**Abstract**

<ab>In 2013 the European Commission presented a draft directive calling for member states to increase the presence of women on corporate boards. Some countries, such as France, have taken a quota approach by passing legislation requiring corporations to increase the numbers of women on their boards over time, while the governments of other states, such as the United Kingdom, have preferred measures to encourage corporations to have more inclusive boards. While there is a growing literature on the impact that an increased presence of women can have on corporate boards, as well as a solid feminist literature on the role of quotas in political structures, there has been relatively little attention to the specific ways in which political actors have viewed the question of women on corporate boards. This article compares the ways in which quotas for women in corporate boards have been examined by the legislatures of the United Kingdom and France, with attention also to parliamentary debates in Canada and Russia. It is hypothesized that variations in political discourse help explain why conservative governments adopted such different approaches toward gender balance on corporate boards.</ab>