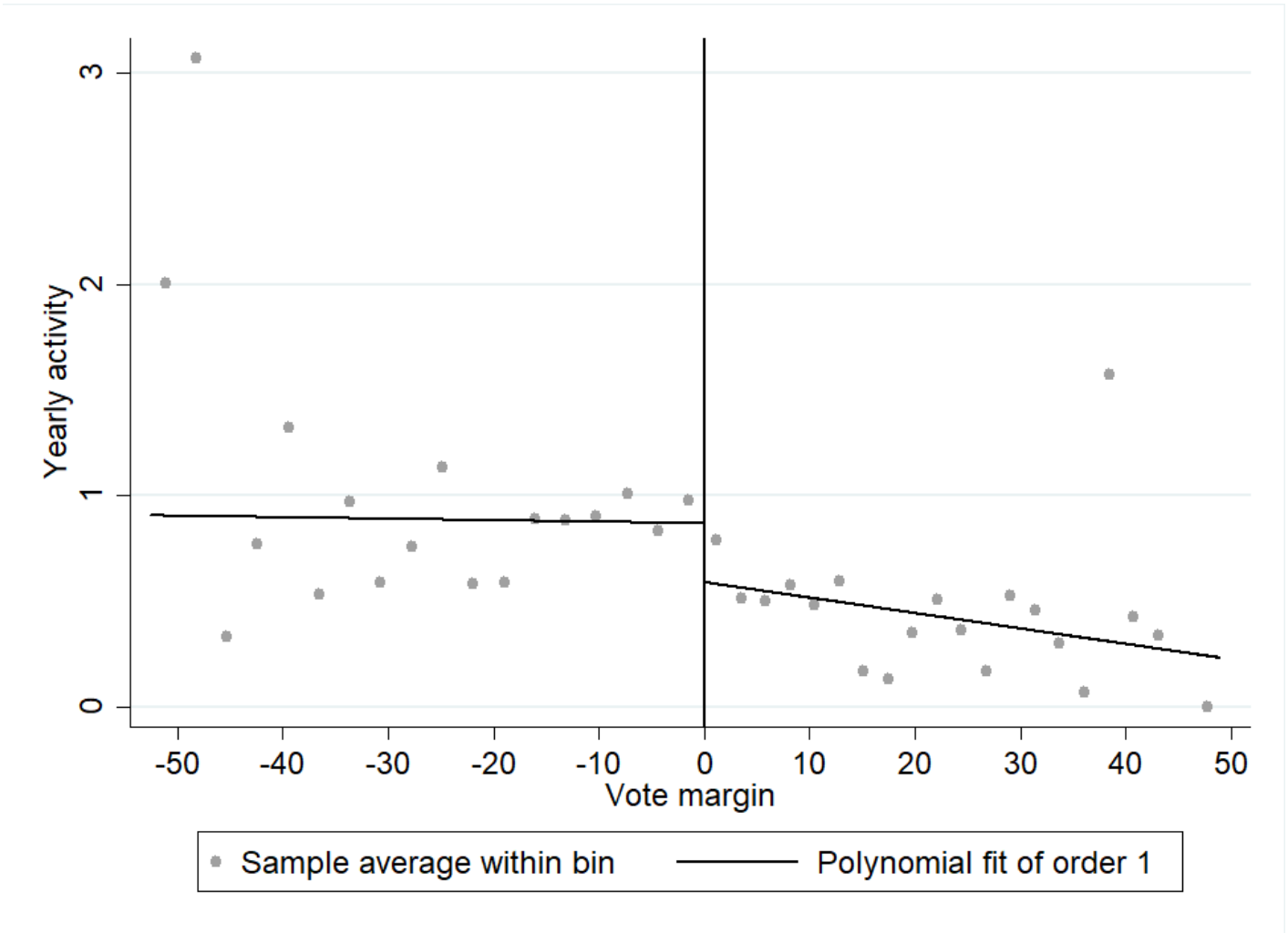
Results - Activity

TABLE – Effect of the parliamentarian's gender on activity (ctd)

	(1) Pooled	(2) Pooled	(3) Fixed-effects	(4) Any activity	(5) Mean activity if parl. active
	Panel D : Questions (% of ghosts = 4.7% / mean if active = 2.13)				
Female	0.018	0.026	0.0790	0.939**	0.019
	(0.084)	(0.075)	(0.091)	(0.448)	(0.092)
				[0.040]	
N	2944	2944	2944	2908	2805
Spec	OLS	OLS	OLS	Logit	OLS
	Panel E : Interventions (% of ghosts = 2.6% / mean if active = 49.6)				
Female	-7.934	-8.818*	-8.613	1.086	-8.688
	(5.432)	(5.128)	(6.496)	(0.748)	(6.645)
				[0.038]	
N	2944	2944	2944	1932	2868
Spec	OLS	OLS	OLS	Logit	OLS
Controls :					
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experience	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constraints	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Field	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupation	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constituency f.e.	No	No	Yes	No	Yes

Results - Activity

FIGURE – RDD plots - Bills



Mechanisms

What drive these results ?

- Learning costs for newcomers : yes
- Before/after "quotas" / trend over time : no
- Peer effects : no
- Other characteristics (majority, political orientation, nb of assistants, etc.) : no

TABLE – Effect of the parliamentarian's gender on passed bills

	(1) Passed All	(2) Passed All	(3) Number All	(4) Number RDD	(5) Number All	(6) Share All	(7) Share RDD	(8) Share All
	Panel A : Bills (Passed (=1) = 13% / number = 0.04 / share = 6%)							
Female	-0.244		-0.0110	0.019		-0.0261	-0.008	
	(0.233)		(0.031)	(0.022)		(0.024)	0.052	
	[0.023]							
Male × Opp.		Ref.			Ref.			Ref.
Male × Maj.		1.228***			0.126***			0.0958***
		(0.269)			(0.029)			(0.023)
Female × Opp.		-0.924*			0.0200			-0.0654*
		(0.475)			(0.043)			(0.033)
Female × Maj.		1.249***			0.0941**			0.0960***
		(0.320)			(0.041)			(0.032)
N	1282	1282	1296	325	1296	1296	324	1296
Controls :								
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constraints	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Field	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constituency f.e.	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Note : Standard errors in parentheses and marginal effect in brackets ; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

TABLE – Effect of the parliamentarian's gender on passed amend.

	(1) Passed All	(2) Passed All	(3) Number All	(4) Number RDD	(5) Number All	(6) Share All	(7) Share RDD	(8) Share All
	Panel B : Amendments (Passed (=1) = 25% / number = 7.2 / share = 18%)							
Female	0.330		-0.829	1.517		0.035*	0.065*	
	(0.204)		(1.708)	(1.289)		(0.018)	(0.066)	
	[-0.039]							
Male × Opp.		Ref.			Ref.			Ref.
Male × Maj.		0.769***			14.27***			0.278***
		(0.219)			(1.639)			(0.017)
Female × Opp.		0.697**			3.952			0.0528*
		(0.307)			(2.576)			(0.027)
Female × Maj.		0.815***			11.24***			0.305***
		(0.292)			(2.201)			(0.023)
N	1778	1778	1780	338	1780	1780	308	1780
Controls :								
Year	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Experience	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constraints	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Field	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Occupation	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Constituency f.e.	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Note : Standard errors in parentheses and marginal effect in brackets ; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Mechanisms

Mechanisms specific to bills :

- All the bills authored by parliamentarians are not subject to a vote (especially when the parliamentarian is in the opposition)
- Selection within each political group to decide which bill will be subject to a vote
- Result : women less likely to be selected ; no gender gap in effectiveness when we control for selection

Mechanisms specific to amendments :

- Difference in the "quality" of male and female amendments
- Men more prone to obstructive behaviors : more likely to author inadmissible, nonsponsored and non-defended amendments ; overrepresentated among parliamentarians with most amendments

Conclusion

- This paper studies gender-related differences in the activity and effectiveness of French parliamentarians using close elections as an identification strategy
- Activity : no systematic gender differences
- Effectiveness : women more effective when looking at amendments but less effective when looking at bills
- Various mechanisms but more related to behavioral differences (gender differences in aversion to competition, self-confidence, discrimination) than to selection
- Next step : cooperation among politicians (cosponsorship and vote)

Supplementary slides

Figure – Share of female parliamentarians (1958–2022)

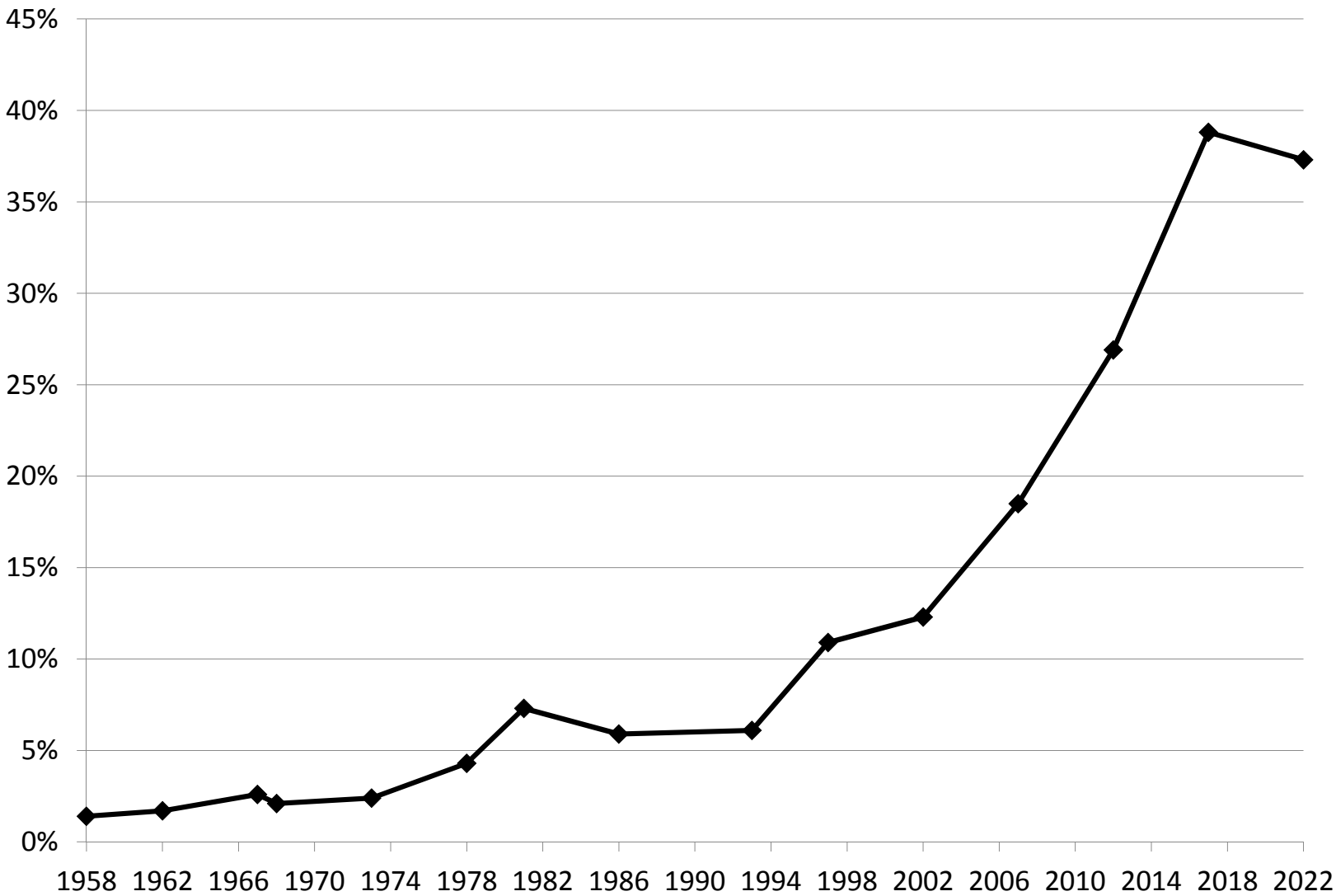


Figure – Manipulation test