DOING POLITICS DIFFERENTLY?

WOMEN PREMIERS IN CANADA’S PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

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What difference, if any, does it make that women have reached the highest levels of political responsibility in Canada’s provinces and territories? In response to considerable public as well as academic interest in this question, this volume offers the first systematic assessment of the track records of women premiers – defined as leaders of constitutionally recognized, subnational jurisdictions in the Canadian federal system.

The significance of the country’s ten provincial and three territorial governments is hard to exaggerate. Responsibility for the design and delivery of health care services, a crucial and long-standing priority of Canadians according to public opinion surveys, rests with subnational decision makers, as does core control over other important policy areas, including education, social welfare and local government (see Research Canada 2015; Soroka 2007, 24). The fact that more than 31.1 million Canadians among a population of 35.5 million (or roughly 88 percent) were governed by a female premier at the beginning of 2014 underlines the importance of who holds power in provinces and territories (Statistics Canada 2017). Stated simply, this book asks how the arrival in power of a wave of female political executives shaped the decisions, personnel, and processes of subnational government.

As the first comprehensive look at women premiers, our account reflects a conscious effort to widen the scope of gender and politics research beyond
its long-standing preoccupation with lawmakers in parliaments. The project builds directly on Trimble et al.’s (2013b, 302) observation that “the true locus of power in the Canadian system is the political executive.” A similarly strong rationale for this line of inquiry can be found in comparative research in the field, notably Atchison and Down’s (2009, 4–6, 17) analysis of eighteen industrialized countries. Their article concludes that the presence of women in political executive roles is more significant for policy outcomes than numbers in legislatures – particularly in parliamentary systems.

For readers with a primary interest in Canada, this volume widens our understanding of the consequences for subnational politics of demographic and, especially, gender diversity among decision makers (see Andrew and Biles 2009). For readers with a cross-national focus, Canada offers an unparalleled opportunity to examine women’s impact as leaders. As demonstrated in the next section of this chapter, no other federal jurisdiction in the world has seen either the proportion or variety of female elites as has Canada since the early 1990s – when Rita Johnston in British Columbia (BC), Catherine Callbeck in Prince Edward Island (PEI), and Nellie Cournoyea in the Northwest Territories (NWT) took the oath of office as political executives. Significant growth in numbers of women leaders in Canada is reflected in the fact that, within twenty years of the arrival in power of these trailblazers, half of Canada’s provinces and nearly 90 percent of the country’s population were governed by female premiers.

Materials presented in Chapters 2 through 11 of this volume show the varied political origins of female premiers. They extend across the left/right ideological spectrum in seven party-based systems and encompass non-partisan backgrounds in the two northern territories, the NWT and Nunavut, which operate on the basis of consensus government. As detailed in Chapters 2 and 4, Nellie Cournoyea in the NWT and Eva Aariak in Nunavut were elected as government leaders in legislatures that do not have formal party organizations or party discipline; instead, these parliaments choose premiers via a secret ballot of all territorial lawmakers. In jurisdictions with party systems, four women premiers led Liberal governments, three were conservatives, one was from the New Democratic Party (NDP), and one led the independentist Parti Québécois (PQ) in Quebec.

Later in this chapter we discuss how the political circumstances under which women became Canadian premiers also diverged markedly. Outside the NWT and Nunavut, five of the nine premiers we consider attained top executive office after their predecessors as party leader fell to dangerously
low levels of public support – a circumstance we term *imperiled leadership*,
given the endangered status of the party formation. Two of nine inherited
the mantle of office from a strong party leader who resigned his position at
a peak of personal popularity – a scenario we call *empowered leadership*,
given the buoyant status of the political organization. Two others governed
under a combination of imperiled and empowered circumstances: these
were *pioneering leaders*, the first political executives in a jurisdiction to
reach top office from what had been a weak opposition party. A number
who served as the first female premiers of their respective provinces, in-
cluding Catherine Callbeck in PEI, Kathy Dunderdale in Newfoundland and
Labrador (NL), Alison Redford in Alberta, and Kathleen Wynne in Ontario,
held the additional distinction of facing women leaders of opposition par-
ties across the legislative aisle.

Beginning with a workshop held at the University of Toronto in May
2017, researchers with specialized knowledge of Canadian provincial and
territorial politics came together to document and assess the contributions
of women elites. The primary subjects of analysis for the workshop and this
volume were provincial political executives from Alberta, BC, NL, Ontario,
PEI, and Quebec; and territorial government leaders from the NWT, Nuna-
vut, and Yukon. It is important to clarify that at the time Cournoyena served
as premier of the NWT, that jurisdiction comprised what is now both
Nunavut and the NWT.

Guided by a larger international literature about gender and politics, the
contributors to this volume analyze the impact of female political leaders
across provinces and territories. They address executive influence by focusing
on the following core question: How has women’s leadership shaped the
climate of political debate, the content of public policy, and the numbers of
women in party, cabinet, and civil service positions? In turn, each chapter
breaks down that primary focus into a set of subquestions that I examine
later in this introduction.

In considering these points, chapters evaluate women premiers in the
context of the specific challenges they faced. For example, how did strong
majority mandates for parties led by women unravel in a single term or
less, notably for Pat Duncan in Yukon, Catherine Callbeck in PEI, Kathy
Dunderdale in NL, and Alison Redford in Alberta? What factors explain the
sharp contrast between Pauline Marois’s policy directions as a Quebec
cabinet minister as opposed to as a premier? How did one imperiled pre-
mier in BC, Christy Clark, secure re-election for her party after another,
Rita Johnston, failed? Close attention to biographical detail ensures that each chapter offers a compelling narrative grounded in a particular time and place, which is, in turn, closely linked to the larger concerns of the volume.

**Comparative and Historical Perspectives**

The remarkable gains made by women as premiers in Canada stand out in bold terms once they are placed in the context of data pertaining to other federal political systems. At the state level in the United States, the most common comparator to Canadian provinces and territories, 6 of 50 states (12 percent) had female governors at the time of writing. Peak numbers for American state leaders were reached in 2004 and 2007, when 9 of 50 governors, or 18 percent, were women. This figure ranks well below the Canadian parity level for premiers reached in 2014. Moreover, all American governors held a party affiliation with about 60 percent Democrats and 40 percent Republicans (Center for American Women and Politics 2017). This background shows how the numerical density and political diversity of premiers in Canada are both absent in the US.

In Germany, a total of five women have at some point headed a state within the federation such that three of the sixteen länder executives, or 19 percent who held office at the time of writing, were women (see Delcker 2016; Dowling 2011). Since 1989, eleven women have at one time or another headed five of Australia’s six states and both of its self-governing territories. The highest number of Australian women premiers at a single moment was three, a peak reached between 1991 and 1992, and again in 2011 (Parliament of Australia 2014; Bramston 2017). Information on subnational government leaders in systems including India, Mexico, and Nigeria reveals a similar pattern whereby men continue to far outnumber women as political executives. As a result, scholars of gender and politics have few subnational leaders to study in other federal states.

It remains clear, however, that the presence of female premiers in half of Canada’s provinces in 2014 came after a long period during which women were far from seats of power. To wit, most women in Quebec were only able to vote in provincial elections beginning in 1944. Indigenous peoples in Canada, including Inuit in the Far North, faced restricted access to voting in general elections until the 1960s.

Moreover, removing formal restrictions on rights did not end informal practices that kept women far from premiers’ offices. Thérèse Casgrain (1972), the first woman in Canada to lead a political party, chose the following title...
Exploring Women’s Leadership

for her memoir: A Woman in a Man’s World. Casgrain headed the Quebec wing of the NDP during an era of conservative nationalism in the 1950s, when the prospects were extremely dim for any social democratic party leader. Although Casgrain’s circumstances were rendered even more challenging by the fact that she was known as a feminist and peace activist, her important contributions to public life were later recognized in an appointment to the Canadian Senate.

In general terms, women who have led provincial parties in Canada tend to more closely resemble Casgrain than the politicians chronicled in this book. Female leaders at the provincial level have typically not held executive office because, like Casgrain, the organizations they headed were weak opposition formations with few (if any) elected legislators and, as a result, little chance of winning power. For the most part, provincial parties that have had more than one woman leader were in a weak, relatively uncompetitive position when those women assumed the top job: the parties were not expected to form the government in the next election and their women leaders were unlikely to become premier. Examples of women who led their parties during uncompetitive periods include Joy MacPhail and Carole James in the BC NDP, Sharon Carstairs and Ginny Hasselfield in the Manitoba Liberals, Elizabeth Weir and Allison Brewer in the New Brunswick NDP, and Alexa McDonough and Helen MacDonald in the Nova Scotia NDP.

What remains significant about these leaders is that many of them vastly improved the standing of their parties. James, for instance, revived the BC NDP such that the party rose from two to thirty-three legislative seats. In 1988, Carstairs brought the Manitoba Liberal caucus from a sole parliamentarian (herself) to twenty members, thus becoming the first woman in Canada to lead the official opposition in a legislature. By winning her constituency in St. John in 1991, Weir erased a pattern whereby the provincial NDP held no parliamentary seats in New Brunswick. McDonough’s election in a Halifax constituency in 1981 marked the first time the Nova Scotia NDP secured a seat outside Cape Breton Island.

Consistent with this historical background, research indicates party competitiveness is a key correlate of female party leadership in Canada. According to Bashevkin (2010), Canadian women have tended to secure the top position in minor parties that have lower competitive stakes and hence fewer barriers to entry than major parties – defined as those that either hold or seem close to holding power (see also Thomas 2018). The costs of winning a party leadership race, whether measured by dollars invested,
numbers of high-profile endorsements, or campaign team size, remain far less in weak opposition than strong governing or likely-to-win organizations (Bashevkin 2010).

Other studies point to left/right explanations of women’s leadership. O’Neill and Stewart’s (2009) analysis of federal and provincial leadership races in Canada between 1980 and 2005 finds that left parties were more likely to select a woman head than were centre or right formations. Given that, as of 2005, the NDP had held power neither at the federal level nor in the provinces of Alberta, New Brunswick, NL, Nova Scotia, PEI, or Quebec, the overlap between women’s leadership of left parties and uncompetitive parties is striking.

Consistent with Margaret Thatcher’s breakthrough as the first woman prime minister of the UK and Kim Campbell’s as the first in Canada, this study finds left/right party ideology is not a meaningful predictor of women’s leadership at the subnational level. Just as Thatcher and Campbell both came from parties of the right, this volume shows that seven of the nine female premiers who led party-based governments in Canada came from centrist or right-of-centre parties. In chronological order, the Liberals included Catherine Callbeck in PEI, Pat Duncan in Yukon, Christy Clark in BC, and Kathleen Wynne in Ontario. The conservatives were Rita Johnston in BC, Kathy Dunderdale in NL, and Alison Redford in Alberta. As discussed in Chapter 11, one NDP woman has thus far held office – Rachel Notley in Alberta. Quebec has had one female premier, Pauline Marois, whose government was criticized for abandoning progressive PQ policies (see Chapter 7). Although party ideology seems to shed little light on who becomes a premier, left/right distinctions are often relevant to the substance of what women do in top office. I develop this argument further in the section below on substantive impact, where I introduce the concept of critical actors.

One crucial dimension of left/right markers in Canadian politics involves variation among parties with the same name, not only across jurisdictions but also longitudinally within them. For example, the Ontario Liberals under Kathleen Wynne were arguably more progressive than the same party under Dalton McGuinty, the BC Liberals under Christy Clark, and the federal Liberals under Justin Trudeau. The federal Conservative Party established in 2003 was not constitutionally linked to Progressive Conservative organizations in any province and was generally more right-wing than the older federal PCs. New Democrats in Alberta under Rachel Notley tended to be far more supportive of energy pipelines than NDP activists in other provinces and at the federal level.
The fact that women from across Canada’s political spectrum gained power under varied competitive circumstances encourages us to probe how circumstances at the point at which they became premiers may have shaped their careers. In the next section, I present a threefold typology for understanding how females reached top office in subnational systems with party organizations.

**When Do Women Lead?**
Kim Campbell’s experiences as the first and, thus far, only female prime minister of Canada illustrate the pathway by which many other women have become government leaders. Campbell succeeded Brian Mulroney as leader of the federal Progressive Conservatives. At the point at which his replacement was selected at the PC leadership convention in spring 1993, Mulroney had headed two consecutive majority governments during roughly nine years in power. His public approval ratings were extremely low. The fact that the PCs spent roughly $18 million to win two seats in the federal election that was held a few months later reflects the extremely tenuous status of the governing party that Campbell inherited.

Popular accounts of women’s leadership often point to an idea known as the “glass cliff.” Instead of a “glass ceiling,” which prevents women from rising to elite levels, the notion of a glass cliff suggests that those who reach the top may be set up to fail because their ascent is often precarious, crisis-fuelled, and riddled with hidden risks (see Ryan and Haslam 2005). This volume refines the glass cliff concept by documenting both (1) institutional challenges associated with women’s political leadership based on the competitive status of their parties and (2) assets or supports that accrued or failed to accrue to women leaders. We view competitive circumstances as closely associated with political resources since leaders of weak parties by definition control fewer tangible and intangible resources than do those in charge of strong parties. In a number of chapters, we probe how female politicians were pushed off the stage, whether because they failed to command public confidence, lost the support of key observers and party insiders, or otherwise.

Like Kim Campbell, most female premiers considered in this study headed parties that faced a precarious future. For each woman, the challenging circumstances she confronted can be summarized as follows: a once-powerful political organization was operating in a measurably weakened competitive position. This scenario of *imperiled leadership* describes the status of five out of nine women premiers (or roughly 55 percent) who held office in partisan systems.
As detailed in Chapter 9, Rita Johnston succeeded the discredited Bill Vander Zalm in 1991 as leader of the BC Social Credit Party and head of a provincial government that (like the Mulroney regime at the federal level) was close to the end of its time in office. Chapter 10 explains how Alison Redford took over in 2011 from the enfeebled PC premier of Alberta, Ed Stelmach. Among Liberals, Christy Clark became BC premier in 2011 following the precipitous decline of Gordon Campbell (see Chapter 9), while Kathleen Wynne took the reins in Ontario in 2013 as public support for Dalton McGuinty went into steep decline (see Chapter 8). Pauline Marois’s ascent echoes this same pattern: she became PQ head in 2007 on her third try, at a point when the once-governing party had been reduced under André Boisclair to third place status in the Quebec National Assembly (see Chapter 7).

In short, most women who headed party governments in Canada’s provinces became leaders under imperiled circumstances. Their political formations faced significant crises that were reflected in weak incumbent leaders, modest support in public opinion polls, and diminished electoral prospects. Although every party these women led had once been a highly successful organization, each of them faced an ominous future at the point at which she took the helm.

This situation stands in stark contrast to the scenario of empowered leadership. Under the latter circumstances, a party faces promising prospects because it is (1) experienced in power under an incumbent leader who retains public legitimacy and support within the organization, and (2) selects a new leader who can reasonably expect to maximize those advantages in order to win the premier’s office on her own. Few women have reached top positions in Canada in an empowered situation, following the resignation of a popular and politically credible premier from the same party. They include Catherine Callbeck, who succeeded Joe Ghiz as provincial Liberal leader and PEI premier (see Chapter 5), and Kathy Dunderdale, who followed Danny Williams as provincial PC head and NL premier (see Chapter 6).

A third category combines elements of imperiled and empowered conditions. Circumstances of pioneering leadership occur when the head of a long-term opposition party brings her organization to power for the first time, as occurred with Pat Duncan in Yukon (see Chapter 3) and Rachel Notley in Alberta (see Chapter 11). Pioneers lead parties that were historically in opposition rather than in government, meaning that their formations have been politically imperiled because they were for many years only
marginally competitive compared to major players in a given jurisdiction. At the same time, pioneers operate under empowered circumstances in that they carry the positive halo that comes from turning the tables on an established governing elite and installing a new regime. In Yukon and Alberta, conservative parties had long dominated subnational politics, with the result that both Duncan and Notley were seen as breakthrough leaders for their respective organizations.

Clearly, each set of conditions carries both advantages and disadvantages. In terms of positives, imperiled leaders take on the top job in a party with experience in government and usually have an individual record of cabinet service. This was the case not just for Kim Campbell but also for all five imperiled provincial leaders discussed in this book. In addition, imperiled premiers face the possibility, however slim, that they will manage to hang on to power in a general election after taking over from an embattled party leader. Imperiled leaders who beat the odds include Clark after Gordon Campbell, Redford after Stelmach, Marois after Boisclair, and Wynne after McGuinty. These women rank as political heroes since they rescued their organizations from what seemed like certain political oblivion.

On the negative side, electoral victory under imperiled circumstances raises expectations that women leaders will consistently perform miracles by injecting life into what looks like a moribund or even defunct party. The fact that one of the five provincial leaders who faced imperiled circumstances, Rita Johnston, was unable to save her party provides a helpful cautionary note regarding the limits of political resuscitation (see Chapter 9). Redford’s difficulty in steering her PC government in Alberta led to harsh criticism and her early departure from office, even though the longer-term decline of the dominant party likely posed a more serious problem (see Chapter 10).

Among empowered leaders who follow popular male premiers, the advantages are obvious. The party holds power, the departing premier is held in high public esteem, and the incoming premier likely commands her own background of cabinet service. Yet the dangers are also apparent. Expectations not only that the party will remain in government but also that the new leader will dominate the political scene like her charismatic male predecessor might prove impossible to meet. Callbeck and Dunderdale led their parties to victory in general elections, but neither was seen as meeting the high standards set by her predecessor. Above all, as discussed later in this chapter, perceptions of male and female leaders typically build on gender stereotypes that make it hard for women to be seen as effective decision
makers. Any woman leader has trouble making the grade, but this is especially true when she arrives in office following the resignation of a high-profile man who has skillfully and unabashedly wielded the levers of power.

For pioneers, a key advantage is not being compared with party predecessors – since none of the previous leaders of the same formation won the premier’s job. Pioneers not only avoid the dark shadow cast by a weakened leader from the same party (as in imperiled circumstances) but also avoid inheriting an oversized halo from the former party leader (as in empowered circumstances). At the same time, pioneers such as Duncan and Notley lack cabinet experience and are unable to call on a loyal cadre of party supporters with experience in governing their jurisdiction. No pool of veteran cabinet ministers, deputy ministers, or ministerial assistants waits in the wings at the point at which they win election. This reality helps to explain Notley’s decision in 2015 to recruit many bureaucratic and political staffers to her government from outside Alberta.

This section has focused exclusively on premiers in partisan as opposed to consensus-based systems. If Cournoyaa in the NWT and Aariak in Nunavut – who were selected as political executives by a secret vote of all legislators – were to be evaluated in light of this typology, then they would seem to share similarities with all three categories. Like imperiled and empowered leaders, both women had government experience prior to becoming premier. Cournoyaa had served in the NWT cabinet and Aariak in the territorial bureaucracy (see Chapters 2 and 4). Like pioneers in an environment with party discipline, they were both trailblazers who came into office on their own – in the case of the NWT and Nunavut, without the benefit of a formal political organization. Similar to other pioneers, neither Cournoyaa nor Aariak had to contend with either a dark shadow or a bright halo cast by any predecessor since they were voted in as individual leaders without party affiliations.

We return to the varied political circumstances facing women premiers in Chapter 12.

**Making a Difference**

This book is organized around three main empirical questions. The first probes *how women lead*, asking whether the tone and style of subnational politics were more constructive and less conflictual during periods when women political executives held office. Is the concept of leadership itself masculine? What constraints do gender stereotypes impose on female
elites? Was the tenor of legislative discussion affected by the presence of multiple women as party leaders? Empirical data that help to inform these discussions include patterns of ejection from the legislature, use of time allocation measures, and commentary offered by legislators, political advisors, and journalists about women leaders.

Second, we examine the policy records of elites, asking how pro-equality social movements shape the actions of elected decision makers. In particular, we consider whether substantive issues that feminist interests historically placed on the public agenda that pertain to child care services, equal pay, and violence against women were more likely to figure in the parliamentary record when female premiers held office. How did women’s issue policy debates and outcomes feature under female leaders as compared with their male predecessors and successors?

Given that organized campaigns for gender equality often emerged on the political left, policy impact tends to be closely related to ideology. Using the language of comparative gender and politics research, we ask whether any female premier championed feminist movement claims to the extent that she was a transformative “critical actor” who carried forward a vigorous pro-equality agenda (see Celis and Childs 2008, 420–21; Celis et al. 2008, 104; Childs and Krook 2008, 734; Childs and Krook 2009, 138). The types of data that authors consider in responding to this set of concerns include left/right ideology, patterns of legislative action while a given premier held office, and the use versus the absence of gendered language in official statements of government intentions (such as throne speeches) and legislative debate.

Third, what are the main patterns of women’s recruitment as party candidates, cabinet ministers, and senior civil servants under female premiers as compared with their male predecessors and successors? Did leaders actively seek out and promote women to senior positions? Did they advance an approach to equality that can be considered intersectional in that it emphasized the recognition of differences among women along such lines as Indigeneity, sexual orientation, social class, and ethno-cultural background (see Crenshaw 1991)? To what extent were the careers of leaders such as Wynne, the first declared lesbian premier in Canada, as well as Cournoyrea and Aariak, both from Indigenous communities, shaped by intersectional identities? Did some premiers believe that the specific merits and qualities of individuals, and not considerations related to demographic groups, formed the proper basis of recruitment to positions of responsibility? In
what ways have the appointment records of women leaders varied, especially with respect to geographic region, ideological positioning, feminist movement background, and the time they arrived in senior office?

**How Do Women Lead?**

A primary concern of this book is the climate of political discussion during the terms of female leaders. The tenor of public debate and the treatment of women elites have, unfortunately, received far less attention than matters of policy action and descriptive representation.

How do women operate as public leaders? This question rests at the core of a long-standing discomfort with the juxtaposition of women and power, which can be traced at least as far back as classical Greek philosophy. The association of strong, articulate men with the public domain of the *polis*, on one side, and weaker, quieter women with a lesser private sphere of home and family, on the other, underpins traditional views of women as partial or impaired citizens. It also helps to explain portrayals of males as excellent debaters and warriors, and females as virtuous, caring nurturers with more skills in securing collaboration than in winning conflicts (see Bashevkin 2009, ch. 2).

What do the noun “leadership” and the verb “to lead” actually mean? According to Genovese and Thompson (1993, 1, emphasis in original), “Leadership is a complex phenomenon revolving around *influence* – the ability to move others in desired directions. Successful leaders are those who can take full advantage of their opportunities and their skills.” This conceptualization of leading as the ability to “move others” fits better with conventional dichotomies between masculine and feminine than do dictionary definitions of power, which usually cite command-based scenarios whereby a dominant actor controls multiple subordinates.

Following from ancient political theory, women might be seen as able to convince others to follow a particular course of action because they are perceived to hold talents as consensus-builders. By contrast, the capacity to operate as a unilateral, autonomous commander who orders other players around would be seen as a masculine rather than a feminine leadership style. In her account of contemporary organizations, Keohane (2010, 26–27) combines group- or team-based with hierarchical views in arguing that “a leader directs the activities of others and coordinates their energies, which is a basic form of power.”

If power is seen as the capacity to act upon, shape, or accomplish meaningful objectives in the public domain – likely through some combination of
collective and individual action – then why do more men than women reach leadership positions? Social scientists posit that leadership in many cultures remains a stereotypically masculine concept. American psychologist Virginia Valian (1998, 136), for instance, finds that “the more a woman is perceived as a woman the less likely it is that she will be perceived as professionally competent. The qualities required of leaders and those required for femininity are at odds with each other” (see also Jamieson 1995). Similarly, Eagly and Karau (2002) conclude that perceptions of ambition and readiness to lead are gender-based. Not only are women presumed to hold strengths in team-based as opposed to autonomous leadership skills, but men remain more likely than women to be viewed as effective decision makers.

Women politicians face particular constraints in projecting typically masculine leadership characteristics such as self-reliance and authoritative nature. According to Schneider et al. (2010, 363, emphasis in original), they “seem to face a choice of being seen as likeable or as competent, but not as both.” Dunaway et al.’s (2013) study of media coverage shows a particularly strong focus on personality traits rather than on public issues in accounts of American women running for the office of state governor. The political styles of women versus men thus figure in efforts to study not just how politicians lead but also how commentators and members of the public view that leadership.

These results help to explain the timing of female enfranchisement and the ascension of women to elite positions. Both occurred earlier in unsettled or sparsely settled frontier communities than in established urban areas. Just as Wyoming and Utah were the first territories to grant women the right to vote in the US, so were Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta the first in Canada to act on both the franchise and eligibility to hold public office. Consistent with this trend, the first woman to win a legislative seat in the entire British Commonwealth was Louise McKinney, a candidate for the Alberta Non-Partisan League who won her provincial seat in 1917. The first female cabinet minister in the Commonwealth was Mary Ellen Smith, a Liberal member of the BC legislature. Audrey McLaughlin, the first woman to head a major Canadian federal party as leader of the NDP beginning in 1989, was the MP for Yukon (see Bashevkin 1993, ch. 1).

Frontier areas are relatively open to outsiders given their fluidity and lack of established political traditions. As well, they are typically places where challenging conditions make it essential for people to know their neighbours and find ways to cooperate and share with each other – since harsh circumstances place everyone’s life at risk. The high valuation that frontier
societies place on the ability to work constructively in groups sheds light on the ascent of not just McKinney, Smith, and McLaughlin but also on the breakthroughs made in 1991 by Rita Johnston as BC premier and Nellie Cournoyea as leader of the NWT. The histories of both BC and the NWT are steeped in tales of survival in the wilderness – such that the contributions of every individual mattered to the well-being of the community (see Cournoyea’s reflections in Chapter 2). This same argument is helpful in interpreting the fact that all three of Canada’s northern territories had at least one woman premier by 2017, compared with only 60 percent of its provinces (six of ten).

In frontier jurisdictions as well as in long-settled regions, research shows female politicians project a stronger community orientation than do the men with whom they work. Studies beginning with Jeane Kirkpatrick’s (1974) account of US state lawmakers reveal that women are more likely than their male counterparts to cite service to local constituents (known as expressive motives) rather than ambition and career mobility (or instrumental) reasons for getting involved in politics (see Bashevkin 1993, 156). Given that traditional norms present women as collaborative, selfless carers and construct ambitious, confident women as deviant, it makes sense that female legislators would – when interacting with voters, researchers, or journalists – highlight their commitment to serving local community needs. This orientation is also consistent with divergent professional backgrounds: women in politics have often come from fields (such as social work, education, and communications) that were more open to them than occupations traditionally pursued by male politicians – namely, law and business (see Kirkpatrick 1974, 43, 60–61).

What happens when women arrive as legislators in disciplined parliamentary environments? Does their presence serve to moderate the often polarized tone of debate? Among the only contexts in Canada that have been studied with respect to this factor is the Alberta House, where Arscott and Trimble (1997a, 14) report that government as well as opposition women members “embraced a noticeably different legislative style. They avoided partisan grandstanding and name-calling in favour of focusing on the issue at hand and seeking or offering information.” Reinforcing this trend, Trimble (1997, 145) concludes that male MLAs in Alberta typically projected more “adversarial” debating styles and females more “co-operative” ones.

In the comparative literature, analyses of interventions by New Labour women first elected to the British House of Commons in 1997 show that
many preferred and tried to practice a “less combative and aggressive style” than men MPs (Childs et al. 2005, 68). Yet these same parliamentarians expressed concern that “women’s different approach is not considered equal to the masculinised style of male politicians” (Childs et al. 2005, 70). More recent research indicates that female MPs in the UK use a more women-focused vocabulary in their parliamentary interventions than do men, although this practice has not altered the overall tenor of legislative discussion (Blaxill and Beelen 2016, 431, 442; see also Mendelberg et al. 2014).

Provincial and territorial patterns reported in this volume coincide with British findings that women MPs did not transform the parliamentary environment. Consistent with a larger literature on feminist institutionalism, it appears that, in deliberative bodies with overwhelmingly male members, female legislators cannot easily alter either the “rules of the game,” including hours of work, seniority practices, styles of debate, and norms of socializing that men create over successive legislative generations, or the policy priorities of parliaments (see Krok and Mackay 2011; Mackay 2008; Poggione 2011). As Kathlene (1998, 197) observes with respect to US state politics, “gender affects more than just the individuals who occupy the legislature. The institution itself is gendered through the rules, norms, and expectations of how business should proceed. In our society, this gendering is also inextricably linked to power,” with the result that those voicing disparate perspectives inside gendered institutions are frequently silenced or excluded. One obvious possibility, as Lovenduski (1993) notes in an early discussion of party organizations, is that institutions may alter or co-opt the women inside them long before those women have a chance to change institutions from within.

The following chapters probe the tone and style of politics during periods when women political executives held office at the subnational level in Canada. In Chapters 2 and 4, authors consider whether consensus-based systems in the NWT and Nunavut, where formal parties and party discipline were absent, assisted female leaders. To assess patterns of cooperation and polarization, we consider whether legislators were expelled more often under male than female premiers. How frequently did leaders close off parliamentary debate? Was the tenor of legislative discussion altered by the presence of multiple women party leaders? How did political observers describe the actions of women premiers, particularly when those leaders faced serious crises?
Policy Impact
On questions of feminist influence in politics, the primary starting point for both Canadian and comparative work is Pitkin’s (1967) concept of substantive versus numerical or descriptive representation. Substantive representation involves how female politicians carry forward the issue priorities of feminist movements or, in Pitkin’s (1967, 111) words, “act for” those interests. In a classic study, Thomas (1994, 57) identifies “the chief area of interest of researchers concerned with the impact of women on politics” as substantive representation – meaning “whether women among the political elite contribute to a political product that differs in any way from men’s.”

Scholars pay close attention to legislators’ rhetoric and behaviour in what have been termed women’s policy fields. According to Swers (2002, 261), this domain encompasses “issues that are particularly salient to women because they seek to achieve equality for women; they address women’s special needs, such as women’s health concerns or child care; or they confront issues with which women have traditionally been concerned in their role as caregivers, such as education or the protection of children.” While researchers since the 1980s have focused intensely on lawmakers in the US and elsewhere, they have directed considerably less attention towards political executives.

What is known about the ripple effects of women’s participation? Arscott and Trimble’s (1997b) volume on Canadian politics reports that the conversion from numbers to outcomes is far from simple. According to studies of British Columbia (Erickson 1997), Saskatchewan (Carbert 1997), and Ontario (Burt and Lorenzin 1997), the ideology of the governing party matters more to policy outcomes than does the percentage of female parliamentarians. In particular, scholars report, the presence of a New Democratic provincial government in each jurisdiction is a better predictor of feminist policies than is the proportion of women holding legislative seats.

The finding that “party ideology can easily trump gender” parallels subsequent conclusions in the Canadian literature (Arscott and Trimble 1997a, 13), including Trimble’s (1998) study of Alberta when PC premier Ralph Klein held power. Trimble (1998, 285) reports that relatively high numbers of women legislators could not override a right-wing, “universalizing discourse” that rejected feminist claims. Writing about the other end of the ideological spectrum, Burt and Lorenzin (1997) as well as Byrne (2009) link women’s strong numerical representation in the NDP cabinet of Ontario premier Bob Rae to that government’s significant pro-equality policy advances.
Comparative scholarship also pays close attention to the correlates of women’s substantive representation. It shows significant variation over time and across systems, especially, since the 1970s, with the growth in the United States of organized anti-feminism and a broader “new right” resistance to equality claims (see Klatch 1987; Schreiber 2008). While early US studies report a positive association between female numerical presence in state houses, on one side, and attention to women’s issues and pro-feminist policy outcomes, on the other, subsequent inquiry finds a far less automatic translation from descriptive to substantive representation (see Berkman and O’Connor 1993; Osborn 2012; Saint-Germain 1989; Thomas 1994). Swers (2002, 263) echoes the conclusions of Canadian scholars in writing that, in the US Congress, “party affiliation is one of the most reliable predictors of legislative behavior.” Similarly, Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers (2007) cite the presence of a left governing party plus high numbers of females in a governing party caucus as crucial predictors of women-friendly policies.

Given the institutional constraints noted earlier, can individuals alter legislative environments (see Childs and Krook 2009, Figure 1; Childs and Withey 2005, 11)? To invoke the language of comparative gender and politics research, parliaments might in some instances reach a “critical mass” threshold of roughly one-third female members but – in the absence of “critical actors” within that mass – fail to enact pro-equality policies. Conversely, legislatures with relatively few women or with only a handful of progressive men could take major steps forward on those same issues. Analyses of substantive representation thus concentrate on critical acts, defined as initiatives that alter the status of women in political institutions (such as legislatures and political parties) and society more generally, performed by critical actors “who initiate policy proposals on their own and/or embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the numbers of female representatives” (Childs and Krook 2009, 138; see also Celis and Childs 2008, 420–21; Celis et al. 2008, 104; Childs and Krook 2008, 734; Dahlerup 1988).

What factors explain the likelihood that an elected politician will be a critical actor? Gender consciousness ranks as an important predictor. As Childs and Krook (2008, 728) note, overall numbers of women parliamentarians tend to matter less than the feminist identity of key change agents. In particular, comparative scholarship maintains that critical actors are usually women and, in some cases, men who have built and remained engaged with feminist reference groups since early in their careers (see Childs and Krook
This stream of inquiry predicts that the most promising opportunities for pro-equality policy change rest in the confluence of critical actors, mobilized women’s movements, and ideologically congenial political environments (Celis and Childs 2008, 421).

The chapters that follow assess the content and outcomes of women’s issue policy debates when female leaders held top provincial and territorial office. Authors consider the track records of these women’s predecessors and successors in order to understand the degree to which the presence of a female executive mattered. In some cases, premiers were conservative individualists who were averse to highlighting their gender. These individuals tended not to intervene in ways that made a measurable difference to substantive outcomes for women in the general population (see Chapters 2, 6, and 9). In other cases, such as NDP premier Rachel Notley, a woman leader consistently advanced feminist policy claims (see Chapter 11). Still others defended strong pro-equality positions in the course of their careers, notably Marois in Quebec and Wynne in Ontario (see Chapters 7 and 8, respectively).

**Recruitment Patterns**

During recent decades, scholars have explored the numerical representation of women in Canadian parliaments as well as its correlates. In the absence of constitutional or legislated quotas in any jurisdiction in the country, much of this research asks whether strategies adopted by individual political parties to increase numbers of women legislative candidates make much difference.

From a comparative perspective, this question is especially significant because Canadian parties tend to function as highly decentralized operations. For the most part, they expect local constituency organizations to select their own parliamentary candidates. Among the only deviations from this pattern are decisions made from time to time by federal Liberal leaders to appoint women nominees, and by federal and some provincial NDP organizations to apply quotas for female candidates. Apart from these instances, legislative recruitment in Canada has been more influenced by informal efforts to attract women candidates – whether by parties themselves or by external organizations such as Equal Voice – than by formal rules and regulations (see Bashevkin 1993, ch. 4).

What factors are associated with higher numbers of women parliamentarians? Arscott and Trimble (1997a, 7) find a close association between the electoral strength of formations such as the NDP that actively seek to recruit
more women to public life, on one side, and higher numbers of female legislators, on the other. Arscott and Trimble (1997a, 7–9) also report that women’s proportions in parliaments rise markedly following elections that remove the incumbent party with the result that large numbers of male legislators lose their seats (see also Praud 1998; Moncrief and Thompson 1991).

More recently, Trimble et al. (2013a) document how left parties like the NDP are generally more likely to nominate female legislative candidates than are their counterparts on the right and centre. This result resonates with findings in the comparative literature. Krook’s (2009) cross-national analysis of internal party rules as well as constitutional quotas that promote women’s election to public office, alongside Kantola’s (2009) study of the extent to which European Union countries have pursued informal, or “soft,” versus mandated, or “hard,” approaches to this objective, suggest that left parties often nominate and elect more women than do centre and conservative formations.

Yet the partisan pathways women follow to legislative office are not necessarily relevant at the level of political executives. While two of Canada’s three northern territories operate without formal party formations, most female premiers who held power elsewhere in the country came from centre and right-of-centre organizations. Contrary to patterns reported in the legislative literature, material presented in this volume shows that only one (Rachel Notley of the Alberta NDP) of the nine women premiers to hold office in a partisan parliament came from a left organization. Aside from Notley, all party-based leaders had roots either in conservative or centrist political formations or, in the case of Marois, in the moderate stream of the sovereignist PQ. In short, their political ascents occurred mainly in organizations that lacked the formal practices for recruiting women that have typified the NDP and parties of the left outside Canada since the late 1970s.

In explaining peaks and valleys in legislative representation, some scholars point towards the willingness of women in positions of political responsibility to recruit other women. Using Canadian federal data, Cheng and Tavits (2011) conclude that numbers of female constituency association presidents as well as the presence of internal party affirmative action policies are positively correlated with the proportions of female candidates (see also Brodie 1994; Carbert 2002; Tremblay and Pelletier 2001). Whitford et al.’s (2007, 574) account of OECD systems demonstrates that a key precondition for women’s advancement into political executive roles is their achieving sustained numerical representation in legislatures. According to Windett (2011), successful female candidacy for state-level office in the US
is associated with gender equality, with the result that progressive jurisdictions with more feminist policies and histories of elected women stand out from more traditional states, notably in the US South.

By contrast, O’Brien et al.’s (2015) study of the impact of prime ministers concludes that women in top posts appoint fewer women to cabinet than do their male comparators. This finding resonates closely with Thatcher’s record in British politics. While campaigning for a seat in the House of Commons in the early 1950s, Thatcher argued that the UK would be better off with more women MPs and cabinet ministers. During her time as prime minister between 1979 and 1990, however, Thatcher appointed a total of one other woman to cabinet. Moreover, within two years she demoted Janet Young from the post of government leader in the House of Lords on the basis that Young lacked “presence” (Thatcher 1993, 307; see Bashevkin 1998, 24–25, 173).

Given that scholars have devoted far less scrutiny to the study of female political executives than to legislators, this volume pays close attention to the political recruitment trajectories of women premiers in Canada. What backgrounds and experiences did they bring to public life? To what extent were close ties with political parties or, alternatively, community groups crucial to their upward mobility? Did women leaders champion the recruitment of other women, whether in their rhetoric or actions? In particular, were they more willing than men to name women to cabinet posts outside lower-prestige social and cultural portfolios where females tend to be clustered (see Krook and O’Brien 2012, 842; Tremblay and Stockemer 2013)?

The chapters in this volume trace female premiers’ candidate recruitment as well as public appointment records. If the presence of women as constituency association presidents enhances the recruitment of female candidates, then does the same hold for political executives and their nominees for public office, cabinet, and bureaucratic leadership? Are higher percentages of female candidates fielded during election campaigns when women head parties? Do women leaders demonstrate a willingness to recruit more diverse nominees on bases other than gender, notably with respect to ethno-cultural, sexual orientation, or occupational characteristics? In chronological terms, did the presence of more women premiers as time passed lead to greater willingness to promote other women?

**Organization of the Book**

This volume is organized by geographic region and, within regions, by chronology. We begin with the three northern territories and then consider the
Atlantic region where two provinces, PEI and NL, were governed by female premiers who succeeded popular male predecessors from the same political party under what we term empowered circumstances. Subsequent sections then move across the country in a westward direction.

The next ten chapters conclude with a female political executive elected in 2015: Rachel Notley, a pioneer in that she was the first NDP leader to serve as premier of Alberta. This way of organizing the book means that we initially consider three frontier jurisdictions in the North (two of them operating as consensus rather than as party systems) with women leaders beginning in 1991, and then turn to an established province that featured the first female political executive to win an electoral mandate of her own – PEI’s Catherine Callbeck in 1993. As noted earlier in this chapter, the five leaders we consider in Parts 3 and 4, from Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, headed imperiled parties whose political fortunes were decidedly weak at the point at which they took the helm.

Part 1 opens with Graham White’s account of NWT premier Nellie Cournoyea. Selected via a secret ballot of all territorial legislators, Cournoyea led a cabinet whose members were also chosen by their fellow lawmakers. Cournoyea welcomed the contributions of everyone in the NWT and did not actively intervene in order to recruit more women to public life. Widely lauded as a hard-working politician, Cournoyea was seen as both tough and demanding yet also as weak in so far as she permitted underperforming ministers to remain in cabinet. White argues that Cournoyea’s willingness to support ministers who were under attack demonstrates her decisiveness in that she placed a long-term commitment to the public good above short-term demands to shuffle her cabinet.

In Chapter 3, Maura Forrest examines Pat Duncan’s career as the first female as well as the first Liberal premier in Yukon. Forrest shows how Duncan had to navigate challenging economic circumstances as a pioneer whose party had no experience holding the levers of power in the territory and who had not served as a cabinet minister prior to becoming premier. Despite Yukon’s frontier history, Duncan found it hard to get a fair hearing as a woman leading the territorial government. She stands out for having appointed the first cabinet in Canadian history with half men and half women, although doing so did not hold significant implications for the content of public policy or the tenor of debate.

In Chapter 4, Sheena Kennedy Dalseg assesses the record of Eva Aariak as Nunavut premier. Aariak brought an extensive record of Indigenous activism to her career in public office, and she sought to engage local citizens
in cooperative relations with the territorial government. Kennedy Dalseg traces the difficulties Aariak and her government faced in trying to evaluate and improve the new territory’s operations through the use of a “report card.” She shows how Aariak was criticized as weak and indecisive even though she reached the premier’s position in part because of views that her predecessor had been abrasive and doctrinaire. Like Forrest’s account of public frustration over the absence of an economic turnaround in Yukon (Chapter 3), Dalseg’s discussion reveals how, in Nunavut, impatience with Aariak’s report card weakened her standing.

Part 2 of the volume considers Atlantic Canada. In Chapter 5, Don Desserud and Robin Sutherland discuss Catherine Callbeck’s contributions as the first woman in Canada to win her own popular mandate. In PEI, Callbeck took over an experienced governing party in which she had spent time as a legislator and cabinet minister prior to becoming leader. Desserud and Sutherland evaluate Callbeck using a metric she herself proposed: the ability to strike a balance among conflicting interests – which was not easy during a period of fiscal restraint. They show how Callbeck’s extensive experience was not able to insulate her from the realities that face many other women at the apex of power. These include harsh media criticism and the unwillingness of top party insiders to demonstrate the same degree of personal loyalty towards her as they might have offered a male leader.

In Chapter 6, in their analysis of NL politics, Drew Brown, Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, and Amanda Bittner explore how, in 2010, Kathy Dunderdale won a majority mandate for a party that had already held power for some time. Yet, following that election, her predecessor Danny Williams’s “large shoes” proved difficult to fill. Chapter 6 reports that Dunderdale named significantly more women than did Williams to top civil service posts. Yet lower numbers of female PC candidates and legislators made it hard for her to appoint women to the provincial cabinet. On the policy front, Chapter 6 explains how Dunderdale’s focus on a major dam construction project as well as a series of political crises diverted attention away from social policy in general and women’s rights in particular.

Part 3 considers leaders in central Canada. In Chapter 7, Philippe Bernier Arcand probes the paradoxical record of PQ premier Pauline Marois. A political veteran who held more than a dozen cabinet portfolios under other PQ premiers, Marois’s priorities as a minister versus as a premier clearly diverged. Unlike the strong social policy focus of her formative years in cabinet, when she championed an innovative and popular five-dollar-per-day child care program, Marois’s time as provincial leader was largely devoted to
debates over the “reasonable accommodation” of ethno-cultural minorities in Quebec. Her government’s proposal for a charter of secular social values drew widespread criticism, including from many feminists. The chapter shows how controversies over the charter, alongside the growth of competing nationalist parties, combined to defeat Marois’s government less than thirty months into its minority mandate.

In Chapter 8, Sylvia Bashevkin considers Kathleen Wynne’s record as Ontario premier. Wynne was the first woman and first declared member of a sexual orientation minority to hold this position. She also stood out from her predecessors because her political origins were in progressive social movement activism. Particularly towards the end of a majority mandate in 2018, Wynne’s government moved policy markers forward in the areas of pay transparency and child care. This same period saw the appointment of a provincial cabinet that approached numerical parity, thus surpassing a high-water mark of 42 percent female ministers that dated from the early 1990s. Data on the climate of parliamentary debate suggest the legislative atmosphere was more rather than less conflictual under Wynne’s leadership. Overall, Wynne’s background as a left-of-centre activist helps to explain her willingness, towards the end of her mandate, to operate as a critical actor on matters of gender equality.

Part 4 of the volume opens with Tracy Summerville’s account in Chapter 9 of two BC premiers: Rita Johnston and Christy Clark. Summerville details how Johnston faced not only the need to call an election right away but also a Social Credit Party that was internally divided and an electorate that saw her as too close to her embattled predecessor. By contrast, Clark had resigned years earlier from cabinet, thus creating distance between herself and her unpopular predecessor. Clark also benefited from more time before her party’s electoral mandate was exhausted in order to frame a distinctive political profile. Summerville contrasts improvements over time in the numerical representation of women in BC politics with the unwillingness of both Johnston and Clark to address structural sources of inequality.

In Chapter 10, Clark Banack considers the brief term in office of Alberta PC premier Alison Redford. He shows how Redford won a majority mandate by convincing moderate and progressive voters that the Wildrose Party threatened to take Alberta far to the right. She reversed some widely criticized actions of the preceding PC government, including cuts to social spending, and made incremental improvements to equality policies, including violence against women and gender-based budgeting. Yet Redford believed women’s presence in top positions made little difference to political
outcomes and was unwilling to introduce the types of programs later implemented by the NDP. A series of scandals engulfed Premier Redford with the result that, parallel with the record of Pauline Marois in Quebec, she stands as the elected Alberta premier with the shortest term in office.

In Chapter 11, Melanee Thomas examines Rachel Notley, Alberta’s first NDP premier. A pioneer who led her party to a majority government, Notley was a critical actor who created a status of women department, appointed the first parity cabinet in Alberta’s history, and pressed for more women to contest elective office. On the policy front, Notley’s government faced budgetary problems, which meant the province undertook a pilot study of twenty-five-dollar-per-day child care but did not immediately implement either a wider child care program or full-day kindergarten. Thomas shows how the ideologically polarized environment of Alberta politics meant that the arrival of progressive women leaders, beginning in 2015, sharpened rather than reduced the corrosive tenor of public as well as legislative debate.

Chapter 12 concludes the volume with a systematic look at findings from the ten substantive chapters. Following from this introductory chapter, we organize, analyze, and interpret the empirical data on individual leaders in order to respond to larger themes concerning women and public leadership.

References
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