

Women's Access to Cabinets in Canada: Assessing the Role of Some Institutional Variables

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Abstract. Only recently have women been recruited to serve in Canadian cabinets, and their presence in these bodies remains marginal, although it is progressing steadily. This article has the objective to examine the role of some institutional variables on women's access to federal and provincial cabinets in Canada, from 1984 to the end of 2007. Six hypotheses are tested exploring the following independent variables: the overall proportion of female legislators versus the proportion of women within the government caucus only; the region; the majority or minority status of the government; the change (or lack of change) of government following a general election; the size of the cabinet; and, the political party that forms the government. The overall proportion of women legislators and notably, their proportion within the government caucus both exert an almost monopolistic influence on the feminization rate of cabinets. In addition, the results invite to qualify the idea which suggests that the higher a political role, the harder it is for women to attain.

Keywords. Canada; women cabinet ministers.

Résumé. C'est seulement il y a peu que les femmes ont été recrutées pour servir dans les conseils des ministres canadiens, et leur présence dans ces organes reste marginale, bien qu'elle augmente régulièrement. Cet article a pour objectif d'examiner le rôle de certaines variables institutionnelles sur l'accès des femmes dans les conseils des ministres aux niveaux fédéral et provincial au Canada, de 1984 à fin 2007. Six hypothèses sont testées afin d'explorer les variables indépendantes suivantes : la proportion globale de femmes législateurs *versus* la proportion de femmes dans le caucus du gouvernement uniquement; la région; le statut majoritaire ou minoritaire du gouvernement; l'alternance (ou l'absence d'alternance) gouvernementale à la suite d'une élection générale; la taille du conseil des ministres; et le parti politique qui compose le gouvernement. La proportion globale de femmes législateurs et, notamment, leur proportion au sein du caucus du gouvernement sont deux variables qui exercent une influence presque monopolistique sur le taux de féminisation des conseils des ministres. En outre, les résultats invitent à nuancer l'idée selon laquelle plus le rôle politique est élevé, plus il est difficile pour les femmes de l'atteindre.

Mots clefs. Canada; femmes dans les conseils des ministres.

Introduction

Today, there is a wealth of literature on women elected in politics, particularly in national legislatures. Knowledge is much less abundant, however, with regard to women who are members of executive bodies, such as ministers in cabinets. One reason, no doubt, is women have gained access to these select circles of state executive power relatively recently and the number remains very limited, although it has grown in recent years. In 1987, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Office at Vienna (1992: 63) observed that 3.5% of the ministerial roles in about 155 national governments were occupied by women. A decade later, in 1998, still only 302 out of 3,486 (8.7%) cabinet ministers in 180 national governments were women (Reynolds 1999). Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson (2005) fixed this proportion at 12% in 2003, while Mathiason (2006: 6) found that on average women filled 10.6% of governmental decision-making positions in 2005.

Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2010) indicate that in January 2010, 16.9% of the approximately 4,100 ministers in 188 countries were women.

Canada is not excluded from these general trends. First, women's access to Canadian legislative spaces has generated much more published research than has their participation in cabinets (among others: Arscott and Trimble 1997, Bashevkin 2009a, Brodie 1985, Megyery 1991, Tremblay 2010, Tremblay and Andrew 1998, Tremblay and Trimble 2003). Second, only recently have women been recruited to serve in Canadian cabinets, and their presence in these bodies remains marginal, although it is progressing steadily. The proportion of women in all federal and provincial cabinets in Canada rose from an average of 1.1% in the 1950s, to 3.3% in the 1960s, 4.1% in the 1970s, 10.1% in the 1980s, 23.4% in the 1990s, and almost one quarter (24.4%) from 2000 to 2007. As this essay will show, the proportion of women is now higher in cabinets than in provincial legisla-

tures and the House of Commons, belying Putnam's (1976: 33) law of increasing disproportion.

The objective of this article is to shed light on some institutional variables associated with women's access to federal and provincial cabinets in Canada, from the mid-1980s to the end of 2007. Below, I define my working hypotheses, which were formulated on the basis of research available on women ministers in Canada. The following section includes the methodology and analysis. In the conclusion, I discuss the main points of the observations made with a focus on envisioning some future developments regarding women's participation in Canadian cabinets.

Theoretical Framework, State of Knowledge, and Working Hypotheses

Canada's government is a British-style parliamentary system. One feature of this type of political system, distinguishing it from the American system, is the fusion of legislative and executive powers: one results from the other – that is, the members of the cabinet (ministers) are also active members of Parliament. Unlike political systems in which the legislative and executive functions are separate, in a parliamentary system such as Canada's, they are cumulative: as a rule, a person cannot be a minister, unless she or he is a member of the legislature. While access to legislative spaces depends on election, admission to the very select circle of the cabinet is the prerogative of the provincial or federal leader (premier or prime minister). Although it might seem, at first glance, that government leaders enjoy a broad margin of manoeuvre when assembling their cabinet (and this is certainly the case), they must also meet a certain number of requirements. For instance, one major constraint is that ministers must be selected from among the members of the leader's legislative caucus. In other words, the range of candidates available to leaders to compose their cabinet is limited to the legislators from their party.

Just as constraining, though informal, is the need for leaders to assemble a cabinet that reflects the range of interests present in Canada: as a general rule, the cabinet must include representation of a diversity of geographic spaces, economic sectors, cultures, and languages – and, in more recent times, must include women (White 2005: 35-36). Yet, this imperative for representativeness is subject to interpretation: must the cabinet reflect the diversity of the population, that of the legislators (that is, all legislators), or that of the legislative caucus of the party that forms the government?

When it comes to women, this question has generated at least two directions of research. One, defended notably by Davis (1997: 88) in her analysis of women members of ministers' councils in fifteen European democracies between 1968 and 1992, has it that the proportion of women ministers depends less on their proportion within the party forming the government than on their overall proportion in the legislature.¹ This reading is very credible in the context of coalition governments, common in Europe, in which governments are formed of several of the parties that elected

members to the parliament, but it loses its heuristic power in Canada, where governments composed of a single party are the rule. On the other hand, although the prime minister is the head of her or his party, she or he represents all Canadians as the head of government, a supra-representation function that justifies her or his taking account of the overall proportion of female legislators, rather than only the proportion of women within her or his caucus, to establish the feminization rate of her or his cabinet. To this are added election-related considerations, which are ever-present in politics. The other research direction has it that it is the proportion of women in the government caucus, rather than the overall proportion of female legislators, that guides the leader, since she or he must draw on this group to select ministers. Studlar and Moncrief (1997, 1999) supported this idea following their study of the process of recruitment of women for Canadian provincial cabinets between 1976 and 1994, even though they recognized that the overall proportion of female legislators also constitutes a significant variable in the feminization rate of cabinets. From these two directions emerges a first working hypothesis: the proportion of women in the cabinet reflects the proportion of female legislators in the legislative caucus of the party that forms the government.

As mentioned above, leaders must also take account of criteria other than sex when forming their cabinet; one of these is geographic space. Since its foundation, in 1867, Canada has been the theatre of deep regionalisms that inspired, at least in part, the adoption of a federal, rather than unitary, state structure (Ajzenstat, Romney, Gentles and Gairdner 1999: 261-326); in return, federalism has no doubt contributed to fuelling and maintaining these regionalisms, which have become an integral part of Canada. At any rate, the Canadian Constitution institutionalizes the regions as a criterion for representation, notably when it comes to the Senate.² Regional identities and cultures have been seen as factors in explaining the unequal access of women to various Canadian legislatures, with the Atlantic provinces showing less enthusiasm for political participation by women (Arscott 1997, Brodie 1977, Moncrief and Studlar 1996, Studlar and Matland 1996, Studlar and Moncrief 1997, Vickers and Brodie 1981; for a critical perspective see O'Neill and Erickson 2003). Whence a second working hypothesis: the feminization rate in cabinets is lower in the Atlantic provinces than in other Canadian regions.

To the above requirements of representativeness (sex and geographic space) in assembling a cabinet is added a legislative context bestowed by the popular vote. Thus the legislative pool available to the government party may exert a certain influence on women's access to Canadian cabinets, according to observations made by two authors. In an attempt to identify some of the factors associated with appointments to federal cabinets between 1935 and 2008, Kerby (2009) examined whether the size of the legislative caucus of the party forming the government influenced the chance of acceding to the cabinet. He postulated that the smaller the size of the legislative caucus, the greater the possibilities for women to accede to the cabinet, because a small caucus offers the leader less choice than does a larger

caucus. This reasoning proved to be well founded. Kerby found that between 1935 and 2008, female members of Parliament representing the governing party had a 50% higher chance of being appointed to the cabinet than did their male colleagues. Clearly, female legislators in a small government caucus have every reason to hope to receive an invitation to join the cabinet. Similarly, in an article in which she summarizes her observations with regard to women's participation in cabinets in a number of English-speaking countries (essentially, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United States), Sykes (2009: 54) develops the idea that in the absence of a strong legislative majority, the government leader may want to portray herself or himself as 'first among peers' and thus form a cabinet in which a collective decision-making process prevails. Following this reasoning, the party leader may be more inclined to put together an open – that is, inclusive and diversified – cabinet, because her or his party does not have a large legislative caucus. In this context, appointment of women to the cabinet may be a strategy deployed by the leader to extend her or his electoral base among female voters – and ultimately to fortify her or his legislative caucus in the next election. From this reasoning flows a third working hypothesis: the smaller the legislative majority of the government caucus, the more feminized will be the cabinet.

The rate of legislative turnover is another contextual datum bestowed by elections. The Canadian House of Commons has one of the highest rates of turnover of legislators among Western democracies (Matland and Studlar 2004), and provincial legislatures show a rate of turnover similar to that for the House of Commons (Moncrief 1998). Yet, Young (1991) maintains, a high turnover rate of elected personnel (attributable to voluntary or involuntary departures) should contribute to larger numbers of women receiving legislative mandates, notably because the candidacies from opposition parties are often less competitive (and thus more accessible to women) than are those of the government party; if the turnover is substantial, the influx of new faces may result in a change of government (Brodie 1985: 124, Studlar and Moncrief 1997, Tremblay 2009, Young 1991). In fact, Studlar and Moncrief (1999; see also Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994: 119-137) observe, changes of government contribute to bringing more women into the cabinet. It may be that the newly elected leader wishes to distinguish her or his administration from the previous one, or that the presence of a larger number of female legislators and the requirement of representativeness of women in the cabinet exerts pressure in favour of its feminization. The fourth working hypothesis follows this line of reasoning: changes of government result in more substantial proportions of women ministers.

However, Studlar and Moncrief (1999) express two reservations regarding their observation about the beneficial effect of changes of government on the proportion of women ministers. First, they posit that the feminization of cabinets may be linked to their size. A number of authors use this reasoning to argue that proportional representation list (that is, multimember constituency) voting systems, more than their plurality/majority and single-member constituency

counterparts, favour the election of female candidates: the more places there are to fill, the more embarrassing it becomes when only men occupy them (Matland 2005, Norris 2004: 179-208, Salmond 2006).³ Thus, a fifth hypothesis is that the larger the size of the cabinet, the more women are in it.

The other reservation expressed by Studlar and Moncrief (1999) concerns the ideological label of the architect of the cabinet – the government leader. A number of studies have shown that left-wing parties are quicker to promote the political citizenship of women than are right-wing parties (among others: Caul 2006: 73-79, Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2005, Jones 2009, Mateo Diaz 2005: 76; but see Forest 2011, Holli 2008, Murray 2008). In general, three ideological families share the political field in Canada: conservatism (on the right side of the political spectrum), liberalism (in the centre), and social democracy (on the centre-left).⁴ Although the influence of these ideologies varies over time, through space, and by context, as a general rule conservatism manifests less enthusiasm for the advancement of women's political citizenship than do liberalism and, especially, social democracy.

Studies have shown that in Canada, in general, female Liberal and New Democratic candidates and legislators are more pro-feminist than are their Conservative counterparts (Tremblay 1993, 2010: 115-141, Tremblay and Pelletier 2001). On the other hand, the latter do contribute to a project of women's political representation, either by introducing into the Conservative space certain positions associated with the women's movement (Tremblay and Pelletier 2003) or by working in concert with Liberals and New Democrats to promote these positions in legislative backrooms or extra-legislative zones (Bashevkin 2009b: 16-17, 2009c). A number of major studies have discussed the accomplishments of the New Democratic Party (NDP) with regard to women's rights. For instance, its electoral commitments to women are more generous and its ranks more feminized (Cochrane 1977: 77, Kohn 1984, Moncrief and Studlar 1996, Trimble 1993, Whitehorn and Archer 1995). Studlar and Moncrief (1997; see also Moncrief and Studlar 1996) note, however, that the Liberals often follow closely behind the New Democrats in promotion of women's rights, a fact that is especially significant because the former hold the reins of power more often than do the latter. The last hypothesis, therefore, explores the ideological positioning of parties, advancing that right-wing cabinets have a lower proportion of women than do centrist and centre-left cabinets.

Methodology

This study takes the feminization rate of federal and provincial cabinets as the unit of analysis. A cabinet is defined as 'a collegial body in which – the first minister aside – ministers engage in genuinely collective decision making (...). [Cabinet] is limited to twenty or thirty people, who gain admission and retain membership only with the first minister's approval.' (White 2005: 21-22, 24) Two constraints on the choice of cabinets were imposed. First, only cabinets formed following

a general federal or provincial election were used, and those resulting from a cabinet shuffle were ignored. This choice is explained essentially by the availability and, especially, regularity, of sources of information. Second, although two women were appointed ministers in 1921 and some 30 before 1984, the present research looks only at cabinets formed between 1984 and 2007, inclusive, whether or not they had women in their ranks.⁵ The reason that cabinets from 1921 to 1983 are not used is their low feminization rate (an average of 2.9%), which skews the results of the statistical analysis. In other words, if the 126 cabinets formed between 1921 and 1983 are included, the average feminization rate for the period 1921-2007 is 9.2%, whereas the rate climbs to 20.3% when they are excluded (and only the period from 1984 to 2007 is used).

Beyond these numerical considerations, there are five reasons for choosing the mid-1980s as the starting point for this study. First, as Studlar and Matland (1994) observe, there was a turning point with regard to women's legislative representation in Canada in the 1980s: the number of seats that they occupied grew from very few to a relatively large number over the course of the decade. For instance, following the 1984 federal general election, the number and the proportion of women in the House of Commons almost doubled overnight (from 14 to 27 women MPs, or from 5% to 9.6%). Of course, the occupancy of less than 10% of seats can hardly be considered substantial representation; nevertheless, the 1984 election was a turning point because it marked a break with the past and established an informal benchmark for representation of women in the future. Furthermore, as mentioned above, because the legislature constitutes the pool for recruitment of ministers, the higher the number of female legislators, the stronger is the supply of female candidates for cabinet positions. Second, in 1981 Canada ratified a major instrument of international law with regard to women's rights: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention deal with political equality of women and men. Third, in 1982 Canada adopted the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, section 15 of which, guaranteeing equality of the sexes, came into effect in 1985. Fourth, in 1984 a leaders' debate took place exclusively on women's issues; this event, still unique in Canadian electoral annals, not only helped to mobilize women voters (Cohen 1993) but put these issues on the electoral agenda and revealed their political dimensions. Finally, in 1985, the last government (in Nova Scotia) that had only male ministers fell, and the ensuing cabinet finally admitted women. In short, the units of observation for this research are the 71 cabinets formed following a general provincial or federal election in Canada held between 1984 and 2007.

The independent variables differ from hypothesis to hypothesis and include the overall proportion of female legislators (all parties combined) and the proportion of women within the government caucus only, the region and province of the cabinet, the majority or minority status of the government, the change or lack of change of government following a general election, the size of the cabinet (or the number of ministers), and the political party that forms the govern-

ment. A temporal variable was also created: the sub-periods of 1984 to 1995 and 1996 to 2007. This division in the mid-1990s is based on two factors: 1) the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, in which Canada was a participant and at which it committed itself to equality of the sexes; 2) the significantly different proportions of women ministers before and after 1995, leading to the notion of two distinct cohorts or eras with regard to participation of women in Canadian governments.

The statistical analysis consisted of T-tests and ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis. Chosen due to the nature of the dependent and independent variables at work, the OLS regression enabled me to determine which variables are significantly associated with the proportion of women in Canadian cabinets from 1984 to 2007.

Analysis of the results

A first section presents the results of descriptive analyses for each hypothesis, and a second section looks in greater depth at the most significant observations through regression analyses.

Comparisons of averages

Hypothesis 1: The proportion of women in the cabinet reflects the proportion of female legislators in the legislative caucus of the party that forms the government.

One pillar of British-style parliamentarism is that government leaders choose their ministers from the legislative caucus of their party. This principle must be combined with the requirement of representativeness of women in the cabinet. In theory, a government caucus devoid of women would translate into a cabinet devoid of women. Moreover, the proportion of female legislators on the government side offers the government leader a convenient benchmark for justifying the proportion, more or less generous, of women within her or his cabinet. On the other hand, it could be argued that the cabinet is accountable to the population on the whole, because the government must have the confidence of a majority of elected representatives to stay in power, and reference to all female legislators, notwithstanding their political party, may constitute a fairer benchmark for the proportion of seats occupied by women in the cabinet.

Table 1. Average Proportion of Women Cabinet Ministers, Members of the Government Caucus and Legislators, 1984-2007

	Cabinet Ministers ³	Government Caucus ⁴	Legislators ⁴
Overall average proportion (71 cabinets) ²	20.3	17.8	17.4
Federal	22.2* (7)	17.8 (7)	17.7 (7)
Western Canada (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan)	22.0** (24)	20.3*** (24)	19.8*** (24)
Central Canada (Ontario, Quebec) ¹	26.1*** (13)	20.2** (13)	19.4** (13)
Atlantic provinces (New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island)	15.5 (27)	14.4 (27)	14.3 (27)
Atlantic provinces (without Nova Scotia)	18.5 (20)	---	---

* : $P \leq 0.10$; ** : $P \leq 0.05$; *** : $P \leq 0.01$.

1) The common practice is to distinguish four regions in Canada: Western Canada, Atlantic provinces, Ontario, and Quebec. Here, the last two have been merged for two reasons. The first concerns the low number of cases: only six cabinets were constituted in Quebec and seven in Ontario between 1984 and 2007. I therefore decided to merge the two provinces in order to generate a stronger category for statistical analysis. The second is that the proportions of women cabinet ministers in Ontario (23.8%) and Quebec (28.9%) from 1984 to 2007 are not statistically significant, and this is true also for women members of the government caucus (17.9% in Ontario and 22.9% in Quebec) and women MPs in the entire legislature (17.4% in Ontario and 21.8% in Quebec).

2) Differences between 20.3%, 17.8% and 17.4% all significant at $P \leq 0.001$.

3) T-tests in which the average proportion of women ministers in the comparison category ("Atlantic provinces") is significantly lower than the proportion of women ministers in central Canada ($P \leq 0.01$), western Canada ($P \leq 0.05$), and the federal government ($P \leq 0.10$). When Nova Scotia is excluded, the proportion of women ministers in the Atlantic provinces is no longer significantly lower than that in central Canada (18.5% versus 26.1%, $P \leq 0.05$).

4) T-tests in which the average proportion of women legislators in the government caucus and total women legislators in the comparison category ("Atlantic provinces") is significantly lower than the proportions of women legislators in the government caucus and total women legislators in central Canada ($P \leq 0.05$) and western Canada ($P \leq 0.01$).

As table 1 shows, an average of 20.3% of members of the 71 federal and provincial cabinets formed in Canada between

1984 and 2007 were women (the proportions were 14.7% for the sub-period 1984-95 and 24.3% for the sub-period 1996-2007), with some cabinets containing none and others flirting with parity of the sexes. For comparative purposes, the government legislative caucuses from which these ministers were recruited had an average feminization rate of 17.8% (13.2% for the sub-period 1984-95 and 21% for the sub-period 1996-2007), and the full legislatures had an average proportion of 17.4% (13.8% for 1984-95 and 20% for 1996-2007) female legislators. All of the differences between the earlier period and the later one are statistically significant at $P = 0.001$. Not surprisingly, the percentage of women ministers and the percentage of women in the government legislative caucus are strongly correlated (Pearson: 0.797, $P = 0.001$; 0.876, $P = 0.001$ for 1984-95; 0.622, $P = 0.001$ for 1996-2007). On the other hand, this is also true for the relationship between the proportion of female ministers and the overall proportion of women legislators (Pearson: 0.756, $P = 0.001$; 0.771, $P = 0.001$ for 1984-95; 0.599, $P = 0.001$ for 1996-2007).

In their study of women's participation in Canadian provincial cabinets from 1976 to 1994, Studlar and Moncrief (1999) urged caution when interpreting such data, because of the strong collinearity that may exist between the overall proportion of female legislators and the proportion of women in the government legislative caucus. A number of cases testify to this, including two extreme examples: in 1987, the *Liberal Party* won all of the seats in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly, and all female legislators necessarily belonged to the government caucus; in the 1991 Saskatchewan general election, 11 of the 12 women elected belonged to the party forming the government. A very strong statistical correlation links the overall proportion of female legislators and the proportion of women in the government legislative caucus (Pearson: 0.877, $P = 0.001$; 0.947, $P = 0.001$ for 1984-95; 0.743, $P = 0.001$ for 1996-2007), which should not be surprising since almost two thirds (65.9%) of provincial and federal female legislators between 1984 and 2007 were members of the government legislative caucus. The regression analyses reported below will confirm the problems of inter-collinearity between these variables.

Hypothesis 2: The feminization rate in cabinets in the Atlantic provinces is lower than in other Canadian regions.

Some research has found that the Atlantic provinces have performed more modestly with regard to political representation by women. The observations of the present study support this. Comparisons – the results of which appear in table 1 – reveal that, for the period from 1984 to 2007, the Atlantic provinces had a significantly lower average proportion of women ministers than did the other regions.⁶ The lower significance threshold between the Atlantic provinces and the federal government may be explained by the small number of units in the latter cell. Moreover, considering these data in light of the sub-periods, only two tests prove to be significant at the 95% threshold for the sub-period 1996-2007 – that is, between the Atlantic provinces, which had an average of 19.3% women ministers, and the Central and

Western regions, with 29.5% and 26.3% women ministers, respectively.

Can the smaller proportion of women ministers in the Atlantic provinces be explained by the ideology of the party forming the governments – that is, a greater number of Conservative cabinets? At first glance, no: of the 27 governments formed in the Atlantic provinces between 1984 and 2007, 14 (51.9%) were Conservative and almost as many (13 or 48.1%) were Liberal. In their study of women's representation in provincial legislatures from 1975 to 1994, Studlar and Matland (1996) observe that the Atlantic provinces are somewhat behind the other regions of Canada, but they point out the uneven performance by women from province to province in the region; in 1993, the legislature of Prince Edward Island was the most feminized in all of Canada (28.1%); that of Newfoundland and Labrador had only 5.8% female members, and women occupied 15.5% and 9.6% of the legislative seats in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, respectively. The Atlantic provinces were no more homogeneous with regard to women's participation at the executive level. In fact, the lower feminization rate in cabinets in Atlantic Canada is attributable to a single province: Nova Scotia. On the one hand, between 1984 and 2007 women occupied an average of 7% of cabinet seats in that province, compared to 18% in Prince Edward Island (gap significant at $P \leq 0.01$ with Nova Scotia), 19.4% ($P \leq 0.01$) in New Brunswick, and 18.4% ($P \leq 0.05$) in Newfoundland and Labrador. On the other hand, comparing the regional averages once again for the period 1984 to 2007 with Nova Scotia withdrawn from the analysis, the feminization rate in Atlantic provincial cabinets is no longer significantly below that of the federal government or the Western region, though it remains so compared to the Central region (18.5% versus 26.1%, $P \leq 0.05$; see table 1).

Hypothesis 3: The smaller the legislative majority of the government caucus, the more feminized will be the cabinet.

The legislative caucus of the party that forms the government is the pool of candidates from which the government leader must select her or his ministers, with its size conditioning the range of possible choices; in theory, a large caucus offers more choice than does a small caucus. What is more, the pressure to have representation by women is imposed to the point that the leader of a minority government might be tempted to form an inclusive and diversified cabinet including women with the intent of broadening her or his electoral base by pandering to a women and/or feminist electorate and thus gaining a majority government in the following election. This reading does not hold. On the one hand, there is no correlation between the proportion of seats held by the party that forms the government and the proportion of women ministers, either for the entire period of 1984 to 2007 or for the sub-periods. On the other hand, provincial and federal cabinets formed in the context of minority governments⁷ between 1984 and 2007 did not have significantly fewer women on average than did cabinets formed during majority governments, or 16.9% versus 20.8%, this lack of statistical difference being maintained for both sub-periods. It must be said that leaders of minority

governments had a less feminized caucus to choose from than did those of majority governments – 16.3% versus 18% – as tighter electoral battles seem to discourage women's access to legislatures, which are springboards to cabinets.

Hypothesis 4: Changes of the government result in more substantial proportions of women ministers.

Aside from contributing to the election of women, substantial turnover rates following a general election sometimes bring about a change of government, a juncture that may favour women's access to the cabinet, especially if the election results bring large numbers of them to the government legislative caucus. Once again, this reasoning does not hold: between 1984 and 2007, the 25 changes of provincial and federal administration that occurred following a general election did not generate cabinets that were significantly more feminized than were those resulting from governments returned to power: 21.2% compared to 19.9%.

Studlar and Moncrief (1999) emphasized that the presumably positive effect of changes of government on women's access to cabinets could be explained by the ideological trend of the new administration. While extreme cases engender clear results, less extreme ones are more ambiguous. For instance, cabinets that change from New Democrat to Conservative see the proportion of women fall dramatically, and the inverse is true. The ascent to power of the Conservative Party of Ontario in 1995 caused the number of women in the cabinet to plummet from 40.7% to 21.1%. On the other hand, when the New Democrats dethroned the Social Credit Party at the head of British Columbia in 1991, the percentage of women ministers leapt by almost 26% – from 11.1% to 36.8%. Following eight of the ten changes of administration in which the Conservatives lost power to the Liberals or the Liberals to the New Democrats, the proportion of women ministers improved. However, in the ten elections in which the change of government went from left to right by only one position on the ideological spectrum (from New Democrat to Liberal or from Liberal to Conservative), there was no clear trend. Thus, the taking of the reins of power by the Conservatives does not have the compulsory corollary of a drop in the proportion of women in the cabinet, as evidenced by the Mulroney cabinet set up after the 1984 federal general election – although the inverse is also seen with the Harper cabinet of 2006. In fact, these two examples force us to recognize that conservatism is not monolithic but contains nuances: Stephen Harper's conservatism includes a strong social component, while Brian Mulroney's did not (Bashevkin 1996). The same reasoning holds when executive rule passes from a New Democrat regime to a Liberal regime: there is not necessarily a drop in the proportion of women ministers. In this regard, however, Studlar and Moncrief (1997; see also Moncrief and Studlar 1996) noted that Liberals and New Democrats are very similar with regard to promotion of women's rights.

Hypothesis 5: The larger the cabinet, the more women are in it.

This hypothesis takes up a widespread argument used to explain the positive impact of proportional representation

list (i.e., multimember constituency) voting systems on the election of women: when a large number of seats are available, it becomes politically risky for all of them to be filled by people who resemble each other (for example, only men). This reasoning sheds light on a condition associated with women's access to Canadian federal and provincial cabinets between 1984 and 2007: the larger the cabinet, the more women are in it (Pearson: 0.519, $P=0.001$). As table 2 shows, when cabinets are distributed by size,⁸ it seems that the more seats there are around the cabinet table, the more women are recruited to occupy them.

Table 2. Average Number and Proportion of Women Ministers

Number of (women and men) ministers	Average number	Average proportion
1984-2007 (71)		
9-17 (23)	2.8	19.6
18-22 (23)	3.8	19.9
23-39 (25)	5.8	21.5
1984-1995 (29)		
9-17 (23)	1.9	12.5
18-22 (23)	2.5	13.1
23-39 (25)	4.9	17.6
1996-2007 (42)		
9-17 (23)	3.3	23.4
18-22 (23)	4.8	25.0
23-39 (25)	6.5	24.5

* T tests revealing significant differences at $P \leq 0.10$ (2.8 vs. 3.8), $P \leq 0.05$ (3.3 vs. 4.8; 2.5 vs. 4.9; 4.8 vs. 6.5), $P \leq 0.01$ (1.9 vs. 4.9; 3.8 vs. 5.8) and $P \leq 0.001$ (2.8 vs. 5.8; 3.3 vs. 6.5).

Moreover, all possible comparisons (except for one⁹) are significant, both for the entire period and for the sub-periods. The region variable is partly responsible for this result: on the one hand, the bigger the cabinet the more women are members; on the other hand, the size of cabinets varies by region, the federal cabinets being bigger (with a mean number of 31 members from 1984 to 2007), followed by central Canada (24.8; more specifically 24.7 in Ontario and 24.8 in Quebec), western Canada (19.7), and the Atlantic provinces (16); these gaps are statistically significant at the level of 95%. To add to this puzzle, cabinet size does not change the *proportion* of women ministers: smaller cabinets do not contain a significantly different proportion of women than do larger cabinets.

That feminization rates do not differ according to the size of cabinets should be put in perspective because, during the period from 1984 to 2007, women were more numerous within cabinets that were shrinking in size and in which men were losing ground. More precisely, over this period, the average size of cabinets in Canada dropped from 21.5 members (from 1984 to 1995) to 19.6 members (from 1996 to 2007), a decline of 8.9%; the average number of men dropped by 19.4% (from 18.3 in 1984-95 to 14.7 in 1996-2007); and the average number of women grew by 50.5% (from 3.2 to 4.8). This conveys not only the imperative that women be represented in cabinets (and recalls the observa-

tions by Kerby (2009) that women have a better chance of acceding to federal cabinets than do men), but the accentuation of this imperative over time. Furthermore, one may hypothesize that female-male parity in cabinets is on the not-too-distant horizon: if the size of cabinets is kept constant at 20 members, along with a 50% rise in the number of women and a 19% drop in the number of men per decade, cabinets should contain an equal number of women and men ministers sometime between 2015 and 2025. This scenario, however, does not take into account both the fact that simple linear projection is a poor tool for predicting future political events¹⁰ and the ideological label of parties that form the cabinets, an important variable when it comes to women's access to power – Conservatives possibly pushing back the advent of the parity scenario and New Democrats and Liberals advancing it.

Hypothesis 6: Right-wing cabinets have a lower proportion of women than do centrist and centre-left cabinets.

As a rule, parties situated on the right side of the political spectrum manifest less enthusiasm for women's political rights than do their counterparts on the left. This is why cabinets formed by right-wing parties should be less feminized than cabinets formed by left-wing parties. This hypothesis is confirmed: cabinets formed by Conservative leaders have significantly lower feminization rates than do cabinets formed by Liberal and New Democrat leaders: 15.3% versus 24% ($P \leq 0.001$). This trend is maintained in the sub-periods (for 1984-95: 9.6% versus 18.2%, $P \leq 0.01$; for 1996-2007: 19% versus 28.2%, $P \leq 0.001$). What is more, even withdrawing extreme cases from the analysis (the 12 cabinets for which the feminization rate was below 10% and the 10 for which it was above 30%), the gap is maintained (19% versus 22%, $P = 0.06$). In short, this is an institutional variable associated convincingly with women's access to cabinets.

To sum up, the proportion of women in Canadian cabinets formed following a federal or provincial election between 1984 and 2007 is associated with a number of institutional variables: the feminization rate of the government legislative caucus and of all elected legislators, the number of cabinet positions to fill, the ideological orientation of the party forming the cabinet, and, to a certain degree, the region. Moreover, minority governments and changes of government do not open cabinet doors to women. The next section presents the result of the regression analyses performed for a better understanding of the interrelationships among the independent variables and their influences on the proportion of women ministers.

Regression analyses

Table 3 shows the results of four OLS regression analyses performed to uncover some of the institutional variables associated with women's access to cabinets. As expected, the simultaneous integration within a single regression model of independent variables of the proportion of women within the government legislative caucus and the overall percentage of

women legislators revealed major inter-correlation problems,¹¹ and so their impact on the proportion of women ministers was tested in separate models.

A first comment concerns the importance of the percentage of women legislators, whether overall (model 1) or within the government caucus only (model 2), in explaining the proportion of women ministers. In fact, each one of these variables covers just about all of the explanatory space in the models in which it was used (that is, about 76% in model 1 and 80% in model 2), and its strong statistical significance ($P=0.001$) is never so far off the mark that the addition of other variables enriches the explanation significantly (see models 3 and 4).

Table 3. Standardized beta coefficients (OLS regression analysis) as for the dependent variable is the proportion of women in Canada's cabinets from 1984 to 2007, and the dominant independent variable is either the overall proportion of women legislators or the proportion of women in the government legislative caucus.

	Beta	Std Error
Model 1 (R^2 adj.: 0.566)		
Overall % of women legislators***	.756	.125
Model 2 (R^2 adj.: 0.630)		
% of women in the government caucus***	.797	0.91
Model 3 (R^2 adj.: 0.644)		
Overall % of women legislators***	.507	.152
Period**	.231	1.705
Region	.167	1.392
Government ideology**	.243	1.566
Size of the cabinet	.002	1.129
Model 4 (R^2 adj.: 0.671)		
% of women in the government caucus***	.613	.129
Period*	.184	1.687
Region	.144	1.343
Government ideology	.121	1.645
Size of the cabinet	.073	1.116

*** $P \leq 0.001$, ** $P \leq 0.01$, * $P \leq 0.05$

From this arises a second comment about whether the overall proportion of women legislators or the proportion of women within the government legislative caucus exerts the more decisive influence on the feminization rate of cabinets. The results presented in Table 3 give credence to the latter variable. That said, the overall proportion of women legislators also has a hegemonic explanatory role in the models into which it is integrated (models 1 and 3).

Models 3 and 4 take into account other independent variables that are revealed by the bivariate analyses to exert some influence on the proportion of women ministers: the ideological label of the government party, the region, and the size of the cabinet.¹² A temporal variable was also added, since the proportion of women ministers differs significantly depending on the sub-period (14.7% in 1984-95 and 24.3% in 1996-2007, $P=0.001$). These two models explain a substantial proportion of the variance (between 64.4% and 67.1%).¹³

The third comment arising from Table 3 regards the size of the cabinet at which the influence on the proportion of women ministers fades in comparison to other variables (see models 3 and 4). The fourth comment is that the ideology of the party called upon to form the government exerts an irregular influence on the proportion of women in the cabinet, being either significant (model 3) or not significant (model 4). In fact, it seemed as if the influence of the government's ideology was notable for its presence among a diversified group of women legislators (that is, all women legislators), but that it completely disappeared when measured among a group of women legislators with an ideologically uniform stance (the percentage of women in the government caucus). Finally, aside from occupying a legislative seat (preferably in the government party), the proportion of women ministers responds to considerations of time: model 3 and, secondarily, model 4 reveal the importance of the historical period – but not of the region – in explaining the proportion of women ministers. Whereas the former is not very surprising, the latter forces us to take a second look at the presumed impact of regionalism on women's participation in cabinets.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to examine certain institutional variables associated with women entering Canadian cabinets between 1984 and 2007. The analyses explored the contribution of six variables to the feminization of these select government teams: historical period, the overall proportion of women legislators and the share of seats that they occupy in the government legislative caucus, the size of the cabinet, the ideological label of the government party, and the region. The role of certain variables is not surprising (the period and the party forming the government), and the results confirm suspicions about other variables: for instance, the Atlantic provinces (notably Nova Scotia) show less enthusiasm toward women's participation in government. The results of this research also call for certain nuances with regard to the descriptive representation of women. One fundamental argument for adoption of a proportional electoral system is that the more spaces are available the more likely are women to occupy them. This reasoning is correct with regard to the *number* of women ministers, but it does not hold when the analysis looks at their *proportion*, as small and large cabinets show statistically identical feminization rates.

Remaining are the variables of overall proportion of female legislators and the proportion of female government legislators, both of which exert an almost monopolistic influence on the feminization rate of cabinets, with the latter seeming to take some precedence. This intermingling is not surprising, since there is a large overlap between these two groups, which highlights the problems of inter-collinearity between them. That said, what the statistics cannot confirm, custom may be able to do: in a British-tradition parliamentary system, ultimately it is the presence of women within the government legislative caucus that will prove to be the most decisive variable, simply because ministers belong to

the government party and not to the opposition parties. Thus, whether the overall proportion of women legislators or that of women within the government parliamentary caucus exerts the most decisive influence over the proportion of women ministers is perhaps a false distinction, as British parliamentarianism circumscribes the pool of selection for cabinet ministers to legislators sitting on the government side.

In this essay, I have looked at the institutional context to understand women's access to cabinets, and not at factors of a personal order. Yet, these are important: age, schooling, profession, language spoken, ethnic origin, region, political experience, social capital, party factions and, more informally, closeness of relationship with the leader are just some of the factors that may lead to choosing one person over another for the cabinet. In this perspective, it would be interesting to analyze the composition of each cabinet in order to bring to light the logics of representativeness underlying them. Beyond sex, to what criteria does appointment to the cabinet respond? In this mathematics of representativeness, in which the leader arranges her or his ministers in a sort of chess-type strategy, are women more profitable, politically, than men? This question, among others, is not answered by the studies.

Other results arising from this research but not predicted by the hypotheses are very interesting. In fact, a number of data throw doubt on the Putnam's law of increasing disproportion, a principle that guides many analyses on women and politics. This 'law' states that the higher the political position, the harder it is for women to attain. Given the supremacy that the executive enjoys in the parliamentary system, the law of increasing disproportion should lead to the conclusion that there is a lower proportion of women ministers than of women legislators. However, observations drawn from the present research do not support this reasoning: while the average proportion of women legislators between 1984 and 2007 was 17.4% (and 17.8% for government legislative caucuses, the ante-chamber to executive power), the feminization rate of the 71 federal and provincial cabinets over the period studied was 20.3% on average, a gap that is statistically significant ($P=0.001$). What is more, the gap is maintained for the sub-period 1996-2007 ($P=0.003$) and for some regions.¹⁴ Refuting the law of increasing disproportion, power does not, in fact, evade women.

Yet, it is important not to reject the law of increasing disproportion too quickly, for two reasons. First, it is possible that it subsists within cabinets – that is, that women find themselves at the bottom of the ministerial hierarchy (as junior ministers) and at the head of 'pink' ministries (for example, education, family, health). The second reason is that its heuristic value may depend on the overall proportion of women legislators: if a weak presence in the legislature allows for lack of representation in the cabinet, when they are more visible among the parliamentary ranks their absence from the cabinet is more difficult to explain. This reading is quite credible: preliminary analyses show that when women constitute less than 15% of all legislators, the proportion of women ministers is not significantly different

(higher or lower) from the overall proportion of women legislators and women members of the government caucus, but when women are more visible in the legislature (at least 15%), their proportion in the cabinet is statistically ($P\leq 0.05$) higher than the overall proportion of women legislators and women in the government caucus (Tremblay with the collaboration of Andrews 2010). It is as if once a certain numerical weight is reached, a contagion effect is triggered from the legislative level to the executive one. Contrary to the concept of critical mass, the heuristic potential of which is now widely questioned (Beckwith 2007, Bratton 2005, Childs and Krook 2006, Studlar and McAllister 2002), the concept of the contagion effect has generated more convincing analysis; for instance, it has been shown that gender quotas in electoral politics are subject to contagion effects (see, among others, Krook 2004, Matland and Studlar 1996). Thus, if the adoption and implementation of a gender quota by one country helps to disseminate this measure to neighbouring countries, one may suggest that when women are present in legislatures in numbers that can no longer be ignored, this may have a contagion effect on their appointment to cabinets. This proposed interpretation calls for further research.

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Endnot

- 1 Discussing local governments in the UK, Bochel and Bochel (2008: 431) also identify such a relationship: 'There was a stronger relationship between the percentage of councillors who are women and the proportion of the cabinet who are women.'
- 2 See section 22 of the Constitution Act, 1867.
- 3 These works do not explore the impact of the voting system on the proportion of women cabinet ministers, a problem that future research should explore (see Tremblay and Bauer 2011). In fact, I know of only one study that takes into account the potential impact of the voting system on the proportion of women cabinet ministers. Examining 72 countries in the mid-1990s, Whitford, Wilkins, and Ball (2007) note that cabinets contained more women in countries using open-list proportional representation voting systems than in countries using closed-list proportional representation or single-member-plurality voting systems. They explain this intriguing result as follows: "The parties in coalition in these [open-list proportional representation] systems perceive and respond to what voters prefer ... and not just what voters have done in actually delivering women to the legislature" (p. 570). It goes without saying that future research should explore this very interesting observation.
- 4 To which is added a nationalist current not examined here because it is concentrated in Quebec, at least as of the late twentieth century.
- 5 Between 1984 and 2007, two cabinets contained only men.
- 6 Table 1 also shows that the Atlantic provinces have significantly lower overall proportions of female legislators (all parties combined) and of women within the government legislative caucus only than do Western and Central Canada, but not than the federal government.
- 7 In Canada, a government is minority when the party that forms it does not have an absolute majority of seats in the House of Commons (for the federal level) or the legislature (in the provinces).
- 8 The 71 provincial and federal cabinets formed following a general election between 1984 and 2007 were divided into three categories by size: from 9 to 17 members (23 of 71 cabinets, or 32.4%), from 18 to 22 members (23/71), and from 23 to 39 members (25/71, 35.2%).
- 9 For the sub-period 1984-95, the gap between 1.9 and 2.5 is not statistically significant at the conventional thresholds.

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- 10 The reason for this is less that linear projection is an uncertain statistical technique than in the fact that estimating the future based on the past supposes that the latter is an appropriate proxy for the former – a precept that needs to be demonstrated.
 - 11 The tolerance index is at 0.23 and variance inflation factor (VIF) at 4.42 for each of these independent variables.
 - 12 Despite the fact that the size of the cabinets varies significantly from one region to the other (see hypothesis 5), the tolerance index and variance inflation factor (VIF) do not reveal problems of inter-correlation when these two variables are integrated simultaneously in an OLS regression model.
 - 13 In models 3 and 4, the order in which the independent variables (that is, the period, the region, the government ideology, and the size of the cabinet) were entered has no impact at all on the results (i.e., the beta and the standard error values).
 - 14 More specifically, for the entire period of 1984 to 2007: at the federal level, the gap between the proportion of women ministers and the proportion of women members of the government caucus is significant ($P \leq 0.05$); in central Canada (Ontario and Quebec), between the proportion of women ministers and, on the one hand, women in the government caucus ($P = 0.001$) and, on the other hand, overall proportion of women legislators ($P = 0.004$). These gaps hold when analyses are run for Ontario and Quebec separately, although the statistical significance is weaker ($P \leq 0.05$ or $P \leq 0.10$, depending on the case).