

# **EXPLAINING GENDER PARITY REPRESENTATION IN SPAIN: THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF PARTIES**

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Abstract: This paper sheds light on the reasons for the rise of women in party politics and public office using the case of Spain and the PSOE as a case study. Structural explanations and the conditioning influence of the electoral system are reviewed before focusing on institutional and party-political explanations. It argues that a key factor in explaining the success of the gender parity project in Spain was its effective implementation at national and regional level in the PSOE, and that this was secured via internal party procedures and controversially, by elite intra-party leadership. The paper then considers how party leaders can be persuaded to implement quotas, suggesting that gender balance in elective office became an instrument of renewal and re-legitimation for a party facing political stagnation. The paper therefore takes the general discussion of parity into the realm of implementation problems, yet argues that parity can be envisaged not as an 'ethical burden' to parties, but as a factor of revitalisation and reconnection with the electorate.

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# **EXPLAINING GENDER PARITY REPRESENTATION IN SPAIN:**

## **THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF PARTIES**

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### **Introduction**

In the space of two decades, Spanish women radically repositioned themselves in relation to the political system. At the beginning of the transition to democracy, in the second half of the 1970s, they were typecast as a conservative bloc (despite Campoamor's findings of 1936) and a concern for the forces of progress, who feared their political passivity, their anticipated high rates of abstention and the unpredictability of their last-minute voting decisions. Yet within a few years, this predominantly male view had been gainsaid. By the end of the millennium, women had not only entered the political system, directed policy-making in a number of spheres, succeeded to elective office and gained many public appointments, but were also demanding full parity of representation with men. Not five years later, the wish had been granted.

Whereas in 1977 women's hopes centered on scrambling out of the ditch of political exclusion, twenty years later a 28% participation rate in the main legislative chamber of Parliament - comfortably above the European Union average and twelfth in the world ranking - was no longer a cause for special celebration. Spaniards had become accustomed to the idea that a woman's place was in... politics. A 1995 survey of future trends found Spanish public opinion confidently asserting that the future would see even more women in political leadership. By the start of the 21st century the political class believed the presence of women in leading posts to be essential to a party's credibility with the electorate. In 2002 Spain broke a record by having both chambers of parliament presided over by women simultaneously - under a conservative government. Finally, the year 2004 came to crown the ascension of women in political decision-making. A dramatic general election brought 126 women into the Congress of Deputies, 36% of the total, and Spain thereby rose to seventh place in the world ranking, the only non-Scandinavian country in the top places together with Rwanda. Responding to this success, the new Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero appointed a gender parity cabinet of eight women and eight men - one of the very first in Europe since Gro Harlem Brundtland's landmark cabinet of the 1980s, and currently the only parity government in Europe apart from the Swedish one.<sup>1</sup>

How were Spanish women able to catch up so quickly and overtake their counterparts in many other countries to reach this unique position? Why did Spain, -- but not other non-Scandinavian countries of the EU -- experience such a remarkable phenomenon? This paper examines some explanations of the Spanish case of gender parity representation. It first considers some of the standard explanations relating to socio-economic modernization, the time factor and the electoral system, before dwelling on domestic party politics. Within this frame, the paper provides an account of how Spanish political elites took steps to empower women in the sphere of elective office, and seeks to explain the political decisions that led to such empowerment. The thrust of the paper's argument is that the Spanish case shows that it is crucial to go beyond structural analyses

to look inside political parties and examine the relationships between feminists and party elites and the internal political dynamics of parties, in this case the Spanish Socialist Workers Party - PSOE, in order to understand why it opened up the party gates to women politicians. In this way the paper contributes towards an actor-centred perspective of change, in which the agency of the women's movement, particularly its institutionalist socialist-feminist wing, is given due recognition.

### **Explanations for women breaking into politics: Spain as a test case**

Structural explanations pose that women's participation in politics is to a large extent dependant on structural factors such as the overall development of a country, and the proportion of women in employment or in secondary and higher education. In this view, political participation rates are thought to reflect the general process of socio-economic modernization. This extensive literature has most recently been tested by Mercedes Mateo Díaz, taking into account many previous studies, and subjecting all findings to statistical analysis. This research builds a complex picture, which is worth summarizing in some detail. It concludes that socio-economic variables are related to women's political status, and that cultural and political structures are strongly correlated with the number of women in parliament (Mateo Díaz 2005: 81). However, the effects of electoral systems were not consistent in all the tests. As to the issue of the causal impact of cultural changes or economic advancement of women on the political presence of women, both are found to be effective. In other words, there was considerable endogeneity, defined as a finding where 'the dependence-independence relationship between two variables is not clearly established.' (2005:81). Therefore, 'socio-economic empowerment is a necessary but insufficient condition to ensure political empowerment. It seems to be necessary to ensure a long-term presence, but it also seems that this is not sufficient to guarantee access' [of women to political power] (2005:81). Overall, the conclusion is that in the West European Member States of the EU, the largest presence of women in national parliaments will be found in states that have "(1) Protestantism as the predominant religion, 2) higher levels of educational attainment, in which (3) men and women have a more equal share of the tasks within the private sphere, 4) women have a better socio-economic status, (5) both men and women obtained an early right to vote, and (6) the proportional system fosters inclusiveness" (Mateo Díaz 2005:63).

One of the intriguing aspects of this thorough analysis, which is the reason it is quoted at some length, is that the case of Spain hardly features (apart from some data input), and that none of the six supporting conditions mentioned appear to apply, *prima facie*, to Spain. As a Catholic country with a 40-year long neglect of educational infrastructures that still casts a shadow over current educational attainment and quality in European comparison (OECD 2004), where there is little evidence that the traditional gendered domestic division of labour has evolved (Valiente 2005), women have bettered their socio-economic status but still display below-average labour market participation rates and some of the highest unemployment rates in the EU (see Cousins 2005 for an analysis of their lack of empowerment in this area). As for giving women the vote, one could claim that 1931 was fairly early, but it was taken away again from 1939-1977. Lastly, though Spain uses a proportional representation system for electing the national and regional parliaments, the d'Hondt allocation method introduces significant disproportionality.<sup>ii</sup> Furthermore, while reviewing the mechanisms that enhance women's representation in chapter 3, Mateo Díaz focuses on *legislation* regarding quotas and parity, which reduces attention given to the Spanish case, since this has involved mainly intra-party agreements rather than laws.

Therefore a detailed analysis of the Spanish case will be necessary in order to offer a way to understand the markedly original features that it currently displays. The next section will discuss

some of the key macro-conditions before moving on to an in-depth consideration of the party politics that are arguably, a rather neglected aspect of the general debate on women's political empowerment.

### Modernization of socio-economic structures

Analysts such as Uriarte & Ruiz (1999: 210-11) view socio-economic structures as relevant only for Greece and Portugal in the European context, and discard such explanations for the case of Spain. They also discard the cultural modernisation explanation regarding the prevalence of Catholicism as a deterrent to women's presence in politics, because of its failure to predict women's participation in Spain and Austria, and their lack of representation in a predominantly protestant and increasing secular country such as the UK. Modernization and socio-economic factors can also easily be set aside for Spain after taking stock of the world rankings of women's participation in national houses of parliament. This showed for 2002 that the top twenty countries with over 25% of women in their lower or single houses of parliament included Scandinavian, African, Latin American, and Eastern European states. Britain came in at 44th place and France ranked 61<sup>st</sup> (Inter-Parliamentary Union -IPU, 2002). For Britain, Lovenduski (2005:15) reminds us that under-representation of women in Britain persisted despite advances in education and work having taken place decades earlier. In 2005 the IPU's top ten had Rwanda as having the greatest proportion of women representatives in the world, followed by five European countries, then Spain tied with Cuba at 7<sup>th</sup> place, followed by Costa Rica, Mozambique and Belgium. France by contrast, had fallen to 75<sup>th</sup> place (IPU 2005). While socio-economic interpretations across the 128 countries counted by the IPU could still hold some value if one considers that seven EU-15 countries are in the top ten, it is essential to also consider that the other developed 'first world' countries are *not* at the top. Thus it is imperative to develop an analysis that dwells chiefly on other factors.

### Time lags

Related to these factors, but not identical to them, is the temporal dimension or 'lag hypothesis' (Lovenduski 2005: 8). This line of analysis shows that the passing of time in a democracy leads to greater political representation. Thus a country that started later than others on the road to democracy and/or granted women suffrage later will have fewer female representatives, and 'will catch up in high office only after they have been present in intermediate institutions for some time', as Lovenduski remarks in her re-statement of the argument (2005:8). Equally recently, Mateo Díaz has graphically shown that over a long period of time, there is a marked rise in the presence of women (2005: pp.40-48) but that is, nevertheless, a non-linear function of time. Instead, she proposes that there was a shared take-off point in the late 1970s and the mid 1980s and relates it to 'the intensification of the debates around gender issues' (2005:44), and concludes that time is far from being the main factor in how women succeeded in entering politics (2005: 48). Adding to Mateo Díaz's data, one can see that Spanish case in this context is notable for displaying a sharper rise than most other European countries -- from 9% to 27%, trebling over a 14-year period. The only country displaying a sharper rise is the UK (from 4% to 18% over 15 years). In keeping with such data, Spanish advocates of women's political participation have *not* put their faith in the simple passage of time, according to a leading feminist (Martínez Ten 1990: 64), even though they knew that the country was experiencing political and social modernization.

So what is striking for the Spanish case is how short its comparative lag in female representation lasted once democracy was restored. This speed cannot easily be charted in relation to modernization trends, for Spanish socialist and conservative women have overtaken their sisters in quite a few of the longer established European parties. What is lacking from any purely temporal perspective is any analysis of the political position of the individual parties in power. Mateo Díaz confirms the existing claim that parties to the left tend to be more inclusive [of women] than parties to the right (2005:76). Why this continues to be the case, especially in the twenty-first century, remains a highly relevant question.

### Electoral systems

Despite the established research analyzing the role of electoral systems in facilitating or constraining women's access to parliamentary assemblies, in the Spanish case the value of the system as an explanatory factor can be shown to be minor. True, Spanish women's share of legislative power in the lower chamber became greater than that of women in Britain and France as soon as democracy returned, which suggests that the adoption of an electoral system of 'reinforced' proportional representation with particular features (d'Hondt method of seat allocation in medium to large multi-member constituencies) was more favourable to Spanish women than the British single member plurality or French single member majority/two-rounds systems would have been if applied to the Spanish Congress. This confirms in a general way Norris's comparative findings on electoral systems (Norris 1993: 312-4). Spain can serve to illustrate the thesis that the electoral system is a 'crucial enabling condition' (Henig & Henig 2001:93) for women to increase their participation in institutional politics. But it should be pointed out that 'enabling' is only creating an opportunity: it is up to the political parties controlling candidates for office to deliberately choose to use the opportunities provided by their electoral system. Spain offers an interesting insight into this question since the lower house is elected by proportional, and the upper house on a majoritarian system.

Women have always been more under-represented in the Spanish Senate (*Senado*) than in the lower house, the Congress (*Congreso*), which may be due to the way the Senate's majoritarian system requires the election of individual candidates. It could be argued that the requirement for voters to select and tick the name of a woman candidate may make them less likely to pick women over men. Yet, evidence also points in a different direction, as there have been relatively more *conservative* party women in the Senate than in the Congress despite the majoritarian system (30% vs. 25%). This shows that outcomes also depend on the party's selection of the candidates to field, independently of the electoral system, a selection that can be governed by political considerations.

Even stronger evidence that it is crucial to look beyond the electoral system in Spain is the fact that for the first four elections under the new PR-D'Hondt system, heralded as a great period of change in Spanish politics, women continued to be poorly represented in both houses and remained below the European average until the second half of the 1980s. They suddenly forged ahead in 1989, as seen in the table below.

**Table 1. Women In Congress Of Deputies as % of Party Group.**

Parliamentary Group	Constituent Assembly 1977-79		Legislature I 1979-82		II 1982-86		III 1986-9		IV 1989-93		V 1993-6		VI 1996-2000	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
AP/CP/PP conservative	1	<b>6.3</b>	1	<b>11.0</b>	2	<b>1.9</b>	8	<b>7.6</b>	10	<b>9.3</b>	21	<b>14.9</b>	22	<b>14.1</b>
							*6	*7.5					*29	*18.7
UCD/CDS centre-right	7	<b>4.2</b>	10	<b>6.0</b>	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
			*11	*6.6										
PSOE Socialists	10	<b>8.5</b>	5	<b>4.0</b>	18	<b>8.9</b>	13	<b>7.1</b>	34	<b>19.4</b>	28	<b>17.6</b>	39	<b>27.6</b>
	*11	*9.3	*6	*5.0									*44	*31.2
PCE to '82 United Left IU 1986-	3	<b>15.0</b>	2	<b>8.7</b>	-	-	-	-	2	<b>11.8</b>	4	<b>22.2</b>	7	<b>33.3</b>
													*5	*31.3
Total in Congress	21	<b>6.0</b>	20	<b>5.7</b>	18	<b>5.1</b>	23-	<b>6.5</b>	51	<b>14.6</b>	56	<b>16</b>	77	<b>22</b>
Nr. & % /350	*22	*6.3	*21	*6	*22	*6.3	25						*87	*25

Notes: - = not applicable; n/a means not available. (1) In 1977: Alianza Popular; in 1979: Coalición Democrática; in 1982-89: Alianza Popular or Coalición Popular (including the Partido Demócrata Popular of Oscar Alzaga); from 1986: Partido Popular. (2) In 1977: Alianza Nacional 18 de Julio and Fuerza Nueva. In 1979: Unión Nacional, led by Blas Piñar. In 1986: all rightists not mentioned separately. (3) Out of 5 parties.

Sources: 1977: J.I.Cases et al (1978) *Mujer y 16 de junio*, Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, pp. 94-5. 1979 & 1982: own calculations based on Boletín Oficial del Estado, Feb. 3, 1979 and Oct. 2, 1982. 1982 total from Instituto de la Mujer (1984 p.17). 1977-82: AP second set of figures from L.López Nieto (1988 p.86). 1986-1989: Instituto de la Mujer (1990) p.48-49, p.30. 1996: Federación de Mujeres Progresistas (1996) Unpublished report. 2000: Secretaría de Participación de la Mujer, CEF-PSOE, unpublished data. 2004: Secretaría de Igualdad, <http://www.psoe.es/ambito/igualdad/docs/index.do?action=List&apt=8783>

As can be seen from Table 1, the figures for the lower house using a PR system show that stasis in representation came to an end in 1989, when the proportion of women more than doubled to 14.4%. This was due in the main to the contribution of the PSOE who were able to get 34 women elected. In the following election of 1993, the Popular Party joined the PSOE in fielding sufficient candidates to obtain 21 women deputies and raise the presence of these to 16% of the total. From then onwards the rise was continuous in all three main nationwide parties, though at different rates. In particular it should be noted that 46 women were elected for the PSOE in 2000 despite the party losing the election and a substantial number of seats going to the PP; and again, in 2004 the PP fielded enough women to put a higher percentage of women in Congress despite losing the election. This provides a good illustration of the limitations inherent to basing an analysis purely on the electoral system.

### Critical junctures and political opportunities

Another type of explanation for the political empowerment of women contains element of structure and of agency. It refers broadly to what is called critical political junctures and derives

from early work on women in revolutionary organizations (e.g. Eisner 1984) observing that surges in women's political empowerment were associated with periods of disarray of parties, or a period of revolutionary upsurge. This is echoed in the findings of Nelson and Chowdury (1994). The thrust of most of that work is that women are later deprived of some of their gains when parties become re-established or when revolutionary change stabilizes. Typically, the moment passes and the zeal for change wanes. It is a view that tends to see women's advancement as cyclical without any long-term gain.

The Spanish case can be seen as illustrating this proposition, but *only* in a general way. It is clear that the break with the dictatorship and the erection of the new democracy gave women's organisations political opportunities for making a mark on policy and law (Threlfall 2005). But their political representation in public office does not follow the overall critical juncture pattern. On the contrary, it shows a turn to women by the PSOE occurred in a period neither of disarray nor upsurge, but of *slow decline* and division. It was a moment when the party quite rationally sought to renew itself and adapt to new times via statutory reform and altered practices. Crucially, the men in power, far from ousting women, were unable to consolidate male domination of the parties. Furthermore, women's gains have so far proven to be lasting, and, in an institutionalized party, it is unlikely that a change of statutes abolishing the parity rule would gather sufficient support to be passed.

It would have been understandable if, in the move from clandestinity and no public posts in 1977 to a situation where the parties needed to field thousands of candidates for municipal as well as national elections in 1979, and hundreds more for the 17 autonomy elections from 1984 onwards, a great many women had been recruited. But in reality, the expansion of female recruitment took place well *after* that original wave, and in the case of the PSOE continued throughout its period of national and regional electoral *decline* in the 1990s.<sup>iii</sup>

The party that gained access to the greatest number of public posts in the first two decades of democracy, and effectively offered its members the likelihood of public recognition, an income, and a career as politicians, was highly male-dominated. Its roots in Marxism and the labour movement, and the cumulative impact of the Second Republic, the civil war and decades of Francoist dictatorship gave it strongly motivated male gatekeepers, the bearers of its historic legacies, the sons of the defeated, the exiled and the dead. Yet, this very male party led a great opening up of politics to women. True, the general expansion of its popularity and consequent access to positions at national regional and local levels, which steeply increased the public posts to be filled by its elected representatives, made it that much easier. But, even more paradoxically, it was not in fact during the PSOE's period of greatest expansion (the early to mid-eighties) that entry to women was facilitated, nor actually took place.

### Parties and gender quota politics

Instead, a focus on the agency of parties reveals that the surge in representation coincided with the PSOE's leftist turn on social matters in its last seven years in power roughly from 1989 to 1996, and with the arrival of quota politics in Spain. According to Squires (1996:81, 87), moving to a quota system signifies a departure from the traditional liberal understanding of representation towards an endorsement of a 'microcosm conception of representation' in which there is fair group presence.<sup>iv</sup> In parties, 'fair' is sometimes taken mean as many women in the leadership as there are members, but in the PSOE this argument was jettisoned when it adopted a 25% quota in 1988 while its female membership was still below that figure. The leftist Izquierda Unida adopted a quota later in the nineties and their numbers of women deputies also rose. By contrast, the

Partido Popular did not endorse the quota principle, with high-ranking female politicians calling it 'discrimination' and 'the Wonderbra quota' (Jenson & Valiente 2003: 86). The figures in Table 1 show the difference: it was mainly the PP's unexpectedly large majority in 2000 that enabled it to catch up. Its change of tack has been interpreted as a 'response effect' (Uriarte & Ruiz 1999:211) and 'mimetic behaviour' (Valiente 2001:58), and can be compared to Sweden, where the Social Democrats' dominant position 'led the other parties to compete, and even outbid, the Social Democrats as champions of equality', resulting in a convergence of trends across the parties (Norris 1993:321), and to Belgium, where a 'mutual contagion effect' was identified by Meir (2004).

Interestingly, the response of the PP, according to their former President of the Congress of Deputies, Luisa Fernanda Rudí, was initiated by the PP's former leader, the ex-francoist Minister Manuel Fraga in 1986, when he declared that there simply had to be more women on party lists (Rudí 2001). This is a credible story and the point is that the increased number of conservative women deputies is also claimed by Rudí to be the result of a party decision. In the existing research, none of these sorts of party decisions have been related to socio-economic developments, not even to suggest that rising numbers of women MPs or parliamentary candidates may reflect a trend in Spanish society towards political activism among women.

Therefore, rather than the product of a static situation upheld by a constant electoral mechanism, or entrenched social traditionalism, the origins of the rise of women in party politics in Spain can be directly linked to the impact of the feminist lobbies and to party decisions. This is comparable to Scandinavian examples where high proportions of women in the lower house were achieved after the adoption by some parties of a 40% quota in the 1970s, and after later legislation to oblige parties to pursue gender balance (Porter 1998:29). A consensus around this political party and agent-centred explanation has emerged in Spain among key researchers (e.g. Gallego Méndez & Durán 1994; Martínez-Hernández & Elizondo 1997; Barbadillo et al 1990; Federación de Mujeres Progresistas 1996; Threlfall 2005). Therefore the next section will investigate the agents of women's increased representation in Spain.

### Internal party politics: the role of party feminists

The political party is one of a set of three factors established by Norris and Lovenduski (1995) and Norris (1993) for explaining the recruitment of women, though it has often been seen as playing a constraining function (such as in the case of Britain) or a gate-keeping role, rather than overtly facilitating women's participation<sup>v</sup>. This view is more recently confirmed by Lovenduski who states that the work of equalizing men's and women's representation must begin in the political parties (2005:57). However, placing a party at the centre of the search for an explanation can also be considered a non-feminist approach that emphasizes the way social-democratic and leftist parties have promoted women, whether for internal party political reasons or because they have taken on board the feminist discourse. At first glance, this appears give the credit for improvements to the mainly male hierarchies of such parties.

But it is also possible to put the spotlight on the activism of women's lobbies and caucuses inside parties and party factions, and on informal alliances and networks of women across parties, thus recognizing the agency of particular groups of women and individuals. This section will adopt this approach and consider developments inside the PSOE in particular. It argues that there is ample factual data to support the conclusion that it was the first and the chief party to increase the presence of women among its ranks of candidates and representatives. In this strict sense it has been the major facilitator of women's access to leadership and representative positions from 1988

onwards, though *not* in the 1977-86 period. Earlier research on the case of the PSOE showed that the roots of the PSOE's transformation lay in the successful strategies and tactics of *party feminists* advocating greater prominence for women (Threlfall 1998).

Having identified (when discarding the electoral system explanation) that the first take-off point for women's representation to be the 1989 election, let us look at political events leading up to the election. Firstly, many more women were fielded as parliamentary candidates. In the preceding years the PSOE had been engaged in an internal political debate on quotas that culminated in the 1988 party conference approval of a minimum of 25% of female candidates for party-controlled internal and public posts. The issue of the lack of women in political posts had been criticised by its feminist caucus *Mujer y Socialismo* ever since the late seventies, with slow progress being made, but feminist members continued to lobby party structures skillfully until it was approved (observation in situ and personal communications).

### Party feminism: international socialist feminism

Why this should have happened is also of interest. The fact that there was a vociferous group of feminists in the PSOE was a crucial antecedent. But the reason why the feminist advocates were there to put pressure on the party would have to be traced back to another story – that of the rise of the feminist movement in Spain. And the reason that the socialist-feminist party caucus lobbied for a quota at that stage, the mid-80s, is also part of the development of strategies for political inclusion by the international feminist movement. This had started with the French Socialist Party (PS) adopting the principle of a quota for 'all levels of responsibility' to be fixed according to the number of women members at each party congress (Neiertz 1980). The decision became better-known internationally in 1979 when the PS implemented a 30% quota for its candidates to the European Parliamentary election of 1979 and invited sister parties for the launch of the campaign<sup>vi</sup>. The PS had been persuaded by its own feminist network, headed at the time by Yvette Roudy, the main force behind the later (1981) creation of the Ministry for Women. It also included Véronique Nieertz, a persuasive orator who became the PS's *Secrétaire Nationale* and later a Cabinet Minister.

These events in the French Socialist Party considerably influenced the 1980s debate among feminists in the PSOE, and Roudy was invited to speak in Madrid in the hope that the French example could persuade the PSOE leaders. The French party, especially after its electoral success, was an important reference point and example that could be held up to legitimate the feminists' demand for an engineered political representation<sup>vii</sup>. At the same time a similar discussion taking place in the Socialist International (SI), of which both parties were longstanding active members. The SI's women's section, Socialist International Women-SIW, had been pressing for quotas in the 1980s as well (Socialist International Women 1995), and as the French feminists were also active in SIW, along with caucuses from the German SPD, the Swedish SAP, the British Labour Party and many more, there was an active international network of socialist-feminist women advocating quotas.

A second take-off moment in Spain can also be perceived in the second half of the nineties. The French parity process has been described a 'sequence of two linked, yet analytically distinct, policy-cycles: the one focused on legislating for minimum quotas; the other on legislating for gender parity' (Lovecy 2000/1: 445). The Spanish case also moved in two cycles, but without legislation<sup>viii</sup>, only party decisions. These were also influenced by the parallel European discussion of the 1990s (M.Navarro 2000: 247) promoted by the French feminist Gisele Halimi (see Halimi 1994). And the Socialist International's council, in turn pressured by its women's

sections, was by 1994 asking all its members to increase their women candidates by a minimum of 10% in every election, with the goal of 50/50 gender parity by 2000 (Socialist International Women 1995:7). After the 25% quota was adopted by the PSOE at its 31<sup>st</sup> Conference in 1988, it took two further party Conferences for its 33rd, held in 1994, to agree the principle of gender parity representation in the terms of a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% men or women in party-controlled elective posts. Finally, its 34<sup>th</sup> Conference in 1997 amended the party's Statutes accordingly.

An important issue is that some parties are willing to proclaim the principle but are in practice 'reluctant to tie their hands' (Meir 2004: 591). In France, the quota was seen not to produce the desired effects (Lovecy 2000: 446-7). But the PSOE's 25% goal was perceived as a successful first step that kicked off a slow-moving political snowball. In this sense, Spanish feminists accepted an incremental approach. Some scholars believe 1988 constituted the key step in terms of placing the proverbial foot in the door that would later prise open the gates (e.g. Celia Valiente, personal communication). Others consider that the more surprising political decision was the 1997 adoption of parity, because it was not discussed in terms of an interim, temporary measure. Instead, it was presented as a principle that was to be made a requirement by being incorporated into the party's constitution (statutes).<sup>ix</sup> By contrast, Meir concluded for Belgium that parties were reluctant to introduce far-reaching measures, and even more hesitant when it came to legally imposed ones (Meir 2004: 592). Therefore, an examination of intra-party politics in the PSOE will help to explain why the principle was implemented as a *party* rule, and effectively so.

#### Intra-party politics and the effective implementation of parity in the PSOE

Effective implementation of a parity decision by a party is arguably a stronger explanation of the presence of women in parliaments and other representative bodies once small socio-economic, time, electoral, conjunctural, and feminist activism effects have been taken into account or discarded. Full, rather than half-hearted, implementation leads to an even greater rise in women representatives. In the Spanish case, the amendment to the PSOE's statutes at its 34th Conference of 1997 was implemented immediately during the Conference for the election of the (nationwide) Federal Executive Committee (FEC). Fourteen women (42% of 33) were included on the winning ticket, but there was no effort to reach 50/50 parity. This immediate move by the Conference to implement the policy was a sign that the commitment was being taken seriously. The factors that explain the lack of fight or resistance once parity had been adopted have to do with a party's internal dynamics. In the PSOE, party statutes rule over proceedings, and once they are amended, the new version is law. Furthermore, implementation is more easily achieved if parity is publicly endorsed by a charismatic party leader: Felipe González had been Prime Minister for 14 years and had at that point resigned after 23 years as the General Secretary of the PSOE: the parity rule was part of his outgoing legacy. A third key factor was that his likely successor, Joaquín Almunia, a long-standing member of the Executive and former cabinet minister, was also personally convinced that parity was the right thing to do (personal communications). Fourth, implementation was facilitated by conference proceedings and long-standing consensual practices for electing the FEC, which allowed the number of women Committee members to rise without this requiring conference delegates to actively side with women candidates against males in a competition for power.

This last factor requires some careful observation of intra-party processes. The fourteen new women on the national Executive were not elected as individuals by the conference delegates but as part of a list that is traditionally prepared by each aspiring Secretary-General to form the Federal Executive Committee. In fact, if there is a pre-existing consensus around an unchallenged leader, as there had been around González, there is only one list. This list of candidates for the

Executive Committee is put together during extensive negotiations in the corridors of the conference sessions rather than on the debating floor. The inclusion of women on an aspiring party leader's list is both facilitated by his (*sic*) freedom to select political allies before being elected, and constrained by his need to include representatives of the majority of political tendencies and regional party organizations in order to gain enough votes. As conference delegates will vote in the Federal Executive Committee by secret ballot, some of the aspiring leader's preferred choices will invariably be negotiated off the list before the ballot during the search for a consensus among key party players such as the heads of the delegations from each regional party branch. If satisfied, these leaders will then ask and even instruct their delegation to back the agreed list of Federal Executive members, thus augmenting the secret ballots.

In this way, the implementation of parity at the micro-level in the shape of fourteen women on the Executive Committee formed part of a political deal between different sectors of the party. This is not to suggest there is less merit in women achieving the positions of party leadership, but that parity was an element in a broader negotiation of alliances among a series of politicians operating at various levels of elective public and party office throughout the country. The need to settle on a list that comprised 40% of women could be accommodated in these negotiations, much as previous conferences had already accommodated the search for 25% of women. Evidently, male aspirants' chances do get reduced, and they may resent this, but resistance to implementation is diluted by the very selection procedure. Gender becomes an additional consideration for the party, in a set of trade-offs between different types of representation, that include political factions, regions, age (youth) and gender, all with a claim to be present in the party's leadership.

#### Sub-national intra-party implementation

The preceding account deals with the national (federal) level. An important question in the search for understanding of how more women achieved parliamentary seats is to consider how sub-national party structures implemented gender parity, given their autonomous regional party conference and separate elective structures. It is possible to envisage, hypothetically, an enlightened national leadership unable to convince not just the rank-and-file, but regional and provincial party leaderships, of the merits of the parity principle. In the case of the PSOE, the sub-national party organizations hold their conferences after the federal level, not before. This is because the federal conference is the supreme decision-making body: only proposals flow upwards from the provincial and regional party conferences, decisions flow downwards. It is the delegates who are sent to the Federal Conference who vote on all the proposals, thereby making the decisions that will thereafter be binding on all branches of the party.

Therefore when the PSOE's regional federations held their conferences in the second half of 1997, they followed suit regarding parity. As a result, 37% (232) of 628 members of PSOE's Regional and Nationality Executive Committees were women by 1998<sup>x</sup> as well as 39% (386) of 988 members of Provincial Executive Commissions (PSOE, 1998). Nevertheless this small shortfall from the minimum requirement of 40% was considered a sign of some resistance on the part of sub-national party leaders (Micaela Navarro, PSOE Secretary for Women's participation, personal communication). And arguably, in terms of the degree of power wielded by men and women, gender parity was not fully achieved, because women did not get elected to the most powerful political positions in these Committees. Nonetheless, the parity principle was rolled out in the PSOE organizations throughout the country, subsequent to an influential example set at the national leadership level, and it was successful in raising the political profile of women inside the Socialist Party, as illustrated by their subsequent greater prominence and participation levels. These details are important for understanding how women get to reach public office as parliamentarians in the national parliament and Autonomous regional assemblies. For it is the

party organisations in the provinces and regional federations that will be involved in the selection of candidates for public office, together with the Federal Executive Committee.

### Candidate selection

Let us now examine the next step in the process through which parity was implemented effectively: the selection of candidates. Obviously, to get elected, candidates have to be not just fielded, but be given a winnable seat. Under the Spanish list system in which seats are allocated through the d'Hondt method starting with the top names on each party's list, it is important for candidates to be ranked sufficiently high up to have a chance of being allocated a seat in that particular constituency, since the length of the list varies by the size of population in each one. After the parity decision, the PSOE fielded in total 171 women, or 49% of their candidates, for the Congress of Deputies elections of 2000, substantially more than the minimum required. While only 72 of these female candidates were in winnable positions on the lists, they occupied 42% of all such positions, thus favouring a positive parity-compliant outcome. However, as the election went badly for the PSOE, only 46 of the 72 'likelies' actually won their seat. Thus ultimately, the proportion of PSOE women in Congress was reduced to 37%, and (non-obligatory) parity of *outcome* was not achieved.

The conclusion derived from these figures is that the PSOE leadership and party federations and provincial leaders effectively complied with the new party statutes on gender balance. And had the party obtained a similar amount of seats as in the previous elections, it would have achieved its target outcome of a minimum 40% of women deputies, ensuring a threshold gender balance of Congress deputies. Yet in order to insure the *outcome* against an overall swing against the party, it would have had to protect female candidates by placing them higher in the ranks of the 'likelies'. By the time of the 2004 election, both a better positioning of the female candidates and a large swing of votes to the PSOE led to parity compliance in outcomes as well. The PSOE was able to boast of having 75 women deputies, 47%, comfortably near to absolute parity. Despite this successful outcome, it is worth noting that the power struggle for seats in the provincial and regional levels of the party was ongoing: in 2000, only 10 women headed one of the PSOE's 52 electoral lists – a key position - showing that a party that allows women space on its electoral lists still leaves men in control of each these parcels of power.

### Regional parity

Access to regional representation is also an indicator of effective implementation. Women's access to regional autonomous assemblies is additionally controlled by the internal structures of parties in western democracies, as in the case of the PSOE, so there is a need to measure the degree to which regional elections and the regional governments underpin gender parity. While data on Spanish sub-national candidates are harder to come by, it is relevant to note a selection of the PSOE's regional results. In the regional parliamentary elections in Andalucía, Spain's biggest autonomous region, the PSOE fielded sufficient women candidates in winnable positions for them to take 49% of the party's seats.<sup>xi</sup> On winning the 2004 regional elections, the PSOE leader Manuel Chaves named a female-dominated cabinet of 8 women and 6 men, 57%. Thus one of Spain's least developed and least industrialized areas managed to outdo the national government on this particular indicator of modernity.

By contrast, Spain's least developed and poorest region of all, Extremadura, lagged behind. Only 36% of the PSOE's deputies were women (2005), despite the party winning an overall majority. And the Socialist president of the Autonomy appointed only 3 women out of 10 to his cabinet - 30% (Junta de Extremadura 2005). These two examples are interesting because they show, on the one hand, that even substantially rural and below-average per capita GDP areas can be led by

legislatures and executives that have been feminised by a party policy; and on the other hand, that even within one party there are variations in the extent of the feminisation process. In this case, the most likely explanation for the gap would be different levels of commitment by the regional leaders. In effect, Juan José Rodríguez Ibarra belongs to a different political tendency within the PSOE and is not a member of the Federal Executive Committee led by Zapatero, whereas the Andalusian leader Manuel Chaves is also the PSOE's President and a member of the FEC. This reflects the importance of individual actors and their degree of commitment to parity for achieving effective implementation.

### Elite willingness

Behind the arguments about the implementation of the gender parity principle through the mechanisms of intra-party political life lies a more intangible point about the willingness of political elites to act in good faith regarding a party's new parity principle. For instance, in Argentina, women activists in parties had to threaten to take their party to court for non-compliance. So, the 'willingness to act in good faith' is key, as Jones puts it (2000:44). It is at least a key to success even if not to sustainability. Precisely because Spanish women's advancement rested on persuasion and the readiness to be persuaded (it is worth remembering that there is nothing binding about the Socialist International's resolutions), some observers considered the situation in Spain to be unstable and to lack the guarantees that a law would provide (Balaguer 2000:53). True, the PSOE leader and prime ministerial candidate for the March 2000 elections, Joaquin Almunia, announced his intention to see the electoral law amended to ensure all parties fielded a minimum of 40% from either sex as parliamentary candidates,<sup>xii</sup> but the bill was not presented (Jenson & Valiente 2003: 85) as the PSOE lost the election and the winning conservatives rejected the policy. True, the Socialist Andalusian leader Manuel Chaves promised in 1999 that if he won the autonomy elections, 50% of his new government would be composed of women (El País 7.11.99.p.24) but he did not comply<sup>xiii</sup> - though he would, years later, as mentioned above. So the case for elite unwillingness cannot easily be made. On the contrary, despite the lack of legislation, the party Conference of July 2000 saw the key post of General-Secretary (leader) of the PSOE contested by two women out of four candidates, perfect parity.

Five years later, the fear of encountering significant resistance to parity in Spain had been dispelled by the notable advances made in 2004 that affected not only the winning party but also the losers, the PP, who also fielded increased numbers of women. The results of elite willingness as opposed to legislative obligation were stunningly illustrated by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero when he appointed a 50/50 gender-balanced cabinet.

### Political imperatives for gender parity: leadership renewal and vote-maximisation

The previous sections have made a case for a focus on the internal life of parties in explaining the ability of women to advance to positions of elective public office. An analysis of the internal mechanisms of adoption of the parity principle and its implementation at sub-national levels in the case of the Spanish Socialist party was carried out to illustrate how intra-party decision-making, leadership selection procedures, and the fielding of election candidates can contribute to making parity effective. Yet even when it is clear how important party decisions are for the advancement of women's political representation, and how crucial the influence of intra-party feminists is, there is still a need to ask whether there are strictly *party-political* grounds for leaders to adopt parity, irrespective of principles of gender equity. For instance, it is generally recognized that parties undertake searches for new electoral constituencies, and that this can

provide a good moment for feminist advocacy (Lovenduski 2005:89). Was this the case for the PSOE?

The next section proposes that there was indeed a political imperative for the parity decision in the PSOE, because it melded with its latent anxieties about internal renewal. The PSOE needed revitalization in the aftermath of its becoming tainted (both rightly and wrongly – see Maravall 2001) by Spanish corruption scandals in the first half of the 1990s, and of losing power to the conservatives in the 1996 general election. Gender parity became part of this project. Demands for parity representation coincided with a period of decline in its electoral fortunes. In 1993 it had lost its overall majority and in 1994, the conservatives won control of a majority of the autonomous communities. It was also suffering a complex internal crisis (Heywood 1993). While the party was able to grasp the nature of the crisis intellectually, as seen by its 1991 ‘Manifesto 2000’ document that hailed an impending ‘women’s revolution’ (PSOE 2000), there was a resurgence of factional conflict between Felipe González and his vice-president Alfonso Guerra (Gillespie 1994).

After a narrow win in 1993, González declared “I’ve got the message” in his victory speech. Part of that ‘message’ concerned overall change and also the place of women. He became known as a (late) convert to feminism. In fact, he had been approached by a group of women’s policy advocates who were concerned about the invisibility of gender issues in the election campaign and gave a positive response. He recognised that quotas and even parity could be seen as an extension of democracy (personal communications from participants). From then onwards, what gave legitimacy to the gender equality demands in the party was that these became part of a long drawn-out political renewal process. Leaders began to call for ‘more women’ and ‘more youth’ and see women as a solution for regenerating the party rather than as a problem.<sup>xiv</sup> Parity advocates did not associate themselves with only one faction, though they obtained more support from the ‘renovators’ (*renovadores*) led by González. In one critical view, parity was used as tool in the struggle between factions: the post-1997 PSOE leaders allegedly favoured it because it allowed them to better control the process of political appointments - meaning that the limitation on posts for men on account of the inclusion of women enabled leaders to reshape their teams of allies more selectively, and to pick ‘new blood’ to their political liking (A. Navarro 2000: 25). This view lends support to this paper’s argument that the parity decision was also the result of the political imperative of renewal.

In addition to overcoming internal tensions, gender parity became associated politically in the PSOE with a bid to attract more women members and votes (personal communications). Internal discussion in the PSOE had long identified that its traditional working-class electorate was numerically insufficient. Rather than effecting a turn to the middle classes and taking into account their occupational interests, the PSOE began to view women, whether homemakers or employed, young or old, middle- or working-class, as a great new discriminated sector that could be attracted to the socialists’ traditional values of equality, justice and solidarity. González’s first inklings of this come to light in his 1979 thoughtful interview with the political thinker Fernando Claudín (1979), though he did not commit to putting the project into action at the time. The chronological trajectory of the association between the PSOE’s attention to gender equality and its (female) voter support is uneven, since nine years elapsed between 1979 and the 1988 quota decision, and between the latter and the 1997 parity decision. Furthermore, the psephology on the gender vote is not rich. However, an internal poll carried out by the PSOE in 1996 reported in *El País* (Aizpeolea 1996)<sup>xv</sup> gave parity advocates the evidence they needed: 43% of women voted for the PSOE in contrast to only 35% for the winning conservative Popular Party in 1996, and so did a plurality (47%) of ‘housewives’ -- more than for any other party. The PSOE therefore received evidence that it was the favourite among women and, more surprisingly, among non-employed homemakers<sup>xvi</sup>. It also grew in both female and male membership to a greater extent than other

European parties, and so did other Spanish parties -- in contrast to their European counterparts (Mair & van Biezen 2001; van Biezen 2003).

The PSOE could have taken female support as grounds for complacency, or instead, as proof that its gender equality policies were a vote-winner. It chose the latter (personal communications). Vote-maximising was also an underlying motive for the gender parity decision a year later in 1997. This is not to suggest political opportunism, for the electoral failure of 2000 did not lead to any departure from its commitment to parity, only to a recognition that most of the PSOE's policies (including parity) had failed to galvanise the electorate over and above the other reasons voters had for *not* choosing the PSOE at that point (PSOE 2000). In sum, the argument about vote-maximising as a reason for choosing parity is possible, though not strong.

## Conclusion

This paper set out to explain why some countries have high levels of women representatives in party political and elective office, by examining the case of Spain. After examining the role of socio-economic structural factors such as modernisation and political structures such as the electoral system, and a mixed structure-agent explanation such as 'critical junctures', the paper argued that pure agent-centred explanations were strongly born out by the evidence in Spain. The influence of women's policy advocates and the decisions of parties, as political actors, were found to be key, especially but not exclusively, those of the PSOE. The paper went on to focus on the internal decision-making process of the PSOE to show how the gender parity concept was implemented effectively. The role of party elites was emphasised, both national and regional. The reason why male elites should advocate gender parity was related to personal conviction and to the political opportunity of integrating parity into the project of renewing the party, its national and regional leaderships, and its voter base. Thus, parity can be analysed not as an 'ethical burden' to parties, but as a factor of revitalisation and reconnection with the electorate. A number of issues of interest are raised by this, as well as some requiring further investigation.

Firstly, without feminist party activists, power networking within parties, as well as competition for leadership posts in organized structures in parties, in other words, without women's agency, choices and personal resources of persuasion and effectiveness, their rise in representative office would not have taken place in the way it has. A party such as the PSOE could, and probably would have, remained resistant to gender parity arguments.

Secondly, parties are the crucial vehicle for delivering the empowerment of women in *representative* politics (though not necessarily in other forms of political empowerment) both in government, state, and sub-national legislatures, and it is their internal structures that are the route to implementation of any gender parity policy. The Spanish parties differ from others in presenting examples of parties, particularly but not exclusively the PSOE, that act as facilitators rather than barriers to women in politics, as 'ushers' rather than 'bouncers'. This throws a different light on the term 'gate-keeping' to the original meaning implied in Lovenduski and Norris's work.

Thirdly, the receptiveness of leaders and the permeability of party leaderships (in this case the PSOE and to a lesser extent the Partido Popular and Izquierda Unida<sup>xvii</sup>) are key to an understanding of the advancement of women in party politics in Spain. Unwelcome as it may sound to feminist ears, male leaders matter. This is not to advocate reliance on enlightened elites and or less still on 'enlightened elitism' as a strategy for democratic progress; but to recognise that

the speed of women's political incorporation, in the Spanish case, from the traditional male authoritarian exclusion of the forty-long era of General Franco to one of only two 50/50 parity governments in Europe is due to male allies inside mainstream parties.

Fourth, perhaps even more unwelcome is the fact that particular male individuals can play a dominant role in exercising their influence. The individual role of lastingly popular and respected leaders such as Felipe González is recognised here to be a persuasive influence on other male leaders. To his name can be added that of Joaquín Almunia, head of the first parity Federal Executive Committee of the PSOE, for his role in the internal implementation of parity in the 1997-2000 period; as well as that of the current Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, in whose gift it was to appoint not only a parity cabinet, but also a strong and experienced feminist as deputy prime minister (*Vice-Presidente* María Teresa Fernández de la Vega). These leaders' endorsement of parity as a factor that silences disgruntled, frustrated male competitors (personal communications) needs to be taken into account in explaining the successful outcome of the parity project. While giving leaders credit, it is worth considering whether there were any risks involved for them. González had nothing to fear as in 1997 he had already decided to resign, but Zapatero won the PSOE leadership by only nine votes and the parliamentary election without an absolute majority.

Fourth, intra-party decision-making structures can play either a gate-keeping or a gate-opening role. The traditional socialist party's version of 'democratic centralism' with a national conference of delegates making and approving decisions that regional federations, provincial and local branches have to follow until the next conference, was shown to be important for the implementation of parity throughout the party and in candidate lists for national and autonomy elections. Further research would be needed to see how differently this works in parties with a different set of hierarchical structures.

This raises the question of masculine cultures. Lovenduski argues that when women participate in political settings, 'the most difficult obstacle is the deeply embedded culture of masculinity' (2005: 48) which makes for institutional sexism. It is difficult at present to hypothesise where this could fit the account given here. Future research could therefore usefully focus on more cultural aspects of the rapid feminisation of politics in Spain.

Lastly, should the the issue of possible *disadvantages* of quotas and parity now rise up the research agenda? While a pessimistic view of the outcome of gender parity in Spain has been mooted (Aurora Navarro, a former Madrid autonomous government leader, was quoted here), this paper has not been concerned with possible unintended consequences detrimental to the aims of women's political advancement. For instance, it is possible that the 40 % minimum will become the new 'glass ceiling'. In time, the 'new blood' of women may become the old guard; female leaders may fail to meet the public's expectations. Parity may lead male politicians to 'enforce a gendered division of political labour' in which they no longer have to take any responsibility for policy on women (Jaquette 1994:232). The point reflects concerns about the feminisation of certain political jobs (the 'reproductive ministries', Henig & Henig 2001:102), and a survey of current job titles of women ministers in Europe would provide anecdotal support for this concern. But all this belongs to another, already, well developed research area regarding the 'substantive' representation of women (Childs 2001: 173, 188) that began in the UK with Elizabeth Vallance (1979) and includes, among many, Norris & Lovenduski 1989, Norris 1996, Childs 2001, Eagle & Lovenduski 1998, Mateo Díaz 2005. The connections between this empirical research on the performance of women in office with the normative arguments for parity remain to be fully drawn out in gender research.

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<sup>i</sup> Belgium's federal government, despite parity law, is composed of 5 women and 15 men.  
<http://www.belgium.be/eportal/application?origin=navigationBanner.jsp&event=be>

<sup>ii</sup> To the extent that a reform of the system is mooted in order to make it more proportional than it is.

<sup>iii</sup> Something similar is claimed for French politics and the socialist party, where the parity debate was taken up at a time when the public was becoming disaffected and the parties needed to 'jump on the bandwagon of equality for women in politics, if they were not to lose massive support'. Also the electoral system is considered a secondary issue (Perry & Hart 2000:10).

<sup>iv</sup> See Joyce Squires (1996) and for a fuller discussion of these issues.

<sup>v</sup> Despite the fact that gates may, technically, open up as well as close off access, the image of gatekeeping mostly has constraining connotations.

<sup>vi</sup> The author is using personal memories and communications from activists at the time as sources for parts of this account.

<sup>vii</sup> personal communications of participants

<sup>viii</sup> Even though it was not thought to be unconstitutional at the time (Balaguer 2000)

<sup>ix</sup> Author was present at this conference. See also PSOE, Estatutos, late 1997 edition.

<sup>x</sup> For details and other party leaderships, see Threlfall, 2005, ch.6)

<sup>xi</sup> Calculated from data published by the Junta de Andalucía, 2004.

<sup>xii</sup> 'Almunia propone cambiar la ley electoral para que las mujeres ocupen el 40% de las candidaturas', *El País* 7.11.99, p.24.

<sup>xiii</sup> A promise he did not keep at the time (only 5 of 14 of the Junta de Andalucía's portfolios were held by women in 2001, as calculated from the names of the consejeros/as on the Junta de Andalucía's website). However, parity in public appointments is not mandatory in the PSOE, unlike for elective posts.

<sup>xiv</sup> Observations made by author during 1997 and 2000 PSOE conferences and discussions with participants.

<sup>xv</sup> The veracity of the article's report of the poll's findings was checked with the PSOE's electoral and polling studies officer (interview with Luis Pérez).

<sup>xvi</sup> 'Housewives' (amas de casa) is a survey category of the 'inactive' population which includes men but is approximately 97-98% female.

<sup>xvii</sup> This account, for reasons of space, has not been able to do full justice to developments inside these parties