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Nadia Urbinati, *Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas*, 10 INT'L J. Const. L. 465 (2012).

ALWD 7th ed.

Nadia Urbinati, *Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas*, 10 Int'l J. Const. L. 465 (2012).

APA 7th ed.

Urbinati, N. (2012). *Why parite is better goal than quotas*. *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, 10(2), 465-476.

Chicago 17th ed.

Nadia Urbinati, "Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas," *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 10, no. 2 (March 2012): 465-476

McGill Guide 9th ed.

Nadia Urbinati, "Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas" (2012) 10:2 Int'l J Const L 465.

AGLC 4th ed.

Nadia Urbinati, 'Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas' (2012) 10(2) *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 465

MLA 9th ed.

Urbinati, Nadia. "Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas." *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, vol. 10, no. 2, March 2012, pp. 465-476. HeinOnline.

OSCOLA 4th ed.

Nadia Urbinati, 'Why Parite Is a Better Goal than Quotas' (2012) 10 Int'l J Const L 465

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Why parité is a better goal than quotas

Nadia Urbinati*

Quotas, parité, and proportional representation have been the main strategies for redressing injustice in political representation, as well as for amending women's under-representation. These strategies are an explicit recognition that representation is both a democratic value and a form of participation. The search for strategies of redress is undoubtedly an important fact that testifies to a change in women's attitude toward representative politics as no longer a target of mistrust in the name of direct participation. This article advocates making parité the general criterion for justice in representation as the best rendering of the peculiarity of women in political representation.

1. The value and meaning of democratic representation

There are two questions I ask in this paper: (a) "Why is women's under-representation a problem, or why is it seen as a problem by women to begin with?" and (b) "Why is it important to have women elected to representative institutions?" These two questions are intertwined. In order to answer them, some preliminary observations on the meaning of representative politics in democracy first need to be made in order to clarify the fact that any critical reflection on the presence or absence of women in elected institutions relies upon a conception of representative democracy that is not identical with electoral democracy.

I take representative democracy to be a complex form of government in which political participation by the citizens takes different forms: direct or indirect, extrainstitutional or institutional, by voting, voicing opinions, or by interfering with decisions through political judgments shaped, among others, by social movements and the media. Representation is an important component in this constellation of public presence and action—in fact, it is one of the most salient ones. It ties to elections in an interesting way: not only because it derives its legitimacy from suffrage but also because it reflects the profound relation of interdependence between society and state institutions resulting from the electoral process.

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Elections generate a gap between civil society and the government at the same time as they allow them to communicate, and even come into conflict with one another, but never intermingle. Representation sets in motion the political process that fills that gap and structures the communication between citizens (their interests, needs, specificity) and institutions. Although, as the Federalists famously argued, the endorsement of representation sanctions the displacement of the people from the position of decision making, representation promotes public action on the part of the citizens—individual and/or associated—that amend somehow the paucity of people’s decision-making power.¹

But if representative democracy is simply a denial of participation, what does it mean to demand inclusion for women in elected institutions? Although elections have been considered an aristocratic institution since the classical times,² in modern states the electoral appointment of public officials prompted two movements that became crucial to the growth of democratic participation. On the one hand, it touched off the separation between society and the state as a premise for a relationship between them that was *politically constructed* through and through. Thanks to individual suffrage, representatives became the chosen actors in a process of competition and communication that was primed to create a wave of participation able to influence state politics indirectly. On the other hand, the individual right to vote made it possible for the candidates to disassociate themselves from corporate groups and social classes; at the same time, it exalted and foregrounded a form of unity that relied on the freedom of speech and association. Thus, as soon as elections became an indispensable and solemn prerequisite of political legitimacy, state and society could no longer be severed from each other, and the boundaries separating and connecting them became an issue of ongoing contestation, negotiation, and readjustment. Representation has mirrored this tension. Any demand that citizens bring into the political arena as a matter for representation is invariably a reflection of the struggle to redraw the boundaries between their social conditions and the political sphere. It is thus appropriate to say that representation is a political process—a form of participation—put into action by elections but not fulfilled by them. Although “elections ‘make’ representation, nonetheless elections do not ‘make’ the representatives.”³ At best, elections define a *responsible* or *limited* government, but not yet a representative government.

Political representation testifies to the fact that although democracy can be explained in terms of the “rules of the game,” citizens’ participation is never a neutral game but a concrete way of promoting ideas and identifying with those who support them or make convincing claims to support them.⁴ Benjamin Constant described the

¹ This view was subsequently formulated as a theory of democracy as electoral selection of a political class by JOSEPH SCHUMPETER, *CAPITALISM, SOCIALISM, and DEMOCRACY*, ch. 21 (1962).

² MORGENS HERMAN HANSEN, *THE ATHENIAN DEMOCRACY IN THE AGE OF DEMOSTHENES: STRUCTURE, PRINCIPLES, AND IDEOLOGY*, ch. 4 (1991).

³ PATRICE GUENIFFEY, *LE NOMBRE ET LA RAISON: LA RÉVOLUTION FRANÇAISE ET LES ÉLECTIONS 146* (Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1993).

⁴ Hence GEORGE KATZ has remarked that whereas the individual is the unit of legal obligation, the political group(s) is (are) the units that create the consent to the law: in HANNAH ARENDT: *POLITICS, CONSCIENCE, EVIL* 130–142 (1983).

two levels constituting representative democracy in a way that remains extremely captivating and timely: *representation of people's opinion* (the will regularly expressed in elections) and *representation in the durée* (the permanent attention and receptivity of the representatives to “those changes in public opinion that might [occur] between one election and the next”).⁵ The former defines the legal or formal act of electoral authorization—counting and aggregating votes. The latter defines representation as reflective adhesion over time to ideas and interests by citizens and candidates/elected; it defines an informal activation of a sovereign people that is a mix of presence and ideas, direct and indirect action.

To re-phrase the Federalists' maxim, representation stipulates the expulsion of the people from the decision-making institutions but gives birth to a dynamic and complex form of presence that is no less powerful than direct lawmaking, although it is only indirect and informal. Representation redefines the permanence of *the presence* of the citizens in the form of *judgment, political action, ideas*; it transcends the actual manifestation of the will on the election day.

2. A nonetheless uneasy task

The above brief outline tries to make sense of the “problematic” character of representation when it is analyzed in relation to democracy. It is problematic because representation can never be corroborated by and rendered in terms of indisputable data concerning what the people “really” want. People's expectations and their representatives' achievements will never correspond.⁶ Yet if we agree that representation is a key component of modern citizenship, rather than a strategy for keeping people away from the government; and if we are persuaded that representation presupposes and inherently promotes indirect forms of participation, then the issue of “women and political citizenship” acquires a challenging and interesting character because it cannot be simply reduced to an issue of electoral participation. The nature of “presence” is itself complex in character, and can hardly be rendered by the notion of votes. On the other hand, ideas—as a representative device or a means that brings citizens together around some objectives, demands, or interests—give participation a new form and meaning in which politics of presence and politics of ideas intermingle.

To be sure, the enriched view of participation I have sketched does not put an end to the many and legitimate reservations concerning the view of women's presence in representative institutions as an evidence for or a sign of their political efficacy, influence, and power. Italy's recent cases of women who were invited (and accepted) to

⁵ BENJAMIN CONSTANT, *Principles of Politics Applicable to all Representative Governments*, in *POLITICAL WRITINGS* 170, 209 (Biancamaria Fontana ed., 1988).

⁶ This makes accountability (of representatives to electors) a structurally ethical and political claim. Theorists of democratic minimalism use this argument to conclude that the only truly democratic institution is election because votes are the most reliable public data at our disposal, and voting is the only formal way citizens have to punish and threaten their rulers: see ADAM PRZEWORSKI, *Minimalist conception of democracy: a defense*, in *DEMOCRACY'S VALUE* 23, 34–35 (Ian Shapiro & Cassiano Hacker-Cordón eds., 1999).

become candidates in party lists in exchange for sex do a disservice to the argument that the number of women in elective bodies is evidence for their political empowerment. The corrupted and outrageous use of women's bodies in politics and in politicians' careers is both a cause and a symptom of women's disaffection with representative politics. Moreover, the exploitation of the female body can be used as evidence that representation is indeed a stratagem for taming political presence rather than for encouraging it. The "use" of women's bodies in order to legitimate men's position in political institutions does a disservice to democracy at the same time as it violates women and distorts politics. Defending democratic representation against corrupt behavior is vital also because corrupt practices can attain the goal of persuading citizens, and women in particular, to stay away from politics. Against this (un)intended consequence, the argument should be made that in a representative democracy representation itself becomes an issue of political inclusion/exclusion that should interest all citizens, and in particular women. This assumption is the point around which this essay pivots.

Before going to the matter at hand, I feel in need to stress again my deep frustration with the increase of misogyny in political campaigns and the political life broadly speaking of our consolidated democracies—a phenomenon that is, unfortunately, widespread in Western societies and far from an exception. As an Italian, I feel, moreover, outraged by young women's "instrumental" inclusion as a means for "attracting" votes and strengthening male politicians' power in political parties as well as in the government. These phenomena of political decline and mediatic barbarism go hand in hand with a persistent fact in consolidated democracies: the amazing low presence of women in party leadership, on lists of candidates, and in political institutions.

3. Advocacy and representativity

A number of contemporary studies have investigated the issue of representation as part of political justice or within the broader analysis of identity politics, group rights, and multiculturalism. They discuss representation with a view to addressing the representativity deficit in our advanced pluralist democracies, that is the tangible fact that some portions of the citizenry are under-represented or proportionally less represented than others. Hence the challenging debate over equal representative opportunity, fair representation, and the search for electoral systems that can make representation more expressive of the identities and claims of the represented.⁷

The criterion of justice in representation, however, remains normative in the sense that it is not conditional on the achievement of any specific outcome that the citizens may legitimately seek (i.e., reparation of past injustices, such as discrimination and exclusion). This criterion consists in the actual and concrete possibility for all citizens

⁷ I am referring in particular to the works of Lani Guinier, Will Kymlicka, Anne Philips, Melissa Williams, and Iris Marion Young.

to participate voluntarily as well as to be heard and have effective advocates for their causes. It supports political minorities not because it favors them or compensates them for being in the minority, but because it does not give the majority more than its numerical due. Justice in representation is therefore proportional rather than reparative because it is a claim of quantitative accuracy, and thus rigorously consistent with democracy. The achievement of reparative justice may or may not be the outcome of the citizens' political presence. Yet *whatever the outcome*, it should certainly not be what justifies justice in representation. Even in a hypothetical case where no group of citizens are suffering any discrimination, representation should still follow the norm of proportionality with respect to the political opinions and partisan views held and developed by the citizens in a society. *Parité* is the criterion, the norm that provides for the democratic legitimacy of majority decision-making. This is consistent with democracy, which begins, as Robert Dahl said, with the "moral judgment that all human beings are of equal intrinsic worth, that no person is intrinsically superior to another, and that the good or interests of each person must be given equal consideration."⁸

The norm of parity implies that all the citizens should be given a chance to express their views in order to influence and, if necessary, repeal existing laws or decisions. Furthermore, by making their voices heard, minorities remind the majority that theirs is just one possible and temporary majority. This amounts to saying that elections are not just a race, but a way of participating in the creation of a representative body, a way by which citizens "send candidates to the assembly."⁹ This neatly captures the distinction within suffrage between "the right of representation" and "the right of decision," since equal prospects of success should refer primarily to the possibility of acquiring representation through voting. Thus the issues of justice raised by representation are issues of equal chance to have one's voice heard or represented, not as a concession or a compensation for past or present exclusions but as a means of effective participation, here and now, in the making of politics. This is why I suggest we call justice in representation *democratic*.¹⁰ Democratic representation is just representation insofar as it involves issues of advocacy and representativity—issues of a meaningful presence and not simply presence—in the interplay of dissent and agreement that is democracy.

I propose the concept *representativity* in order to stress the role of representation as a medium that exalts the specificity of the participants in an electoral race and induces voters to seek out the best candidate, looking for an advocate not a signpost.¹¹ In a

⁸ ROBERT DAHL, ON POLITICAL EQUALITY 4 (2006).

⁹ Hence David Plotke wrote that in a representative government not to be represented (not to be given the chance to send our voice to the legislature) is a form of exclusion: see *Representation is Democracy*, 4 CONSTELLATIONS 19 (1997).

¹⁰ For an excellent account of political equality, see RONALD DWORKIN, SOVEREIGN VIRTUE: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF EQUALITY 194–198 (2000).

¹¹ Philip Pettit's recent distinction between "responsive" and "indicative" in representative politics seems to match the distinction which I developed in a previous work. See, respectively, NADIA URBINATI, REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY: PRINCIPLES AND GENEALOGY (2006), in particular ch. 1, and Philip Pettit, *Representation: Responsive and Indicative*, 17 CONSTELLATIONS 426 (2010).

representative government, most political questions are determined by elected officials whose attitudes towards a variety of issues are public knowledge, while most of their constituents' views remain anonymous and cannot be identified individually. Constituents are generally identified through their representatives; they are identified through a process of reflexivity. Hence, representativity is essential because it allows for the citizens' opinion to be identified and known. When voters elect their representatives, they tend *not* to elect candidates who differ from them in some important respects. Thus goal of representation is not merely to designate representatives or mandataries (to select neutrally competent agents) but to give a "part" of the citizenry a political individuality or visibility and thus create the condition for political dialectics and friendly partisanship. It is certainly true that "[w]e can only talk about representation where there is difference—and *not* an identity between the representative and the person represented."¹² Yet it is not the existential presence that should be our parameter of representative relation, but presence through ideas. Representatives and the represented are certainly not identical, but they can and actually should have some relevant similarity at the level of visions and ideas—a similarity that they construct, transform, or disrupt.

The second component of the process of democratic representation, *advocacy*, casts light on the nature of political deliberation. Far from transcending the specific situation of citizens, deliberative reasoning rests on the premise that specificity needs to be known and acknowledged. "Understanding" and "hearing" are the faculties at work in deliberative speech just as they are in forensic speech. They express the complex nature of the work of the representative who should *adhere* to her cause but *not be driven* by it. They allow us to see better the competitive nature of democracy which relies heavily on personal ability. Although every citizen can become a representative in theory and *de jure*, citizens select those whom they judge to be better advocates. They do not choose randomly or feel it is enough that a candidate belongs to their group (in fact, they discriminate within their own group), although, on the other hand, they do not want someone who professes ideas opposed to their own.¹³

4. Politics of ideas and politics of presence

Having clarified the meaning and values of representation, I can return to the two basic questions with which I started: (a) "Why is women's under-representation a problem, or why is it seen as a problem by women to begin with?" and (b) "Why is it important to have women elected to representative institutions?" In the last two decades, these two interrelated questions have intersected with the issue of *justice in representation* as a challenge to advanced democracies almost everywhere with very few exceptions (notably,

¹² FRANK R. ANKERSMIT, *AESTHETIC POLITICS: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY BEYOND FACT AND VALUE* 46 (1997).

¹³ Ronald Dworkin, *What is Equality? Part 4: What is Political Equality?*, 22 U.S.F. L. REV. 5 (1987). The link between elections and choice is effectively discussed by BERNARD MANIN, *THE PRINCIPLE OF REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT* 132–142 and 161–167 (1997), and HANNA FENICHEL PITKIN, *THE CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION* 90 (1967).

the Scandinavian countries). Anne Philips has given us good reasons to argue that in order to increase the number of elected women, modern democracies should be ready to support legislative initiatives that are not free of contradiction, such as “quotas.”¹⁴ Re-establishing gender equilibrium within democratic institutions, as the argument goes, would justify a temporary violation of the blind-equality principle, which characterizes the right to suffrage in modern constitutional democracy. Meanwhile, some countries, like France, have tried to go beyond quotas and tackled this issue by legislating a fifty-percent criterion in the composition of party lists (using financial support as deterrence for enforcing *parité*).¹⁵ Finally, proportional representation has been also used in several countries as a means of correcting the under-representation of some groups (although not only women) by containing majoritarianism.

Quotas, parité, and proportional representation have been the main strategies for redressing injustice in political representation, as well as amending women’s under-representation. These strategies are an explicit recognition of what we said above: that is, that representation is both a democratic value and a form of participation. The search for strategies of redress is undoubtedly an important fact that testifies to a change in women’s (and leftist movements’) attitude toward representative politics as no longer a target of mistrust in the name of direct participation. As non-traditional theorists of democracy have argued, in consolidated democracies exclusion may take on new forms and one of them is precisely depriving citizens of an equal chance to be represented.¹⁶ Thus in representative democracy, non-representation—lack of advocacy and representativity—is the most radical form of political disempowerment.

Based on these theoretical premises, in the remaining part of the essay I will construct my argument on women and political citizenship in consolidated democracies around the following *two correlated phenomena*: women’s quest for presence in representative institutions grew hand in hand with: (a) the decline of the role of political parties, and (b) the decline in trust in the relationship between political parties and their electorate (a decline that became dramatic in Europe with the end of Cold War).

It might be said that the decline of political parties translated into an increased quest for women’s presence in politics. Few years after the victory of Tony Blair’s Labor Party in 1987, Anne Philips rendered this inverted relation as one between “politics of ideas” and “politics of presence.” In her claim for an equal presence of women on the Labor Party’s list, Phillips argued that the “politics of ideas” was no longer enough to make women feel represented. Quests for quota—a phenomenon that became widespread throughout Europe in the last few decades—meant to be a denunciation of the lack of representativity that followed the decline of party programs and organized platforms which were previously able to express manifold views and interests, of men and women alike. Since ideas were no longer able to convey citizens’ social presence, citizens had to find other ways to make themselves visible and, more precisely,

¹⁴ ANNE PHILIPS, *THE POLITICS OF PRESENCE* 57–83, 167–168 (1995).

¹⁵ JOAN W. SCOTT, *PARITÉ* (2005), see in particular the Introduction.

¹⁶ Jane J. Mansbridge, *Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent “Yes.”* 61 *J. POL.* 628 (1999); and Iris Marion Young, *JUSTICE AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE* (1990).

to make their ideas and interests heard and effective. Let us try to clarify what was the politics of ideas in order to make sense of the quest for a politics of presence.

The centrality of the “politics of ideas” corresponded to an age in which political parties enjoyed strong legitimacy among their members and, more generally, among citizens. Parties belonged to an age in which democratic citizenship consolidated through party identification. Parties were the medium for both presence and ideas. As a matter of fact, when women’s claims for presence started in the 1980s, political parties were already using quotas to allocate “presence” proportionally among the social, economic, and cultural groups they included or represented. For example, in the case of Italy’s Christian Democracy, Italian Socialist Party, and Italian Communist Parties, their leading national organisms were filled in proportion to the weight of the groups they comprised (blue- and white-collar workers, peasants, professionals, women, students, etc.). It is impossible to pinpoint a direct causal relation between parties’ de facto quota system and the content of parties’ electoral programs. Yet it is certain that proportionality and quotas were meant to strengthen the militants’ belief that their party was an inclusive universe and that they had a voice in it. The stronger their belief, the more the “politics of ideas” took precedence over the vindication of their “presence.” This means that their vindication of “presence” followed the decline of party loyalty: this was one important meaning of the quest for quotas. Women’s claim for a political “presence” foregrounded the crisis of party democracy. Representation lost advocacy because parties had lost representativity.

For at least three decades following World War II, the “politics of ideas” was able to satisfy representativity. To limit the argument to the Italian case, it is certain that crucial reforms that were passed in the 1970s (from the law instituting the right to divorce to the law regulating voluntary interruption of pregnancy) were a direct expression of the success of the “politics of ideas,” not of a “politics of presence.” Political parties were the main protagonists of the vindication of those rights. Social movements and women’s movements in particular, undoubtedly played a crucial role in making political parties more determined and more forceful in pursuing that politics and winning large consent in society and legislative assembly. Yet the strong influence that those movements exerted on parties was not measurable in terms of their “presence” in the lawmaking bodies.

As a matter of fact, the number of women within the Italian Parliament and within the leading organisms of political parties was not much higher than it is today. Yet parties were able to represent and carry on political programs that women could identify with (and actually did). “Politics of ideas” was then perceived by the citizens as being in a quasi-perfect harmony with “politics of presence” (as a politics that was attentive to the “interests” of the citizens). Political scientists have argued that this phenomenon of alignment of ideas and presence in post-war European democracies was peculiar to the phenomenon of highly social and cultural homogeneity within political parties and society as well.¹⁷ Homogeneity in class interests made “politics of

¹⁷ Philippe Schmitter, *Diagnosing and Designing Democracy in Europe*, in *THE FUTURE OF REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY* 194 (Sonia Alonso, John Keane & Wolfgang Merkel eds., 2011).

ideas” the equivalent of a politics of identity insofar as citizens identified themselves in relation to their ideological loyalties.

One might be tempted to draw the following generalization: the “politics of presence” went along with the decline of ideological unification. It emerged when pluralism of interests and identities became more fragmented and pronounced, and when groups referring to a party realized that their ideological loyalty did not satisfy their demands nor identified with them, but actually translated into a sacrifice of their demands and the neglect of their specificity.¹⁸ Communication between civil society and political society—between movements and political parties—was an essential factor in the success of the politics of ideas. It was also an expression of the democratic nature that representation acquired thanks to political parties. Does this mean that as long as politics of ideas worked, politics of presence was not necessary? Does this mean that democracy works at its best when homogeneity of interests and ideas is at its highest? Let us go back to the analysis of the age of party democracy.

Once women started demanding inclusion in party lists, when they contested the way party lists were drawn, they showed they no longer thought it was necessary to follow the “party line” in order to win their cause. In fact, they thought it was important to be able to disobey the party line and declare openly that the “politics of ideas” was no longer representative of *their* interests or “ideas.” If women were not able to “disobey” the party, to betray their ideological loyalty, they would not ask for a “politics of presence.” But women learned to disobey and to be disloyal—and their decision was not a minor one; in fact it was a tremendously important decision which questioned the way representation was performed and managed.

If women needed to disobey to their party—and ask for a greater presence—it was because their political priority was no longer identical with the politics prioritized by their parties.¹⁹ The priority of “presence” over “ideas” indicated a break in the unity of representation as construed in the age of party democracy. When women demanded a greater presence on party lists or in elected institutions, it was because they no longer trusted their party; they did not believe that “politics of ideas” was representative of their absence (or lack of presence). They no longer believed that their absence from decision-making institutions was irrelevant to the fulfillment of their demands. They did not trust party’s advocacy anymore. They no longer believed that politics of ideas was a valid substitution for their “direct” presence or that it made the latter not determinant. Being present had gained in relevance. Thus, the growth of politics of presence signaled a crisis of representation because it signaled a crisis of representativity of the institutions that were supposed to do the advocacy work and transform the electoral democracy into a representative democracy.

¹⁸ There exists vast literature on the exponential growth of interest groups as a linkage between citizens and institutions, and the parallel decline of political parties as magnates of ideological identification, but see Jeremy Richardson, *Organized Interests as Intermediaries*, in *ELITISM, POPULISM, AND EUROPEAN POLITICS* 164 (Jack Hayward ed., 1996).

¹⁹ Anne Philips, *Perché è importante se i mostri rappresentati sono donne o uomini?*, 6(7–9) *INFO/QUADERNI* 133 (2000).

5. Empty and full generality

It is not the “number” per se (the number of women on party lists or in the parliament) that is at the origin of women’s denunciation of being under-represented. Neither is it the low number per se that can explain the rise of the “politics of presence.” The number of women started to matter because political parties were no longer representative. This means that “presence” is not necessarily a question of “number” while, on the other hand, “number” does not translate in and by itself into “identity” or specific policies. If we recall the above-mentioned important legislation that Italian society was able to pass in the 1970s, we may see that the “number” of women was not a crucial issue in that achievement.

Reflecting on politics of presence, scholars have argued that it was not a given that women representing women would translate into the making of some policies instead of others. It is widely known that mirror representation does not necessarily produce desired results. This is so because representation always has to do with ideas and interpretations, rather than empirical or physical presence. This also means that even “politics of presence” turns out to be “politics of ideas,” since ideas are the issue of “presence” in representative institutions.²⁰ Furthermore, in representative democracy the right to vote is an individual right in the profound sense of the word: not only because voting is an individual act, but also because democracy is not a mass regime but a political system whose sovereignty rests in each of its citizen’s will and opinion. In democracy, each and every vote counts because the goal is not merely to win a political majority, but also to make it possible for citizens to see their political ideas, opinions, and interests represented somehow—and this requires considerable effort, as well as means, opportunity, and social power.²¹

If number is not the substantive issue in the politics of presence, then why do we, women, think that we need to increase our numerical presence on party lists and in deliberating assemblies? Why is it not enough to have parties conduct the politics of ideas? The answer to this question allows me to return to the intrinsic value of political representation. In political representation two visions of citizenship (and politics) converge without intermingling: an interest-based one and a political one. The former corresponds to the view of representation as *vindication*—according to this politics of interests, representation mimics delegation (agent/principal relationship) insofar as citizens “use” elections and representation in order to gain something tangible or voice their interests. The political vision of representation is, instead, more directly in tune with the fiduciary model of political representation, or the free mandate model, insofar as citizens “use” elections and representation in order to *exercise their sovereign power* to make authoritative decisions.

Since the inception of representative government in the eighteenth century, political theorists have been split into two camps: while some viewed elections as a means

²⁰ Urbinati, *supra* note 11, at ch. 1.

²¹ See the excellent research by DARA Z. STROLOVITCH, *AFFIRMATIVE ADVOCACY: RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN INTEREST GROUP POLITICS* (2007).

for selecting the personnel of political institutions or creating a lawmaking body (i.e., Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès), others viewed elections as a means for protecting or voicing interests (James Madison). According to my interpretation, this traditional dualism today takes the form of the “politics of presence” and the “politics of ideas.” The important thing is that, as I have explained above, representative democracy rests on and needs both, not just one of them. Consequently, each of these two models is in and of itself insufficient if taken to represent the whole meaning of representation. Yet together they help define quite faithfully the character of representation in a democratic society.

Anne Philips and Iris Young argued for complementariness of “interests” and “loyalties,” of “presence” and “ideas” when they questioned the commonplace according to which women should not lament their political absence since they are enjoying an effective and strong social presence (in the world of economics, culture, and society as a whole). Clearly, social visibility does not substitute for political invisibility because in a democratic society, political voice is not interchangeable with social voice. To enjoy positions of “influence” and “power” in society does not translate necessarily into being free from discrimination or political domination. In democracy, citizenship is prior and superior to all other identities because it is an identity that pertains to political liberty, that is both the protection and vindication of claims and interests and the assertion of power and decision-making.

If this is true, then, when women vindicate their representative presence they do not do so because they assume that political representation is purely instrumental or can be translated into tangible outcomes; they do so because they presume that representation has a value, even if it does not “give” them anything specific in return. Representation is a means of defending or promoting interests, but it also has a value that is not reducible to the interests it may help to protect or voice, or fulfill. It is, as mentioned earlier, a question of political liberty: being in the game and playing the game as citizens who are equal in power. This is the reason why having a social identity that is both gratifying and rewarding in terms of power or influence does not compensate for a political identity that is scarcely gratifying and far from rewarding, in fact debilitating.

The mixing of “politics of presence” and “politics of ideas” is thus equated with the mixing of an interests-based vision of representation and a political vision of representation: the former takes into account specificity (advocacy), while the latter is “general” or blind to social specificity (representativity). This mix of “particular” and “general” is not contradictory if it is examined from the perspective of representative democracy whose character, as we saw above, reflects the complexity of equality itself, which is both a relation of numerical identity and of proportionality. The logic of the mixing of “politics of ideas” and “politics of presence” is similar to the logic sustaining civil rights and social rights respectively: the former must be absolutely equal in their distribution in order to be enjoyed as rights not as privileges, but the latter should take into account social differences and cultural or economic specificities in order to be effective.

A good representative democracy needs both levels because the generality of citizenship without the specificity of its actualizations would not be a form of generality

to begin with, but an abstraction (in fact a deception). Karl Marx's critique of the emptiness of citizenship may be used as a call for sensible attention to what happens outside institutions and their normative and regulated practices. This ought to be the guiding principle in distributing the "good" of representation: women are "needed" in representative bodies so that the generality of democratic citizenship is not empty but full (*full generality*). Otherwise we would not be able to explain why women's successful social achievement do not compensate for their political absence or low presence in elected institutions. Contrary to all other specificities, whether cultural or social, gender specificity is ubiquitous and universal. It permeates all other specificities as well as the generality of citizenship. It is a universal condition, as it were, and should be treated as such because it would be hard, if not impossible, to call democratic a society whose parliament is composed only of either male or female representatives. Regardless of the existence of universal suffrage, and regardless of a good performance of the "politics of ideas," the lack of presence would be rightly perceived as deeply unjust, even if, in the hypothetical case, it did not translate into unjust laws.

The perpetuation of the political community like that of the human species is essentially grounded in the coexistence of both women and men. And although the "citizen" is a general and artificial identity, its generality and artificiality is not to be confused with indifference to the composition of the human species. Reference to the living foundation of political community (which was an important argument for political inclusion formulated by early suffragists) brings me to conclude by suggesting the following criterion for political citizenship: in a representative democracy, any electoral list ought to have an equal number of male and female candidates, so as to give all citizens a truly equal opportunity to make a free choice. Women are not a minority that wants to claim special rights. They are not a group seeking representation in order to protect itself from disappearance in the ocean of majority culture or opinion. In this sense and for this reason, calculating the *right number* of women on party lists or in representative bodies is not only impossible, but plainly wrong. The general fifty-percent criterion is the best way of rendering the peculiarity of women in political representation. The reason it should be used as the ideal criterion for party lists' composition is that it symbolizes the fundamental principle of parity. The "half-and-half" ideal thus appears to be more consistent with the principle of democratic citizenship than all tentative quotas, since it demands that the generality of citizenship speaks always in its universal voice, which is dual not singular: the voice of women and of men.