

Politics, Policy, and Participation: Contemporary Issues in Canadian Gender Equality

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Introduction to the Symposium

In this symposium, the Canadian Political Science Review (CPSR) invites readers to explore current issues in Canadian gender equality and women's participation in politics. There is a long history of Canadian gender scholars studying the historical and institutional factors that shape equality outcomes (Vickers 1994). Women's representation in formal politics and in positions of political leaderships has been a significant issue for Canadian feminist scholars (Bashevkin 2003; Tremblay and Trimble 2003). In addition, much work has been conducted on the Canadian women's movement (Brodie 1995), advocacy groups (Burt 1990), gender-based policy analysis (Grace 1997), and women in the public sector (Chappell 2003).

The contemporary political landscape is, however, changing. New women's equality issues are emerging, while many of the traditional challenges with representation, participation and discrimination remain unresolved. Gender equality is a moving target and feminist scholarship must keep pace with shifts in political culture, the institutionalization of a conservative federal government agenda, and an increasingly diverse Canadian population. Progress towards gender equality has occurred over the last several years, especially in terms of the recent rapid increase of women in positions of political leadership. As of February 2013 there were six female premiers in power in Canada, including Christy Clark in British Columbia, Alison Redford in Alberta, Kathleen Wynne in Ontario, Pauline Marois in Quebec, Kathy Dunderdale in Newfoundland and Labrador, and Eva Aariak in Nunavut. Still, major challenges associated with gender equality in Canada exist. This symposium examines six such challenges including the nature of women's recent representation in the House of Commons, women's access to cabinet positions, approaches to gender mainstreaming, social capital among immigrant and visible minority women, gendered mediation in Alberta's newspaper coverage, and the renewed threat of a feminist backlash. Each contribution provides important lessons for understanding the implications of a shifting political culture on the contemporary gender equality project.

In the first article, "The Hidden Rise of New Women Candidates Seeking Election to the House of Commons, 2000 – 2008," Louise Carbert examines why increases in women's candidacies over the last four federal elections has not translated into a substantive increase in the number of

women legislators. Carbert surveys several key historical shifts in federal politics, including the merger of Canada's two right wing parties (Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada), changes in voting preference, and the stagnation of the proportion of seats held by women in the national legislature. At first glance the paradox between women's candidacy and election may seem to arise from the partisan effects of the shift from a Liberal government with a women-friendly policy to a Conservative government that rejected affirmative action; however, Carbert's provides a more nuanced explanation. Using sensitivity analysis the article considers the number of female candidates put forward by the major parties as compared to election results and examines the relationship between the pool of candidates and the number of non-incumbent women elected. Throughout the piece, simulations and hypothetical scenario development are used to consider alternative outcomes and forecast future House of Commons gender compositions. Carbert's contribution to understanding women's representation in Canada's contemporary national legislature provides vital new insight on issues of women's representation in national politics.

In the second contribution, "Women's Access to Cabinets in Canada: Assessing the Role of Some Institutional Variables," Manon Tremblay examines Canadian women's access to state executive power. While scholarship exploring women's access to Canadian legislatures is well documented, women's participation in Cabinets is much less so. Although women's ministerial roles have increased over the past fifty years women's presence remains marginal. With feminization rates in federal and provincial cabinets from 1984 to the end of 2007 as her unit of analysis Tremblay examines a range of institutional variables including the proportion of female legislators versus the proportion of women in caucus, geography, status of the government (majority/minority), changes following a general election, size of the cabinet, and the political party in power. Tremblay's contribution provides key insights into understanding women's access to cabinets in the contemporary Canadian institutional context. She also suggests that, despite recent growth in women's participation in cabinets, other institutional determinants, such as the ideological orientation of the party and to some extent regionalism continue to impede women's access to cabinet positions.

In the third article "The Lexicon of Mainstreaming Equality: Gender Based Analysis (GBA), Gender and Diversi-

ty analysis (GDA) and Intersectionality Based Analysis (IBA)," Olena Hankivsky distinguishes between three available models to achieve gender mainstreaming goals, discussing the strengths and limitations of each approach. GBA, GDA and IDA are distinct, with specific modes of analysis leading to different interventions and outcomes. GBA is informed by gender as the key unit of analysis in policy analysis, policy formulation and implementation often privileging heteronormativity and failing to fully incorporate considerations of diversity. GDA takes on an additive approach to analyze diversity where gender still remains the primary focus. IBA is focused on simultaneous interactions between different social variables, highlighting intersectionality and complex inequalities. Hankivsky provides a significant contribution to gender scholarship and the treatment of inequality in policy processes and outcomes, suggesting that IBA's intersectional perspective offers the greatest flexibility and analytic capacity to address complex discriminations and to promote equality in all its multiple dimensions.

In the fourth contribution, "The Political Integration of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women," Brenda O'Neill, Elisabeth Gidengil, and Lisa Young examine how immigrant and visible minority status influences women's willingness and ability to participate in conventional and unconventional political activities. The study presents the results of a telephone survey conducted with English-speaking women in nine Canadian provinces. The survey suggests political integration of women depends on whether the activity is conventional or unconventional. The determinants for these political activities are also different. Resources and demographics may have substantial effect but not always with mobilizing networks and local participation in neighborhood activities showing some positive effects. Overall the research finds that immigrant women from an ethnic minority demonstrate a measurable participatory deficit compared to the native-born majority women. The research presented by O'Neill, Gidengil and Young provides significant lessons for future considerations of immigrants and members of ethnic minorities' political integration, with consequences for both levels of citizen political engagement and democratic legitimacy.

In the fifth article, "Wildrose Wild Card' Alberta Newspaper Coverage of the 2009 Wildrose Alliance Leadership Contest," Linda Trimble and Angelia Wagner examine whether women aspiring to political leadership continue to face media coverage biased by gendered norms and sex-based assumptions. This case study examines gendered mediation in Alberta's newspaper coverage of the Wildrose Alliance leadership contest, in which Danielle Smith ran as a contender. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the authors present findings on gendered mediation affecting candidate visibility, framing and evaluation. Although previous Canadian scholarship on media coverage has found various sex-based assumptions concerning women's leadership, Trimble and Wagner did not find this to be the case with the coverage of Danielle Smith during the Wildrose Alliance leadership contest, which was largely positive. While the findings cannot be generalized to conclude that mediation of party leadership is un-gendered, this

contribution supplies an interesting counterpoint to previous gender and media scholarship on female candidates seeking party leadership.

The final contribution, Shannon Sampert's "Enlightened Feminism and Charles Adler: The New Backlash?" examines the impact of Conservative's policies and the growing anti-rights rhetoric on women's equality issues in Canada. To explore the implication of government's cutbacks on women advocacy funding initiatives, Sampert demonstrates how the reduction of public funding to support public radio is aligned with a conservative media backlash. Through a study of selected podcasts of Charles Adler, a private talk radio host airing a daily news analysis, she explores how Adler's framing of equality rights are expressed in a way that promotes class, race and gender antagonisms giving the impression that Canadians are in a struggle for power with special interests groups including minorities and women. Sampert's impression of how Charles Adler's talk radio program frames equality claims and feminism, and her examination of the contemporary language of backlash provides important warnings on how government cutbacks on funding for public radio, falsely projected as political demands, threaten to further discredit feminist agendas and narrow the scope of equality claims.

In sum this symposium brings together some of the most influential gender scholars in Canada to explore contemporary equality issues surrounding women's representation, political participation and emerging challenges.

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