

## WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

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**WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT\***

**WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT: THE ISSUES**

It is generally accepted that a more equitable representation of women in parliament is required worldwide to more accurately reflect the composition of society and to ensure that women's diverse interests are taken into account.<sup>(1)</sup> Although women play important leadership roles in community and informal organizations, their representation in public office remains considerably lower than that of men, both in Canada and internationally.

The international community has made a number of commitments to rectify the under-representation of women in parliament. For example, the equal participation of women and men in public life is one of the cornerstones of the 1979 United Nations *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW), of which Canada is a signatory. Inequality between men and women in positions of power and decision-making was one of the twelve key areas identified in the landmark 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.

The widely recognized minimum benchmark to ensure a critical mass of women parliamentarians has been set at 30%.<sup>(2)</sup> As of 31 July 2008, however, the proportion of women in parliaments around the world stood at 18.2%; the proportion of women holding Cabinet-level office was even lower, at 16%.

**A. Women in Parliament: Canada**

Agnes Macphail became the first woman elected to the House of Commons in 1921. While the decades following her election witnessed a steady growth in women's representation in parliament, progress appears to have remained near the 20% level over the past decade, as indicated in Table 1. With 22.1% of seats in the House of Commons currently held

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\* This paper was prepared in collaboration with Diane Leduc, Political and Social Affairs Division.

(1) United Nations, *Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration*, United Nations Department of Public Information, New York, 1995, clause 190 (d), <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/decision.htm#object1> (accessed 30 January 2006).

(2) This is the benchmark used by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations.

by women, Canada is still far from the 30% minimum necessary to ensure a critical mass of women, and ranks 45<sup>th</sup> internationally, with Mauritania, in the representation of women in the lower house of parliament. Visible minority women and Aboriginal women<sup>(3)</sup> are even further under-represented.

**Table 1 – Women in the Canadian House of Commons Since 1984**

Year	Total Number of Seats	Seats Held by Women	Proportion of Seats Held by Women
1984	282	27	9.6
1988	295	39	13.3 <sup>(4)</sup>
1993	295	53	18.0
1997	301	62	20.6
2000	301	62	20.6
2004	308	65	21.1
2006	308	64	20.8
2008	308	68	22.1

Sources: Equal Voice Canada and Library of Parliament.

The representation of women in Canada's Senate is considerably higher than in the House of Commons, with 35% of Senate seats held by women.<sup>(5)</sup>

The representation of women on municipal councils (23.4%)<sup>(6)</sup> and in provincial/territorial legislatures (23%)<sup>(7)</sup> is now higher than that at the federal level. Quebec became first among the federal/provincial/territorial jurisdictions in Canada to meet the critical threshold of 30% in the 2003 election, when 32% of seats in the National Assembly were held by women. That gain was short-lived, however, as the rate went back down to 27.4% in the 2007 election. The representation of women in provincial and territorial legislatures currently varies widely, ranging from a low of 11% in Nunavut and Yukon to a high of 31.6% in Manitoba.

(3) See Manon Tremblay, "The Participation of Aboriginal Women in Canadian Electoral Democracy," *Electoral Insight*, November 2003,

[http://www.elections.ca/eca/eim/article\\_search/article.asp?id=26&lang=e&frmPageSize=&textonly=false](http://www.elections.ca/eca/eim/article_search/article.asp?id=26&lang=e&frmPageSize=&textonly=false).

(4) Percentage calculated based on 294 filled seats at the opening of Parliament, following the death of an elected member immediately after the election.

(5) Proportion of women as at 21 September 2008 (89 filled Senate seats, 31 held by women).

(6) Tabulation from statistics in Federation of Canadian Municipalities, *Male-Female Municipal Statistics 2007*, <http://www.fcm.ca/CMFiles/wstats1UDB-3262008-3961.pdf>.

(7) The Library of Parliament maintains a table showing the representation of women in provincial and territorial legislatures on its website. It is available at <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/compilations/ProvinceTerritory/PartyStandingsAndLeaders.aspx?Language=E>.

## B. Women in Parliament: International Success Stories

In September 2008, Rwanda became the first country to have more female members of Parliament (56%) than male. By July 2008, 21 countries had succeeded in meeting the 30% critical mass target. One-quarter of these are Nordic countries, which have made long-standing efforts to increase the participation of women. Another quarter are so-called “post-conflict” countries (Burundi, Mozambique, Rwanda and South Africa) which have taken advantage of rebuilding efforts to implement electoral and political party practices that facilitate the representation of women. In these cases, the increased representation of women is not the result of incremental progress, but a radical re-conceptualization of the electoral and parliamentary processes in a way that recognizes the importance of equity between men and women.

**Table 2 – Top Countries in the Representation of Women in the Lower House, 2008**

Rank	Country	Lower or Single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Date of Elections	Number of Seats	Number of Women	% Women	Date of Elections	Number of Seats	Number of Women	% Women
1	Rwanda	2008	80	45	56.3%	2003	26	9	34.6%
2	Sweden	2006	349	164	47.0%	---	---	---	---
3	Cuba	2008	614	265	43.2%	---	---	---	---
4	Finland	2007	200	83	41.5%	---	---	---	---
5	Argentina	2007	255	102	40.0%	2007	72	28	38.9%
6	Netherlands	2006	150	59	39.3%	2007	75	26	34.7%
7	Denmark	2007	179	68	38.0%	---	---	---	---
8	Angola	2008	220	82	37.3%	---	---	---	---
9	Costa Rica	2006	57	21	36.8%	---	---	---	---
10	Spain	2008	350	127	36.3%	2008	263	79	30.0%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>, based on information provided by national parliaments by 30 September 2008.

## WHY ARE WOMEN UNDER-REPRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT?

The three crucial barriers that individuals must pass to get elected are: first, they need to select themselves; second, they need to be selected as candidates by the parties; and, third, they need to be selected by the voters.<sup>(8)</sup> Although there is a willingness on the part of the electorate to increase the representation of women in elected positions, a number of factors make it less likely and more difficult for women to run and get elected.

### A. Do Women Select Themselves to Run for Parliament?

Women are less likely than men to run for parliament for a number of reasons. As Canada's Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Lortie Commission) reported in 1991, some of the barriers to women's participation "relate to broad social phenomena ... [which] do not lend themselves to solutions by institutional or legal reform of the electoral system."<sup>(9)</sup> For example, women continue to hold a disproportionate share of household and family responsibilities and, on average, have lower incomes (and hence less financial independence) than men. In addition, they may have been socialized to view politics as an unsuitable or undesirable vocation. These challenges are even greater for certain groups of women, such as Aboriginal and visible minority women. A recent American study suggested that women were more than twice as likely as men to believe they were not qualified to run for office, even when men and women possessed similar qualifications.<sup>(10)</sup>

Women also continue to be under-represented in the upper echelons of areas such as law, academia and the business world. They thus have fewer opportunities to develop the high-profile professional reputations that are sought by political parties, and to obtain easy access to the necessary networks and financing to secure nominations.

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(8) Richard Matland, *Explaining Women's Representation: The Role of Legislative Recruitment & Electoral Systems*, paper delivered at the Expert Group Meeting on equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership, organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24-27 October 2005, [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/docs/EP.4\\_Matland.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/docs/EP.4_Matland.pdf) (accessed 18 January 2006).

(9) Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, *Reforming Electoral Democracy*, Vol. 1, Ottawa, 1991, p. 107.

(10) Jennifer Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 98.

Traditional ways of working in political parties and other political institutions may discourage women from seeking political office through discriminatory attitudes and practices, and lack of attention to mechanisms that could support a balance between family and work responsibilities.<sup>(11)</sup> It has also been suggested that women may be reluctant to run for parliament because of the adversarial and combative nature of the work.

Recognizing that women are hesitant to identify themselves as potential candidates, some non-profit and non-partisan campaign schools have been developed to provide mentoring and training to women. These include the Campaign School organized by Femmes, politique et démocratie in Quebec; the Women's Campaign School organized by the Canadian Women Voters Congress in British Columbia; the Campaign School for Women founded by the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women; and the Getting to the Gate Online Campaign School hosted by Equal Voice.

## **B. What Role Do Parties Play in the Selection of Women Candidates?**

As indicated above, women may be less likely than men to see themselves as potential candidates. As a result, "if parties adopt gender-neutral nominating rules the consequence would be a pool of candidates skewed towards men."<sup>(12)</sup> The role of political parties in promoting and supporting women to run for nominations has been repeatedly identified as the most important factor in increasing the representation of women in parliament.

When more women candidates run for office, more women are elected to office. Parties that have a greater proportion of women candidates tend to have a higher proportion of women in their caucuses (Table 3).

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(11) Carolyn Hannan, Opening Statement at the Expert Group Meeting on equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership, organized by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, [24-27 October 2005], [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/docs/ST\\_CH\\_EGM\\_political\\_decision-making\\_Addis\\_2005\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/docs/ST_CH_EGM_political_decision-making_Addis_2005_FINAL.pdf).

(12) Matland (2005).

**Table 3 – Women Candidates and Women Elected, by Party,  
2008 and 2006 Canadian Federal Elections**

Party	Women Candidates, 2008	Women Elected, 2008	Women Candidates, 2006	Women Elected, 2006
<b>Bloc Québécois</b>	28%	30%	31%	33%
<b>Conservative Party of Canada</b>	20%	16%	12%	11%
<b>Liberal Party</b>	37%	24%	26%	20%
<b>New Democratic Party</b>	34%	32.4%	35%	41%
<b>Overall</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>22.1%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>20.8%</b>

Sources: Equal Voice Canada and Library of Parliament.

This raises the question of the role of political parties in nominating more women to run for Parliament. Most political parties in Canada have implemented a variety of measures to attract and support women candidates. These include special funds to help nominated women cover campaign-related costs, and minimum targets for women candidates. The New Democratic Party, which has historically attracted more women candidates than the other parties, has a policy of freezing nominations until riding associations prove that a genuine search has been made for women or other candidates from under-represented groups. Similarly, Liberal leader Stéphane Dion committed that “a thorough search for women candidates [would be] conducted in each un-held riding before a nomination meeting [would be] called.”<sup>(13)</sup> This process allowed the Liberal party to exceed its minimum target of 33% female candidates in the 2008 election.<sup>(14)</sup>

Although political parties have occasionally set voluntary quotas for nominations of women candidates, local riding associations maintain a level of autonomy in the nomination process that makes it difficult for political parties to impose and meet these targets.<sup>(15)</sup> There is also debate as to the appropriate use of quotas, which are criticized by some commentators as being undemocratic and unfair.

(13) National Women’s Liberal Commission, *Nominations Tracking*, [http://www.nwlc-clfn.ca/tracking\\_e.aspx](http://www.nwlc-clfn.ca/tracking_e.aspx) (accessed 8 October 2008).

(14) Equal Voice, “Dion’s Campaign Commitments to Electing Women,” News release, Ottawa, n.d., [http://equalvoice.ca/handler.php?\\_file=on&tag=newleader](http://equalvoice.ca/handler.php?_file=on&tag=newleader).

(15) Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott, *Still Counting: Women in Politics Across Canada*, Broadview Press, Peterborough, Ont., 2003, p. 61.

### **C. How Successful Are Women Candidates?**

The major hurdle for women in Canada appears to be at the party level rather than at the polls. Women running for office in Canada are only slightly less likely than men to be elected. The 64 women elected in January 2006 represented 17% of all women candidates running for office in that election, only slightly lower than the 19% success rate for male candidates.

If the electorate is not actively discriminating against women candidates, why are more women not elected? It is commonly held that changes to the electoral system may help bolster the representation of women in parliament. The vast majority of countries that have reached a 30% critical mass of women in their lower house of parliament have done so through the use of measures such as proportional representation electoral systems (described below) or the use of electoral quotas.<sup>(16)</sup> Countries that rely exclusively on the “first-past-the-post” electoral system, as does Canada, consistently have lower levels of representation of women.

### **THE EFFECT OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS ON WOMEN’S REPRESENTATION**

Over a decade ago, the Beijing Platform for Action called on nations to “review the differential impact of electoral systems on the political representation of women in elected bodies and consider, where appropriate, the adjustment or reform of those systems.”<sup>(17)</sup> As noted previously, the representation of women in the parliaments of post-conflict countries has dramatically increased when electoral and constitutional measures have been introduced to achieve greater equality in positions of power.

Reform of the electoral system appears to be garnering increased attention in Canada for a variety of reasons, including pressure to correct the ongoing gender imbalance in elected positions. In its annual Portraits of Canada poll, the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC) noted that:

Openness to change was manifested in reactions to questions on whether specific measures should be taken to ensure greater representation of women in politics. Fifty-three percent of Canadians feel that political parties should be required to nominate a specific

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(16) For more information on the application of quotas around the world, see the *Global Database of Quotas for Women* at <http://www.quotaproject.org/>.

(17) *Platform for Action and the Beijing Declaration* (1995), clause 190 (d).

percentage of women candidates for election campaigns and 46% believe that parties should be given financial incentives to increase the number of women candidates they put forward.<sup>(18)</sup>

### **A. Proportional Representation Versus “First-Past-the-Post” Electoral Systems**

Canada’s electoral system is a “single-member plurality” or “first-past-the-post” system. In every federal electoral district, the candidate with the most votes wins a seat in the House of Commons and represents that riding as its Member of Parliament. It has been argued that this system tends to discourage the election of women and other under-represented groups.

An alternative to the first-past-the-post system, and one that is supported by many advocates of greater gender equality in legislatures, is proportional representation (PR)<sup>(19)</sup>. Most of the countries in which women occupy at least 30% of parliamentary seats use a PR system. Although there are many variations of PR, the most widely used form is the *list system*, whereby each party presents a list of candidates and receives seats in proportion to its overall share of the national vote. In the *mixed member system*, voters elect a certain proportion of the legislature from single-seat, “winner-take-all” districts while the remaining members are chosen from lists based on the proportion of votes obtained by each party.<sup>(20)</sup>

Although PR electoral systems are often discussed as a potential solution to the under-representation of women, critics caution that these systems do not necessarily benefit women. As long as parties still exercise discretion in drafting the list of candidates, there is no assurance that these lists will be more gender-balanced. Proportional representation works best in environments, such as the Nordic countries, where the electorate has high expectations for equality between men and women, and thus pressures parties to ensure that lists are gender-balanced. Other commentators have noted that, in order to successfully increase the representation of women, PR systems need to be supplemented by additional incentives for parties to ensure parity on party lists.

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(18) CRIC, “Portraits of Canada 2005,” *The CRIC Papers* (#19), January 2006, p. 4.

(19) For more information on proportional representation, see Michael Dewing and Megan Furi, *Proportional Representation*, TIPS-120E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, 5 July 2004, <http://lpintrabp.parl.gc.ca/apps/tips/tips-cont-e.asp?Heading=16&TIP=106>.

(20) Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), *Getting the Balance Right in National Parliaments*, 1995, <http://www.wedo.org/files/5050factsheet4.pdf>.

Several provincial and territorial governments have recently undertaken a re-evaluation of their electoral processes, proposing alternatives to the first-past-the-post system currently in use. While referenda on electoral systems were put to the electorate in British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, these proposals were defeated in both jurisdictions in 2005.

### **B. Quotas<sup>(21)</sup>**

Quotas to increase the representation of women can be either legislated or voluntary. Legal quotas are mandated in a country's constitution or by law, usually in the electoral law. All political parties must abide by legal quotas, and may be subject to sanctions in case of non-compliance. Costa Rica, Belgium and Argentina have legislated quotas, which specify that a certain percentage of candidates for election must be women. There are firm legal sanctions in place if the provisions are not met, such as rejecting electoral lists that have less than the statutory minimum number of women.

Voluntary quotas are developed at the discretion of political parties. In Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Mozambique, Austria, South Africa, New Zealand, Germany and Iceland, one or more political parties has adopted a voluntary party quota setting a target or firm percentage for the number of women candidates it fields for election.

### **C. Proposals for Electoral Change – Canada and the Provinces**

Proposals for electoral change in Canada have included alternatives to the first-past-the-post electoral system as well as incremental changes to the rules regulating elections. While some advocates for greater representation of women call for a focus on the electoral system, others have identified the importance of changing the rules to create a more level playing field for women.

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(21) For more information about the use of quotas, consult the website of the research project *An International Comparison of the Use of Electoral Quotas to obtain Equal Political Citizenship for Women*, led by Professor Drude Dahlerup, University of Stockholm, at <http://www.statsvet.su.se/quotas/>.

Recent electoral reform initiatives in British Columbia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Quebec<sup>(22)</sup> have elicited interest among advocates of greater gender equality in legislatures. While the major impetus for reviewing the electoral systems in these provinces has been to ensure that a party's representation in the legislature more closely reflects the percentage of votes it receives, a secondary goal in some provinces has been to redress the gender imbalance in the legislature. In New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island, for example, the impact of alternative electoral systems on the representation of women was clearly laid out for the population.<sup>(23)</sup> Draft legislation to change the electoral system in Quebec specifically identified equitable representation between men and women as one its goals, proposing financial incentives to parties that elect minimum thresholds of women and increased rates of reimbursement of election expenses incurred by women.

There is no agreement, even among women's groups, as to which electoral reforms would best increase the representation of women. Many equality-seeking organizations in Canada recommend a system of proportional representation, yet Quebec's Conseil du statut de la femme argued against the introduction of mixed member proportional representation in Quebec. Pointing to the list of countries that have elected a very low proportion of women despite having a PR system in place, the Conseil du statut de la femme argued that other factors, such as the socio-economic status of women and the political culture, are likely to carry more weight than the type of electoral system.<sup>(24)</sup>

Although there may be disagreement about whether changing the electoral system would automatically increase the representation of women, equality-seeking organizations agree that measures to incite political parties to nominate more women would result in increased representation. Such organizations in Quebec gave wide support to proposals in the draft legislation to introduce financial measures to disburse more money to political parties that elect more women candidates.<sup>(25)</sup>

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(22) For more information on electoral reform in Canadian provinces, see Andre Barnes and James R. Robertson, *Electoral Reform Initiatives in Canadian Provinces*, PRB 04-17E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, rev. 16 October 2007, <http://lpintrabp.parl.gc.ca/lopimages2/prbpubs/bp1000/prb0417-e.asp>; and Andre Barnes et al., *Canada's Electoral Process: Frequently Asked Questions*, PRB 05-46E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, rev. 19 October 2007, <http://lpintrabp.parl.gc.ca/lopimages2/prbpubs/bp1000/prb0546-e.asp#part2a5a>.

(23) See New Brunswick, Commission on Legislative Democracy, *Final Report and Recommendations*, <http://www.gnb.ca/0100/FinalReport-e.pdf>; and the Commission on PEI'S Electoral Future, *Women in Politics*.

(24) Quebec, Conseil du statut de la femme, *Mémoire sur l'avant-projet de loi remplaçant la Loi électorale*, September 2005.

(25) Quebec, Secrétariat à la réforme des institutions démocratiques, *Shine Among the Best: Equitable Representation of Women in the National Assembly*.

The Law Commission of Canada<sup>(26)</sup> identified the importance of looking at both the electoral system and other measures to improve the representation of women. Based on extensive consultation on electoral reform, it concluded that “increased representation of women is an important reason for reforming Canada’s first-past-the-post voting system,”<sup>(27)</sup> and recommended that Canada adopt a mixed member proportional electoral system.<sup>(28)</sup> It cautioned, however, that a mixed member proportional system would not, by itself, result in more equitable results for women, and recommended other measures to ensure that women would be equally represented in the House of Commons, including recruitment policies, incentives and ensuring gender parity on party lists.

The 1991 recommendations of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Lortie Commission) focussed on the rules of elections rather than the electoral system. The Commission report noted that “one of the challenges of electoral reform is ... to help reduce the systemic or structural barriers to candidacy without compromising the elements that constitute its strengths.”<sup>(29)</sup> Noting that many women considered the nomination process to be a greater challenge than the election itself, it recommended that party nomination and recruitment processes be reformed to remove barriers for women. Proposed changes included the introduction of spending limits on nomination campaigns, and tax credits for contributions to support prospective candidates seeking nomination. The Lortie Commission’s recommendations in this area have yet to be fully implemented, and are still regarded as relevant and important in increasing the representation of women.

At the federal level, amendments to the *Canada Elections Act*, which took effect in January 2004, introduced new limits on political contributions for both nomination contests and election campaigns (although the limits are higher than those proposed by the Lortie Commission). The possibility of wider electoral reform has also been discussed by Canadian parliamentarians. Citing concerns about low voter turnout, the lack of representativeness of Parliament, and the lack of proportionality between votes cast and the

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(26) Law Commission of Canada, *Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada*, Department of Public Works and Government Services, Ottawa, 2004, [http://parlcat/web2/tramp2.exe/do\\_keyword\\_search/A32f3uhi.000](http://parlcat/web2/tramp2.exe/do_keyword_search/A32f3uhi.000).

(27) *Ibid.*, p. 109.

(28) In a mixed member proportional electoral system, each voter has two votes: one for the party of his or her choice and one for the riding candidate of his or her choice.

(29) Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (1991), p. 8.

representation of parties in the House of Commons, a report tabled by the House of Commons Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in June 2005<sup>(30)</sup> outlined a process to consider electoral reform,<sup>(31)</sup> including a citizen's consultation process.

The government began public consultations in March 2007, holding 12 citizens' forums – one in each province, one in the territories, and one national youth forum. Among the topics participants were asked to comment on was electoral reform.<sup>(32)</sup>

According to the report on the consultations, *Public Consultations on Canada's Democratic Institutions and Practices*, released on 10 September 2007, participants preferred the existing first-past-the-post system to a system that includes proportional representation.<sup>(33)</sup> At the same time, they were "open" to considering change, including a system in which every vote for a party counts.<sup>(34)</sup>

## **MAKING PARLIAMENT A WOMEN-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT**

Ensuring that both women and men will be able to influence decisions and resource allocations requires going beyond simply increasing the number of women in different positions, to providing real opportunities for influencing the agendas, institutions and processes of decision-making. This calls for special attention to the values, norms, rules, procedures and practices in parliament to ensure that, once they are elected, women can apply their unique and diverse perspectives.<sup>(35)</sup>

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(30) House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, *Report 43 – Electoral Reform* (adopted by Committee on 7 June 2005; presented to the House on 16 June 2005), <http://www.parl.gc.ca/committee/CommitteePublication.aspx?COM=8988&Lang=1&SourceId=122500>.

(31) In supplementary opinions to this report, the Bloc Québécois and the Conservative Party of Canada expressed alternative views on the both nature and composition of the proposed citizens' consultation.

(32) For more information on federal electoral reform proposals, see Andre Barnes et al., *Canada's Electoral Process: Frequently Asked Questions*, PRB 05-46E, Parliamentary Information and Research Service, Library of Parliament, Ottawa, rev. 19 October 2007, <http://lpintrabp.parl.gc.ca/lopimages2/prbpubs/bp1000/prb0546-e.asp#part2a5a>.

(33) *Public Consultations on Canada's Democratic Institutions and Practices: A Report for the Privy Council Office*, 2007, [http://www.democraticreform.gc.ca/docs/news-comm/docs/20070910\\_research.pdf](http://www.democraticreform.gc.ca/docs/news-comm/docs/20070910_research.pdf).

(34) Jack Aubry, "Poll shows voters favour winner-take-all system," *Ottawa Citizen*, 16 September 2007.

(35) Hannan (2005).

Discussions at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and within parliamentary associations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union have turned to ways in which parliaments can better accommodate women.<sup>(36)</sup> Among other options, parliaments could consider reorganizing their work to become more gender-sensitive – for example, by instituting family-friendly hours, ending parliamentary business at a reasonable time; reorganizing work schedules to allow for “family days”; or spreading parliamentary business over a number of shorter days.<sup>(37)</sup>

While family-friendly changes to how parliament works help both women and men, women are more likely to benefit as they continue to spend more time than men providing care for children and seniors.<sup>(38)</sup> Some of the countries with a higher proportion of women parliamentarians have made family-friendly changes to the way parliament works. For example, Sweden’s parliamentary calendar is prepared one year in advance with sittings scheduled Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays, commencing in October and ending in June.<sup>(39)</sup>

Provincial legislatures across Canada continue to make efforts to become more family-friendly. On 11 December 2007, the Ontario legislature passed a motion to create “an all-party panel ... to make recommendations to the Speaker on ways to make working at the Ontario legislature more family friendly for members of provincial Parliament.”<sup>(40)</sup> That panel has not yet been convened, but provisional amendments to the standing orders introduced in the Ontario legislature on 1 May 2008 introduced certain family-friendly changes such as limiting the use of evening sittings of that legislature.

In 1993, a Member of Parliament missed a vote in the Canadian House of Commons while she was searching for a women’s washroom. Shortly afterward, the large men’s washroom off the lobby of the chamber was converted into separate facilities for men and

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(36) See Julie Ballington, “Institutional Change: Gender-sensitive Parliaments,” in *Equality in Politics: A Survey of Women and Men in Parliaments*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2008, <http://www.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-e.pdf>.

(37) Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Ten Years in Review: Trends of Women in National Parliaments Worldwide*, 2005.

(38) Statistics Canada, *Canada’s Changing Labour Force, 2006 Census*, Catalogue No. 97-559-X, March 2008, p. 31.

(39) Ann Wicks and Raylene Lang-Dion, “Women in Politics: Still Searching for an Equal Voice,” *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, Vol. 31, Spring 2008, pp. 34-7, <http://pintrabp.parl.gc.ca/lopimages2/bibparcat/18000/Ba418623.pdf>.

(40) Legislative Assembly of Ontario, *Debates*, 1<sup>st</sup> Session, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 11 December 2007.

women.<sup>(41)</sup> It has been suggested that Parliament will change as more women are elected. Research indicates that to have a significant impact on the culture of an organization, women must occupy at least one-third of the available space<sup>(42)</sup> – the target referred to as the “critical mass of women.” It would be expected, then, that Parliament might become a more women-friendly environment when Canada approaches that critical mass – which brings us back to the question of electing more women to Parliament.

## CONCLUSION

Increasing the proportion of women in Canada’s Parliament is important to ensure that Parliament represents the Canadian electorate in all its diversity, and that it addresses issues of concern to women. Despite rapid gains in representation of women in Parliament in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the past decade has witnessed a stagnation in representation at approximately 21% in the House of Commons.

While the Canadian electorate appears equally likely to elect men and women candidates, women still represent a minority of candidates in federal elections. Measures proposed to address this imbalance include: education and mentoring activities to increase interest in political office among women; voluntary or mandatory changes to how candidates are selected; a re-examination of Canada’s electoral system; and changes to make Parliament a more welcoming work environment for women.

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(41) Trimble and Arscott (2003), p. 42.

(42) Manon Tremblay, “Women and Political Participation in Canada,” *Electoral Insight*, January 2001.

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## ELECTRONIC SOURCES

International comparisons available at *Women in National Parliaments*, Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

For information about women in Canadian federal elections, consult the website of Professor Andrew Heard at Simon Fraser University, at  
<http://www.sfu.ca/%7Eaheard/elections/index.htm>.

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) is an international online workspace on the subject of women in politics. Available at:  
<http://www.iknowpolitics.org/node/220>.

Equal Voice has a number of fact sheets, including “Women in Provincial Politics.” Available at:  
<http://www.equalvoice.ca/index.htm>.

**A. Historical and Statistical Information About Women  
in the Canadian Parliament on the Library of Parliament Website**

- Women – Current Provincial and Territorial Party Standings  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/related/province/StandingsProvGlobal.asp?Language=E&Cat=F>
- Women Candidates in General Elections  
<http://lp-bp/content/info-resources/federal/Asp/WomenElect.asp>
- Women – Federal Political Representation  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/key/StandingsWomen.asp?lang=E&Hist=N&source=key>
- Women in Cabinet  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/key/WomenCabinet.asp?Language=E&Hist=N&source=ap>
- Women in the House of Commons  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/House/WomenHofC.asp?lang=E&Hist=N>
- Women in the Senate  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/Senate/WomenSenate.asp?lang=E&Hist=N>
- Women’s Right to Vote in Canada  
<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/process/House/asp/WomenVote.asp?Language=E&source=hoc>