Explaining Gender Parity Representation in Spain: The Internal Dynamics of Parties

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This paper sheds light on the reasons for the sudden rise of women in party politics and political representation in Spain. Structural explanations and the conditioning influence of the electoral system are reviewed before focusing on institutional and party-political explanations. It argues that the key factor in explaining this rise is not just the adoption of rules on the gender parity representation, but the intra-party politics that allows for effective implementation of such rules. Using insights into the internal dynamics of the PSOE gained from extensive field observations and interviews, it argues that high levels of female representation were secured via internal party procedures, coupled with political backing from the party leadership. The paper therefore takes the discussion on women’s participation in representative politics beyond the question of adopting quota rules into the terrain of how, instead of remaining a dead letter, it is successfully implemented in practice.

The rise to political prominence of women in Spain is as revealing of the political process as it is under-analysed. From a modest starting point in the first democratic elections, Spain has witnessed the biggest surge in female participation in parliament of all western democracies since the 1970s, gaining 30 percentage points (Caul Kittilson 2006: 139). This is all the more noteworthy when one remembers women’s forceful relegation to the private sphere during the Franco dictatorship which, at its most participatory, only allowed male ‘heads of household’ any say in decision-making. Even during the period of crafting the new democracy, prejudice typecast women as a conservative bloc¹ and a concern for the Left who feared their alleged political passivity and high rates of abstention, and the unpredictability of their last-minute voting decisions.

While the last decades of the twentieth century saw notable rises in the political presence of women around the world, Spanish trends have far outstripped a mere catching-up process. In 2002 Spain broke a record by
having both chambers of parliament presided over by a woman simultaneously – under a conservative government. By 2004 the presence of women in the lower house, the Congress of Deputies, had reached 36 per cent, a critical mass of 126 parliamentarians. In the world ranking, Spain thereby rose to seventh place, the only non-Scandinavian European country at the top, together with Rwanda. It remained at joint eighth place with Cuba in 2006 after fresh elections in Costa Rica, Sweden, Finland and Denmark (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU] 2006). Responding to his 2004 success, the new prime minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, appointed a gender-balanced cabinet of eight women and eight men, one of the very first in Europe since Gro Harlem Bruntland’s landmark Norwegian cabinet of 1986, and, together with Sweden, one of only two in Europe in 2004.2

How were Spanish women able to overtake their counterparts in many other countries to reach this noteworthy position? Why did Spain – but not other non-Scandinavian countries of the EU – experience such an unexpected phenomenon? This article sheds light on the reasons for the sudden rise of women in party politics and political representation. It first considers some of the standard explanations such as socio-economic modernisation and the electoral system, before dwelling on domestic party politics and examining the internal workings of the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party). The thrust of the argument is that the Spanish case shows that it is crucial to go beyond structural analyses and even beyond conventional institutional analyses to look at feminist agency, especially the role of party feminists working inside parties, and to examine the internal dynamics of parties. In addition it holds that this procedure is essential in order to move beyond accounts of how parties reach the decision to promote higher proportions of women to political posts via minimum quotas, into the terrain of explaining how such decisions are implemented effectively. While other research has covered some of the former – there is a burgeoning literature on women in politics and on quotas in particular – a factor analysis to explain the Spanish case and a detailed examination of the intra-party processes that ensured effective implementation are missing. This study claims to fill this gap as it takes the explanation of the rise in women’s participation in representative politics beyond quota adoption into the terrain of why, instead of remaining a dead letter, quotas are successfully implemented in practice. It also contributes in general towards an actor-centred perspective of such change, in which both the agency of women’s policy advocates, particularly those from the institutionalist socialist-feminist tradition, and the agency of political leaders is given due recognition.

Current Explanations of Women’s Representation and the Spanish Case

Structural explanations find that women’s participation in politics is to a large extent dependent on factors such as the overall development of the country, and the proportion of women in employment or in secondary
and higher education, as it is thought to reflect the general process of socio-economic modernisation. This extensive literature has most recently been re-tested by Mateo Díaz (2005), subjecting all previous findings to statistical analysis, but it uses hardly any data from Spain. Mateo Díaz builds a complex picture, concluding that socio-economic variables can indeed be related to women’s political status, and that cultural and political structures are strongly correlated with the number of women in parliament, though the effects of electoral systems were not consistent in all the tests (Mateo Díaz 2005: 81). As to the issue of the impact of socio-cultural changes and the economic advancement of women on their political presence, both were found to be effective, though it was not clear which influenced which. Socio-economic empowerment was a ‘necessary but insufficient condition to ensure political empowerment’ (Mateo Díaz 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).

Prima facie, it is striking that none of the six key supporting conditions mentioned appear to apply 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); as a country where the traditional gendered domestic division of labour has hardly evolved (Valiente 2005a: 193–6) and where women still display below-average labour market participation rates and some of the highest unemployment rates in the EU, despite having improved their socio-economic status (see Cousins 2005), Spanish women’s political empowerment should be far lower than it is. As for gaining the vote early, Mateo Díaz and Millns (2004: 283–4) found a ‘substantial correlation between the date at which women received the franchise and the number of women in parliament’ (i.e. the earlier, the more) and included Spain on the grounds that the Second Republic granted female suffrage in 1931. But the Spanish Right had been strongly against female suffrage, and under General Franco’s dictatorship a handpicked ‘organic’ assembly boasted only two women during its first eight legislative periods and no more than ten even after introducing ‘family representatives’ into the assembly. And as for the supporting condition of a proportional representation (PR) system, Spain uses it for electing the lower house and regional parliaments, but not for the Senate, and also applies the corrective of the d’Hondt method that re-introduces significant disproportionality into the final allocation of seats to parties.³

More agency-centred explanations tend to focus on the role of parties and of women’s activism in promoting women’s representation. Recent comparative studies such as those of Caul Kittilson (1999; 2006, neither
of which included Spain as a case) explore party characteristics, some of an institutional nature (organisation, rules, electoral systems) and others more squarely agent-related (ideology, leadership, activists). Caul’s 1999 multivariate regression analysis covered 68 parties, but neither the Spanish Socialist nor People’s parties. The party characteristics singled out for positively influencing party-level variation in women’s representation are: high levels of institutionalisation, a localised level of candidate nomination, leftist or post-materialistic values, and, to a lesser extent, high levels of women activists on the party’s national executive, and the presence of quotas or other rules specifically designed to increase the representation of women (Caul 1999: 93–4). Caul’s findings accord with Spanish research on the importance of quota rules, though not on other aspects of ‘institutionalisation’, nor on localised selection, as will be shown below, since national-level rules on candidate selection were key for the PSOE to advance women’s representation and also for getting more women onto the party’s Federal Executive Committee rather than the other way round, as Caul argued. Nor, indeed, do post-materialistic values fit Spain, in so far as only the smallest of the three main parties formally fits this label. The thrust of Caul Kittilson (2006) is away from sociological variables towards the political party, which is generally borne out for the Spanish case, but the model of institutional and political structures also stresses a variety of factors exogenous to the party organisation, such as party competition, electoral system rules, loss of votes and social change (Caul Kittilson 2006: 18–39).

A further broad comparative study is Krook (2004), in which four main ‘causal narratives’ in the worldwide literature (excluding Spain) are identified, and the multiplicity of actors and the diversity of the reasons involved in the adoption of quotas is stressed. It concluded that the most consistent actors across all campaigns are women’s movement organisations, at least among those who favour candidate gender quotas (Krook 2004: 62–3). Krook singles out the role of women and political elites as the first two causal narratives, which fits well with the analysis presented in this article. However, neither here nor in Krook (2005; 2006) is the role of intra-party dynamics given the prominent place in successful implementation of a quota policy that it is here. Lovenduski’s edited volume (2005a) used the different methodology of issue framing and structured comparative analysis of interactions between policy agents, advocacy activity, and policy outcomes – not geared to statistical results of factor correlation and significance – to find out whether women’s policy agencies play a role in advancing political representation. The findings that they supported women’s moment positions on how to increase it via quotas in most of the policy debates in eight West European countries and the USA (Lovenduski 2005a: 271–2) did include Spain, but the accounts are limited to three policy debates separated into three time periods, so do not serve as an explanatory account of intra-party processes nor of effective implementation.
Clearly there is a case for reviewing where the case of Spain stands in relation to at least some of these explanations, given the notable prominence of women in Spanish politics on a comparative ranking. While it is possible that Spain is simply an exception to the rule, this article proposes that there are other aspects of party organisation that explain levels of women’s representation more convincingly, namely a specific set of intra-party dynamics that led to the effective implementation of the party rule on gender quotas once these had been adopted. The issue of effective implementation via the party is a crucial factor for outcomes, as both legislation and informal agreements to promote women’s presence can be ignored, bypassed, or weakly implemented, as was the case in the UK (Caul Kittilson 2006: 75) and France (Freedman 2004). As Dahlerup and Freidenwall (2005; 2006) found, quota provisions may be merely symbolic. Their solution to implementation problems emphasises the fit between the quota and the electoral system, the rank order of candidates, and sanctions for non-compliance. But, arguably, if resistant party gatekeepers are unwilling to implement a parity rule, they will be as unwilling to apply sanctions or to pass a law making quotas obligatory. While the presence of women party activists (as a main driver) can be effective in generating movement towards the adoption of the gender representation rule (Mackay 2004), even women members of executive committees (whose presence is underscored by Caul Kittilson (2006)) cannot force through implementation of a conference decision. They may well have no direct say in candidate selection, this being usually confined to a specific party unit such as the Secretariat for Membership/Organisation or an ad hoc electoral committee. Therefore, there is little research that has attempted to factor in party decision-making structures such as policy adoption at conference time, or the way national and regional executives are themselves elected, or the role of leading male advocates, and the way these factors combine to overcome (or entrench) male resistance and allow policy to be implemented on the ground, in a way that ensures that the minimum proportion of women candidates actually gets fielded, and fielded in winnable seats, at the next election.

Modernisation of Socio-economic Structures

Analysts such as Uriarte and Ruiz (1999: 210–11) view socio-economic structures as relevant only for Greece and Portugal in the European context, discarding them 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 increasingly secular country such as the UK. Modernisation and socio-economic factors can easily be set aside for Spain after taking stock of the world rankings of women’s participation in
national houses of parliament. This showed that when there were 20 countries with at least 25 per cent of women in their lower or single houses of parliament (IPU 2002), they included Scandinavian, African, Latin American, and Eastern European states of varying levels of development. When four years later the number of countries with 25 per cent or more women had grown to 31, the range of continents and levels of development remained wide (IPU 2006). The strength of structural or developmental factors is undermined by the fact that Rwanda surpassed Sweden to become the top-ranking country in September 2003, and remained so despite Sweden having had another election in September 2006 (IPU 2006). The other eight of the top ten in 2006 were Costa Rica followed by four northern European countries, then Spain tied with Cuba at eighth place, followed by Argentina and Mozambique. Indeed, in 2002 Britain came in at 44th place and France ranked 61st for women in national legislatures (IPU 2002). For Britain, Lovenduski (2005a: 15) confirms that under-representation of women in Britain persists despite the advances in education and work of earlier decades. What is more, by 2006 the UK, the US and France had dropped to 50th, 67th and 84th place respectively: three G8 countries falling in the rankings (IPU 2006). While socio-economic interpretations might still have some value if one considers that six of the top ten countries in 2006 are members of the EU-15 (down from seven in 2005), it is more significant that major developed ‘first world’ countries are so far behind less developed ones, making an analysis that dwells chiefly on other factors crucial.

Time Lags

Related to these factors, but not identical to them, is the temporal dimension or ‘lag hypothesis’ (Lovenduski 2005a: 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 (2005a: 8) remarks in her re-statement of the argument. Mateo Díaz (2005: 40–48) has graphically shown that over a long period of time there is a marked rise in the presence of women but argues that it is, nonetheless, 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, relating it to ‘the intensification of the debates around gender issues’ (Mateo Díaz 2005: 44). She concludes that time is far from being the main factor in how women succeeded in entering politics (2005: 48).

The Spanish case does not fit the notion of a time lag, and displays a sharper rise than most other European countries – trebling from 9 to 27 percentage points over the 14-year period 1979–93. The only country
displaying a sharper rise is the UK (from 4 to 18 per cent over 15 years). In fact it has been a strategy of Spanish advocates of women’s political participation to refuse to 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 a political and social modernisation that might play in their favour. 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 modernisation 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 explanations based purely on time is any analysis of the political position of the individual parties in power during the period, and the developments inside them that transform a gradual step by step rise over time into sudden jumps.

Electoral Systems

The established research on the role of electoral systems in facilitating or constraining women’s access to parliamentary assemblies contends that they are a ‘crucial enabling condition’ (Henig and Henig 2001: 93 amongst others) and ‘an integral component in explaining women’s representation’ (Caul 1999: 84). Proportional representation list systems have been identified as more favourable for getting women elected than single-member plurality systems (Caul 1999; Matland and Studlar 1996). However, in the Spanish case the effect of the electoral system is far less apparent. The Spanish upper house Senate (Senado) uses a four-member plurality (‘majoritarian’) system requiring voters to choose individual candidates, while the lower house Congress of Deputies (Congreso) uses a proportional representation list system together with the d’Hondt method of seat allocation that somewhat over-represents the seats of leading parties. Therefore the effect of both systems can be compared. Women’s presence in the Spanish lower chamber rose to a higher level than that of Britain and France as soon as democracy returned. This suggests that the use of ‘reinforced’ PR in medium to large multi-member constituencies was clearly not a restraining factor, confirming in a general way Norris’s comparative findings on electoral systems (Norris 1993: 312–14). Furthermore, more women entered the lower house than the Senate with its four-member plurality system, where they remain under-represented. It can be surmised that the requirement for voters to select and tick the name of a woman candidate from a long list ordered alphabetically may make them less likely to pick women over men, thus possibly confirming the impact of the electoral system. Matland and Studlar (1996) refer to the lower opportunity cost to incumbent males of fielding women in multi-member PR systems.

Nonetheless, an ‘enabling’ electoral system only creates opportunities and it is up to the political parties who control candidate selection to use them.
Spain offers an interesting insight into this question: there have been relatively more conservative party women in the Senate than in the Congress despite the latter’s PR system (30 per cent vs. 25 per cent). This shows that outcomes also depend on the party’s selection of the candidates to field, independently of the electoral system (as also emphasised by Caul 1999), and that candidate selections are governed by political considerations. Stronger evidence that it is crucial to look beyond the electoral system in Spain is the fact that in the first four legislatures of the Congress and Senate (1977–86), heralded as a great period of change in Spanish politics, women continued to be poorly represented under both PR and majoritarian systems, remaining below the European average until the second half of the 1980s. Then they suddenly forged ahead in 1989. Therefore the Spanish case leads us to look beyond static institutional factors, towards dynamic political factors, such as historical periods and critical junctures.

Critical Junctures, Party Disarray and Windows of Opportunity

Another type of explanation for the political empowerment of women contains elements of structure and of agency. The identification of critical political junctures derives from earlier work on women in revolutionary organisations (e.g. Eisen 1984), which found that surges in women’s political empowerment were associated with periods of disarray of parties, or a period of revolutionary upsurge, as echoed in the conclusions of Fisher (1993) referring to Latin America, and Nelson and Chowdury (1994) for a wide selection of countries from around the world. Critical political junctures are seen to provide entry points for women into politics as well as policy gains, but, crucially, women are later deprived of some of their gains when parties become re-established or when revolutionary change stabilises (Fisher 1993: 106–7). Typically, the moment passes and the zeal for change wanes. It is a view that tends to see women’s advancement as cyclical with little if any long-term gain. In terms of numbers of women representatives in Spain, Table 1 helps to distinguish the movement over time and across parties.

As can be seen from the table, the figures for the lower house Congress of Deputies that uses the reinforced PR system show that in the 1989 election the proportion of women more than doubled to 14.6 per cent, and that this was achieved mainly via the PSOE which was able to get 34 women elected. In the following election of 1993, the People’s Party (PP) joined the PSOE in fielding sufficient women candidates to obtain 21 seats for them, 16 per cent of the total. From then onwards the rise was continuous in all three main nationwide parties, though at different rates. It is particularly notable that 46 women were elected for the PSOE in 2000 despite it losing an election in which a substantial number of seats went to the PP. For its part, in 2004 the PP also augmented its percentage of women in Congress (29) despite losing the election. Does this reflect the critical junctures theory? Arguably, the
| Parliamentary group | Constituent Assembly 1977–79 | Legislature I 1979–82 | II 1982–86 | III 1986–89 | IV 1989–93 | V 1993–96 | VI 1996–2000 | VII 2000–04 | VIII 2004– | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|-----|----|
| AP/CP/PP<sup>1</sup> conservative | 1 | 6.3 | 1 | 11.0 | 2 | 1.9 | 8 | 7.6 | 10 | 9.3 | 21 | 14.9 | 22 | 14.1 | 45 | 24.6 | 43 | 29 |
| UCD/CDS<sup>2</sup> | 7 | 4.2 | 10 | 6.0 | 0 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | – |
| PSOE Socialists | 10 | 8.5 | 5 | 4.0 | 18 | 8.9 | 13 | 7.1 | 34 | 19.4 | 28 | 17.6 | 39 | 27.6 | 46 | 36.8 | 76 | 46.3 |
| PCE/IU Communist Party. 1986 > United Left | 3 | 15.0 | 2 | 8.7 | – | – | – | – | 2 | 11.8 | 4 | 22.2 | 7 | 33.3 | 2 | 25.0 | 2 | 40 |
| Total<sup>3</sup> elected to Congress No. & %/350 | 21 | 6.0 | 20 | 5.7 | 18 | 5.1 | 23 | 6.5 | 51 | 14.6 | 56 | 16 | 77 | 22 | 99 | 28.3 | 127 | 36.3 |

**Notes:** – means not applicable. <sup>1</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>UCD was dissolved and one sector launched CDS. <sup>3</sup>Figures are given at the time of elections, not later during the legislature, when substitutions of deputies may have occurred. Total in Congress includes small parties not analysed, and is given over the maximum of 350 deputies.

**Sources:** Own compilation using: 1977: Cases et al. (1978). 1979: de Esteban and López Guerra (1979). 1982 and 1986: Instituto de la Mujer (1992: 58), Instituto de la Mujer (1990: 45). 1993 and 1996: Ministry of Social Affairs press release, 7 March 1996, and Servicio de Información del Congreso de los Diputados, personal communication. 2000: personal communications from parties and Congress, and Instituto de la Mujer website. 2004: PSOE, Secretaría de Igualdad, http://www.psoe.es/ambito/igualdad/docs/index.do?action=List&apt=8783.
break with the dictatorship did give Spanish women’s organisations substantial political opportunities for making a mark on policy and law (see Threlfall et al. 2005). But Table 1 shows that their presence in parliament did not follow the ‘critical juncture’ pattern, which should have led to greater political representation in the 1970s instead of 20 years later.

Major institutional reform has been underlined for the UK as providing ‘windows’ or moments of opportunity for political actors (Mackay 2004: 108). Caul Kittilson (2006: 18) calls opportunity structures the key to women’s access. In Spain, four democratic elections from 1977 to 1986 allowed the PSOE to gain control of an increasing number of public posts and offer hundreds of its activists a new career in politics and the likelihood of public recognition – a clear window of opportunity by any criteria. But the activists were mainly male, so this was not the period that provided opportunities for a new cohort of women representatives: for ten years they gained no more than 5–6 per cent of seats in Congress (see first four columns, Table 1). In fact, the recruitment of women occurred in a period not of upsurge, but of the slow electoral decline of the PSOE (from 44.4 per cent in 1986 to 39.8 per cent in 1989, 38.7 per cent in 1993, 37.6 per cent in 1996 and 34.2 per cent in 2000) and of political divisions within the party. And while the electoral years 1989 and 2000 cannot be characterised as of ‘general upheaval’, they nonetheless both provided inflection points for women: the PSOE lost both elections but still increased its proportion of women representatives. Furthermore, the trends are not the same for each party, which they should be were political environment factors the key. Women representatives for the PP have increased their presence in a more ad hoc fashion than the PSOE, with marked increases only occurring in the last two elections. The presence of women for the Communist party and United Left has fluctuated, but has also risen steadily from 1996.

Thus it appears that in Spain women’s presence is mainly associated with the left-wing parties, especially the PSOE, an observation made for other countries in the literature. What this association consists of is a subject that needs further investigation, and an in-depth analysis of the relevant elements in the internal dynamics of the PSOE is presented in the next section. A focus on the internal dynamics of parties will provide a more convincing explanation of how Spanish women increased their political representation so quickly and effectively.

**The Internal Dynamics of Parties – Spain and the PSOE**

Thus the search for explanations of women’s rising presence in formal political representation must turn the spotlight on to what occurs inside political parties. Some of this terrain, namely that of political recruitment, has been explored by Norris and Lovenduski (1995) and Norris (1997), who compare countries other than Spain. Yet in a recent review of the state of the discipline, the ‘uncertain dynamics’ of party responses to feminist
interventions were identified as an area for future research (Mackay 2004: 106). Arguably, the ‘secret garden’ inside parties (Gallagher and Marsh, cited in Mackay 2004: 106) has still not been well explored, in the UK or Spain. This article explores how key dynamics around gender representation, beyond political recruitment, can help to explain the distinctive presence of women in party politics in Spain. For reasons of space, given that the process spans nearly two decades, only the PSOE will be studied in some depth. Party developments will be studied in two parts. The first leads up to adoption of 40/60 parity as a formal party rule, and the following key elements will be highlighted: the influence of a feminist lobby and the work of party feminists inside the PSOE, the attractiveness for feminists of ‘importing’ the concept of gender parity into Spain, their claims for gender parity, and the response of successive party leaders Felipe González, Joaquín Almunia and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The second phase, de facto successful implementation of the parity policy, is here considered crucial for actually achieving large rises in women’s presence in political office, and is analysed in some detail in order to reveal why and how the accepted policy was translated into actual seats for women.

Spanish Parties and the Adoption of Gender Parity

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 around initial quotas for women. Moving to a quota system signifies a departure from the traditional liberal understanding of representation towards an endorsement of a ‘microcosm’ conception of representation (Squires 1996: 81, 87), in which there is fair group presence. At other times the terms ‘descriptive’ (e.g. Chaney and Fевre 2002; McKay 2004: 100; Caul Kittilson 2006) and ‘social’ (Squires 1999: 203) or ‘sociological’ representation (Schroedel and Mazumdar 1998) have been applied.4 In Spain, a consensus around an explanation highlighting women’s agency and the adoption of quotas has emerged among key researchers (e.g. Gallego 1994; Martínez-Hernández and Elizondo 1997; Barbadillo Griñán et al. 1990; Federación de Mujeres Progresistas 1996; Threlfall 2005; Valiente 2005b). This is comparable to Scandinavian countries where high proportions of women in the lower house were achieved after the adoption by some parties of a 40 per cent quota in the 1970s, and after later legislation to oblige parties to pursue gender balance (Porter 1998: 29) and is also shown in the case studies of the IDEA project reports5 and Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2005).

The PSOE was the first to adopt a 25 per cent quota in 1988,6 and the first to make the case for 40/60 gender parity in 1997. The leftist Izquierda Unida adopted a quota later in the 1990es (Izquierda Unida, undated) and their numbers of women deputies also rose. By contrast, the People’s Party did not endorse the quota principle, with high-ranking female politicians calling
it ‘discrimination’ and ‘the Wonderbra quota’ (Jenson and Valiente 2003: 86), and female representation remained markedly lower than in the quota parties (see Table 1). It was only in 2000 that it fielded more women and an unexpectedly large majority enabled it to catch up. Its change of tack has been interpreted as a ‘response effect’ (Uriarte and Ruiz 1999: 211) and ‘mimetic behaviour’ (Valiente 2001: 58), and can be compared with 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). The PP’s version, according to their former President of the Congress of Deputies, Luisa Fernanda Rudí, was that the move towards promoting women in political office was initiated in 1986 by their former leader, the ex-Francoist Manuel Fraga, when he declared that there simply had to be more women on party lists (Rudí 2001). In other words, it was also the result of a party decision of a different kind.

In this leader/follower competitive dynamic, it is key to understand how the PSOE took the lead, since it made an impact on the other parties. ‘Feminist agency’ in general is recognised in existing research and for Spain. Valiente (2005b: 174–94) shows up the alliances and links between, and overlap of, actors in the women’s movement, the state policy agency, and the party feminist group who pressed for quotas in Spain using a number of existing studies (Threlfall 1985; 1996; 1998; Gallego 1994; Jenson and Valiente 2003) and concludes they were successful while the PSOE was in power but not under the People’s Party despite concerted pressure. But there is little information about the specific activities of women inside parties, nor why parties either respond to or ignore such pressures. Here the case of a traditional labour party such as the PSOE, formed in 1879, is revealing. With its roots in Marxism and Spanish labour, and the cumulative impact of the Second Republic, the civil war, and decades of Francoist dictatorship, the PSOE at the start of the 1980s remained a 90 per cent male party with strongly motivated male gatekeepers (Threlfall 1984) – the bearers of its historic legacies, the sons of the defeated, the exiled and the dead. Yet in a period of decline, far from ousting any women to consolidate male allies and networks, male leaders in power gave in to feminist demands for greater presence of women, risking a backlash among male incumbents.7 This is the unexpected behaviour that needs explaining.

The Role of Party Feminists in the PSOE in Furthering the Adoption of Gender Parity

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 to political office, though it has often been seen as having a
constraining function (such as in the case of Britain) or a gatekeeping role, rather than overtly facilitating women’s participation. Lovenduski (2005a: 57) states that the work of equalising men’s and women’s representation must begin in the political parties and sees it as a difficult process. This work is carried out by women’s policy lobbies and caucuses inside parties and party factions, and by informal alliances and networks of women across parties. Thus agency can be attributed to particular groups of women and individuals inside parties.

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 women, specifically party feminists advocating greater prominence for women (Threlfall 1998). The lack of women in political posts had been criticised by the PSOE feminist caucus Mujer y Socialismo, and the quota idea discussed since 1979 (Threlfall 1979), with slow progress being made. When the then deputy secretary-general of the PSOE, Alfonso Guerra, was presented with a list of names of women willing to be candidates in the 1979 election, his reaction was far from welcoming (Mayte Gallego, member of Mujer y Socialismo, personal communication). But the quota idea did not go away: it was challenging yet intrinsically attractive to party feminists, and was becoming legitimate for democratic-socialists as it was being discussed at the Socialist International. The main agent identified here as taking the lead on the need for greater political representation is the party feminist group, as distinct from women in a party or party women who are not organised as feminist policy advocates, and distinct also from women in non-party organisations and lobbies. Non-party feminists were, by their nature, less interested in gaining party political office, and the women’s movement had a number of other pressing policy concerns affecting different categories of women. The national and regional women’s policy agencies had not yet been set up; even by 1987, the Instituto de la Mujer’s first action plan did not mention the need for greater political representation and the second one for 1993–95, while addressing the under-representation of women, did not advance the quota or parity idea (Instituto de la Mujer 1987; 1993). While Valiente (2005b) has argued that party feminists were later aided by the presence of a women’s policy agency, the first discussions and documents came from inside the party and from sister parties of the Socialist International. As the process of increasing female representation took so long, it is not possible in the space of this article to recount the full story, so it will cover essential points in support of the contention that intra-party dynamics, the agency of Spanish and international party feminists, and persuadable PSOE party leaders account for the decision to adopt the gender parity principle, and the internal workings of the PSOE account for its effective implementation. Space also constrains the account to focus on the ‘how’ rather than the ‘why’ questions such as the motivations of party leaders (e.g. gaining more votes).
The Parity Idea and International Socialist Feminism

The development of strategies for political inclusion by the international feminist movement 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 when the PS fielded 30 per cent of women candidates in the 1979 European Parliamentary election and invited sister parties for the launch of the campaign. The PS had been persuaded by its own feminist network, headed at the time by Yvette Roudy, the main force behind the later creation of the French Ministry for Women in 1981, and including Véronique Neiertz, who later became the PS’s Secrétaire Nationale and a cabinet minister. In addition, the French feminist deputy Gisele Halimi unsuccessfully launched a proposal in 1982 for a 25/75 gender quota law for the municipal elections (Ramsay 2003: 66).

These events in the French Socialist Party considerably influenced the 1980s debate among feminists in the PSOE (observation in situ and personal communications of participants), who hoped that the French example could persuade the PSOE leaders. Flush with its 1981 electoral success, the French party was a reference point that could be held up to legitimate the feminists’ demand for political representation. The party feminists were also sensitised via their participation in the Socialist International’s women’s section, Socialist International Women (SIW). A delegate from the PSOE group regularly went to the SIW meetings where discussions were held with party feminists from the French, German, Dutch, Swedish and British sister parties, amongst others (Socialist International Women 1995). References to international debates continued to be a feature of the Spanish debate (Valiente 2005b: 176).

International feminists and party feminists can also be seen as responsible for provoking a second take-off moment for women’s political representation in Spain in the second half of the 1990s with the demand for gender parity representation of a minimum of 40 per cent and a maximum of 60 per cent men or women in party-controlled elective posts. 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: 445). The Spanish case also moved in two cycles, but without legislation, only party decisions. The second cycle was also influenced by the parallel European discussion of the 1990s, according to Micaela Navarro (2000: 247), the PSOE spokeswoman, and the renewed efforts of Halimi and the Groupe Parité 2000 in France (see Halimi 1994) and of the party feminists around Yvette Roudy (Ramsay 2003: 70, 72). The Socialist International’s council, of which the PSOE is a member and Felipe González was a vice-president, in turn pressured by its women’s section, Socialist International Women, in which
the PSOE party feminists such as Carmen Mestre and Dolores Renau had been active, was by 1994 asking all its parties to increase their women candidates by a minimum of 10 per cent in every election, with the goal of 50/50 gender parity by 2000 (Socialist International Women 1995: 7). On 11 February 1994, the European Parliament, at the instigation of the Socialist Group, had invited the member states to undertake specific action to achieve a balanced participation of women in decision-making bodies (EP 1994). This was the context for the PSOE’s second policy cycle starting in the same year with a motion at the 33rd party conference approving the policy. Finally, the PSOE’s 34th Conference in 1997 amended the party’s statutes to institute parity (observations in situ; amended statutes published later). These were the party-political decisions, both at international and national level, involving both male leaders and feminist party activists, which soon led to marked increases in political representation for women.

Intra-party Politics and the Effective Implementation of Gender Parity in the PSOE

The next issue is therefore the question of how a party decision on gender parity representation was implemented effectively. Some parties are willing to proclaim the principle but are in practice ‘reluctant to tie their hands’ (Meir 2004: 591). In France, the quota did not produce the desired effects (Lovecy 2000: 446–7). Yet the PSOE’s 25 per cent goal was a successful first step that kicked off slow-moving and consistent progress (see Table 1). It was the proverbial ‘foot in the door’ that would later prise open the gates (Celia Valiente, personal communication). Others consider that the more surprising political decision was the second cycle adoption of 60/40 parity, because rather than being discussed as an interim, temporary measure, it was presented to the PSOE’s conference delegates first as a principle and then as an amendment to the party’s constitution (statutes).13 By contrast, in Belgium, parties were reluctant to introduce such far-reaching measures, and were even more hesitant when it came to legally imposed ones (Meir 2004: 592). Effective implementation of a parity decision by a party is arguably a crucial second step that follows the initial success of feminist agency in gaining the adoption of quotas, because full, rather than half-hearted, implementation in and by the PSOE can explain the particularly large rise in women members of parliament in Spain. Analysis of effective implementation also allows for male resistance and gatekeeping to be explored.

The amendment to the PSOE’s statutes at its 34th Conference of 1997 was implemented immediately for the election of the (nationwide) Federal Executive Committee (FEC). Fourteen women (13 would have been just under 40 per cent) were included on the list of candidates.14 This immediate move by conference to implement its policy showed that the commitment was serious. Yet previous research would lead one to expect resistance from
male gatekeepers. Again precise party internal dynamics, rules and leadership endorsement can provide an explanation. Firstly, in the PSOE, party statutes rule over proceedings, so that an amendment to statutes is difficult to flout in a mass gathering. Secondly, there was a willingness to comply, as parity had been publicly endorsed by a legitimate leader, Felipe González, who had been prime minister for 14 years, and party leader for 23. When he resigned during the 1997 Conference, gender parity became part of his outgoing legacy, as the executive had annexed a document written by a socialist-leaning women’s group calling for a new social contract between women and men to their official report (see PSOE 1997a: 209–17). Had he been a discredited leader in the eyes of the party, parity might have been ignored by his successor. The third key factor was that his successor, Joaquín Almunia, a long-standing member of the executive and former cabinet minister, was also personally convinced that gender parity was desirable (personal communication). Fourth, implementation was facilitated by conference proceedings and long-standing consensual practices for electing the incoming Federal Executive Committee. These allowed the number of women committee members to expand without this requiring conference delegates to actively side with women candidates against males in an individual competition for selection.

This last factor requires some careful observation of intra-party processes. To get no fewer than 14 women onto the national Executive Committee did not require them to be elected as individuals by conference delegates. They stood as part of a complete team (list) of candidates for the committee – traditionally prepared by each aspiring secretary-general (observations in situ). Since 1976, as there was a pre-existing consensus around an unchallenged leader (González), there has been only one list of candidates, but if there were two, both would obtain a proportion of seats on the executive (PSOE 1997b: 5, Article 5). The team(s) is put together during extensive negotiations in the corridors of the conference sessions. The inclusion of women on any aspiring party leader’s list is both facilitated by the freedom to select political allies before being elected, and constrained by the need to include representatives of the majority of internal political tendencies and regional party organisations in order to gain enough delegate votes. As conference delegates individually vote in, or reject, the whole team (PSOE 1998: 15), some of the aspiring leader’s preferred choices will be negotiated off the list before the ballot, during the search for a consensus among key players such as the heads of the party delegations from each regional branch (federación). If satisfied, these leaders may then ask and even instruct their delegates to back the agreed list of candidates in the election of the Federal Executive Committee, but the ballot is secret. In this context, party leaders were able in 1997 to effect a consensual implementation of a minimum of 40 per cent women in the PSOE’s top leadership. This method avoids the need for individual women to build up a power base throughout the party and be chosen as popular individuals by the delegates.
In other words, women candidates are able to avoid this gatekeeping process in the PSOE’s method for national leadership selection.

Thus, when parity is 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 find 40 per cent of women can be accommodated in these negotiations, much as previous conferences of the PSOE had already accommodated the search for 25 per cent of women. Evidently, male aspirants’ chances were reduced. While there is no research on whether they have resented the arrival of more women, the point is that resistance to implementation at this level 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 executive leadership. Parity benefited from the consensual method based on team-building rather than individual competition that reigned at the time. In the party conference of 2000, four leaders competed for the post of secretary-general and the winner, bound, by then, by the parity rule, negotiated a team with 47 per cent of women for the top tier of the Executive Commission (observation in situ; PSOE 2000).

Sub-national Intra-party Implementation

The preceding account explained how a 40 per cent women’s representation in party leadership at national (federal) level of one party was achieved. It is also necessary to fill in the links that lead from national party leadership to the national parliament. These links show that it is party structures, specifically sub-national structures, that are responsible for implementing gender parity at the regional and provincial levels by determining the presence of sufficient women candidates in each province-constituency, and the goal of parity representation can run aground if these links do not function in a facilitative way. It is possible to imagine an enlightened national leadership unable to convince its regional and provincial parties of the merits of the gender parity principle, and regional and provincial politicians putting up resistance. Identification of the links in a chain of decisions running from the national-level organ (at which the original policy is adopted) to the constituency-level decisions to field sufficient women for parity to be effectively achieved in outcome, is often missed out in the literature.

The following section strengthens the contention that internal party structures can play a more crucial role in explaining the rise of women in politics than previously recognised. In the case of the PSOE, potential obstructions in the chain are overcome by the peculiarities of internal party organisation and decision-making The PSOE’s internal structures have been characterised as ‘delegatory’ (Hopkin 2001). They are, on paper, not unlike
those of democratic-centralism as practised by communist parties, except that the PSOE has an interim weak parliament (the Federal Committee) that theoretically oversees the Federal Executive between conferences. The latter is formally the supreme decision-making body. Before conference, a framework document drafted by the outgoing Federal Executive circulates for discussion by party members. Amendments or alternative papers are circulated and submitted; and delegates to conferences vote on resolutions and a framework political document (observations in situ). A policy or rule change agreed at conference has been agreed by the whole party. On this principle, regional party organisations hold conferences after the nationwide conference because they are not sovereign decision-making bodies. Therefore, in 1997, they could not challenge the new gender parity rule directly, though they could resist it, alleging, for instance, a scarcity of women candidates, or raise new arguments to counter it. In fact, the parity policy was implemented fairly effectively, as 37 per cent (232) of the 628 members of PSOE’s Regional and Nationality Executive Committees were women by 1998 as were 39 per cent (386) of the 988 members of Provincial Executive Commissions (Secretaría de Participación de la Mujer 1998: 38, 45), within six months of adoption. While the PSOE has been characterised both as faction-driven (Gillespie 1989; 1994) and as highly disciplined (Hopkin 2001: 355), in this case there was a fairly even spread (ranging from 35 per cent to 43 per cent) of women’s presence in Executive Committees across 18 regional, 30 provincial, and dozens of county and island organisations, despite their known political differences and the uneven presence of factions.

This progress reveals just how far effective implementation of gender parity in sub-national organisations was dependent on it having been the subject of a national-level decision taken democratically over two party conferences that also benefited from sufficient consensus to avoid becoming a fault-line of division in the factional struggles taking place at the time. Despite this fact, the small shortfall from the 40 per cent minimum was considered a sign of resistance on the part of some sub-national party leaders (Micaela Navarro, PSOE Secretary for women’s participation, personal communication). While the whole process could be interpreted as ultimately driven from a notional ‘above’, it is crucial to unpick who ‘the top’ is composed of. The national leadership in a federal party such as the PSOE tends to be a nationwide group drawn from a range of sub-national party federations, particularly those with leaderships legitimated by winning elections to the autonomous community parliaments and to major city councils. When this occurs, policy from above is also policy from below.

Candidate Selection

The next step in the process through which parity was implemented effectively is candidate selection. This is important for understanding how women get to reach public office as parliamentarians in both the national
parliament and autonomous regional assemblies. For the party organisations in the provinces and regional federations are involved in the selection of candidates for public office, together with members of the Federal Executive Committee. Under the Spanish list system, seats are allocated through the d’Hondt method to the top names on each party’s list. Candidates need to be ranked sufficiently high up to have a chance of being allocated a seat in their particular constituency, since list length varies by the size of population in each.

After the 1997 parity decision, the PSOE fielded in total 171 women (49 per cent 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 estimated winnable positions on the lists, they had been given 42 per cent of the winnable positions, a little more than the minimum requirement. While this favoured a positive parity-compliant outcome, the election went badly for the PSOE and only 46 of the 72 ‘likelies’ won a seat, but the PSOE still managed to increase their proportion of women in parliament over 1996 (see Table 1), despite losing the election. While gender parity was not the outcome, as this depends on voter choices, the party had implemented the policy correctly by putting enough women in seats that were ‘winnable’ unless the party’s vote dropped substantially. Had the party obtained a similar amount of seats as in the previous elections, it would certainly have achieved its (non-obligatory) target outcome of 40 per cent or more PSOE women deputies. By the time of the 2004 election, both a better positioning of the female candidates and a large increase of votes for the PSOE led to gender parity compliance in seats as well as candidates. At the time of writing, the PSOE had 75 women deputies, 47 per cent of its total, nearing absolute 50/50 parity.

Gender Parity in Regional Assemblies

Women’s representation in sub-national assemblies is also an indicator of effective implementation. This channel is also controlled by party branches and internal structures in most western democracies, so there is a need to pinpoint elements of sub-national party politics that favoured effective implementation. A selection of two of the PSOE’s regional results are analysed here, as they serve to underline how internal factors such as the position of regional leaders can enhance or subvert a gender parity rule.

In the elections to the regional parliament of Andalucía, the PSOE fielded sufficient women candidates in winnable positions for them to take 49 per cent of the party’s seats in 2004. On winning, the Andalusian president, the socialist Manuel Chaves named a female-dominated cabinet of eight women and six men – 57 per cent. Thus one of Spain’s least developed and least industrialised 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 per cent of the
PSOE’s deputies were women (2005), despite the party winning an overall majority. Furthermore, the Socialist president of Extremadura appointed only three women out of ten to his cabinet – 30 per cent (Junta de Extremadura 2005). These two examples reveal, 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;22 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 current Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, whereas the Andalucian leader Manuel Chaves is also the PSOE’s federal president and a member of the Federal Executive Committee, and part of the González and the post-González eras. This underscores the importance of individual actors and their degree of commitment to parity, for achieving effective implementation. Evidently, a more systematic study of all 17 autonomous communities would require more than the space of this article affords.

Party Leadership

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 in the 1990s, women activists in parties had to threaten to take their party to court for non-compliance with the electoral law on candidates. So the ‘willingness to act in good faith’ as Jones (2000: 44) puts it, is key and raises the issue of sustainability. Political representation of women may be vulnerable to hostile Executive Committees and party national figureheads. As argued here, Spanish women’s political advancement rested initially on party feminists’ ability to persuade both the PSOE Federal Executive before the 1988 conference, and other regional federations of the merits of their case. Some consider this to be unstable and lacking in the guarantees that a public law would provide (Balaguer 2000: 53). True, the Socialist Andalucian leader Manuel Chaves promised in 1999 that if he won the autonomy elections, 50 per cent of his new government would be composed of women (El País, 7 November 1999: 24) but did not comply at the time.23 Though he did five years later. True, the PSOE leader, Joaquín Almunia, announced his intention in August 1998 to see Spanish election law amended to ensure all parties fielded no more than 60 per cent of parliamentary candidates of the same sex, but the bill was not presented (Valiente 2005b: 187; Jenson and Valiente 2003: 85). The same announcement was made in November 1999 (EFE 1999: 24), but the bill was finally presented only in November 2001 (Valiente 2005b: 189).
Nonetheless, gender parity representation progressed without legislation in Spain. The PSOE Party Conference of July 2000 saw the post of party leader (general-secretary) contested by two women out of four candidates, 50/50 parity. By the time of the national elections of 2004, obstruction of the rule by any gatekeepers had waned, as all parties fielded increased numbers of women. Leadership willingness, as opposed to legislative obligation, was incontrovertibly illustrated by the new Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero when he appointed eight men and eight women to his cabinet even though these are discretionary appointments not subject to the parity rule. The Spanish case shows that a party rule can be akin to a law, and given broad leadership support, is an effective tool of implementation. It suggests that laws that are not fully backed by electorates or party leaders can be less effective than a party rule that commands a consensus among party and government leaders and is seen to be endorsed by them in practice. Yet Zapatero’s commitment has gone further. Despite being rejected by the conservative majority in parliament in 2003, the PSOE maintains its intention to legislate for parity (PSOE 2006: 34) and has already approved a draft law.

Conclusion

This study set out to explain how far the case of Spain fits in with existing theories regarding the increase of women representatives in party political and elective office since it had not been covered by most previous comparative work. After examining the role of socio-economic structural factors such as modernisation, political structures such as the electoral system, and political environments such as critical political junctures and opportunities, the article argued that agent-centred explanations, particularly those highlighting the role of the women’s movement and of party initiatives on quota and parity representation, were strongly supported by researchers and by the data for Spain. It highlighted the leading role of the PSOE in pushing up the numbers and the proportions of women in the Congress of Deputies. With regard to the origins of the quota and parity idea, observation in situ and interviews with participants established that it came to Spain firstly from France and then through the Socialist International and SI Women, through the socialist and social democratic party networks. Within the PSOE, a group of party feminists first established in 1977 took the arguments forward. By the mid-to-late 1990s key party leaders were persuaded of the merits of 40/60 parity and helped get the policy through conference.

The article also set out to show how effective implementation of the parity decision was the only way to ensure that substantial increases in the numbers of women representatives were actually achieved. Focusing on the internal decision-making process of the PSOE around the party conference, the election of the Executive Committee, the lines of hierarchy between the
federal and regional levels, and the placing of women candidates in winnable seats, added to the driving role of national and regional party leaders, all contribute to explaining how effective implementation was achieved in a party that had remained well over 80 per cent male into the 1980s. Thereby parts of the ‘black hole’ or ‘secret garden’ of internal party dynamics has been opened up for the case of the PSOE.

The first conclusion is that without feminist party activists and their networking within parties, in other words, without women’s agency, choices and personal resources of persuasion and political effectiveness, the rebalancing of representative office would not have take place. The PSOE, like the conservative People’s Party could have remained resistant to the arguments about ‘fast-tracking’ mechanisms (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005) of women into political office, or let the policy die on the vine. Therefore the figure of the party feminist activist, as distinct from the more amorphous women’s movement, from women members of national party executives, from leaders of national policy agencies for the advancement of women, and from the simple presence of a generic critical mass of women party members, deserves further research both in Spanish and in other parties.

Secondly, parties are the crucial vehicle for delivering the empowerment of women in _representative_ politics in government, state, and sub-national legislatures, and it is party internal structures that provide a route to effective implementation of gender-balanced representation. 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’, even when they do so, like the PP, late in the day while denying the usefulness of quotas and rejecting the sociological/descriptive representation they embody. This throws a different light on the term ‘gatekeeping’ in the original meaning implied in Lovenduski and Norris’s work. As Caul Kittilson (2006: 135) concluded, on the whole ‘women’s efforts were matched by party responses’. Further comparative research would be needed to see how different party decision-making processes work in this regard, especially in the case of newer parties with less complex structures and rules than traditional social democratic ones like the PSOE, as it can be hypothesised that the less rigid or cumbersome the party decision-making is, the more dependent quota advocates are on currying favour with leaders, and falling out of favour with them too.

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) 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 male elites as a strategy for women’s representation, but to recognise their role in the speed with which women’s incorporation into politics was
effected once they had been persuaded of the case. Indeed, particular male individuals can play a crucial role. A lastingly popular and respected leader such as Felipe González was a persuasive figure, especially after his ‘conversion’ to the need for greater political participation of women; and the commitment of Joaquín Almunia, head of the first parity Federal Executive Committee of the PSOE during the internal implementation of parity in the 1997–2000 period, should be recognised, as well as that of 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 silenced disgruntled, frustrated male competitors (personal communication), and so need to be taken into account in explaining the successful outcome of the parity project.

As to other issues raised by this research, there is the question of substantive representation (Childs 2001: 173, 188; Mackay 2004, amongst others), in other words the substantiation of women’s representative presence into policy that confers equity on gender relations. Is it of value, normatively speaking, to achieve ‘mere’ presence if women representatives then make little effort to develop equality policy? A critical numerical threshold helps, but so does the quality of subsequent action, as Raaum (2005) found. The question of masculine cultures as obstacles to substantive representation is a linked issue. A survey of the gender-balanced Swedish parliament in 2004 found that 60 per cent of women MPs felt that they were treated less favourably by their male colleagues (Ekselius and Olsson 2004). Łoventuski (2005b: 48) argues that when women participate in political settings, ‘the most difficult obstacle is the deeply embedded culture of masculinity’ which makes for institutional sexism. Future research could therefore usefully focus on these aspects of the rapid feminisation of politics in Spain.

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**Notes**

1. A study by the Radical member of the Spanish parliament in the 1930s, Clara Campoamor (1981[1936]), found this was not in fact the case but it was published shortly before the outbreak of the civil war in 1936.
2. This was soon followed by Austria in 2005. Strictly speaking, only Sweden's complies with full 50/50 parity including the prime minister, as Spain’s is 9-8 if Zapatero is included. Compare with Belgium's federal government, which despite a law on parity, is composed of 5 women and 15 men. http://www.belgium.be/eportal/application?origin=navigation Banner.jsp&event=be
3. To the extent that a reform of the system is mooted in order to make it more proportional than it is.

4. ‘Descriptive’ is equal to numerical representation in some accounts, meaning the higher the numbers, the better – on grounds of equality, justice and fairness (Mackay 2004: 100). ‘Sociological’ and ‘social’ representation are similar, and emphasise the need for institutions of governance to reflect the social composition of the population, at least to some extent.

5. See the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, http://idea.int/gender/quotas.cfm

6. Author observation and interviews at PSOE Congress, Madrid, 1988.

7. 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’. The electoral system is considered a secondary issue in Perry and Hart (2000: 10).

8. Despite the fact that gates may, technically, open up as well as close off access, the image of gatekeeping mostly has constraining connotations.

9. While this distinction is common in of feminist activists’ language, differences in behaviour are well illustrated in the Finnish case (Caul Kittilson 2006: 103–17).

10. So much was women’s political participation a left-wing party feminist issue, that the nationalist Convergence and Union party running the Catalan autonomous government had no mention of it in either of its equality plans for 1989–92 and 1994–96 (Generalitat de Catalunya 1989; 1994).

11. The author is using personal memories and communications from activists of the period as sources for parts of this account.

12. Discussion in the SI on increasing representation continues to this day (see SI Women website: http://www.socintwomen.org.uk/members/).

13. Author was present at this conference. See also PSOE, Estatutos, late 1997 edition.

14. This account is based on direct observations, recorded by the author in 1997.

15. It is possible for parties to flout their own rules when the internal political culture allows for such behaviour by leaders and conference organisers. From observation in situ at party conferences, in the case of the PSOE the rules on conference proceedings are applied by a presiding board (mesa) of conference delegates elected by the delegates at the start of conference, and this election has in fact always taken place – which does not mean that there is no political competition to dominate the proceedings and policy outcomes.

16. González is considered by PSOE party feminists to have had a gradual change of heart over the feminist agenda and to have specifically altered his position and discourse after party feminists demanded and got a meeting with him to protest at the low visibility of women’s issues during the election campaign of 1993 (personal communication from some of those present).

17. With the exception of a failed attempt to get González to head an alternative list in 1979 (28th Congress).

18. For details and other party leaderships, see Threlfall, 2005.

19. For example, recent Federal Executive Commissions have included leaders from Andalucía, Castilla-La Mancha, A Coruña, Extremadura, Barcelona as well as party members elected for particular political qualities unrelated to any regional base or provenance. It is the commonplace view from inside the PSOE, based on the need for the executive to gain support from a large majority of conference delegates, though it is open to empirical verification.

20. Critics of the system are more concerned with the distribution of the political space for minority political factions to operate within the system than with the system itself (interviews).

21. Calculated from data published by the Junta de Andalucía (2004).

22. Pace Andalucía’s much larger urban centres than Extremadura’s.
23. Only 5 of 14 of the portfolios were held by women in 2001 (as seen by the names of the consejeros/as on Junta de Andalucía’s website, www.juntadeandalucia.es), but parity in public appointments is not mandatory in the PSOE, unlike for elective posts.
24. As observed by the author in situ.
25. For reasons of space, the article cannot account fully for developments inside these parties.
26. Brought to my attention and translated by Jakob Brandt.

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