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Acknowledgments

Independently of each other, Sylvia Bashevkin and Manon Tremblay approached Linda Trimble to find out if an update of *In the Presence of Women: Representation in Canadian Governments* was in the works (Arscott and Trimble 1997). After all, a lot had happened in the fifteen years since its publication, and, while women’s representation in the House of Commons was fairly regularly tracked, in the interim the provinces and territories had been largely overlooked. Determining whether or not the benchmarks observed in 1997 had been surpassed would require more investigation. Linda and co-editor Jane Arscott concluded a new volume was a good idea and convinced Manon to join the editorial team. Sylvia agreed to write a foreword for the book, and we were delighted when leading scholars from across the country quickly and enthusiastically signed on to the project as well.

Producing this volume would not have been possible without a great deal of support and assistance. First drafts of several of the chapters were presented at the 2011 meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association in Waterloo, and we received invaluable feedback from panel participants and audience members. The two anonymous reviewers for UBC Press offered detailed comments on all of the chapters and their thoughtful suggestions were enormously helpful. We were fortunate indeed to work with a fabulous group of authors who produced first-rate work on time and happily agreed to update material when elections occurred. A special thank you must go to
Emily Andrew at UBC Press. Not only did Emily champion the idea of a new book on women’s descriptive representation, she and her colleagues deftly steered it through the various stages of the publishing process.

In this volume we show that only a few more women have been elected to public office in Canada over the past few decades. But, ever hopeful that the goal of gender parity in political representation can, eventually, be achieved, we dedicate this volume to the many more women who will seek and win public office in the years to come.
In 1997, the publication of *In the Presence of Women* marked a significant watershed in the development of gender and politics scholarship in Canada. The volume skilfully presented and codified what was known about women's engagement in federal, provincial, and territorial legislative politics. Organized in a way that made a large body of research material accessible to students at all levels, the book proved extremely useful to faculty members teaching a wide range of subjects, including introductory Canadian and comparative politics. That volume stands, nearly fifteen years later, as a landmark accomplishment not only for its editors, Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, but also for each of the chapter contributors. Together, they mapped the terrain and challenged future researchers to gauge both how the field had evolved and how women's participation had or had not increased.

What do we now know about women's political engagement in Canada that we did not know in 1997? Which areas of enquiry have been most vigorously pursued, and which are in need of closer attention? To what extent has scholarly research in this field challenged broader understandings of Canadian politics?

Among the reasons that we are able to think retrospectively, and to analyze what's known and not known, is that a considerable body of scholarship exists today that was not available in earlier decades. This is no small matter since the professional norms discouraging gender and politics research were, and in many instances remain, quite powerful. One of the
major reasons to press forward with scholarship by colleagues at all levels, including graduate and undergraduate students, is to ensure the largest possible reach for their work and to attract both academic talent and public attention towards what remains an intellectually exciting, empirically and conceptually promising, and politically relevant area of enquiry.

This foreword advances two main propositions. First, the empirical gender and politics field has made progress, but not enough. Large stretches of the Canadian terrain remain un- or at least under-explored. To a large extent, we are in the curious position of seeing that the more we know, the less we know. Phrased differently, as more layers of onion are removed, the more interior we find – meaning that what has been learned can directly inspire further research. Second, the academic and public impacts of this scholarship have been measurable and important, but challenges remain. My reflections suggest that we need not only more academic recognition of research in the field but also, given its fundamental link to political representation in democratic systems, more public sharing of that material. Electronic databases provide Canadians with a wealth of contemporary as well as historical information, for example, about patterns of women’s election to parliamentary office. Yet public awareness and understanding of this subject remains for the most part frozen in time, having advanced little beyond the level of knowledge that prevailed when research in the field was in its infancy during the 1980s.

One of the obvious ways of assessing a field of enquiry is to think chronologically, going back to the earliest work and then moving forward to the present time. From that perspective we can begin to understand why relatively more is known about some areas – notably election to legislative office – than others. Janine Brodie and Jill Vickers conducted among the very first empirical studies in the area, examining patterns of candidacy and election to public office during the 1970s (see Brodie 1977; Vickers 1978). This research built on what was then a nascent comparative politics literature, which asked how many women served in legislatures, from what socio-economic and professional backgrounds they came, and how political mobility and ambition differed by gender (see Duverger 1955; Gruberg 1968; Jaquette 1974; Kirkpatrick 1974, 1976; Lovenduski and Hills 1981; Vallance 1979).

The major organizing themes in this literature include why so few women were elected to public office, what relationships existed between elected women and women in the general population, and how changes to parties, elections, and legislatures could enhance female political participation.
Decades later, these remain core interests of scholars in the field. Moreover, as was the case in the early years, much of the research in this area continues to pivot at a conceptual level around questions of representation. Hanna Pitkin’s classic 1967 study titled *The Concept of Representation* set out a key organizing concept, namely, “acting for,” or substantive representation, which raised the possibility that elected politicians could be carriers of ideas for broader societal interests and could act, while in public office, on behalf of social movements (Pitkin 1967, 11).

During the 1970s and following, as feminist organizations in Canada began to engage directly with mainstream political institutions, probing linkages between politicians and movements offered a logical next step for this literature. Among gender and politics scholars, especially those studying one of the world’s most disciplined parliamentary systems, parties became an institutional focal point in this story, whether the questions involved how women voted, which parties fielded women candidates and under what competitive circumstances, or how policy issues of particular relevance to women unfolded during as well as between election campaigns.

Vicky Randall’s (1987, 108) comparative overview of the field argued that party ideology mattered to each of these questions. Her claim was highly significant in an era dominated by notions of “the end of ideology” in post-industrial society (see Bell 1960), and it demonstrated the extent to which gender and politics research, from a very early point in its development, interrogated prevailing social science wisdom. Randall’s conclusion – that left parties seemed more rhetorically congenial towards feminist claims, more willing to field women candidates, and less likely to segregate women members in separate women’s auxiliary organizations than did parties of the centre and right – was confirmed in Canadian research dating from the mid-1980s (see Bashevkin 1985).

Progressive parties were also more willing to experiment with formal rule changes designed to increase numbers of female party convention delegates and legislative candidates. Research on quotas, targets, and what was termed a “critical mass” of influential women dates back at least to the 1968 US Democratic Party convention, where criticism of the seeming exclusion of women and racial minorities from traditional party structures prompted the creation of what became known as the McGovern-Fraser Commission (see Kirkpatrick 1976, 43). The willingness of both Democrats and Republicans to introduce important representational reforms between 1968 and 1972 helps to explain why numbers of women delegates to US
party conventions increased markedly through the 1970s. This transformation took place during the same period that the United Nations declared 1975 the International Year of the Woman, thus directing global attention towards women’s engagement in politics and other fields.

A robust comparative literature exploring quotas and their impact developed during subsequent years. Much of it focused on how large a numerical presence in what kinds of institutions was necessary to alter not just the content of policy rhetoric and decisions but also the tenor of issue debates (see Childs and Krook 2008, 2009; Dahlerup 1988; Krook 2009). In Canada, some research was undertaken in this area, notably by Manon Tremblay on federal MPs (see Tremblay 1998). Yet a number of obvious questions that might have been asked by an alien landing from outer space remain unanswered. For example, given that the federal, British Columbia, and Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) organizations were at the forefront of pursuing party quota strategies, what was the impact of these reforms on the gender composition of party caucuses? The nature of party issue platforms? The ability of parties to mobilize women voters? The dynamics of party strength between elections? Is it a coincidence that the federal NDP has elected women leaders, as have both the BC and Ontario parties?

The fact that Canada has had an unusually high number of women party leaders, often in organizations far from power, provides another crucial dimension to this story. Researchers have only begun to probe the within-Canada as well as cross-national aspects of this pattern. Published work reveals a preponderance of female party heads in weak opposition organizations on the political left, which suggests that, in the future, closer attention should be directed towards system-wide variables, including electoral rules, as well as party-level factors such as competitive circumstances and ideological positioning (see Bashevkin 2010; O’Neill and Stewart 2009). Analyzing party leadership campaigns also permits scholars to examine the role of individual women elites in acting as transmission belts between feminist movements and mainstream political institutions (Bashevkin 2009).

If we compare the years 1980 and 2010, we see that far more women were elected to Canadian legislatures, even though the proportion reached a stalemate in the one-fifth range (Bashevkin 2011). The reasons that numbers plateaued deserve closer examination since research suggests the causal chain may begin with a hostile media climate that reduces the supply of willing candidates (see Gidengil and Everitt 2003; Goodyear-Grant 2009). In addition, the rural-urban divide is illustrated by the fact that relatively few women politicians are elected in the rural and small-town constituencies.
that are typically overrepresented in Canadian legislatures (Carbert 2009). Early studies point as well towards such obstacles as the financial and occupational costs of candidacy, discrimination within party organizations (including “dirty tricks” in the course of competitive nomination contests), and the weight of family responsibilities on women generally (see Brodie 1985, 111).

Lisa Young’s *Feminists and Party Politics*, published in 2000, explores party/social movement relations with reference to both the United States and Canada. Her conclusions closely parallel those of Vicky Randall in identifying strong ideological drivers whereby left and centre parties were more welcoming towards women activists, particularly those with feminist backgrounds, than were parties of the right (see Young 2000, 169, 206; Randall 1987, 108). In a period of conservative ascendance since 2006, therefore, stalled growth in numbers of elected women seems far from surprising. More systematic longitudinal comparison across provinces and at the federal level will permit researchers to test the relationship between electoral results and women’s legislative recruitment.

Above all, scholarship in this area would benefit immeasurably from a comprehensive, up-to-date analysis of the evolution of contemporary feminisms in English Canada and Quebec (published studies include Adamson, Briskin, and McPhail 1988; de Sève 1985; Dumont 2008; Lamoureux 1986; Vickers, Rankin, and Appelle 1993). A thorough political study of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), to parallel accounts of the Women’s Electoral Lobby in Australia and of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in the United States, could address many significant questions (see Barakso 2004; Sawer 2008). Did NAC’s evolution parallel that of peak Canadian Aboriginal, anti-poverty, and environmental groups that emerged during the same wave of “new social movement” ferment? How have organizations in Quebec and the rest of Canada differed in their strategies for engagement with mainstream political institutions? Were elected women more likely to pursue substantive representation activities during the height of extra-parliamentary feminist mobilization? To what extent did levels of cross-party cooperation among women legislators, and the dynamics of party women’s caucuses, mirror the ebbs and flows of organized interests operating outside parliaments?

Although Canadian researchers have begun to address feminist movement-political party relations, they have not extensively probed the consequences of electoral outcomes for women in the general population. Cheryl Collier’s (2001, 2008) work on anti-violence as well as child care initiatives
in Ontario and British Columbia demonstrates the importance of the party in power to the treatment of both policy issues. Turning her question around to interrogate women’s collective effectiveness within parties as a phenomenon to be explained would tell us what factors facilitated or, alternatively, discouraged feminist activists from joining various organizations and seeking to mould party platforms. In turn, this scholarship would shed light on the internal party dynamics behind both electoral and substantive representation.

Although relations between organized anti-feminism and political parties form an important part of this narrative, they have for the most part escaped academic scrutiny. Understanding how groups such as REAL Women and other anti-equality interests have established themselves within both party grassroots and elite circles poses a significant challenge, in part because of the difficulties entailed in studying what remain largely closed organizations. Yet Canadian gender and politics scholarship needs to extend its reach to this area, and we are fortunate to have useful models to draw upon in the US literature (see Schreiber 2008) and in earlier work on feminists in Canadian parties (Tremblay and Pelletier 2003).

It is also worth juxtaposing research on movement and legislative involvement with the study of Canadian constitutional and judicial politics. Debates surrounding constitutional reform during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and later in the Meech Lake and Charlottetown periods, stimulated strong interest in how courts interpreted women’s rights. The presence of equality language in sections 15 and 28 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms led researchers of diverse political persuasions to ask how equality-seeking interests intervened in the courts, how judges made decisions, and whether women judges made much difference (see, for example, Anderson 2001; Manfredi 2004; Razack 1991).

What remains remarkable about this literature is how few linkages have been made between peaks and valleys in movement mobilization, movement interest in mainstream politics, and women’s legislative engagement, on one side, and constitutional and judicial outcomes, on the other (for one exception, see Dobrowolsky 2007). In particular, we need to assess relationships among elected women in parliaments and at local and municipal levels, on one side, and extra-parliamentary (including court-focused) mobilization, on the other. Did periods of sustained success by the Women’s Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF) as Canada’s lead gender equality litigator correspond with periods of growth in elected numbers? What was the role of the Court Challenges Program not only in supporting equal-
ity-seeking interests in the courts but also in stimulating women’s interest in pursuing legal and political careers? Why has the Charter not served thus far as the foundation for a successful campaign to secure system-wide quotas for women candidates? Will efforts to vet Canadian judicial appointees in ways that emulate US practices reduce the numbers of women who are willing to be considered for these positions and thus diminish the likelihood of “acting for” behaviour on the bench?

During the past three decades, Canada’s major cities have undergone significant transformations not just in terms of de facto jurisdictional responsibilities – given the process of downloading from constitutionally privileged orders of government – but also with respect to population growth and population diversity. Have these shifts created new expectations concerning gender representation in cities, including in urban party organizations? Studies, including Andrew (2009), probe the involvement of local ethno-cultural women’s groups in municipal policy making, thus setting in place the groundwork for a more expansive research agenda that asks if and how diverse women are making their way into elective office at federal and subnational levels. Future steps in this area might build on Holli’s (2008) comparative theorizing, which considers links among extra-parliamentary feminist interests, elected politicians, and bureaucratic units charged with gender equality responsibilities. According to Holli, studying “feminist triangles” over time and space, even within a single city or region, can illuminate the ways in which organized interests shape institutions and policies.

Finally, it is essential to bear in mind that women’s political engagement unfolds in political executive institutions that are likely even more severely gendered than any of those mentioned to this point. In political science generally, senior appointive office remains an under-researched area – perhaps, as MaryAnne Borrelli (2002, 15) observes, “because it seems to lack continuity in its relationships and practices.” This point is worth pursuing because several Canadian women from the centre-right Progressive Conservative Party held federal cabinet posts that were uncommon in international terms, including two as external affairs ministers (Flora MacDonald and Barbara McDougall) and one as defence minister (Kim Campbell) between 1979 and the early 1990s. Moreover, women from across the political spectrum were appointed during the 1980s and following to top finance positions in provincial cabinets.

Despite the powerful role of political executives in Canada, relatively little scholarship has explored cabinet office-holding (exceptions include Bauer and Tremblay 2011; Kerby 2009; Studlar and Moncrief 1997, 1999;
Trimble and Tremblay 2005). Published memoirs and biographies of elite women provide useful background material but do not evaluate, for example, the substantive representation discourse and behaviour of appointed female elites, whether comparatively across women in terms of left-right party-in-power considerations or with reference to male predecessors and successors who held the same positions. How did elite-level women relate, or not relate, to organized feminism as well as anti-feminism in civil society?

It is worth concluding with an even tougher question: Has Canadian political science been fundamentally challenged or changed during the past thirty years by gender and politics research? Most gender and politics scholars carefully read what is considered the “general” literature of their respective specializations, whether that material concerns parties, elections, public policy, federalism, or political economy, since currency is a professional expectation in the discipline. It remains doubtful, though, that most “general” scholars invest parallel energies in the gendered scholarship – even if it falls within their own areas of interest. Important opportunities continue to exist to reverse that situation – including by insisting that colleagues, journalists, and our fellow citizens take women and politics scholarship more seriously than they have, and by ensuring the research produced in this subfield is so academically strong (in the sense of conceptually compelling and empirically interesting) that other members of the discipline cannot afford to ignore it. The publication of Stalled: The Representation of Women in Canadian Governments presents a valuable chance to attain this goal.

References


Introduction

The Road to Gender Parity

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Stalled: The Representation of Women in Canadian Governments maps women’s political representation across Canada and over time by tracking the numbers of women elected to municipal councils, provincial and territorial legislatures, and the House of Commons as well as women appointed to the Senate. In addition to documenting women’s representation as candidates, office-holders, cabinet ministers, party leaders, and representatives of the Crown, each of the chapters in this volume offers explanations for the continuing under-representation of women in these categories. The authors consider what is being done by political parties, governments, and women’s organizations to recruit more, and more diverse, women candidates and to promote women into executive positions. Prospects for gender parity – roughly equal numbers of women and men in political office – are assessed in each jurisdiction and institution. The conclusions are disappointing. In 1990 Chantal Maillé projected that, at then current rates of increase, equal representation of women in political office would take forty-five years. More than two decades later, the achievement of gender balance in Canada’s legislatures remains as distant as before due to lower than anticipated rates of feminization (increases in the percentage of women elected) (Praud 2003).

The present volume extends and updates earlier work conducted on women’s descriptive representation across Canada (Arscott and Trimble 1997; Trimble and Arscott 2003). Some political levels have been better documented than others. Parliament and a few of the provincial legislative...
assemblies (notably in Ontario and Quebec) have been relatively closely examined, whereas research about the presence of women in municipal governance, the Senate, and the territories has barely begun. This volume helps fill the gap by incorporating chapters on women’s representation in these under-explored jurisdictions. In addition to offering a systematic array of data on women’s electoral representation in federal, provincial and territorial, and municipal politics, the chapters map the progression of women in party leadership roles and appointed positions such as cabinet and Senate posts. With the exception of the municipal politics chapter, each of the chapters begins with an information box that presents the most recent data on women’s representation in elected and appointed political positions. The chapters on Canada’s national and subnational elected legislatures each follows a common template, beginning with key cultural, historical, socio-economic, or political factors that shape women’s political representation in that jurisdiction before offering longitudinal data on numbers of women legislators, candidates, party leaders, cabinet ministers, first ministers, and representatives of the Crown. Each chapter analyzes these data, identifying the factors that best explain the observed trends. In particular, authors address the puzzle of the stalled electoral project for women. Why, after significant increases in the 1980s (Studlar and Matland 1994), has women’s electoral representation stagnated since the mid-1990s? Finally, each of the chapters assesses the prospects for gender equality in the individual jurisdiction or institution.

Based on the traditional dominance of scholarship at the federal level, readers might expect to see the national institutions given priority by being placed at the front end of the book, or to see the chapters grouped regionally or thematically. Because city politics is, quite literally, “politics where we live,” the newest material on the municipal level appears first. Chapter 1 explores the argument that election to city politics is somehow “easier” than winning a legislative position. The lens then shifts to the subnational legislatures, with Chapters 2 to 12 detailing women’s political presence in each of Canada’s provinces and territories. Rather than organizing these chapters from west to east, a conceptual configuration that ignores the North and misleadingly implies that there are geographic explanations for women’s under-representation, the jurisdictions are arranged in alphabetical order, beginning with Alberta and ending with the territories. As these chapters illustrate, there are leaders and laggards in each region of Canada. The remaining chapters present information on the federal level of governance, examining women’s progress in the House of Commons (Chapter 13) and
the Senate (Chapter 14). The final chapter, an integrative conclusion, assesses trends over time and across jurisdictions and gauges the overall prospects for gender parity.

This introductory chapter answers two questions. First, what do we already know about the recruitment, integration, and impact of women in institutions of representative democracy? In the first section of the chapter, we provide a brief overview of the evolving literature on women’s representation in Canada. While the knowledge base has expanded considerably over the past three decades, many questions about women’s descriptive representation remain unanswered. But this gives rise to another question: Why should we care about women’s continued under-representation in positions of political authority? As we explain in the final section of the chapter, the representation of women in elected and appointed offices continues to be an important measure of both gender equality and the overall health of democratic governance.

The State of Knowledge about Women and Political Representation in Canada

Numerous studies have been written about women and politics, including analyses of their integration into the institutions of representative democracy. Thomas (1994, 4) divides the evolution of works on women in politics in the United States into three distinct periods, starting with the first women elected, followed by the electoral project that may have been driven by feminism, and rounded out by considerations about substantive representation. This division is reflected in the development of research on the subject in Canada.

The first period of research on women and politics was instigated by the election of women at various levels of government. While very few academic researchers studied women’s political participation in Canada at this time, articles by Bashevkin (1983), Brodie (1977), Cochrane (1977), Kohn (1984), Kopinak (1985), Langevin (1977), Tardy (1982), Vickers (1978), and Vickers and Brodie (1981) laid the initial groundwork. These authors compared female legislators with male legislators, emphasizing socio-demographic profiles, including age when first elected; marital status, employment status, education, occupation or profession; and participation in civil society organizations. Studies took note of where women were elected – in rural or urban communities, and in municipal, provincial, or federal arenas – and examined women’s positioning and responsibilities when they gained access to ministerial posts.
The small number of women in political institutions, and their necessarily exceptional character, inspired the first reflections about why there were so few women in politics. Early explanations maintained that political parties were reluctant to select women candidates in competitive ridings (Brodie and Vickers 1981, 1982; Hunter and Denton 1984), that the media depicted female politicians as actors belonging mainly to the private sphere (Archibald et al. 1980), or that socialization and female gender roles did not encourage women to think of themselves as political beings. Research on women in politics in Canada has been preoccupied with explaining the disproportionately low levels of election and appointment of women to public office ever since.

The second and third periods of research on women in politics have been set against the background of a feminist electoral project. In general, the goal of this project is to increase the presence of women in Canadian politics and to use women’s presence in governing institutions to change and improve women’s living conditions. As Iris Marion Young (1994, 116) notes, “identity-based representation requires both the presence of women in legislatures [descriptive representation] as well as the inclusion of women’s perspectives, beliefs, interests and diversity in the representational process [substantive representation]” (see also Pitkin 1967, 60-143). The idea of critical mass links descriptive and substantive representation by arguing that, if there are more women in politics, they will be in a better position to move the process of public decision making in a direction that is favourable to the interests of women (Dahlerup 1988; Kanter 1977). A number of feminist theorists, including Phillips (1995), Williams (1998), and Young (1989, 1990, 1994, 2000), have expanded the contours of the feminist electoral project (in Canada, see Vickers 1997; Young 1997). The notion that elected women represent all women has also generated a number of different opinions and critiques (see, among others, Ship 1998; Trimble 2006).

The second period of research, which began during the early 1980s, gave some attention to substantive representation. In addition to documenting continued obstacles to the election of women, researchers asked whether elected women were more likely than their male counterparts to support feminist ideas and policies. For instance, Erickson (1997) analyzed the opinions of a sample of female and male candidates in the 1993 federal election. She found that female candidates were significantly more likely than male candidates to support the election of more women members of Parliament. As well, women were more likely to favour the implementation of measures designed to remediate gender imbalances. Similar research was conducted...
at the provincial level. In 1982, Bashevkin (1985a) investigated feminist attitudes among delegates to the conventions of the three main political parties in Ontario. Women in each party were more likely than were their male counterparts to support the women’s movement and affirmative action measures (Praud 1995, 1998), and more of them detected discrimination against women in politics. Tremblay (1992, 1995) made the same observation in Quebec: female politicians had more firmly feminist convictions than did their male colleagues. Although the Atlantic provinces are often described as being more traditional with regard to women’s participation in politics (Brodie 1977; Carbert 2002), O’Neill and Erickson (2003) and Arscott (1997) have challenged this assumption. Arscott (1997, 330) discovered that “women legislators [in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia] began taking a more openly woman-positive political stance in debates over the prospect of institutionalizing the government’s concern for the status of women.”

The second period of research on women and politics in Canada has also been typified by “barriers” research. A number of works were inspired by Norris’s (1996) model, which addresses obstacles to women’s success by dividing the pathway to political power into four steps: eligibility, recruitment, selection, and election. In other words, to sit in the legislature a person must: have the right (or legal capacity) to do so, decide to become a candidate, be selected by a political party, and be chosen by the electors to represent them. Norris’s pathway to a legislative mandate is analogous to being hired: eligibility corresponds to the group of people who are qualified to apply for a job vacancy; recruitment refers to those who apply; selection is similar to the short list of applicants chosen for an interview with the employer; and election is equivalent to hiring one of the applicants. The process occurs in an environment made up of socio-cultural regimes (such as socialization and gender roles), economic regimes (for example, employment structure by sex), and political regimes (the party system and the voting system, for example).

Eligibility alone does not explain the under-representation of women in politics in Canada since, like men, women are now entitled to vote and to run for office. Recruitment, selection, and election, however, are not universally available and, as a result, have generated a good deal of research. In Tahon’s (1997) view, maternity is at the core of the political exclusion of women. Among the factors that MacIvor (1996, 235-41) advances to explain the low presence of women in Canadian politics, three are linked to recruitment: first, the public-private split; second, the gendered division of labour
in the home and the workplace; and, third, the negative impacts of parenthood. Women’s sense that they can understand politics, which certainly is a precondition for envisaging a political career, remains salient, as a recent study by Gidengil, Giles, and Thomas (2008) shows.

It is one thing for a woman to see herself in politics but another for her to be seen by others as capable of assuming a mandate of political representation. For political parties, selection consists of choosing the candidates who will run for election under their banner; as such, the demand for candidates is orchestrated by party elites. The selection process is not neutral as it is based on a group of values regarding the ideal profile of a candidate (Norris and Lovenduski 1989). The candidate profile differs from one party to another; moreover, parties that historically have monopolized the political scene (the Conservatives and the Liberals) tend to favour candidates whose features correspond more to masculine socialization and roles than to women’s experiences (Erickson 1993; Pitre 2003a, 2003b; Tremblay and Pelletier 2001).

The processes used by political parties for selecting candidates have posed additional difficulties for women, one related to the position of women within parties, the other to incumbent female candidates. In Bashevkin’s (1985b, 53-79) view, the position of women within English-Canadian political parties could be summarized as “the higher the fewer” – that is, the higher the positions, the fewer women fill them. As they did not hold key positions, women were less likely to be identified as potential candidates by selection committees. In a survey of MPs conducted in 2000, Young and Cross (2003) observed that women had a less prestigious profile than did their male counterparts, a gap that certainly militated against their selection as candidates.

Moreover, the number of terms an elected official may serve is unlimited. Incumbent politicians seeking re-election are almost automatically selected by their political party. Incumbent female candidates have clearly higher success rates than do female candidates seeking a first term in office, and men are proportionally more numerous than are women within federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal political institutions; this situation represents a major barrier to women who wish to win a first mandate (Gidengil and Vengroff 1997; Tremblay 2009). However, Young (1991) found that the high turnover rate for members of Parliament favoured the election of women.

Election, the last step in the path to political power, may pose a number of difficulties for women, starting with the voting system. The first-past-the-post voting system poses obstacles to the election of women because parties
present only one candidate per riding, whereas proportional voting systems encourage a diversified list of candidates in each riding (Matland 2003, 2005; Norris 2000, 2004). In Canada, Maclvor (2003) and Studlar and Moncrief (1999) have demonstrated the negative impact of the first-past-the-post system for women.

Women running for office are further disadvantaged by campaign financing and treatment by the media. Although Canada has public election campaign funding, Brodie (1991) found that lack of money was a major obstacle reported by the (then) few women candidates. In contrast, Young (2006, 57) more recently notes “that candidate gender has only a minimal effect on ability to raise funds and rates of campaign spending.” Media treatment of women aspirants to political office has been a well-documented issue since the mid-1980s (see, among others, Gingras 1995; Robinson and Saint-Jean 1995; Sampert and Trimble 2003), including in high-visibility political party positions (Everitt and Camp 2009a, 2009b; Everitt and Gidengil 2003; Gidengil and Everitt 1999; Tremblay and Bélanger 1997; Trimble and Everitt 2010).

Obstacles to women’s quest for political power have changed over time. Such changes have inspired an evolving research agenda. Bashevkin (2009, 11) characterizes the current situation as: “women plus power equals discomfort,” which “refers to a specific normative climate that says either no woman is good enough to be a public leader, or else no normal woman is (or would ever want to be) powerful.” For example, women party leaders confront the “discomfort equation” highlighted by Bashevkin. O’Neill and Stewart (2009) demonstrate that major parties are less likely to select women than are less competitive parties. Moreover, female leaders’ careers are shorter than men’s, and male leaders are more likely to achieve greater electoral victory. Bashevkin’s (2010, 87) examination of ten party leadership campaigns in Canada since the mid-1970s “found electoral competitiveness, defined with reference to the firmness of a party’s grip on power or its proximity to power in opposition, to be negatively related to women’s leadership success.” The reluctance of competitive political parties to select a female leader may be counterproductive. As O’Neill (1998) has shown in the case of the 1993 Canadian federal elections, a female leader may attract female electors, offering parties the potential to strengthen their electoral base of support (see also Bashevkin 2011; for a divergent point of view see Goodyear-Grant 2010 and Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011).

The third, and newest, period of research on women in politics is distinctive in three ways. First, in addition to analyzing obstacles, researchers
in this phase have documented opportunities for enhancing women’s representation in political life. Gauvreau (2011) interviewed female candidates in the 2010 New Brunswick election and found that fixed-date elections were seen as an opportunity for women to prepare their campaigns. Kerby’s (2009) analysis of ministerial careers in Ottawa from 1935 to 2008 found that women have been 50 percent more likely than men to sit in the federal cabinet. Drawing on earlier scholarship by Studlar and Matland (1996), Moncrief and Studlar (1996), Studlar and Moncrief (1997), and Byrne (2009, 1997), several chapters in this book suggest similar trends in provincial cabinets.

Second, researchers in the third phase challenge the totalizing category of “woman” (Arend and Chandler 1996; Black and Erickson 2000, 2003). While a great deal of work in this area remains to be done, the gross under-representation of Aboriginal and racialized women has been documented and scholars are beginning to identify the particular obstacles to elected office posed by race and ethnicity (Andrew et al. 2008; Black 2000, 2003, 2008; Ship 1998). As the chapters in Electing a Diverse Canada (Andrew et al. 2008, 255) illustrate, there is “an archetype of the Canadian elected official – male, White, middle-class, middle-aged, Christian, Canadian-born, and majority-language speaking.” However, research is beginning to reveal opportunities as well as barriers to the election of women who do not fit the archetype. For example, the assumption that visible minority women are less likely to be elected than are Caucasian women is challenged by recent data on women’s election to the House of Commons and in eleven cities across Canada (Andrew et al. 2008, 265; Black 2008, 247).

Third, the research agenda has evolved beyond descriptive representation to determine whether or not women’s presence in political spaces changes ways of performing politically (Tremblay and Trimble 2004; Trimble and Tremblay 2005). Whereas authors in the second period investigated whether feminist ideas could make female politicians allies with the women’s movement in a pro-woman electoral project, authors in the third period ask whether female politicians have been translating words into actions. The basic question was: Do women change politics? There is some evidence to suggest that they do, albeit only under certain conditions (Tremblay 1998; Trimble 1993, 1997). Factors other than the presence of women in legislatures constrain the ability of women to substantively represent women’s interests in legislative discussions, including feminist consciousness, role within the legislature, party affiliation, and parliamentary procedure. The critical mass theory’s argument that, below the level of 30 percent women,
legislators are collectively silenced has been called into question as well (Burt, Horton, and Martin 2000). Trimble (1993, 1997) and Lore (2008) analyzed statements by MLAs in Alberta and British Columbia, respectively, and found that even a small number of women can make a difference in legislative discussions. Hence a question for future investigation remains: Which factors (institutional and others) empower a minority composing less than the 30 percent critical mass threshold within an organization to substantively represent a group or a cause within specific representational bodies?

Four decades of research has shown that descriptive representation, or being there, is a necessary but insufficient condition for substantive representation – that is, voicing ideas and making claims on behalf of women and other previously excluded or marginalized groups. But there can be no doubt that symbolic representation, or the very presence of women in political roles from which they were once formally excluded, is a crucial marker of equality. While women are no longer formally barred from contesting or holding elected or appointed office, the problem of under-representation remains, especially for marginalized and racialized women. This book was prompted by the seemingly intractable nature of this problem in Canada.

**The Count Continues: Women, Representation, and Equality**

Why do numbers matter? Why are scholars still counting the women in elected and appointed office in Canada and around the world? Very simply, the numbers still do not add up to fairness in political representation for women. How can a democracy be legitimate if it fails to represent up to half its population? Gender parity is defined as the attainment of roughly equal numbers of women and men in elected and appointed political offices. Parity remains a remote prospect for women. At present women hold approximately one in five seats in national parliaments around the world (IPU 2013a). As of February 2013, women are 40 percent or more of the representatives in fewer than a dozen countries, comprising the majority of representatives in only one nation: Rwanda. Nowhere in the world do women predominate at the level of 60 percent or more of the legislative positions as men do in more than 90 percent of countries (IPU 2013b). In Canada’s House of Commons the numbers of women present have increased over time, from 18 percent fifteen years ago to 25 percent in 2012 (IPU 1997a, 2013b). But while Canada is above the international average, its global ranking has fallen from a three-way tie for twenty-first in 1997 to a tie for forty-fifth place in 2013 (IPU 1997a, 2013b).
Counting the number of women elected and appointed to national legislative bodies is internationally recognized as a measure of women’s equality globally. Over the last half-century, attentiveness to the gender dimension of representation has been variously used to compare and analyze women’s involvement in the life of nations. Starting in the 1950s, the United Nations (UN) has encouraged women’s participation at the national level (Duverger 1955), and UN agencies and programs have sponsored and promoted educational campaigns for this purpose (United Nations Development Programme 2011). The global relevance of the issue is illustrated by the efforts of international organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the World Economic Forum (WEF), and the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics. As noted above, the IPU (1997a, 2013a, 2013b) tracks women’s numbers in elected national legislatures worldwide. The WEF goes further, ranking countries according to their ability to close gender gaps, including gender gaps in legislative representation (Hausman, Tyson, and Zahidi 2011). The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW 2011) coordinates knowledge exchanges among political activists. More sophisticated measures of women’s equality – most recently, the indices of women’s “empowerment” – have been produced for the World Economic Forum (Hausman, Tyson, and Zahidi 2011).

However, the problem of women’s under-representation is not merely a matter of numbers or formal equality (Gotell and Brodie 1991). The legitimacy of democratic institutions and decision-making practices is challenged by the scarcity of women in elected office. The argument that the under-representation of women in public life constitutes a democratic deficit has gained wide acceptance internationally (Cool 2010, 4). Since the 1990s, international organizations have highlighted the relationships between women’s political participation and equality, empowerment, and democracy: “Democracy, security, development, human rights and gender equality are inextricably linked” (World Conference of Speakers of Parliament 2010). As the Universal Declaration of Democracy affirms, the “achievement of democracy presupposes a genuine partnership between men and women in the conduct of the affairs of society in which they work in equality and complementarity, drawing mutual enrichment from their differences” (IPU 1997b). The very act of making representational claims by and for women serves to improve the quality of democratic deliberation and decision making (Saward 2006, 2008; Rehfeld 2006).

The Report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1970, 339-41) initiated systematic counting of women’s election and appointment to
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political office in Canada. Since then the figures have increased from under 2 percent to nearly 25 percent, or about half a percent a year on average. Two leaps forward have occurred. The first took place in the mid-1980s when the 10 percent watershed was broken at the federal level, and the second happened a decade later when the level of women’s representation federally approached 20 percent. Alarmingly, the evidence shows no significant overall increases since then. It is clear that the pattern in Canada exemplifies incremental rather than fast-paced growth (Dahlerup and Freidenvall 2005, 27). Gender parity is possible, but without awareness, public education, advocacy (Equal Voice 2011), affirmative action measures, and political will it is unlikely to be achieved for another half century. With no further great leaps forward in sight, explaining the gender malaise in representation becomes all the more important.

The number of women in the highest public decision-making roles in national public life has long been emblematic of how far women’s equality has come, and how far it has yet to go. As the individual chapters in this volume demonstrate, the addition of a few more women over time has not yet realized the goal of an equal partnership between women and men in democratic governance.

References


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