

QUOTAS OR PARITY?

HOW THE FRAMING OF POSITIVE ACTION MEASURES IMPACTS PUBLIC SUPPORT AND BACKLASH*

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Abstract

While gender quota and parity laws are increasingly popular worldwide, their introduction often causes controversy. Thus far, we lack an understanding of how the framing of these measures affects public support. We conducted a survey experiment in the UK and France (combined N=2,772) to identify the causal effect of framing on levels of support and potential backlash against women. Comparing 1) gender quotas to increase women's underrepresentation and 2) gender parity laws to achieve gender balance, we find that overall levels of support are greater than opposition in both countries. Parity is more supported than quotas in France, but no such framing effects emerge in the UK. Respondents' gender also matters, with men less supportive of both measures than women. We find no evidence that either type of positive action measure increases backlash in the form of reduced support for hypothetical women candidates running under such measures.

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Over the last few decades, the number of countries adopting positive action measures (PAMs) to increase the political representation of women has increased significantly. More than 130 countries worldwide have introduced legal or party gender quotas or parity laws (Hughes et al. 2019). Research confirms that such laws increase the number of women in office, improve cultural norms about women in politics, and lead to policies that are more aligned with women's preferences (Beaman et al. 2009; Clayton and Zetterberg 2018; Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005; Weeks 2022). Despite these positive attributes, the introduction of positive action measures (PAMs) – and gender quotas in particular – is almost always controversial. Initially most PAMs were described as “gender quotas.” More recently, however, it has been suggested that the word “quota” has negative connotations, implying that candidates are selected not due to merit but because of an artificially-imposed rule (Beremi and Lépinard 2004), and that this could de-legitimize those women elected via a quota (Krook 2014). As a result, advocates of PAMs began pushing for “parity” instead of quotas, most notably in the case of the French parity law adopted in 2000 (Scott 2005), but also in Portugal, Spain, and many Latin American countries (e.g., Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama). These frames differ in important ways, with a gender parity law intended to promote an equal gender balance in parliaments and a gender quota law intended to reduce the underrepresentation of women.¹ Thus far, no empirical study directly compares support for these different types of PAMs (see also Morgenroth and Ryan 2018). Therefore, the research question motivating our study is: how does the framing of positive action measures influence levels of public support?

¹ In recent years, scholars have advocated reframing gender quotas as “quotas for men”, to place the onus not on women but on men to justify their presence (Murray 2014). Although compelling, no country has yet framed a positive action measure in this way.

We argue that the framing of PAMs affects public support, with citizens more likely to support a gender parity law intended to promote an equal gender balance in parliaments than a gender quota law intended to reduce the underrepresentation of women. We also investigate the potential for a gender *backlash* that PAMs may create; a topic that has so far received little attention. PAMs created to increase women's representation could cause backlash against women candidates, especially among men. We expect that framing could mitigate such gender backlash, with (men) respondents less likely to downgrade the qualifications of women candidates running under a "parity" law compared with "quotas."

Previous research suggests that gender is a crucial determinant of support for PAMs, with women being significantly more supportive than men (Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020; Barnes and Córdova 2016; Gidengil 1996; Keenan and McElroy 2017; Barnes and Córdova 2016). We investigate the extent to which gender has a different impact depending on the framing of the positive action measure. Given that gender quotas focus on preferential treatment of women to increase their representation, whereas gender parity laws highlight gender equal representation, we expect the gender difference to be larger for support for quotas compared with parity laws. We also move beyond the role of binary gender and make the case that masculinity moderates the link between binary gender and support/backlash. Building on the concept of political masculinity and "masculine men" (Glick et al. 2015; Starck and Sauer 2014), we suggest that masculine men drive low levels of support for PAMs, especially for quotas, and gender backlash. In summary, the main contributions of our study are: 1) to provide a causal test of the impact of the framing of PAMs (quotas vs parity) on levels of support; 2) to deepen our understanding of public opinion by examining backlash in addition to support, and; 3) to consider the moderating role of masculinity among men.

To test our arguments, we field an original survey experiment randomly manipulating the way that PAMs are described and justified, with – in addition to a control group that

receives no information about PAMs – two different ‘treatment’ conditions: 1) a gender quota law that is intended to reduce the underrepresentation of women, and 2) a gender parity law that is intended to promote an equal gender balance in parliaments. We measure average treatment effects on levels of support, as well as backlash in the form of perceived qualifications of women candidates running under these hypothetical rules. Our study focuses on the cases of France and the UK, employing nationally representative samples collected in February of 2023 through YouGov (total N=2,772). Both countries are Western European democracies and use a Single Member District electoral system, but offer interesting variation on the use of PAMs. France has had a gender parity law since 2000. The UK has no legislated measures, but some political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas.

In line with our expectations, we find that support for a parity law is higher than support for a quota law in France, whereas in the UK the framing of PAMs has no impact on support. Importantly, in both countries levels of support overall are higher than levels of opposition. Gender mediates levels of support: men are less likely to support both types of measures in both countries, though the gender gap is smaller in France. We also find a moderation effect of masculinity in our French sample: more masculine men (the interactive effect of binary gender and masculinity) support quota laws less than parity laws (and support both measures less than less masculine men). We find no evidence of a backlash against hypothetical women candidates running under these positive action contexts in either country. Indeed, in the UK, the perceived qualifications of women candidates even *increase* under both types of PAMs, especially quotas, compared with the control condition. Overall, our study suggests relatively high levels of support for PAMs, particularly in France where citizens now have over twenty years’ experience of a gender parity law, and neither framing is associated with backlash in either country.

SUPPORT FOR POSITIVE ACTION MEASURES: GENDER QUOTA LAWS VS GENDER PARITY LAWS

Democratic theorists agree that an equal gender representation in politics is important for the legitimacy of democracies (Mansbridge 1999; Phillips 1995). Yet, few countries around the world have an equal number of elected women and men. As a remedy, various countries have introduced PAMs, mostly gender quotas. Over 60 countries have adopted national-level legislative gender quota or parity laws (Weeks 2022). These introductions often cause controversy. One common argument is that quotas lead to less qualified candidates. The word “quota” can imply that certain individuals get places not due to merit, but because of an artificially-imposed rule (Beremi and Lépinard 2004). For example, in 2021 the Australian Liberal party considered adopting voluntary quotas within the party. Editorials in leading newspapers covering the debate included comments such as, “a proposal to implement gender quotas in the Liberal Party will throw merit out the window,”² and, “does it enhance the quality of representation to demand that women fill the same number of spots?”³ Scholars worry that the negative associations of “quota” make it easy for critics to dismiss the measure, and that it could also de-legitimize those women elected via a quota (Krook 2014).

As a result, advocates began pushing for “parity” measures instead, most notably in the case of the French parity law (Scott 2005). Scholars studying the French case argue that the notion of “quota” received little support in mainstream French politics; it was never accepted by right-wing elites, and many women politicians saw it as either “humiliating” or not radical enough (Bereni 2007, p. 195). The notion of “parity”, however, was more accepted because it does not imply preferential treatment for women. Instead, it offers a “rhetoric of universalism”, and subsequent support from mainstream French politicians and

² Thrupp, Jake, “Quotas will not help women, or the Liberal Party,” *The Chronicle*, 7 April 2021

³ Albrechtsen, Janet, “Women in politics: Quotas idea needs more careful debate”, *The Australian*, 7 April 2021.

activists was attributed to this discursive framing. Even some countries that do not propose gender equality among candidates (i.e, the threshold is lower than 50%) now use the terminology of “parity”. For example, in 2006 Portugal adopted a parity law requiring a minimum representation of 33% for each sex (increased to 40% in 2019).

A review of previous research on public support for positive action measures reveals considerable variation in support across countries. This research mostly refers to support for quotas (rather than “parity”), state legal requirements, or voluntary political party commitments. Overall, support tends to be high in countries where gender quota laws have been adopted. For example, the majority of citizens in most countries in Latin America (where most countries have such a law) support the idea that “The state should require political parties to reserve some space on their lists of candidates for women, even if they have to exclude some men” (Barnes and Córdova 2016), including for example 60% of citizens in Brazil (Batista Pereira and Porto 2020). Support can be much lower in countries where no national-level gender-based positive action law has been adopted. For example, in Germany 8% of citizens say that they support gender quota laws (Coffé and Reiser 2023), and in New Zealand the figure drops to 4% (Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020). However, research from Ireland in 2011, before the country adopted a quota law, suggests that support for legal quotas can be high in countries without existing measures. 48% of Irish citizens agreed that “Parties should be forced to nominate more women candidates” (Keenan and McElroy 2017).

The way in which survey questions about support for quotas are phrased might also be part of the reason that large cross-national differences are observed (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). For example, in a 2016 survey Australians were asked “Should there be more efforts to increase the number of women MPs? If so, what means would you prefer?” Respondents could choose one of five options, including, “Yes, by legally requiring all political parties to select more women candidates by means of a quota.” 13% of women and 9% of men

supported this option (Beauregard 2018). In 2017, another survey in Australia asked about how to increase the number of women in politics, this time asking respondents how much they agree with each policy given. Support for legal quotas is much higher using this survey question, with overall levels of support reaching 40% (Beauregard and Sheppard 2021). The studies from New Zealand and Germany cited above use similar forced-choice questions, which measure relative support given other hypothetical options rather than absolute levels of support, while the Irish study mentioned does not. These studies suggest that the framing of the policy and the question format might shape levels of support in important ways. Our experimental approach studies the effects of framing on absolute levels of support (without requiring respondents to choose between the policy and several other potential options).

While little research compares different types of legislative PAMs, the available literature suggests differences in support exist. For example, relying on the 2014 New Zealand Election Study, Bolzendahl and Coffé (2020) found significantly greater support for keeping or increasing the number of reserved seats for Māori (the indigenous New Zealand population) (62%) compared with introducing gender quotas (4%). While these results may be influenced by the fact that reserved seats for Māori are known for New Zealand citizens while the country does not have legislative gender quotas, it does suggest the support might differ depending on the type of positive action measure.

Overall, in line with theories suggesting that frames impact public opinion (e.g. Chong and Druckman 2007) and given the negative connotation of “quotas” that can be perceived as unfairly discriminating in favor of women, we anticipate support for gender quotas is lower compared with support for gender parity laws. Our first hypothesis reads: Hypothesis 1: *Support for gender parity laws is higher than support for gender quota laws.*

The extent to which the public supports parity versus gender quota laws may, however, differ between contexts. Political institutions affect attitudes and public opinion.

They can alter the opportunity structures for citizens, influence the visibility of social phenomena, and signal behaviors that are considered appropriate (Sjöberg 2004). Hence, implementing PAMs ought to positively affect citizens' support for such measures.

Confirming this expectation, studies of support for PAMs in the workplace and politics find that public opinion is more positive in contexts where these measures have already been implemented (Barnes and Córdova 2016; Möhring and Teney 2020; 2023). Our second hypothesis thus reads:

Hypothesis 2: Support for gender parity laws and gender quotas is higher in countries with existing legislative PAMs.

Gender and Support for Gender Quota and Parity Laws

Previous studies on public support for increasing women's representation and PAMs aimed at achieving this goal show that women (as the target group of the policy) are more likely to be supportive (Allen and Cutts 2016; Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020; Barnes and Córdova, 2016; Cowley 2013; Espírito-Santo 2016; Gidengil 1996; Keenan and McElroy 2017; Rosenthal 1995; Sanbonmatsu 2003). This has often been explained by the symbolic value of group identity and (related) substantive concerns (Mansbridge 1999; Bolzendahl and Coffé 2020). The identity explanation highlights that people want MPs who look like them (Cutler 2002). For example, a meta-analysis of survey experiments shows that women prefer women candidates more than men do, supporting the idea of a "gender affinity" effect (Schwarz and Coppock 2022).

Group identity is also related to substantive concerns, with identity groups having the tendency to share substantive concerns that are related to shared life experiences. For example, women prefer more social spending than men across advanced democracies, and are more concerned with inequalities in society (e.g. Manza and Brooks 1998; Fox and Oxley 2015); correspondingly, women legislators are seen as better equipped to address issues of

inequality and supportive of strengthening the government (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; McDermott 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002). Looking at Northern Ireland, Allen and Cutts (2016) revealed that respondents – and in particular women respondents – believed that increasing women’s descriptive representation improves the representation of women’s interests.

In sum then, women are expected to be more supportive of PAMs to increase women’s representation than men. Since – as discussed above – gender quotas tend to focus on preferential treatment of women to increase their representation whereas gender parity laws highlight the ideal of an equal representation of women and men, we expect the gender difference to be larger for support for gender quotas compared with gender parity laws. Our third hypothesis thus reads:

Hypothesis 3: Support for gender quotas and (to a lesser extent) gender parity laws will be lower among men compared with women.

Masculine Men and Support for Gender Quota and Parity Laws

Most empirical research studying gender and public opinion, including studies on support for PAMs, relies on a binary measure of gender, distinguishing men and women. A small but rapidly growing strand of research moves beyond binary measures to more comprehensive measures of gender as a spectrum (for an overview, see Lindqvist et al. 2021). Such measures include Bem’s (1974) Sex Role Inventory which asks respondents to evaluate their personalities on masculine/agentive and feminine/communal traits (Hentschel et al. 2019). As a gendered stereotype, the masculine/agentive traits broadly conform to expectations of (hegemonic) masculinity and include traits like assertiveness, independence, and leadership, while feminine/communal traits are associated with (emphasized) femininity and include traits such as sympathy, warmth, and compassion (see also Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Another measure of gendered personality traits relies on respondents’ self-assessment on continuous scales of masculinity and femininity (e.g. Hatemi et al. 2012; Bittner and

Goodyear-Grant 2017; Wängnerud et al. 2019).

These scale-based measures of gendered personality traits allow us to measure respondents' perceived alignment of themselves with social stereotypes (see also e.g. McDermott 2016; Bittner and Goodyear-Grant 2017; Wängnerud et al. 2019; Gidengil and Stolle 2021a). Empirical studies on gendered personality traits, public opinion, and political behavior confirm that gendered personality scales, and in particular masculinity, matter. For example, masculine traits are linked to support for populist radical right parties and organizations (Coffé 2019; Coffé et al. 2023; Gidengil and Stolle 2021b; Ralph-Morrow 2022), and agentic forms of activity, including engaging with political parties and politicians (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2021). Masculinity matters especially among men. The concept of “hypermasculine men” refers to men who are not just masculine and not just male (Mosher and Tomkins 1988: 64). Hypermasculine men exhibit an exaggerated form of masculinity, engage in stereotypical masculine behavior, and see themselves as possessing a high level of stereotypical masculine characteristics (Gidengil and Stolle 2021b: 1819). They also typically fear the feminization of society and are most likely to be susceptible to masculine threats.

Because masculinity has been found to be the crucial aspect of gendered personality traits when examining public opinion and political behavior, particularly among men, we focus on how masculinity relates to support for PAMs in interaction with binary gender. We expect masculine traits such as independence, leadership and dominance to negatively affect support for PAMs especially among men. We thus hypothesize a reinforcing effect between gender and masculine identity: men with strong masculine traits will be least supportive of the idea of positive discrimination of women (and therefore, against men). The fourth hypothesis is:

Hypothesis 4: Men who identify as more masculine will be less likely to support PAMs (and gender quotas in particular) than men who identify as less masculine.

A Gender Backlash Effect of Positive Action Measures?

Besides explaining support for different positive action measures, we are also interested in potential backlash effects. As Krook and Sanín note, quotas can “trigger various forms of backlash and resistance to women's political integration” (Krook and Sanín 2016: 126). Here, we explore the backlash effect that PAMs may have on perceived qualifications of candidates. As mentioned above, one of the most common arguments against PAMs is that they will lead to less qualified candidates for office. While empirical research consistently shows this is not the case (e.g. Weeks and Baldez 2015; Besley et al. 2017), it has seemingly done little to dispel common perceptions. Studies on affirmative action support the idea that candidates are perceived as less qualified in the context of PAMs. Minority candidates are evaluated as being less qualified than white candidates under the condition of an affirmative action measure (Garcia et al. 1981). The specific framing of the positive action measure has, however, been found to matter. When the affirmative action measure is called “promoting diversity”, minorities are less stigmatized (Awad 2013). We expect exposure to PAMs, and in particular gender quota laws which - as suggested above - tend to be more controversial than parity laws, to trigger a backlash against women candidates. Our hypotheses thus read:

Hypothesis 5: PAMs increase backlash against women candidates.

Hypothesis 5a: Gender quota laws increase backlash more than gender parity laws.

As with support, we expect gender quota and parity laws to have a different effect on gender backlash in different countries, depending on the prior existence of such measures. Political institutions affect public opinion, and support for affirmative action policies tends to be higher in countries with existing measures (Barnes and Córdova 2016; Möhring and Teney 2020, 2023). Thus, we expect that backlash against women candidates will be less common in countries with an existing gender quota or parity law. Our hypothesis reads:

Hypothesis 6: Gender quotas and to a lesser extent gender parity framing are associated with

higher levels of backlash against women candidates in countries with no existing legislative PAMs (compared with countries with existing legislative action measures).

Gender, Masculine Personality Traits and the Backlash Effect

Like support for PAMs, we expect the effects of different PAMs on perceived candidate qualifications to be conditioned by respondent gender and gendered identities. According to “intrusiveness” theory, when majority groups perceive a threat to their dominance, they will respond negatively (Krook 2015; Blalock 1967). Men exposed to information about positive action which threatens the traditional political dominance of men and which may elicit justice concerns about legitimacy might perceive the women candidates running for office under such rules to be less qualified.

We further expect masculinity and in particular men’s identification with their stereotypical gender identity, masculinity, to shape their perceived qualifications of women candidates. Not all men view their gendered identity in the same way (Bittner and Goodyear-Grant 2017), and this could have important implications for their propensity to feel threatened by the inclusion of women. Though the “jury is still out on whether masculine identification necessarily leads to chronic derogation of nontraditional male and female types” (Glick et al. 2015, p.211), research suggests that hostility toward nontraditional female types (such as women politicians) is more likely among men with strong masculine identification (Maass et al. 2003). Our final two hypotheses are thus:

Hypothesis 7: Men respondents will show higher levels of a backlash against women candidates when exposed to information about PAMs (compared with no exposure to such information) than women respondents.

Hypothesis 8: Men who identify as more masculine will show higher levels of a backlash against women when exposed to information about PAMs (compared with no exposure to such information) than men who identify as less masculine.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

To investigate the causal effect of the framing of PAMs on legitimacy, we rely on original experimental data collected in the UK and France in February 2023. The survey was fielded by YouGov to a representative sample of UK (N= 1,038) and French (N=1,734) voters.⁴ Both countries are Western European democracies and use a Single Member District electoral system in their parliamentary elections – a relatively difficult institutional context in which to enact PAMs (Davidson-Schmich 2016). They also offer interesting variation on the use of PAMs. France has had a gender parity law since 2000, mandating an affirmative action policy to enhance women’s representation in several elected assemblies. The UK does not have legislated quotas or parity laws, but some parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas.

Our study was pre-registered and approved by our university’s relevant ethics boards.⁵ In the experiments, we randomly manipulate the way that PAMs are described and justified, with three conditions: 1) a gender quota law that is intended to reduce the underrepresentation of women, 2) a gender parity law that is intended to promote an equal gender balance in parliaments, and 3) no positive action law mentioned (control).

The treated versions (conditions 1 and 2) of our survey instrument present respondents with information about the actual share of men and women in their country’s national parliament, and then explain that gender quota laws [gender parity laws] are one way to address unequal representation. We explain that there are different arguments for and

⁴ Weights provided by YouGov are employed for both UK and France samples throughout. Summary statistics are in the Appendix, Section 5.

⁵ The pre-analysis plan is available here:

https://osf.io/6hfnt/?view_only=30a3981430324807a3eeddf5eb5686ce

against such laws, and present respondents with two arguments for and two arguments against such laws, which are randomly varied. Advocates of PAMs can make many different types of political arguments for and against quota and parity laws, for example relying on comparisons with other countries, appeals to fairness, or the link between descriptive and substantive representation. Some of these arguments might be more effective at shaping public opinion than others. We want to avoid the potential for results to be driven by a particular political argument, or that particular arguments confound our latent frames of interest (quota versus parity). Thus, we follow the recommendations of Blumenau and Lauderdale (2022) and Fong and Grimmer (2023) and randomly present respondents with arguments for and against quotas [parity]. We draw from a pool of eighteen arguments in total (nine for and nine against), which were developed by building on those identified from previous debates about PAMs in Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2010). In this way, we are able to make general conclusions about support for the two different frames (quotas versus parity), averaged over the different political arguments typically used in debates for and against them. Through this approach, we can be more confident that the effects we estimate are attributable to the treatments (quotas versus parity) rather than specific political arguments for PAMs.

Following the treatment (either quota or parity framing), respondents are asked, “To what extent do you **support or oppose** gender quota/gender parity laws in your country?” This is our first dependent variable. Respondents indicate their attitudes using a 5-point Likert scale (options range from *Strongly support* to *Strongly oppose*). Question responses were recoded such that higher values indicate higher levels of support. Questions about support for PAMs were not asked in the control version of the survey, which is included to measure potential backlash by collecting baseline levels of perceived qualifications of men and women candidates.

To measure perceived qualifications of candidates, we field a forced-choice candidate

conjoint experiment, randomly varying gender and other relevant attributes (such as age and political experience). The benefit of using a conjoint experiment is that we can be sure that any gender differences observed in levels of support or perceived qualifications between the treatment and control conditions are not reliant on any one particular candidate attribute. We ask those in the treated conditions to imagine that their country had passed a gender quota [parity] law and the following candidates are running for office under the new rules.

Respondents in the control condition are asked to evaluate the candidates without receiving any information about PAMs. After respondents select which candidate they would support, they are asked to rate the **qualifications** of each candidate on a 1-11 scale (“how qualified do you think this candidate is to be your MP?”) in order to test how framing of PAMs might influence public attitudes at the micro, candidate-level. This is our second dependent variable and our measure of a possible *backlash* against women candidates elected through PAMs.

Upon completion of this task, treated respondents answer a factual manipulation check (FMC) question (Kane and Barabas 2019) and a battery of follow-up questions, including a question asking respondents to what extent they hold masculine characteristics, with responses ranging from 0 to 10. We collect demographic information, including binary gender, in the final stage of the survey. Further details about the survey, including wording, can be found in the Appendix (Section 1; Section 5 for summary statistics).

EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

We first present our results related to public support for different PAMs, before turning to the question of whether different PAMs lead to backlash. In both cases, we consider men and women respondents together before examining heterogeneous treatment effects by binary gender, and gender and masculinity. We use ordinary least squares regression analysis to estimate average treatment effects. These effects should be interpreted as average differences

between the two treatment conditions in support, and between the two treatment conditions and control for backlash. Throughout the analysis, we present figures of the relevant treatment effects; Section 2 of the Appendix includes all regression tables used to create the figures.

Support for positive action measures

Do respondents support parity more than quotas? Figure 1 shows mean levels for support for both types of PAMs in France and the UK. Differences in means between the gender quota and the gender parity law treatment can be interpreted as the average treatment effect of positive action framing (quota vs. parity) on public support. For the UK sample, the mean level of support is very similar across treatments (3.02 for quota compared with 2.98 for parity; difference not statistically significant), while for the French sample respondents support parity more than a quota (3.46 for quota compared with 3.64 for parity, difference significant at $p < 0.05$; see Table S1 in the Appendix). We thus find support for Hypothesis 1 in France, where respondents support a gender parity law more than a gender quota law, but not in the UK.

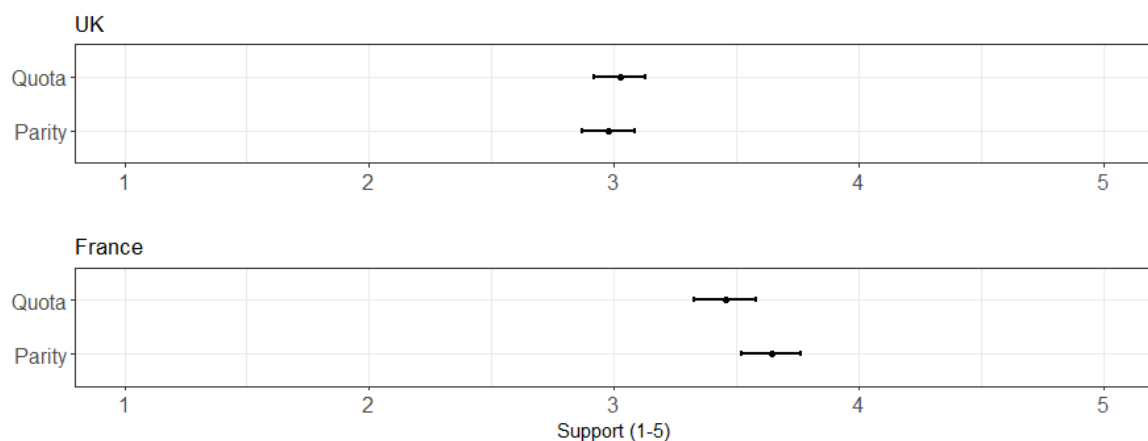


Figure 1: Support for Positive Action Measures

Note: The figure shows mean levels of support by treatment for the UK (top) and France (bottom). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 1 shows moderate levels of support for both quota and parity laws in the UK, with support rising noticeably in France, which has had a national parity law for over twenty years. In line with H2, these country-level mean differences in overall support are statistically significant (Welch Two Sample t-test of support by country significant at $p < 0.001$; see also Appendix Section 6). Looking at the full distribution of response options, Figure 2 further reveals that citizens exposed to a treatment explaining the purpose of legislative gender quotas / parity and arguments for and against them tend to support the use of such a provision in their own country more than they oppose it, again especially in France. Overall, a plurality of 39% of respondents support PAMs in the UK (with no difference between quota and parity treatments), while 37% oppose such measures (36% for quotas and 39% for parity). In France, support is higher at 57% overall (56% for quotas and 59% for parity), with small numbers opposing such measures (21% for quotas and 14% for parity).

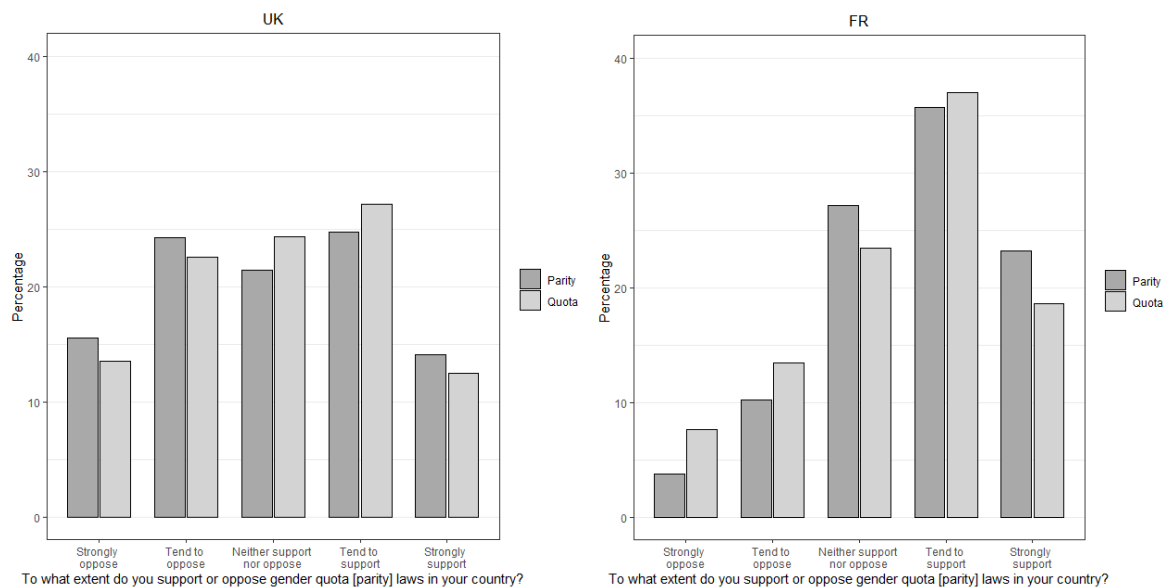


Figure 2: Distribution of Support for Quotas and Parity

In line with previous studies, our findings indicate that support for PAMs is strongly conditioned by binary gender. Figure 3 shows that men are less supportive of both types of positive action laws compared with women in both the UK and France, and this gender

difference in overall support for PAMs is significant at conventional levels in both countries. In the UK, the mean level of support for quotas is 2.90 for men compared with 3.15 for women, and for parity the mean levels of support are 2.78 for men and 3.16 for women. This equates to 35% of men tending to support or strongly supporting quotas and 33% parity in the UK, compared with 44% of UK women supporting both quotas and parity (e.g., a gender gap in support of 9 to 11 percentage points). In France, the mean level of support for quotas is 3.32 for men and 3.61 for women, and for parity the figures are 3.51 for men and 3.78 for women. Overall, the majority of men in France tend to support or strongly support both quotas (53%) and parity (56%), and an even larger majority of French women support both measures (58% support quotas, 62% parity). The gender gap in support is thus smaller within France (ranging from 5 percentage points for quotas to 6 percentage points for parity laws) compared with the UK. However, as Figure 3 shows, the interaction between binary gender and framing is not significant for either country, indicating no significant difference in how men or women view different types of PAMs (see Appendix Table S1 for regression results). Our findings thus show partial support for Hypothesis 3: men are less supportive of both quotas and parity laws compared with women in both country contexts, but men are not significantly less supportive of gender quotas than parity laws.

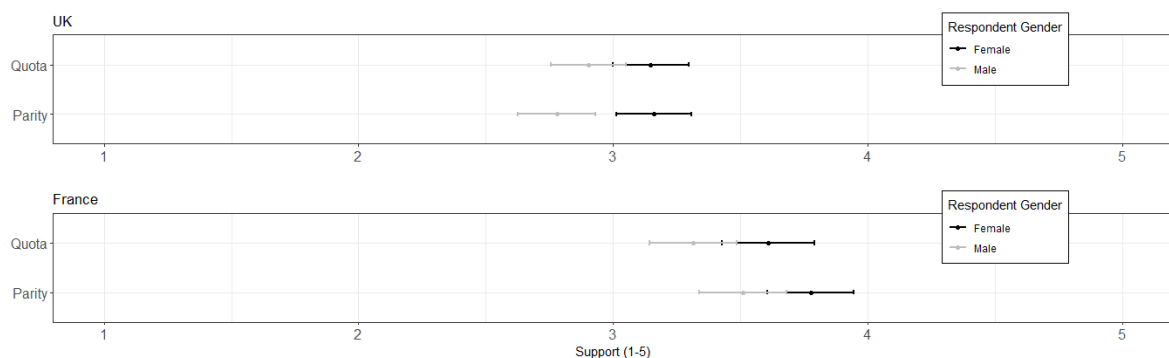


Figure 3: Support for Positive Action Measures by Respondent Gender

Note: The figure shows mean levels of support by treatment and respondent gender for the UK (top) and France (bottom). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Next, we consider the extent to which the interaction of gender and masculinity affects support for different PAMs. As discussed, we anticipate a stronger negative link between masculine personality traits and support for PAMs (and gender quotas in particular) among men versus women. Masculine men are thus expected to show the *lowest* levels of support for PAMs, and for gender quotas in particular. Figure 4 shows the marginal effects from a regression on level of support including the interaction of treatment (quota vs parity), binary gender, and masculinity (including all constituent terms and lower-order interactions, see Table S1 in the Appendix). The figure shows that masculinity matters differently and more strongly for men than for women. Partially confirming Hypothesis 4, masculine men are less likely to support both quota and parity laws than less-masculine men in both country cases. Among women, conversely, masculinity is not a significant determinant of support for either measure in France, while it positively predicts support for quotas in the UK.⁶

In France, the triple interaction of gender, masculinity, and treatment is significant at conventional levels, suggesting support for the theory that respondent gender and masculinity *together* determine support for parity vs quota. Specifically, as expected in H4, masculine men support quota laws less than parity laws. “Parity” thus seems to be a more palatable framing than “quotas” for masculine men who tend to be most opposed to PAMs. However, in the UK the triple interaction is not significant, indicating that while masculinity determines overall support for men especially, masculine men do not prefer one type of positive action measure over another (a finding which should not be surprising given the lack of an overall quotas vs parity framing effect in the UK).⁷

⁶ Subgroup analysis by respondent gender confirms that masculinity is negatively linked to overall support among men and positively linked to overall support among women (both significant at conventional levels).

⁷ We also explored whether feminine gendered identities condition support for PAMs. We find no evidence that “traditional”, more feminine women, support PAMs more or less than less feminine women. The interaction

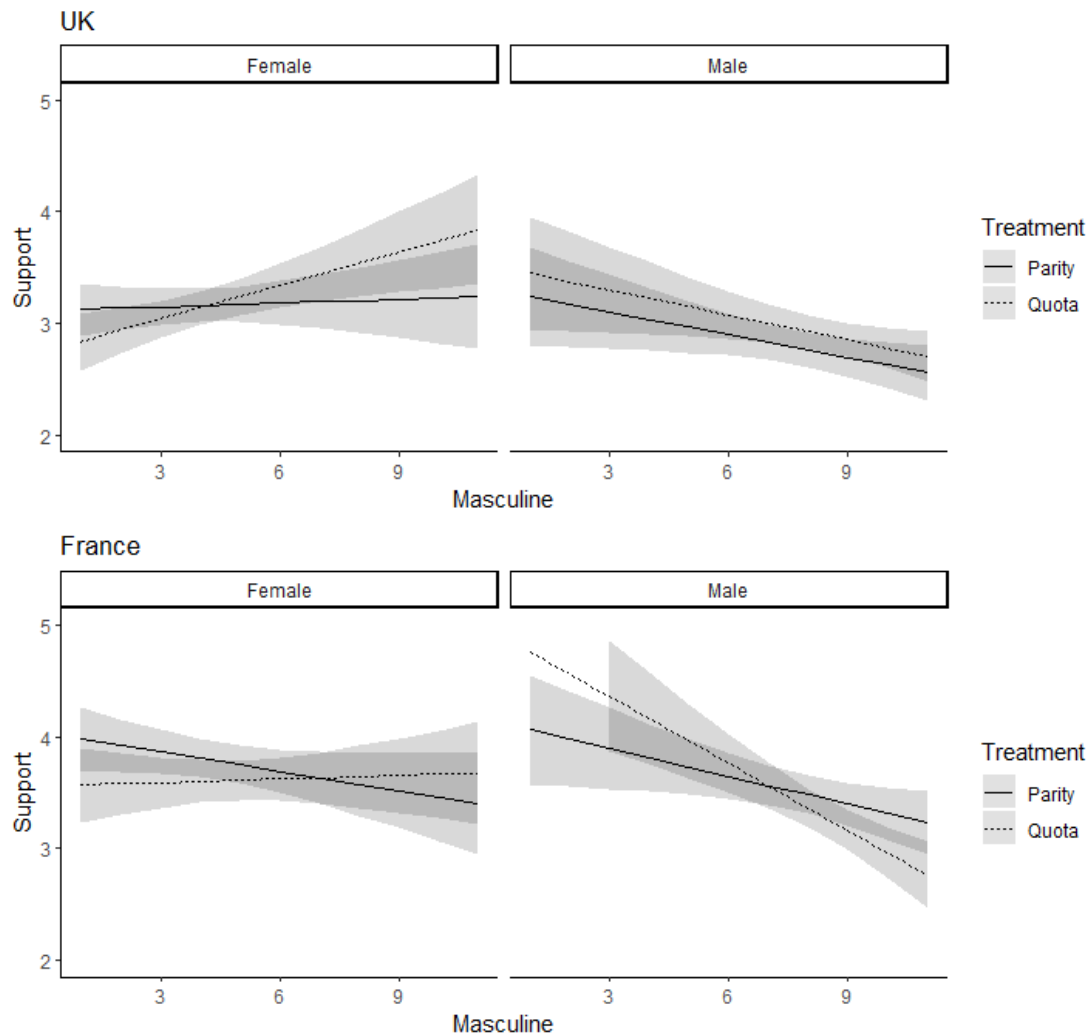


Figure 4: Gender, Masculinity, and Support for Positive Action Measures

Note: The figures show support for a gender quota law (dotted line) versus gender parity law (solid line) on the y-axis across a range of masculine values along the x-axis among men (left) and women (right), with 95% confidence intervals.

Gender backlash?

Beyond support for PAMs, we are interested in the extent to which the framing of PAMs might lead to a backlash against gender equality, measured by perceptions of the

between respondent gender and feminine gender identity is not significant for either country, nor is the triple interaction of treatment, respondent gender, and femininity (to save space, results available from authors).

qualifications of hypothetical women candidates running under these electoral rules. To measure respondents' perceptions of the quality of hypothetical men and women candidates, we ask respondents to evaluate men and women candidates elected under a system that: 1) uses a gender quota law; 2) uses a gender parity law; 3) no information about PAMs. Importantly, we use a conjoint experiment to present candidate resumes. We randomly vary not only candidate gender but also age, political experience, policy interests, marital status, career experience, and talent. This setup ensures that any differences observed in perceived qualifications of women candidates between the treatment and control conditions are not reliant on any particular candidate attribute. Respondents in the treatment conditions (quota and parity) are primed to consider how they would rate the candidates under a system that uses positive action with the following text:

*Now we are going to ask you to imagine that the UK/France adopted a **gender quota [parity] law**, and the following hypothetical candidates from your political party are running to be your member of parliament under the new rules. Please read the following two candidate resumes carefully:*

Respondents in the control version, which includes no information about gender quota or parity laws, are asked to evaluate the candidates without any mention of positive action rules. All respondents then are asked twice (once for each of the two candidates running to be a member of parliament) to what extent they believe that the candidate is qualified, with response options ranging from 1 (not at all well) to 11 (extremely well).

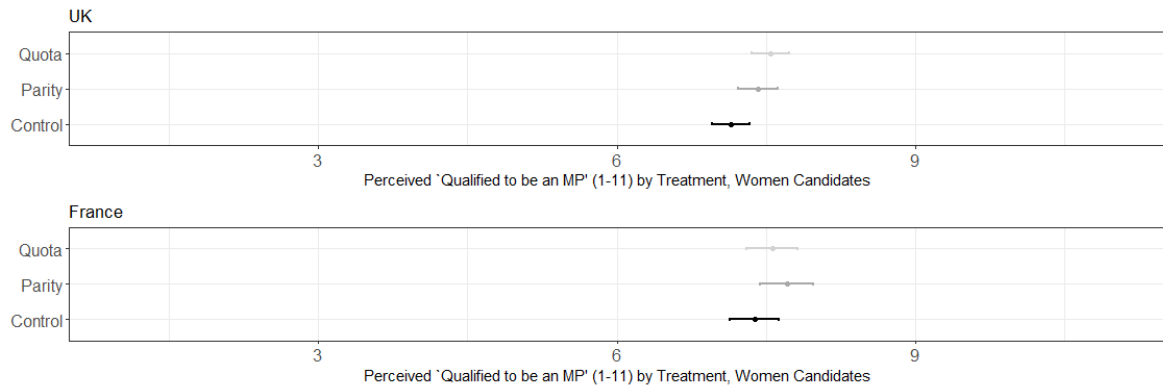


Figure 5: Quotas, Parity, and Perceived Qualifications of Women Candidates

Note: The figure shows mean “qualified” ratings by treatment for women candidates for the UK (top) and France (bottom). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Contrary to our expectation (Hypothesis 5), we find no evidence that PAMs negatively impact the perceived qualifications of women candidates. Figure 5 shows that the differences in perceptions about the women candidates’ qualifications are not statistically significant at conventional 0.05 levels in France. Respondents in the UK exposed to the quota treatment rate the women candidates as *more* qualified than those in the control condition, and this is significant at conventional 0.05 levels. Contrary to our initial expectation, UK citizens respond to the positive action treatments – especially the gender quota treatment – by *positively* adjusting the perceived qualifications of women candidates (see Appendix Table S2 for regression results). Given these positive effects in the UK, we find no evidence to support H6, that PAMs are associated with a backlash against women (here measured as lower perceived qualifications for women candidates) in countries with no existing legislative PAMs (compared with countries with existing legislative action measures). Note that ratings for men candidates do not change from control to treatment conditions in both the UK and France (see Appendix Section 8).

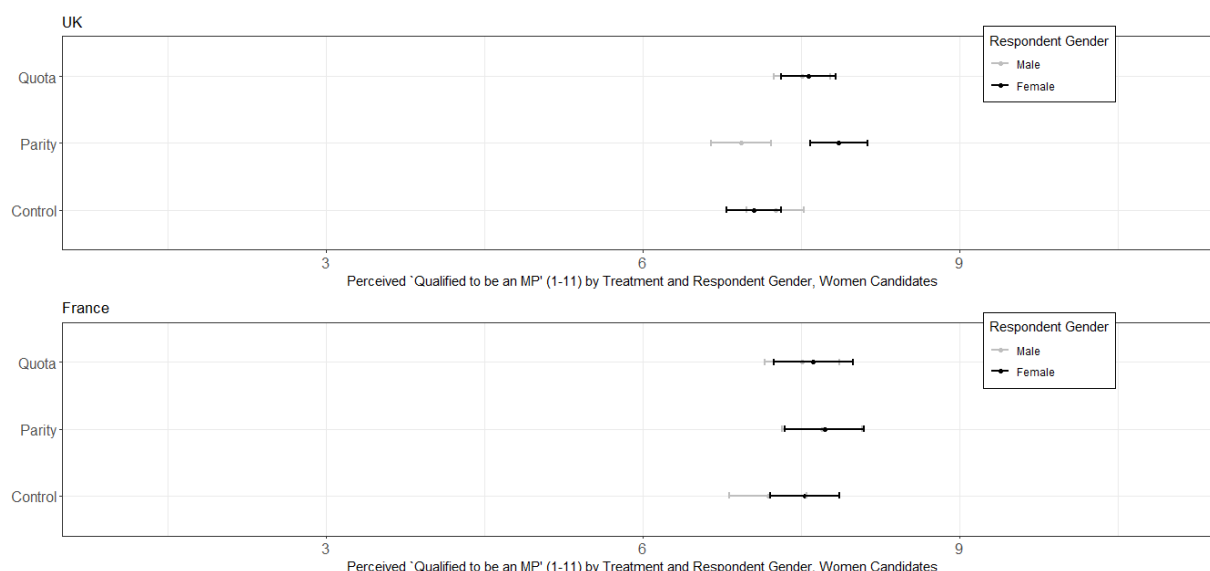


Figure 6: Quotas, Parity, and Perceived Qualifications of Women Candidates by Respondent Gender

Note: The figure shows mean “qualified” ratings by treatment and respondent gender for women candidates for the UK (top) and France (bottom), with 95% confidence intervals.

How does respondent gender impact perceptions about the qualifications of women candidates in these different positive action contexts? Figure 6 shows the results of a regression model interacting respondent gender and the treatment (quotas, parity, or control) for women candidates (see Table S2 in the Appendix for the regression results). Contrary to Hypothesis 7, the figure suggests that men do not downgrade the qualification ratings of women elected under PAMs more than women. French men and women respondents react no differently to the treatment conditions. In the UK, however, women respondents in the parity treatment increase the qualification rating of women candidates, while men respondents slightly decrease it. This gender difference of 1.2 points on the 11-point qualification rating of women candidates is significant at conventional levels for the parity treatment. We also explore whether masculinity has different effects for men and women (the triple interaction of treatment, binary gender, and masculinity), but we fail to find any significant interactive effects (see Table S2 in the Appendix for regression results). We thus reject Hypothesis 8,

that masculine men will be more likely to decrease the ratings of women candidates in a hypothetical gender quota or parity context.

Overall, our findings about the link between PAMs and potential backlash against women candidates are positive. They suggest that, when PAMs (either quotas or parity) are justified and explained, citizens do not respond by automatically downgrading the quality of women running in these contexts. One interpretation of the unexpected findings about PAMs increasing the perceived qualifications of women candidates is that our results could reflect information effects. Our experimental treatment informs respondents about the levels of men and women in office, showing persistent political inequality. It also informs respondents that PAMs are widespread. Making (the lack of) gender equality salient in this way could lead women respondents especially to perceive women candidates as more qualified compared with the control condition, where gender or gender equality is not primed at all. We thus observe initial evidence of what might be an empowering public impact of PAMs: debate about these might remind (women) voters of the importance of gender equality in politics.⁸

Finally, as an alternative measure of backlash we included a list experiment in the survey. List experiments provide a way to measure attitudes that are difficult to pick up due to social desirability bias. Respondents see a list of statements and choose how many of the statements they see make them angry or upset, rather than indicating which ones. We randomly vary which respondents see the statement, “A gender quota [parity] law in politics,” where the framing of the measure described matches the framing treatment

⁸ In addition to perceived qualifications, we also explored whether framing of PAMs affects support (vote choice) for women candidates. We find no evidence of significant effects.

condition.⁹ As Figure 7 shows, overall, PAMs trigger some people to become angry or upset. However, the framing of these measures (quotas vs parity) is again not a significant determinant of backlash in either country (see Appendix, Section 10 for results). This is reassuring; not only do we find no evidence that quota or parity framing negatively impacts evaluations of women candidates, we also find no evidence that the framing of PAMs negatively impacts feelings about the policy in general.



Figure 7: Quotas, Parity, and List Treatment Results

Note: The figure shows the mean number of statements that make respondents angry or upset by list treatment and framing (quotas, parity, or none) for respondents in the UK (top) and France (bottom), with 95% confidence intervals.

Sensitivity Checks

We conduct several checks on the robustness of our findings. First, following the recommendations of Kane and Barabas (2019), we use a factual manipulation check (FMC) to assess attentiveness and test whether the treatment manipulations conducted in the experiments were perceived by the subjects. Such a test is particularly important when the

⁹ List treatment respondents in the framing control condition see the statement, “A gender quota or parity law in politics.”

treatment stimuli require that participants read carefully, as the framing passages in our experiments do. In Section 4 of the Appendix, we rerun our analyses on a subset of respondents who pass the factual manipulation check. We note that the number of observations drops significantly in some of our models; e.g., in analyses of support for quotas versus parity among the treated respondents, the N falls to 387 in the UK and 169 in France. In the FMC sample, we find that our findings mostly hold, with the exception of H4, that masculine men in France support quota laws less than parity laws, which does not emerge as a pattern in this robustness check (Tables S5-S6). Given the smaller sample size and the triple interaction in this model, it could be that our robustness check data might be underpowered for this hypothesis. However, given its lack of robustness we advise that this finding be treated as preliminary.

Another interpretation is that social desirability bias could be driving the findings, though we note that we employ two experimental methods that are known to reduce the potential for social desirability effects: conjoint and list experiments (e.g., Burden, Ono, and Yamada 2017; Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022). Furthermore, the survey is carried out online, where research suggests respondents are less likely to report socially desirable answers (Chang and Krosnick 2009) -- but we cue gender in both treatments. To examine the degree to which answers are influenced by the desire to appear socially acceptable, we follow Berinsky and Lavine (2012) and include three questions gauging self-monitoring. These questions load onto a single factor, and we used the psych package for R to create a composite measure of respondent social desirability. Respondents with higher scores exert more effort to seem socially desirable. As a robustness check in Section 3 of the Appendix, we conduct our analysis on a subset of respondents (for support, N=401 in UK; 180 in France) who score below the mean of the composite score and therefore are less likely to provide socially desirable answers. In the SDS sample, similar to the FMC sample, all of

our findings hold except for H4 regarding masculine men and lower support for a quota law in France (Tables S3-S4).

Lastly, while not part of our pre-analysis plan, we investigate the effects of partisan identification on support for PAMs in both countries. As one might expect, in both countries support for these measures is higher for left-wing voters than right-wing voters. In the UK, 55% of Labour Party voters support PAMs compared to only 20% of Conservative Party voters. In France, 66% PF Renaissance (Macron) voters support PAMs while 50% of National Rally (Le Pen) voters do. Importantly, we find no evidence that the interaction of positive action framing and partisan voting is significant (i.e., no indication that framing effects differ across parties) in either country (see Section 9 of the Appendix).

CONCLUSION

PAMs for women are now commonplace in democracies worldwide, yet they are still controversial (Bacchi 2006; Teigen and Karlsen 2020). Understanding what motivates public support and opposition for PAMs is key to implementing policies that are viewed as legitimate and likely to promote fair democratic representation, rather than social conflict. To shed light on these questions, our study investigates how the framing of PAMs affects levels of public support and potential gender backlash. Using an original experimental approach, we examine differences in support between gender quotas and gender parity laws. While both PAMs aim at increasing women's representation, a gender parity law is intended to promote an equal gender balance in parliament while a gender quota law is intended to reduce the underrepresentation of women.

Measuring support for PAMs, our analyses - relying on UK and French samples - show that there is a significant difference in support between these measures, but only in France, a country with a well-established gender parity law. In France, support for parity is

significantly higher than support for a quota law, whereas we report no difference in support for quotas versus parity in the UK. A plurality of citizens support both quotas and parity laws in their own country, though support is more widespread in France, where a majority of both men and women support both types of PAMs, compared to the UK. In addition, we find no evidence that voters view women running for office under these hypothetical measures as less qualified – a finding that aligns well with observational data suggesting that women candidates elected under a positive measure framework are just as qualified as those not elected under such framework (e.g., Weeks and Baldez 2015; Besley et al. 2017). On the contrary, instead of PAMs reducing perceived qualifications of women, we find that such measures can *increase* perceived qualifications of women. When citizens receive balanced information about PAMs and their potential consequences, they tend to be supportive and we find no evidence that they punish women candidates in a context with PAMs.

Our findings also confirm that respondent gender conditions support and backlash. Women have higher overall levels of support for both quota and parity measures than men, suggesting that people do seem to want representatives that “look like them” (Plutzer and Zipp 1996). Men are, however, not more or less supportive of parity laws compared with gender quotas. Moving beyond a binary gender measure, our study provides initial evidence about the important role that masculinity plays in moderating support for both gender quotas and parity laws, especially among men. Masculinity decreases support for both types of PAMs among men, and masculine men in France have lower levels of support for quota laws especially. Future research is needed to unpack the diversity inherent in the social group of “men” and such research would benefit from large(r) sample sizes.

To summarize, our data collected using an original experiment manipulating the framing of PAMs shows relatively high levels of support for both gender quotas and gender parity laws, and no evidence either frame inspires negative gender backlash. Our findings in

the case of France suggest that the framing of PAMs, and associated information given to justify them, can impact levels of support for these policies. One policy implication of our study is that “parity” does indeed seem to be more palatable than “quotas,” or at least equally supported (as we find in the UK). To maximize levels of support, positive action advocates would do well to use the framing of “parity,” and its associated normative justifications. Our two-cases study also provides additional evidence that public support is higher in countries with pre-existing PAMs (supplementing e.g., Barnes and Córdova 2016). This might indicate that policy familiarity matters and shores up support – although additional data collection across a larger sample of cases and over time would strengthen these findings even more. Without longitudinal data, we cannot rule out selection effects whereby countries with already higher levels of support are more likely to adopt PAMs. Further research is needed to understand whether long-term exposure to PAMs may (further) increase public support for such measures. While policy makers should obviously consider public support when implementing policies, their policies might also reinforce support.

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ONLINE APPENDIX:

QUOTAS OR PARITY?

HOW THE FRAMING OF POSITIVE ACTION MEASURES IMPACTS PUBLIC SUPPORT AND BACKLASH

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Section 1

Survey Instrument

Main Experiment

Participants are randomly categorized into the Control, Parity, or Quota conditions.

Those in the Control condition begin with the conjoint experiment.

Imagine that the following hypothetical candidates from your political party are running to be your member of parliament. Please read the following two candidate resumes carefully:

	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Gender	Male	Male
Marital Status	Married	Married with children
Policy Interests	Pensions	Security
Political Experience	City council member	None
Age	65	35
Career Experience	Solicitor	Solicitor
Talent	Tough negotiator	Assertive

Full attribute list and levels

Attribute 1: Gender

Levels: Male, Female

Attribute 2: Marital Status

Levels: Married with children, Married, Divorced, Single

Attribute 3: Policy Interests

Levels: Health, Pensions, Economy, Security, Environment

Attribute 4: Political Experience

Levels: None, City council member, Mayor

Attribute 5: Age

Levels: 35, 45, 55, 65

Attribute 6: Career Experience

Levels: Teacher, Small business owner, Solicitor

Attribute 7: Talent

Levels: Empathetic, Collaborative, Good communicator, Hard-working, Assertive, Determined to succeed, Tough negotiator

Following the conjoint table, respondents answer the two following questions:

Based on the limited information above, which of the two candidates would you be more likely to support in this election?

- ☐ Candidate 1
- ☐ Candidate 2

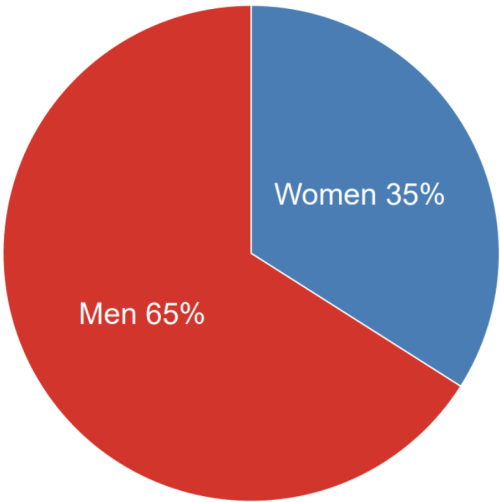
Thinking about the candidates, how does the following phrase describe them running in this election?

"They are qualified to be a member of parliament."

	0 - Not at all well	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 - Extremely Well
Candidate 1	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Candidate 2	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Those assigned to the Parity condition begin with viewing the following information:

Today, women make up 35% of parliament in the United Kingdom, with men making up the remaining 65%.



Then, they see this prompt:

One way of improving the balance of men and women in politics is Gender Parity Laws

Gender parity laws are laws that require all political parties to select equal numbers of men and women among their candidates, to help achieve an equal gender balance in national governments.

There are different arguments for and against gender parity laws.

Then, they are presented with two arguments in favor and two arguments against gender parity laws. For example:

Please read the following two examples of arguments **in favour of gender parity laws:**

- A legislature with gender parity will bring a different style and approach to politics.
- Over sixty countries in the world have introduced measures to achieve gender parity in legislatures, and these measures have resulted in more gender balance.

Please read the following two examples of arguments **against gender parity laws:**

- Women elected via parity laws will only be seen as representatives of the group 'women', and their impact on the style and approach to politics will, consequently, be limited.
- These parity laws are unnecessary, since gender balance in political representation will gradually occur in a natural way.

Full list of arguments in favor of gender parity laws

1. These parity laws will result in and are necessary to rapid achievement of gender balance in political representation.
2. A legislature with gender parity will bring a different style and approach to politics.
3. A legislature with gender parity will be able to introduce new policy concerns onto the political agenda.
4. Gender parity laws will contribute to the process of democratization in a country and to the legitimacy of democracies.
5. Women make up half the population but they are not equally included in positions of political power; gender parity laws are necessary so that everyone has a chance of getting these important positions.
6. Gender parity laws have clear political benefits, as parliaments with the highest level of gender balance can make the best use of everyone's talents and skills for the good of society.
7. The historical pace of change toward gender parity in politics is simply too slow; we need to now take active measures to achieve gender balance.
8. Over sixty countries in the world have introduced measures to achieve gender parity in legislatures, and these measures have resulted in more gender balance.
9. A gender parity law will mean more powerful women in legislatures, which can encourage other women to engage and participate in politics.

Full list of arguments against gender parity laws

1. These parity laws are unnecessary, since gender balance in political representation will gradually occur in a natural way.
2. Women elected via parity laws will only be seen as representatives of the group ‘women’, and their impact on the style and approach to politics will, consequently, be limited.
3. Parity laws will contribute to a suspicion that women have been elected thanks to their sex rather than their talent, and these women will not be able to influence the political agenda.
4. Gender parity laws will result in the nomination and election of unqualified candidates and, consequently, they are demeaning to women and undermine the principle of merit-based elections in democracy.
5. After gender parity laws, other groups will also demand these provisions – where does it stop? Volvo owners, left-handed people, redheads.
6. The benefits of gender parity laws are uncertain, as there is no definitive link between more gender balance and better legislatures, but the costs are concrete, as parties and voters are more constrained in who they can support.
7. History shows that parity laws are unnecessary: the UK parliament is now made up of 35 per cent women and this percentage has nearly doubled since 2000.
8. We should not make gender parity an issue of law, but rather – like many other countries – allow political parties to take a voluntary approach to candidate recruitment.
9. Parity laws will only treat the symptoms of lack of gender balance in political representation, and consequently will only be a symbolic gesture that will not encourage more women to participate in politics.

After viewing these arguments, respondents then answer the following two questions:

To what extent do you support or oppose gender parity laws in the United Kingdom?

- ☐ Strongly support
- ☐ Tend to support
- ☐ Neither support nor oppose
- ☐ Tend to oppose
- ☐ Strongly oppose
- ☐ Don't know

Following this, respondents in the Parity condition then view the conjoint table and answer the two outcome questions (vote choice and perceived qualifications of each candidate). See earlier for details. Please note below for slight adjustment to preamble of conjoint and question stems:

Now we are going to ask you to **imagine that the UK adopted a gender parity law**, and the following hypothetical candidates from your political party are running to be your member of parliament under the new rules. Please read the following two candidate resumes carefully:

Based on the limited information above, which of the two candidates would you be more likely to support in this election with gender parity laws?

Thinking about the candidates, how does the following phrase describe them running in this election with gender parity laws?

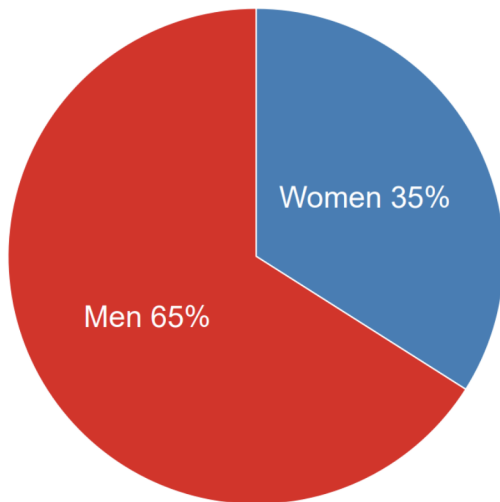
Then, respondents answer the factual manipulation and attention check question:

Which one of the following statements is most accurate based on the information that was just presented to you?

- ☐ One way of increasing the share of women in politics is through gender quota laws
- ☐ One way of increasing the share of women in politics is through gender parity laws
- ☐ One way to improve the balance of men and women in politics is through gender quota laws
- ☐ One way to improve the balance of men and women in politics is through gender parity laws

Those assigned to the Quota condition begin with viewing the following information:

Today, women make up 35% of parliament in the United Kingdom, with men making up the remaining 65%.



Then, they see this prompt:

One way of increasing the share of women in politics is Gender Quota Laws

Gender quota laws are laws that require all political parties to include a certain percentage of women among their candidates, to help reduce the underrepresentation of women in national governments.

There are different arguments for and against gender quota laws.

Then, they are presented with two arguments in favor and two arguments against gender quota laws. For example:

Please read the following two examples of arguments in favour of gender quota laws:

- The historical pace of change in women's representation in politics is simply too slow; we need to now take active measures to achieve gender equality.
- A legislature with a critical mass of women will bring a different style and approach to politics.

Please read the following two examples of arguments against gender quota laws:

- Gender quota laws will result in the nomination and election of unqualified candidates and, consequently, they are demeaning to women and undermine the principle of merit-based elections in democracy.
- The benefits of gender quota laws are uncertain, as there is no definitive link between more gender diversity and better legislatures, but the costs are concrete, as parties and voters are more constrained in who they can support.

Full list of arguments in favor of gender quota laws

1. These quota laws will result in and are necessary for a rapid increase in women's political representation.
2. A legislature with a critical mass of women will bring a different style and approach to politics.
3. A legislature with a critical mass of women will be able to introduce new policy concerns onto the political agenda.
4. Gender quota laws will contribute to the process of democratization in a country and to the legitimacy of democracies.
5. Women make up half the population but they are not equally included in positions of political power; gender quota laws are necessary so that everyone has a chance of getting these important positions.
6. Gender quota laws have clear political benefits, as parliaments with the highest level of gender equality can make the best use of women's talent and skills for the good of society.
7. The historical pace of change in women's representation in politics is simply too slow; we need to now take active measures to achieve gender equality.
8. Over sixty countries in the world have introduced measures to increase the share of women in legislatures, and these measures have resulted in a higher percentage of women in legislatures.
9. A gender quota law will mean more powerful women in legislatures, which can encourage other women to engage and participate in politics.

Full list of arguments against gender quota laws

1. These quota laws are unnecessary, since women's political representation will gradually increase in a natural way.
2. Women elected via quota laws will only be seen as representatives of the group 'women', and their impact on the style and approach to politics will, consequently, be limited.
3. Quota laws will contribute to a suspicion that women have been elected thanks to their sex rather than their talent, and these women will not be able to influence the political agenda.
4. Gender quota laws will result in the nomination and election of unqualified candidates and, consequently, they are demeaning to women and undermine the principle of merit-based elections in democracy.
5. After gender quota laws, other groups will also demand these provisions – where does it stop? Volvo owners, left-handed people, redheads.
6. The benefits of gender quota laws are uncertain, as there is no definitive link between more gender diversity and better legislatures, but the costs are concrete, as parties and voters are more constrained in who they can support.

7. History shows that quota laws are unnecessary: the UK parliament is now made up of 35 per cent women and this percentage has nearly doubled since 2000.
8. We should not make gender quotas an issue of law, but rather – like many other countries – allow political parties to take a voluntary approach to candidate recruitment.
9. Quota laws will only treat the symptoms of women’s underrepresentation and consequently will only be a symbolic gesture that will not encourage more women to participate in politics.

After viewing these arguments, respondents then answer the following two questions:

To what extent do you support or oppose gender quota laws in the United Kingdom?

- ☐ Strongly support
- ☐ Tend to support
- ☐ Neither support nor oppose
- ☐ Tend to oppose
- ☐ Strongly oppose
- ☐ Don’t know

Following this, respondents in the Quota condition then view the conjoint table and answer the two outcome questions (vote choice and perceived qualifications of each candidate). See earlier for details. Please note below for slight adjustment to preamble of conjoint and question stems:

Now we are going to ask you to **imagine that the UK adopted a gender quota law**, and the following hypothetical candidates from your political party are running to be your member of parliament under the new rules. Please read the following two candidate resumes carefully:

Based on the limited information above, which of the two candidates would you be more likely to support in this election with gender quota laws?

Thinking about the candidates, how does the following phrase describe them running in this election with gender quota laws?

Then, respondents answer the factual manipulation and attention check question:

Which one of the following statements is most accurate based on the information that was just presented to you?

- ☐ One way of increasing the share of women in politics is through gender quota laws
- ☐ One way of increasing the share of women in politics is through gender parity laws
- ☐ One way to improve the balance of men and women in politics is through gender quota laws
- ☐ One way to improve the balance of men and women in politics is through gender parity laws

Follow-up Questions

To what extent would you say that you have feminine and masculine characteristics, respectively? Please indicate on the scale below where 0 is 'I have few of such characteristics' and 10 is 'I have many such characteristics'.

	0 - I have few of such characteristics	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10 - I have many of such characteristics
Feminine characteristics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Masculine characteristics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Please read the following questions and indicate your response:

	Once in a while	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
When you're in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
When you're with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How good or bad of an actor would you be?

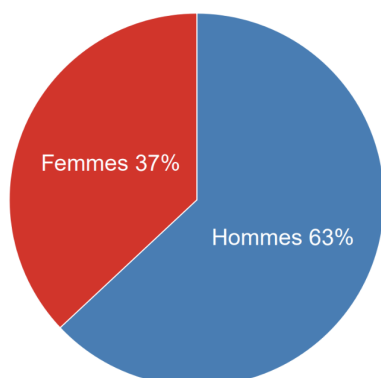
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Excellent

<END>

The French version of the survey instrument is virtually identical and translated into French. There are 3 differences:

- References to pounds changed to euros.
- All mentions of the UK changed to France.
- The figure below is used:

Aujourd'hui, les femmes représentent 37% des parlementaires français, les hommes constituant les 63% restant.



Section 2

Main Regression Tables

Table S1: Main Regression Results for Support

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Support					
	(UK)	(UK)	(UK)	(FR)	(FR)	(FR)
Quota	0.047 (0.076)	-0.012 (0.107)	-0.377* (0.216)	-0.188** (0.089)	-0.167 (0.127)	-0.482* (0.264)
Male		-0.381*** (0.108)	0.193 (0.294)		-0.267** (0.124)	0.104 (0.331)
Masculine			0.011 (0.032)			-0.058* (0.033)
Quota:Male		0.136 (0.152)	0.595 (0.441)		-0.026 (0.177)	1.297** (0.543)
Quota:Masculine			0.089* (0.047)			0.069 (0.049)
Male:Masculine			-0.079* (0.045)			-0.025 (0.048)
Quota:Male:Masculine			-0.095 (0.065)			-0.185** (0.075)
Constant	2.977*** (0.055)	3.160*** (0.075)	3.115*** (0.146)	3.643*** (0.062)	3.776*** (0.087)	4.039*** (0.171)
Observations	1,099	1,099	1,099	623	623	623
R ²	0.0003	0.016	0.033	0.007	0.023	0.066
Adjusted R ²	-0.001	0.013	0.026	0.006	0.018	0.055
<i>Note:</i>					*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table S2: Main Regression Results for Perceived Qualifications

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Perceived Qualifications of Hypothetical Female Candidates					
	(UK)	(UK)	(UK)	(FR)	(FR)	(FR)
Parity	0.269* (0.140)	0.801*** (0.191)	0.451 (0.354)	0.328* (0.184)	0.187 (0.253)	0.759 (0.502)
Quota	0.392*** (0.136)	0.515*** (0.186)	-0.202 (0.364)	0.177 (0.181)	0.082 (0.253)	0.239 (0.548)
Male		0.200 (0.193)	-1.541*** (0.592)		-0.349 (0.250)	-3.005*** (0.759)
Masculine			-0.040 (0.054)			0.015 (0.066)
Parity:Male		-1.121*** (0.278)	0.353 (0.805)		0.327 (0.370)	1.625 (1.076)
Quota:Male		-0.261 (0.270)	0.643 (0.837)		0.241 (0.363)	0.601 (1.200)
Parity:Masculine			0.092 (0.079)			-0.128 (0.096)
Quota:Masculine			0.176** (0.079)			-0.032 (0.100)
Male:Masculine			0.233*** (0.083)			0.314*** (0.103)
Parity:Male:Masculine			-0.225* (0.116)			-0.093 (0.149)
Quota:Male:Masculine			-0.200* (0.118)			-0.026 (0.161)
Constant	7.148*** (0.097)	7.054*** (0.132)	7.204*** (0.240)	7.382*** (0.124)	7.534*** (0.165)	7.464*** (0.344)
Observations	1,708	1,708	1,708	969	969	969
R ²	0.005	0.018	0.032	0.003	0.005	0.035
Adjusted R ²	0.004	0.015	0.026	0.001	0.0003	0.024

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Section 3

Robustness Checks: Social Desirability Subset (SDS)

Table S3: Regression Results for Support (SDS Sample)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Support					
	(UK)	(UK)	(UK)	(FR)	(FR)	(FR)
Quota	0.112 (0.095)	0.005 (0.132)	-0.384 (0.259)	-0.374*** (0.115)	-0.322** (0.157)	-0.500 (0.311)
Male		-0.450*** (0.133)	-0.223 (0.374)		-0.246 (0.158)	0.421 (0.412)
Masculine			-0.012 (0.040)			-0.040 (0.042)
Quota:Male		0.239 (0.189)	1.317** (0.593)		-0.113 (0.228)	0.921 (0.793)
Quota:Masculine			0.100* (0.059)			0.043 (0.061)
Male:Masculine			-0.022 (0.057)			-0.067 (0.061)
Quota:Male:Masculine			-0.179** (0.086)			-0.130 (0.104)
Constant	2.849*** (0.067)	3.062*** (0.092)	3.106*** (0.171)	3.713*** (0.080)	3.830*** (0.109)	3.997*** (0.206)
Observations	702	702	702	351	351	351
R ²	0.002	0.022	0.036	0.029	0.049	0.087
Adjusted R ²	0.001	0.017	0.026	0.027	0.041	0.069

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table S4: Regression Results for Perceived Qualifications (SDS Sample)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Perceived Qualifications of Hypothetical Female Candidates					
	(UK)	(UK)	(UK)	(FR)	(FR)	(FR)
Parity	0.049 (0.171)	0.387* (0.234)	-0.099 (0.410)	0.438* (0.248)	0.630* (0.341)	1.483** (0.663)
Quota	0.283* (0.168)	0.179 (0.230)	-0.724* (0.432)	0.207 (0.248)	0.206 (0.326)	0.473 (0.680)
Male		-0.133 (0.238)	-1.196 (0.773)		-0.346 (0.324)	-0.363 (1.144)
Masculine			-0.082 (0.071)			0.065 (0.081)
Parity:Male		-0.725** (0.342)	0.148 (1.008)		-0.285 (0.500)	-1.462 (1.472)
Quota:Male		0.220 (0.335)	0.439 (1.118)		0.045 (0.501)	-2.841 (1.942)
Parity:Masculine			0.146 (0.101)			-0.209 (0.138)
Quota:Masculine			0.239** (0.100)			-0.059 (0.129)
Male:Masculine			0.175 (0.109)			-0.028 (0.147)
Parity:Male:Masculine			-0.188 (0.147)			0.254 (0.207)
Quota:Male:Masculine			-0.157 (0.155)			0.375 (0.249)
Constant	7.198*** (0.119)	7.260*** (0.163)	7.528*** (0.285)	7.274*** (0.159)	7.409*** (0.203)	7.111*** (0.424)
Observations	1,094	1,094	1,094	530	530	530
R ²	0.003	0.014	0.026	0.006	0.014	0.028
Adjusted R ²	0.001	0.010	0.016	0.002	0.005	0.007
<i>Note:</i>					*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Section 4

Robustness Checks: Factual Manipulation Check Subset (FMC)

Table S5: Regression Results for Support (FMC Sample)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Support					
	(UK)	(UK)	(UK)	(FR)	(FR)	(FR)
Quota	0.229 (0.140)	0.035 (0.184)	-0.601 (0.366)	-0.522*** (0.172)	-0.010 (0.230)	0.025 (0.516)
Male		-0.675*** (0.176)	-0.932 (0.573)		0.069 (0.238)	0.747 (0.672)
Masculine			-0.110** (0.048)			-0.010 (0.058)
Quota:Male		0.426 (0.276)	1.897** (0.871)		-0.981*** (0.335)	-1.307 (1.263)
Quota:Masculine			0.159** (0.080)			-0.006 (0.095)
Male:Masculine			0.087 (0.079)			-0.088 (0.096)
Quota:Male:Masculine			-0.259** (0.123)			0.055 (0.164)
Constant	3.003*** (0.089)	3.307*** (0.118)	3.751*** (0.229)	3.716*** (0.122)	3.688*** (0.153)	3.732*** (0.310)
Observations	387	387	387	169	169	169
R ²	0.007	0.047	0.069	0.052	0.132	0.142
Adjusted R ²	0.004	0.039	0.052	0.046	0.116	0.105

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table S6: Regression Results for Perceived Qualifications (FMC Sample)

Table 9: Regression Results

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Perceived Qualifications of Hypothetical Female Candidates					
	(UK)	(UK)	(UK)	(FR)	(FR)	(FR)
Parity	0.508*** (0.185)	1.249*** (0.248)	1.277*** (0.453)	0.184 (0.303)	0.029 (0.419)	0.534 (0.805)
Quota	0.244 (0.203)	0.729*** (0.272)	-0.043 (0.557)	-0.060 (0.304)	0.544 (0.431)	-0.118 (0.985)
Male		0.200 (0.196)	-1.541** (0.604)		-0.349 (0.259)	-3.005*** (0.782)
Masculine			-0.040 (0.055)			0.015 (0.068)
Parity:Male		-1.623*** (0.366)	-1.459 (1.111)		0.354 (0.604)	0.319 (1.540)
Quota:Male		-1.056*** (0.401)	0.236 (1.119)		-1.109* (0.607)	-1.125 (2.356)
Parity:Masculine			-0.007 (0.101)			-0.112 (0.153)
Quota:Masculine			0.194 (0.122)			0.126 (0.175)
Male:Masculine			0.233*** (0.085)			0.314*** (0.106)
Parity:Male:Masculine			-0.017 (0.155)			0.088 (0.224)
Quota:Male:Masculine			-0.250 (0.168)			-0.063 (0.300)
Constant	7.148*** (0.099)	7.054*** (0.134)	7.204*** (0.245)	7.382*** (0.129)	7.534*** (0.171)	7.464*** (0.354)
Observations	982	982	982	527	527	527
R ²	0.008	0.036	0.052	0.001	0.018	0.064
Adjusted R ²	0.006	0.031	0.041	-0.003	0.008	0.044

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Section 5

Summary Statistics

Table S7: Summary Statistics for UK Dataset

Statistic	Mean or %	UK Census 2021 (or BES 2019)
Age	48	40
Female	52%	51%
Level 4 Education (work-related degree) or Higher	43%	34%
White	89%	82%
Conservative or Brexit	45%	45% (BES 2019)

Table S8: Summary Statistics for French Dataset

Statistic	Mean or %	French Census 2023 (or official election results)
Age	50	42
Female	52%	52%
Baccalauréat or higher	68%	60%
Le Pen Voter	37%	41%

Section 6

Between Country Differences in Support for Positive Action Measures

Table S9: Regression Results for Differences in Support Between Countries

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Support		
	(Full Sample)	(SDS Sample)	(FMC Sample)
UK	−0.666*** (0.085)	−0.864*** (0.111)	−0.713*** (0.164)
Quota	−0.188* (0.096)	−0.374*** (0.130)	−0.522*** (0.199)
UK:Quota	0.235* (0.121)	0.486*** (0.159)	0.752*** (0.239)
Constant	3.643*** (0.067)	3.713*** (0.091)	3.716*** (0.141)
Observations	1,722	1,053	556
R ²	0.048	0.065	0.033
<i>Note:</i>		*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Section 7

Gender Differences (Additive Models)

Table S10: Regression Results Showing Gender Differences in Support for Positive Action Measures Across Samples

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Support					
	(UK)	(FR)	(UK SDS)	(FR SDS)	(UK FMC)	(FR FMC)
Quota	0.055 (0.076)	-0.180** (0.088)	0.122 (0.094)	-0.376*** (0.114)	0.225 (0.137)	-0.473*** (0.171)
Male	-0.312*** (0.076)	-0.280*** (0.088)	-0.331*** (0.094)	-0.301*** (0.114)	-0.501*** (0.136)	-0.428** (0.171)
Constant	3.127*** (0.065)	3.783*** (0.076)	3.006*** (0.080)	3.856*** (0.096)	3.229*** (0.107)	3.894*** (0.139)
Observations	1,099	623	702	351	387	169
R ²	0.015	0.023	0.019	0.049	0.041	0.087
Adjusted R ²	0.014	0.020	0.017	0.043	0.036	0.076

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table S11: Regression Results Showing Gender Differences in Perceived Qualifications of Women Political Candidates Across Samples

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Perceived Qualifications					
	(UK)	(FR)	(UK SDS)	(FR SDS)	(UK FMC)	(FR FMC)
Parity	0.271* (0.139)	0.338* (0.185)	0.048 (0.171)	0.492** (0.248)	0.503*** (0.184)	0.210 (0.302)
Quota	0.395*** (0.136)	0.193 (0.181)	0.284* (0.168)	0.230 (0.247)	0.240 (0.202)	-0.022 (0.304)
Male	-0.241** (0.113)	-0.170 (0.151)	-0.288** (0.139)	-0.418** (0.207)	-0.376** (0.151)	-0.464** (0.216)
Constant	7.261*** (0.110)	7.456*** (0.140)	7.333*** (0.136)	7.437*** (0.178)	7.324*** (0.122)	7.584*** (0.159)
Observations	1,708	969	1,094	530	982	527
R ²	0.008	0.005	0.007	0.014	0.014	0.010
Adjusted R ²	0.006	0.002	0.004	0.008	0.011	0.004

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Section 8

Quotas, Parity, and Perceived Qualifications of Men Candidates

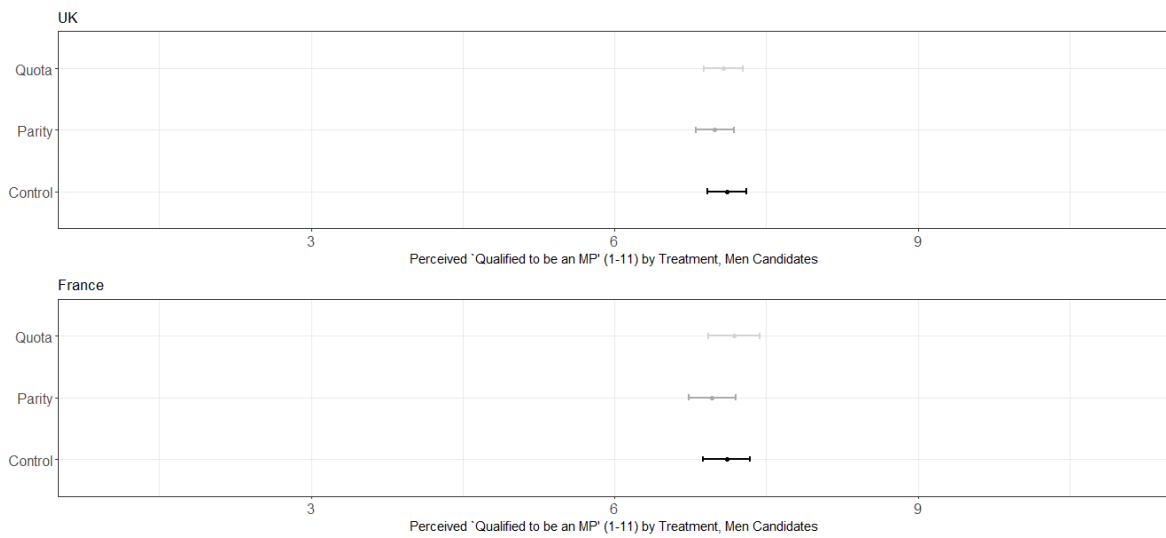


Figure S12: Quotas, Parity, and Perceived Qualifications of Men Candidates

Note: The figure shows mean “qualified” ratings by treatment for men candidates for the UK (top) and France (bottom). Error bars show 95% confidence intervals.

Section 9

Partisan Identification and Support for Positive Action Measures

Table S13: Regression Results Showing Heterogeneous Effects by Respondent Partisan Identification and Gender in Support for Positive Action Measures in U.K.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Support			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Quota	0.047 (0.076)	0.050 (0.093)	-0.114 (0.164)	0.023 (0.189)
Right		-0.959*** (0.094)	-1.057*** (0.134)	-0.925*** (0.177)
Male		-0.345*** (0.093)	-0.403*** (0.133)	-0.219 (0.210)
Quota:Right			0.191 (0.188)	-0.060 (0.256)
Quota:Male			0.115 (0.186)	-0.203 (0.287)
Right:Male				-0.309 (0.272)
Quota:Right:Male				0.550 (0.377)
Constant	2.977*** (0.055)	3.537*** (0.094)	3.620*** (0.116)	3.546*** (0.133)
Observations	1,099	653	653	653
R ²	0.0003	0.160	0.162	0.165
Adjusted R ²	-0.001	0.156	0.155	0.156
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table S14: Regression Results Showing Heterogeneous Effects by Respondent Partisan Identification and Gender in Support for Positive Action Measures in France.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Support			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Quota	-0.188** (0.089)	-0.262** (0.104)	-0.313* (0.182)	-0.364* (0.210)
Right		-0.289*** (0.105)	-0.353** (0.146)	-0.466** (0.208)
Male		-0.300*** (0.104)	-0.281* (0.146)	-0.398* (0.212)
Quota:Right			0.132 (0.210)	0.240 (0.302)
Quota:Male			-0.036 (0.209)	0.076 (0.305)
Right:Male				0.223 (0.292)
Quota:Right:Male				-0.213 (0.420)
Constant	3.643*** (0.062)	4.001*** (0.103)	4.025*** (0.124)	4.078*** (0.143)
Observations	623	449	449	449
R ²	0.007	0.052	0.052	0.054
Adjusted R ²	0.006	0.045	0.042	0.039
<i>Note:</i>			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Section 10

List Experiment Results

Table S15: Regression Results for List Experiment Interacted with Main Experimental Treatment.

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Opposition to Positive Action Measure for Women			
	(UK)	(France)	(UK)	(France)
Treated (List)	0.315*** (0.100)	0.422*** (0.119)	0.315*** (0.100)	0.422*** (0.119)
Parity	-0.097 (0.102)	-0.109 (0.120)		
Quota	-0.034 (0.100)	-0.065 (0.127)		
Treated (List):Parity	0.069 (0.142)	0.162 (0.173)		
Treated (List):Quota	-0.008 (0.141)	0.118 (0.175)		
Pooled (Parity or Quota)			-0.064 (0.088)	-0.089 (0.106)
Treated (List):Pooled (Parity or Quota)			0.029 (0.122)	0.142 (0.149)
Constant	4.072*** (0.072)	4.019*** (0.086)	4.072*** (0.072)	4.019*** (0.086)
Observations	1,734	1,038	1,734	1,038
R ²	0.020	0.049	0.020	0.048
Adjusted R ²	0.017	0.044	0.018	0.046

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01