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Research on French Gender Equality Policies in Practice: One Step Closer to A Recipe for Success

RÉSUMÉ

Ce policy brief présente les résultats du GEPP-France -sept analyses de cas de mise en œuvre de politiques d'égalité entre les sexes- afin d'identifier de manière systématique et comparative les facteurs, ou "ingrédients", du succès de ces politiques. L'utilisation du modèle et l'approche *Gender Equality Policy in Practice* pour mener des analyses de cas qualitatives fines, la participation de 18 experts en politiques d'égalité ainsi que l'analyse comparative des cas présentés dans ce dossier, contribuent à l'élaboration d'une recette, basée sur des données, pour le succès des politiques d'égalité entre les sexes. Celle-ci est destinée aux praticiens politiques, aux défenseurs de la cause, aux décideurs, aux militants et aux universitaires. Les conclusions mettent en évidence le rôle clé des formes de mise en œuvre dans la détermination du succès des politiques.

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ABSTRACT

This policy brief presents the findings of GEPP-France – seven case analyses of gender equality policy implementation -- to identify in a systematic comparative manner the factors, or “ingredients”, for gender equality policy success. Through using the Gender Equality Policy in Practice model and approach in conducting fine grained qualitative case analyses, the 18 policy experts and the comparative analysis of those cases presented in this brief contribute to moving towards an evidence-based recipe for gender equality success for policy practitioners, advocates, decisionmakers, activists and scholars alike. The findings point to the key role of the forms of implementation in determining policy success.

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Introduction

As policy actors on the world stage, like the OECD, have lamented, gender equality is an “uphill battle”. The persistence of large gaps between men’s and women’s status, resources, and power, even in the wealthiest democracies, is one of the most serious challenges of our times. It endangers girls and women’s safety and well-being, undermines sustainable economic productivity and growth, threatens world peace and weakens democracies. The following questions need to be answered: How and why are current public policies in action since the 1970s across the globe not up to the task? What are the

** Les auteurs adhèrent à la charte de déontologie du LIEPP disponible en ligne et n'ont déclaré aucun conflit d'intérêt potentiel.*

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combinations of ingredients for recipes for success in gender equality policy in action? And what can be done to improve this situation? Moreover, we are behind the curve in conducting systematic evidence-based research on the causes of these thorny gender-based problems in their complex contexts and to link this “slow science” to the design and implementation of innovative policy solutions that actually narrow the gender-based divide.

The Gender Equality Policy in Practice (GEPP) network was formed in 2013 to take a significant step toward answering these complex questions and filling the gaps in knowledge, understanding and science-based policy to address persistent, deep-seated gender-based inequities. GEPP brings together over 100 policy experts who seek to study the implementation and impact of equality policies. Alongside work on specific sectors of policy across post industrial democracies – care policy, corporate board equality and political representation, the GEPP group has pursued research on countries as well, both Germany and France.

This policy brief presents the results of the GEPP-France team that were published in 2020 in a special issue of the journal *French Politics* that contained seven detailed case analyses of the implementation of individual gender equality policies conducted by the world’s leading experts of feminist policy and women’s rights in France [1]. This brief first overviews the GEPP approach and the comparative design in which the in-depth qualitative cases analyses, based on deep policy expertise, archival research and elite interviews, were conducted. Next, the major findings are presented and the brief ends with a discussion of the recipe and recommendations for successful gender equality policy success that comes out of this study.

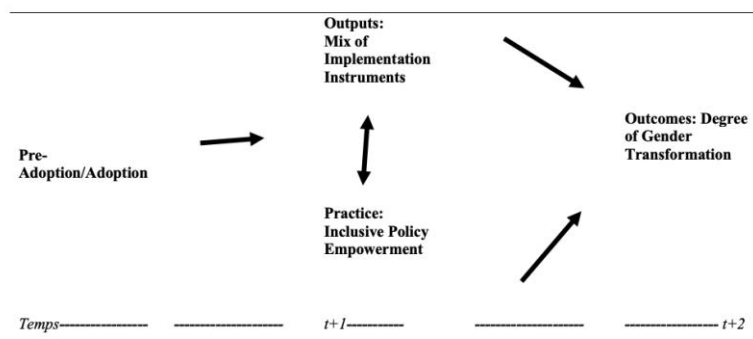
1. The Gender Equality Policy in Practice Approach: Taking Implementation Seriously

GEPP’s central focus is to explore whether gender equality policies result in greater equality between men and women in terms of administrative outputs and results, impacts and outcomes (Engeli and Mazur, 2018). The GEPP

[1] See the detailed contents of the special issue at the end of the brief and a summary of the 7 policies in Table 1. The GEPP network benefitted from funding for a research planning workshop held in the summer of 2014 from LIEPP through the French National Research Agency (ANR) as part of the “Investissements d’Avenir” program within the framework of the LIEPP center of excellence (ANR-11-LABX-0091, ANR-11-IDEX-0005-02). LIEPP also hosted several workshops of the GEPP-France group as well as a dissemination seminar in Spring 2020.

approach reflects a new “turn toward implementation” in Comparative Gender Policy Studies: it not only opens the black box of government and administration, but it develops an analytical framework and uniform measures, presented in Figure 1, for the mix of policy instruments and policy success in terms of – women’s empowerment and gender transformation. The figure can be used to trace an individual policy through the policy implementation process and also for assessing cross-case processes and outcomes. Table 1 below presents the data for each of the components of the model for all 7 cases. As the Figure indicates all policies unfold within a given context that also may affect policy implementation and outcomes.

Figure 1. Gender Equality Policy in Practice Model
SUB-NATIONAL, SECTORIAL, AND EXTRA-NATIONAL
CONTEXTUAL DETERMINANTS



Each policy first goes through the pre-adoption process which includes, agenda-setting and problem definition, then a formal decision is made in adoption with a final policy statement, like a piece of legislation. The administrative outputs for implementation come out of the formal policy statement and can set up a mix of policy instruments. Once the policy is put into practice, actors come forward to implement the policy and mobilize around implementation- who gets included in the process is reflection of the level of policy empowerment. Then ultimately there three levels of outcomes – direct – was the problem solved, indirect, did implementer perspectives change about gender equality issues and then whether there was significant levels of gender transformation –the highest level gender transformation, which can be simple or complex, then next are gender accommodation, gender neutral and gender rowback. The model structures the design of the GEPP project, how individual researchers collect and analyze data, including the GEPP-FRANCE team and the analysis and interpretation of results.

2. France as a Laboratory for Gender Equality Policy Implementation

As the GEPP model shows, the context in which the policy process unfolds can affect how policy implementation practice and outcomes

unfold. The most similar within case design of the study means that France serves as a laboratory in which to test the hypotheses about the ingredients for gender equality policy success. There are certain institutional, cultural and political factors found by researchers within countries and even across regions of countries that are conducive to feminist policy success. The French national context provides both opportunities and barriers to gender policy success in general and as it shifts in each policy case presented in Table 1 and reviewed in the rest of this section. These country contextual effects are being held constant across all of the cases, so if there is any variation in the instruments, practice or outcomes of gender equality policy across the cases it is not coming from these commonalities.

Table 1. Key Attributes of the 7 Policy Implementation Cases

Political Representation (Status)		
Party Parity Penalty Laws 2002, 2007, 2014	L/R	National
Quotas in Administration Law 2012	L	National
Work and Family (Class)		
Elder Care Allowance Law 2014	L	Department
Equal Employment (Status)		
Pay Equity Law 2006	L	Firm-level
Gender-Based Violence (Status)		
Violence Against Women (VAW) Training 2005	R	Regional
Forced Marriage Law 2006	R	City
Anti-Prostitution Law 2016	L	Department

Dates indicate when the policy was formally adopted and/or significantly reformed. L or R indicates left-wing or right-wing governing majority in power at the time of adoption.

2.1. Sector/Type vs Country/Region

Recently a debate has unfolded around whether national/regional patterns of politics, culture and institutions are more salient than sector specific dynamics. Indeed, mixed methods cross-national studies with high levels of validity and reliability have shown that patterns of feminist influence, policy outcomes and state feminism actually tend to follow certain general types or “logics” of policies, which are status, class and morality. The status policy sector targets issues of rights, class --socio-economic divisions and morality – issues based on religion. The within case design of this study is able to confront head-on these competing hypotheses by selecting policy cases that were adopted and implemented beginning in the 2000s to the present across four different sectors of feminist policy – political representation policy, work and family policy, equal employment policy and gender-based violence policy.

The elder care allowance is categorized as a feminist work and family policy given the potential for policies on elder care to help women and men equalizing parenting and professional obligations; even though as Ledoux and Dussuet show the 2001 law was completely gender-blind. The other three policies more clearly fell into sub sectors of explicitly feminist policy. Given that the two political representation policies are both a part of

the larger “parity policy package” codified by constitutional reform, it means that it can be determined whether the processes of each law have similar dynamics and outcomes. These policies also fall into two out of the three policy “logics” that produce similar policy dynamics, however not necessarily outcome – status and class, indicated in Table 2. Thus, in the cross-case analysis, the impact of sector and type on outcomes can be isolated.

2.2. Time period

The attributes of each case also allow for isolating the effect of period of adoption. In four of the cases, important reforms in the policy were adopted in the early to mid 2000s and 4 cases in the mid 2000s, ten years later. For the parity penalties, sanctions to the political parties for non compliance were increased in 2002, 2007 and then to an extremely high level in 2014 prior to the 2017 elections, thus that case is in both categories. Although the elder care allowance legislation of 2001 did not formally identify feminist goals or even mention gender at all, the 2015 reform of the allowance was gendered, including references to gendered statistics on elder care. Ledoux and Dussuet show that the integration of gendered statistics has raised awareness; thus, the formal adoption of a gendered policy in elder care is 2015 and not 2001. Thus, here the effect of the politics of adoption during those two time periods can be observed in what follows. While the two laws were adopted almost 15 years apart, they remain largely similar regarding the implementation timeframe- all were implemented in the context of increasing government cutbacks, shrinking budgets and the meteoric rise of Macron’s En Marche.

2.3. Government Level

The level of government has also been shown to be an important ingredient in policy success. Some studies indicated that policies put into action at the sub national or local levels tend to be more successful where feminists are more able to mobilize around implementation and evaluation and implementers are more sympathetic to their demands. This was the case, for example, in the violence against women campaign in Scotland in the 1990s. Here, the cross-case variation in the seven cases of policy implementation provides for comparing implementation and outcomes at the national, regional, departmental and local levels. The level of government is determined according to the location of the major arena for the implementation process.

2.4. "Critical Actors" over "Critical Mass"

Another difference that can be observed is whether a “critical mass” of women representatives in the national legislature or individual “critical actors” are important in gender equality policy

success, and at which level and/or policy stage. The scholarship has nuanced the original argument of critical mass to put the stress on the pivotal importance of critical actors. In other words, numbers may well be less important than the power and commitment of individuals—be they women or “male allies”. Given the steady increase over the period of policy implementation of the percentage of women in the National Assembly, from 12.1 % in 2002 to 26.8 % in 2012 to 38.7 % in 2017, the critical mass hypothesis can be readily examined.

At the same time, the critical actor hypothesis is equally compelling given the presence of a powerful and active women’s rights minister under the Socialists from 2012 to 2014. Benefiting from a significant budget increases and the president’s vocal backing, the feminist activist minister Najat Vallaud-Belkacem undertook a series of sweeping reforms for women’s rights that culminated in the 2014 Vallaud-Belkacem Law on gender equality, which included the increase in the parity penalty for parties in 2014. Many observers compared the impact of the Vallaud-Belkacem ministry on gender equality policy to the Roudy ministry during the Mitterrand Experiment in the early 1980s. Thus, the presence of this critical actor may have been an important catalyst for gender equality policy; indeed reforms of gender equality policy occurred in three of the cases under her watch and this was at the time when women’s representation in the National Assembly was still at 26.8 %, below what some have identified as the 30 % cut-off for critical mass to take effect.

2.5. Influence of the Left

Previous research has identified left-wing majorities as important factors in policy change. However, recent studies have put into question how crucial the presence of a left-wing government is for feminist policy success. From the adoption of the first policy in this study, parity constitutional reforms in 2000 to 2017, there has been an alternation of right-wing and left-wing in the presidency and parliament: May 2002-May 2012 president and parliament of the Right; and from May 2012 to May 2017 a president and parliament of Left and from June 1997 to May 2002 a president of the Right cohabitating with a parliament of the Left.

2.6. Where does "path dependency" fit-in?

Historical institutionalists seek to understand institutional change and choice over time, as exhibited by state-based structures and rules. Theories of path dependency assert that state action is limited by the way in which “increasing returns” develop around a specific policy. These returns create patterns of interactions linking state and societal actors and institutions that are mutually reinforcing over time. According to the path-dependent perspective, new institutions and

institutional dynamics appear at specific moments during the process of development—sometimes called “critical junctures”—which set the pattern of institutional interactions until the next juncture. The outcome is that even many years after these critical junctures, it is difficult to alter political dynamics.

This is a serious consideration in France, given the prevalence of “gender-biased universalism” where identifying gender differences in policy is ruled out based on republican equality while established gender norms still place women in inferior positions to men. Indeed, nearly all of the analyses in this study present the gender-biased universalism as trigger for resistance to concrete achievements in gender equality policy. Thus, it seems the path dependent gender-biased universalism could be a country-wide similarity, but as the historical institutionalist literature shows, path dependencies can also build up around specific policies or areas of policy as in the case of family policies. This corroborates arguments for sectoral patterns of policy formation by sector or policy type, over national patterns, given that certain political dynamics develop around the issues at stake. No matter whether it is by sector or at the national level, the path dependent gender biased universalism in France is an important force to observe in the within case comparative analysis as well as any “critical junctures” where these long-held policy dynamics have shifted. Indeed, the apparent shifts in feminist policy that were catalyzed during the Holland presidency, from 2012 -2014, might represent a critical juncture for a real shift in the gender-biased republican model.

3. A Cross Case Analysis

Table 2 provides a summary of the cross-case analysis in terms of the three major dimensions of the GEPP model.

3.1. The Mix of Implementation Instruments: Approach, Scope and Authority

Comparing the mix of policy instruments across three main dimensions is part of the larger GEPP project of opening the black box of government in the post-adoption stages to systematic analysis. The paper record of the policy outputs does not necessarily imply a direct translation when the policy is implemented and used in practice. The particular mix of instruments can differ according to: (1) the approach – legislative, mixed or self-regulation; (2) the scope – how comprehensive is the policy coverage and authority-; (3) whether policies used coercive or more voluntary measures to get compliance groups to implement policies. The dimensions can be formally set up at the time of the policy adoption. They can also be adapted or more radically transformed at the time of the implementation.

As Table 2 shows, what is immediately striking from mapping out formal outputs established by formal policy statements in the seven cases is the variety and complexity of the instruments and tools for implementation and evaluation. No clear systematic pattern of mix of policy instruments across sector or time emerges. Instead, each policy case displays a specific mix of tools. Only in one case (Elder Care Allowance), is there a single tool established- a “capacity tool” and only in the case of the forced marriage policy all of the instruments are used. There is no recurrent mix of policy instruments, either, that corresponds with a certain approach, scope or authority across sectors. However, the parity policies take a state-driven approach through legislation and the three gender-based violence policies spanned all three types of approaches. There were no recurrent patterns by time-period of adoption either – policies that were adopted in the first period 2002-2007 and those adopted from 2012-2016 covered all three approaches as well.

The authority dimension also reflects this absence of convergence across policy sector or time. The Elder Care Allowance (adopted in 2015) and the VAW Training policy (adopted in 2006) are full voluntary- low authority. All three parity penalties and the pay equity policy (adopted in 2012) are at a moderate level of authority with light coercion. The 2012 administrative quotas, the 2006 forced marriage policy and the 2016 anti prostitution law are at the highest level of authority

and full or moderate levels of coercion. The extent to which policy instruments have comprehensive coverage in terms of the compliance or target groups shows the highest level of convergence out of the three dimensions with the two parity levels at medium coverage and the three gender-based violence policies at the highest level of policy comprehensiveness.

The presence of a left-wing governing majority does not necessarily ensure authoritative or comprehensive policies. In all of the cases, feminist demands for more authoritative and comprehensive policy tools were systematically downgraded and/or diluted by non feminist actors, regardless of the party in control of the governing and parliamentary majority. At least for the formal content of policy and implementation instruments. The Senate in particular has proven to be a bastion of resistance for demands for formally authoritative policy that contains challenges to the status quo on gender roles and gendered distributions of resources and power.

3.2. Practice and Inclusive Policy Empowerment

Turning to the actual practice of the policies and the level of inclusive policy empowerment in that practice allows for the crucial assessment of whether words were turned into deeds; whether the paper record of the policy instruments were actually followed through on the ground. Here too, with regards to inclusive policy empowerment, to what

Table 2. Comparing Policy Outputs, Practice, Level of Inclusive Policy Empowerment and Gender Transformation

Policy	Mix of Instruments	Approach	Authority	IPE	Level of GT
Political Representation (Status)					
Party Parity Penalties 2002,2007, 2014 (L/R)	Authority and Incentive Negative	High	Moderate Light Coercion	Moderate	→ GA
Quotas in Administration 2012 (R)	Incentive Negative	High	Full Coercion	Low	→ GT (Simple)
Work and Family (Class)					
Elder Care Allowance 2014 (L)	Capacity-Money	High	Low Voluntary	Low	GN → GA
Equal Employment (Status)					
Pay Equity in Firms 2012 (L)	Capacity Negative Incentive	Moderate	Moderate Light Coercion	Moderate	→ GA
Gender-Based Violence (Status)					
VAW Training: Regional 2005 (R)	Capacity Symbolic	Low	Low Full voluntary	High	→ GA
Forced Marriage: 2006 (R)	All Four	Moderate	High-Moderate Coercion	High	→ GA
Anti-Prostitution 2016 (L)	Authority, Incentive and Symbolic	High	High Coercion	Moderate	→ GA

Years indicate when the policy was formally adopted and/or significantly reformed. L or R indicates left-wing or right-wing governing majority in power at the time of adoption.

IPE: Inclusive Policy Empowerment; GT: Gender Transformation; GA: Gender Accommodation; GN: Gender Neutral.

degree actors speaking for women came forward in the implementation process, on its own, there are no patterns by sector, time-period or governing majority in power. There are two instances of high inclusive policy empowerment -- VAW regional training and awareness campaigns about forced marriage --where not only did both women's policy agencies and non governmental groups participate in the implementation and/or evaluation processes, but they spoke for more than just the upper middle class white women, including, for example, the voices of immigrant women of color. Demands were partially reflected in the unfolding of implementation: in the actual content of the VAW training and in the consultation regarding the evaluation of the measure regarding the forced marriage in the 2016 National Action Plan. The 2016 law that promoted both exit programs for sex workers and punishment for clients of sex work had a moderate level of IPE along with the parity penalties on parties.

State feminists in government and parliament played crucial roles in drawing attention to the parity sanctions: through naming and shaming political parties not in compliance with parity and through filing the formal evaluation requested by the legislation of parity in the National Assembly. They nevertheless only spoke for upper white middle class elites. Similarly, the coalition of feminist groups and femocrats in the department level delegates of women's right that mobilized around both the social programs to help sex worker exit and the criminalization of clients tended not to speak for the sex workers themselves who were from vulnerable populations both economically and socially, often being immigrants. As St. Denny asserts, this became even clearer in the actors who came forward when criminalization of clients had the unintended consequence of making it much more dangerous and less profitable for sex workers who did not choose the exit option. None of the interests of sex workers were brought forward by the state feminists or feminist groups at the local level either. There was also a moderate level of policy empowerment in the collective negotiation over equal pay at the firm level. While femocrats, representatives of trade unions and even citizen movements came forward to represent women from lower socio-economic groups, their demands were not heeded in the implementation and evaluation processes. The structural impediments based on dominant gender norms that contribute greatly to existing pay gaps between men and women were not addressed in the final equal pay agreements.

Finally, there are low cases of IPE across sectors. In the implementation and evaluation of the quota for upper level civil servants, there were some presence of femocrats and groups that spoke for women in the upper level civil service. They only spoke for upper class white women and had no real impact on the implementation or evaluation given that the successful implementation of the quota occurred outside of the typical state feminist circles. A slight turn away from the gender-blind approach

of the health care and social work infrastructure occurred after 2004. Gendered statistics of elder care givers and clients have started being collected by the health care administration and women's policy offices. The fact that care workers tend to be mostly women was somewhat taken into account in the 2014 law through the mandated additional paid time for respite for elder care workers. This said, there still has not been much significant involvement of feminist groups or femocrats in how elder care is delivered or in practice of the various elder care policies and programs across the department where Ledoux in Dussuet conducted their extensive field work. It is also significant to note that in all of the cases feminist actors from all vantage points never raised the interests of any other groups of women than cisgender women. Heteronormativity, thus, remains a dominant organizing principle in French gender equality policy.

3.3. Gender Transformation: Pessimistic and Optimistic Assessments

There is an imperative of "gender accommodation", that dominant attitudes toward gender equality were not changed but some policy success was achieved, as defined by the GEPP framework, across all of the cases, but one. Policies are thus not entirely symbolic and have made some gains. In the practice of the policies and in the outcomes, the gender established norms that construct men and women in differential positions are however still operative for implementors, evaluators and powerful non feminist, typically white male stakeholders. Also, when women's interests are represented they tend to mostly be in terms upper white cisgender middle class French women. As Jacquemart, Bereni and Revillard assert, there has been an increasing broad-based acceptance of the "parity grammar" by stakeholders, elites and decision makers. Pursuing the 50-50 representation in politics, corporate board, administration is increasingly legitimized but as long as the women do not take away positions of power from men. In addition, in all of the cases, this elite resistance to "gender transformation" seems to lag behind public opinion that has progressed at a faster pace.

Moreover, in all seven of the cases some progress has been made, and that progress has occurred clearly within the past twenty years. In the context of the hypothesis about the path dependency of gender-biased universalism, this accomplishment indicates that we may be witnessing a critical juncture in the past several years. In two cases, there has been significant grassroots and group mobilization against backlash on existing policies. The rightwing efforts to turn back the clock on equal pay negotiation in 2015 and to reverse the schedule of the Sauvadet quotas were blocked. Moreover, the accomplishment of gender transformation, albeit piecemeal, at the very pinnacle and elite part of the French state may be a preliminary indicator that gender equality policy can

succeed in the face of deep-seated gender biases. Success may also happen without the strong support of the femocracy. For example, elder care policy has moved from being gender neutral – where gender was not even mentioned in any of the policy statements on elder care and the optic of gender equality was completely missing – to gender accommodation. This evolution happened with virtually no help from femocrats in the department or at the national level. In the same vein, the progress made in the arena of gender-biased violence in areas that are quite challenging in French society – forced marriage, anti prostitution and violence against women – indicate that there is significant foundational movement afoot.

This said, recent developments in this area including the 2019 demonstration in Paris to protest Macron government's budget cuts on anti-violence policies and in reaction to 121 cases of femicide indicate that policy reversal is never far away. Similarly, the unintended negative consequences of the criminalization of the clients of prostitution and the continued pursuit of pimps by law enforcement on sex workers, often non hetero and from non white marginalized communities further foreshadow more pessimistic trends. St Denny's analysis of anti-prostitution policy emphasizes that France may be even further away from a critical shift in gender equality now than before the landslide victory of Macron's in the 2017 presidential election.

Indeed, a number of recent developments suggests that the core driver behind this slow and steady incremental change may be being phased out: the down-graded Deputy Ministry of Women's Rights and Struggle Against Discrimination (no longer gender equality), the placement of a state feminist outsider at the leadership, the reduced budgets as well as the disappearance of the administrative backbone of national level state feminism (Service des Droits des femmes). Backsliding under the Macron presidency appears to be threatening the progress made and undermining policy implementation across all areas of policy. Similarly, the recurrence of heteronormativity as organizational principle of policy action further confirms the salience over the French national context over sector specific dynamics.

4. A Step Closer to A Recipe for Success: Larger Lessons and Ways Forward

The findings of the seven detailed cases analyses and their comparative analysis constitute a major step towards the "elusive recipe for gender equality policy success". Which ingredients are important and those which are not have been empirically pinpointed are presented in the box below.

To be sure, the direct causal effect of French gender equality policy implementation in practice

Important Ingredients

- Country Level Path Dependent Dynamics: Breaking Gender-biased Universalism
- Critical Actors: Feminist Coalitions and Alliances through women groups and women's policy agencies
- A "boomerang effect" on national policy through the EU or Council of Europe

Not Important Ingredients

- The Dynamics of Agenda-Setting and Adoption
- The Mix of Implementation Instruments in Action (Approach, Type, Scope, and Authority)
- Inclusive Policy Empowerment
- Critical Mass of Women MPs
- Time- period
- Government Level of Policy Implementation

remains difficult to isolate. The progress that has been made in the policy sectors where it could be quantitatively measured (political representation) is in some part due to the actual practice of the implementation and evaluation of the policies. Even in the clear case where progress in women's appointment to upper civil servant positions had begun prior to the adoption and implementation of the Sauvadet law, its effective implementation is likely to have continued and perhaps even sped up the numerical progress and also the value shift that occurred in the past 15 years in senior executive services. Put another way, this progress might not have happened without these policies.

Complete gender transformation is not an easy task and will not be reached in the near future. Incremental and piecemeal policy change sometimes produce simple transformation and gender policies shifts lead to slow progress from gender-neutral policy outcomes to gender accommodation. Time will tell which way this momentum will take gender equality given on one hand the potential for a real critical juncture to change institutionalized gender-biased universalism and on the other, current political developments that signal a reversal and even gender row-back.

Thus, this study has shown that policy implementation clearly matters for gender equality policy success. It confirms previous feminist comparative policy research about the configurational nature of causality in looking at feminist success, the importance of critical actors over critical mass, and that the left in power is not necessarily a force for change. At the same time, the study surprisingly challenges a growing body of work that asserts that success and failure can be best explained by sectoral dynamics or the type of policy. Indeed, national dynamics seem to trump sectoral trends for implementing gender equality, at least in the case of France. Findings on the content of policy and the politics of pre-adoption and adoption also downplay what many scholars had identified as important forces in the unfolding of post-adoption. In the final analysis, definitive conclusions about a theory of gender equality policy success and implementation cannot be made,

the 7 case analyses of gender equality policy implementation and their comparative analysis has moved forward understanding and knowledge, through the GEPP framework and approach, about the central role of policy implementation in gender equality policy success and has taken a step closer to addressing core questions on equality, policy implementation, power and representation at the center of healthy and vital democracies in the 21st century.

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