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The Dynamics of Women's Representation in the Canadian Provinces: 1975-1994*

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RICHARD E. MATLAND  University of Houston

Introduction

Although considerable research has been done on the growth of women's representation in the Canadian federal parliament, less has...
been done on patterns of women’s representation in provincial legislatures.\textsuperscript{2} Using the period 1975-1994, this article investigates an important but neglected area in four ways: (1) by comparing women’s representation at the provincial level with that in the House of Commons, (2) by examining whether there are significant differences across provinces in their propensity to nominate and elect women representatives to their provincial legislatures, (3) by describing the broad patterns of gender representation by party across the provinces, and (4) by examining whether women are disproportionately chosen as candidates in uncompetitive races for their party, that is, are women largely “sacrificial lambs”?

There is a strong tradition of studying federalism in Canadian politics,\textsuperscript{3} but most of this work concerns federal-provincial relations, especially at the constitutional and executive levels. Relatively less effort has been expended on studying comparative provincial politics, that is, patterns of similarity and differences among the provinces. Instead, research has focused on the politics of particular provinces or regions, with relatively few exceptions.\textsuperscript{4} This article contributes to two streams


Abstract. This article presents evidence concerning women's representation in Canada's provincial legislative assemblies over a 20-year period (1975-1994). Data from 3,755 elections and over 11,000 candidates are analyzed to inspect trends in representation. The authors find there has been a gradual increase in both female candidates and legislators. The New Democratic party has clearly been the leader in putting women on the ballot and into legislatures at the provincial level. In addition, hypotheses are tested to see if there are differences across provinces in parties' willingness to nominate and elect women, and whether women are more likely to be nominated primarily in districts where a party does not expect to win. The study finds that the Atlantic provinces lagged behind the rest of Canada as representation increased markedly everywhere else in the late 1980s and the 1990s. There is also evidence that the major parties nominated female challengers in ridings that were inferior to the ridings where the party's male challengers ran in the mid- to late-1970s. By the mid-1980s, however, evidence that women were treated as sacrificial lambs had disappeared.

Résumé. Cette étude fait le bilan de la représentation des femmes dans les assemblées législatives provinciales au Canada lors de 20 années (1975-1994). Les données visant 3,755 élections et plus de 11,000 candidats ont été analysées afin de cerner les principales tendances quant à la représentation des femmes durant cette période. Les résultats démontrent une augmentation progressive du nombre de candidates et de législatrices. Il est clair qu'à l'échelle provinciale le Nouveau parti démocratique est celui qui a présenté le plus de femmes aux élections et promu le plus de candidates féminines aux fonctions législatives. On évalue également des hypothèses relatives au comportement respectif des provinces quant vient le temps de présenter et d'élire des femmes. Les résultats de cette étude démontrent que les provinces maritimes traînent la patte par rapport aux autres assemblées provinciales où la représentation des femmes a augmenté sensiblement à la fin des années quatre-vingt et dans les années quatre-vingt-dix. Il est également clair que durant la deuxième moitié des années soixante-dix tous les principaux partis ont placé leurs candidates dans des circonscriptions plus difficiles que celles de leurs collègues masculins. Cependant, dès la mi des années quatre-vingt, les femmes cessaient d'être sacrifiées lors d'élections perdues à l'avance.

of political science research on Canada: how and why women's representation in legislatures increases and comparative provincial politics.

Provinces vary greatly both in population and in number of legislators, ranging from Ontario with almost 10 million inhabitants and 130 members in its legislative assembly, to Prince Edward Island with 130,000, and 32 provincial legislators. Although the formal term for legislators differs, the most common is member of the legislative assembly (MLA), which we use generically here. Elections occurred in at least one province every year from 1975 to 1994 except for 1980 and 1992 (see Appendix). All elections are held according to plurality rules, but there are a few double-member ridings (two members run-


5 The territorial governments of Yukon and the Northwest Territories are not considered here because their governing powers are less and their number of legislators are fewer (24 in Northwest Territories, 16 in Yukon).

6 Legislators in Ontario are called members of the provincial parliament (MPPs) and those in Quebec are referred to as members of the national assembly (MNAs).
ning for separate seats in the same constituency), most notably on a continuing basis in Prince Edward Island (PEI) and up to 1991 in British Columbia. Several provinces have more than a two-party system, with the New Democrats a significant factor in many provinces, and the Parti Québécois (PQ) and Social Credit having held power in Québec and British Columbia, respectively. Parties maintain separate organizations on the federal and provincial levels. Voters, too, often have split partisan identifications.\(^7\)

**Theoretical Problem and Approach**

One of the results of "second wave" feminism in Western democracies in the 1960s has been an increase in the number of women serving in legislatures. Sometimes this increase has been slow and incremental, but it has been persistent, in Canada and elsewhere.\(^8\)

One of the unusual features of the increased representation of women among members of parliament (MPs) in the Canadian House of Commons, at least compared with other single-member district systems, has been the substantial increase in female representation, from 5 per cent in 1980 to 10 per cent in 1984, 13 per cent in 1988 and 18 per cent in 1993. This is generally attributed to the high turnover in the legislature, relatively low barriers to nominations and volatility of the Canadian electorate, as well as more women presenting themselves as candidates.\(^9\)

Another unusual feature of women's representation in Canada has been that the number of female legislators in the provinces lagged for a time behind that in the House of Commons. In most democracies, women consistently have greater legislative representation at lower levels of government. For instance, in the United States after 1992, the "Year of the Woman," women constituted 11 per cent of the House of Representatives but almost twice that, 20 per cent, in state legislatures. As Table 1 shows, however, in Canada only rarely has women's repre-

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9 Young, "Legislative Turnover and the Election of Women"; Erickson, "Making Her Way In"; and Studlar and Matland, "The Growth of Women's Representation."
sentation in provincial legislatures been greater than in the House of Commons, and even then by only small margins. In other countries, factors such as the lower prestige and power usually associated with subnational legislatures, along with nearness to home, less professional (full-time) legislatures and less competition for office, have been suggested as reasons why women usually have greater numbers at lower levels. What accounts for the unusual pattern in Canada?

TABLE 1

COMPARATIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN CANADIAN FEDERAL AND PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURES (as percentages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All provinces</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newfoundland</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A crucial starting point in understanding why women's representation in provincial legislatures at times lags behind federal representation is the subnational political context in Canada. One very significant factor is that the two recruitment streams, federal and provincial, are separate. In other countries, women build on success at lower levels to gain footholds in representation at higher levels. In Canada, however, few politicians move from the provincial to the federal level.

10. Since some provincial elections occur in almost every year, the years of federal elections are chosen for federal/provincial comparisons. The one exception is 1979. There were federal elections in both 1979 and 1980. There were, however, no provincial elections in 1980. Since the only figure changing between 1979 and 1980 was the percentage of women at the federal level, which rose from 3.4 per cent to 5.0 per cent, 1979 is not included in Table 1.

11. Darcy, Welch and Clark, Women, Elections and Representation, chaps. 2 and 3.

has an unusual requirement that an elected officeholder must resign a
current position before running for another position, even at another
level of government. This requirement helps maintain the dual political
career tracks, and limits what has been called in the United States
"progressive ambition." 13

A second important factor is that provincial legislatures remain
very significant centres of political power. The trend for provinces to
gain increased decision-making authority has meant that provincial
politics remains an attractive alternative for politically ambitious indi-
viduals, and has encouraged separate federal/provincial career tracks.
That politicians are as likely to move from the federal to the provincial
as vice versa is a compelling commentary on the near-equality of the
power relationship between the two levels. 14 Being elected to the pro-
vincial legislature can be as attractive as a seat in the House of Com-
mons. Therefore it may be as difficult for women to gain provincial
nominations as federal. 15

The existing literature on women's representation provides a use-
ful theoretical starting point for describing the "opportunity structure"
for women in the Canadian provinces. Women's opportunities are
hampered by their roles as primary caregivers in many families and by
their limited ties to the groups from which candidates are traditionally
recruited. In addition, women's access to political power is limited by
such institutional features as single-member district electoral systems,
decentralized methods of selecting candidates, the power of incum-
bency, limited turnover, dominance of right-wing parties and lack of
competitive seats. 16 Some of these institutions, such as single-member

Wiley, 1967), 266-93; V. Peter Harder, "Career Patterns at the National and Sub-
national Levels in the United States and Canada," in Jean-Pierre Gaboury and
James Ross Hurley, eds., The Canadian House of Commons Observed (Ottawa:
University of Ottawa Press, 1979), 327-45; and Doreen Barrie and Roger Gib-
bins, "Parliamentary Careers in the Canadian Federal State," this JOURNAL 22
(1989), 137-45.

13 Schlesinger, "Political Careers and Political Leadership."
14 Ibid.; and Harder, "Career Patterns."
15 One of the explanations for the decreasing representation of women in higher
levels in other countries is that power increases, and therefore the competition for
office becomes much stiffer. But in Canada, federal/provincial power differen-
tials are not that great; therefore there may be little difference in competition
across levels.
16 Darcy, Welch and Clark, Women, Elections and Representation; Wilma Rule,
"Electoral Systems, Contextual Factors and Women's Opportunity for Election
to Parliament in Twenty-Three Democracies," Western Political Quarterly 40
(1987), 477-98; Norris, "Conclusions: Comparing Legislative Recruitment," 309-30; and Susan Welch and Donley T. Studlar, "Multi-member Districts and
the Representation of Women: Evidence from Britain and the United States,"
district systems and decentralized selection procedures, apply throughout the Canadian provinces. Other institutional barriers, however, vary.

Turnover of MPs in the House of Commons has averaged more than 40 per cent in Canada since the Second World War. By international standards, this is an extraordinarily high rate, and probably contributes to women being able to increase their federal representation considerably in the 1980s and 1990s.\(^{17}\) Turnover at the provincial level is slightly below that of the federal. The average for all provinces for 1960-1993 is 36.3 per cent, still an appreciable amount by comparative standards.\(^{18}\) Women have gained seats more rapidly in the last decade when turnover has been at its peak. This is prima facie evidence that turnover acts as a constraint on women gaining positions. Incumbents are rarely denied renomination by Canadian parties, but incumbency itself is less powerful in federal elections in Canada than elsewhere, because of the volatility of the electorate.\(^{19}\) These generalizations about incumbency also apply provincially.\(^{20}\)

Women's representation may be enhanced because Canada has a political party which has enacted policies specially designed to improve women's representation. The New Democratic party (NDP) has been actively sponsoring women's candidacies at both levels. Various provincial parties and the federal NDP have adopted affirmative action policies to advance women's candidacies, and both the provincial and the federal NDP have promoted feminist issues since the late 1970s. For the 1993 federal election, the NDP adopted a goal of having women as half of their candidates; they actually nominated 113 (38%).\(^{21}\) Large infusions of NDP MLAs in the provinces in recent years have included substantial numbers of women. NDP victories in Ontario in 1990 and in Saskatchewan and British Columbia in 1991 brought noticeable increases in women to these legislatures. Thus political party composition of the legislature may affect women's representation.

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20 Moncrief, "Professionalism and Careerism"; and Moncrief, "Turnover in Canadian Provincial Legislatures."

21 See Bashyevkin, *Toeing the Lines*, chap. 4; and Erickson, "Making Her Way In."
Several scholars contend that the competitiveness of seats negatively affects women's chances of election in Canada; even when women receive nominations, they are likely to be "sacrificial lambs" in ridings where their party stands little chance of winning. Systematic empirical testing, however, has cast doubt on this proposition at the federal level in the 1980s and, at the provincial level, in Quebec, in the same period. We shall test the sacrificial lamb hypothesis on a cross-provincial basis for the period under study here.

Data and Methods

Data on candidates and elected MLAs were gathered for all parliamentary elections in the 10 provinces between 1975 and 1994, using primarily the Canadian Parliamentary Guide, supplemented by material from provincial Election Officers. There were over 11,000 candidates in these elections who received 5 per cent or more of the vote in their ridings; women constituted 14.7 per cent of the candidates, increasing their share over time. Of the 3,755 MLAs elected, women won 384 seats, or 10.2 per cent. By parties, the Progressive Conservatives (PC) won 37.1 per cent, the Liberals 31.6 per cent, the New Democrats 18.5 per cent, the Parti Québécois 7.5 per cent, Social Credit 4.4 per cent and other parties 1.0 per cent of the seats. The pre-eminence of three parties in the provinces, aside from the two provinces of Quebec and British Columbia, is well established. While we consider all five of the provincial parties which have attained substantial support, our discussion will focus on the three major parties. We start with an initial analysis of the data, looking at trends in candidates and MLAs by gender across provinces.

Aggregate Gender Representation by Provinces, 1975-1994

Table 1 shows the individual provinces and the aggregate figures for the growth of women's legislative representation at the provincial level and how that compares to the federal level. As Brodie points out, the

22 Hunter and Denton, "Do Female Candidates Lose Votes?"; Brodie, Women and Politics in Canada, 106-19; Bashevkin, Toeing the Lines, 84-85, 155; and Brodie with Chandler, "Women and the Electoral Process in Canada," 33.

23 Studlar and Matland, "The Growth of Women's Representation"; and Pelletier and Tremblay, "Les femmes sont-elles candidates dans des circonscriptions perdues d'avance?"

Western provinces, especially British Columbia, have had the strongest tradition of choosing women. British Columbia’s proportion of women in its legislature is above the national provincial average for all five years presented in Table 1, and in most years it is well above the national average. Alberta is above the average in four of the five time periods.25

The number of female MLAs in the 1970s and early 1980s was quite low. In the 10 years from 1975 through 1984, their absolute numbers increased by 100 per cent from 25 (out of 669) to 50 (out of 698). Yet the total number of women in any one legislature remained quite small. The Ontario assembly had the greatest number of women, with 7 out of 125. Quebec became the first province to break into double digits when, in 1985, 18 women were elected out of 122 representatives. In the 10-year period from 1985 to 1994, women’s MLA numbers increased at a much brisker pace. There was a 268 per cent increase in the number of female MLAs, from 50 to 134 (out of 730). The two largest legislative assemblies (in Quebec and Ontario) each had over 20 women, while the four western provinces all had 10 or more women. The four Atlantic provinces were all below 10 women. This occurs partially because of smaller legislatures, but also because women were elected at substantially lower rates than in the other Canadian provinces. There appears to be a fairly clear regional effect, with the Atlantic provinces, except for Prince Edward Island, lagging behind the rest of Canada.

To see whether the Atlantic provinces lag at such a rate that we can speak of a true regional effect, we used a difference of proportions test to see if the share of women elected as MLAs in the four eastern provinces was significantly different than that elected in the rest of Canada for each of the time periods listed in Table 1. For the earlier periods (1975, 1980 and 1984) the differences are substantively inconsequential and statistically insignificant. As the rest of the country showed marked increases in women’s representation in the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, the Atlantic provinces lagged behind to the point that the differences are both statistically and substantively significant. From 1984 to 1988, female representation rose a meagre 1 per cent in the eastern provinces (from 6.2% to 7.2%) while it showed strong growth in the rest of Canada (from 7.5% to 13.5%). In 1988 the difference between the East and the rest of Canada is statistically significant at the .01 level (t = 2.65). From 1988 to 1994 the gap between the East and the rest of Canada widens. Women increased their repre-

25 While Table 1 shows western Canada tends to be a leader, the differences are small, and when difference of proportions tests were done comparing the level of representation in western Canada with the rest of Canada, the difference was not statistically significant for any period.
sentation in the Atlantic provinces from 7.2 per cent to 12.9 per cent, but representation advanced even more quickly in the rest of Canada, from 13.5 per cent to 20.3 per cent. Again this difference is statistically significant at the .01 level ($t = 2.49$).

Finding a significant difference between the Atlantic provinces and the rest of Canada poses some fascinating questions, but we need to note that women do not have equal difficulty in getting represented in all Atlantic provinces. At 28.1 per cent women, the Prince Edward Island legislature has the highest level of women's representation of any province in 1994. New Brunswick, at 15.5 per cent, slightly lags behind the non-Atlantic provinces, but the biggest gaps are between Nova Scotia at 9.6 per cent and Newfoundland at 5.8 per cent and the rest of Canada.

Why should the East lag? And why does PEI display such a striking difference from the other Atlantic provinces? First, as we shall see, the national party with the highest proportion of women candidates and MLAs is clearly the NDP. The NDP is quite weak in the East. This means fewer female NDP representatives and less pressure from the NDP on the other parties to nominate women. Second, turnover rates, which are important in opening up new seats for female candidates, are lower in the East than in the rest of Canada. Third, party organizations in the Atlantic provinces have a reputation for being more centralized, traditional and patronage-based than party organizations elsewhere. Such closed organizations have been less receptive to women's demands for representation.

A plausible explanation for the better representation of women in PEI is that women are less disadvantaged by the electoral structure there than in the other provinces. While district magnitude is one in most provincial ridings, in PEI it is two, that is, there are two seats in each riding. Studies have shown that greater district magnitude can have a positive effect on female representation. These studies have been done in a variety of settings, including US state legislative elections, and parliamentary elections in Ireland, Norway and Argentina.

26 Moncrieff, "Turnover in Canadian Provincial Legislatures."
29 Richard E. Matland and Deborah D. Brown, "District Magnitude's Effect on Female Representation in State Legislatures," Legislative Studies Quarterly 17
In this case, because each party nominates two candidates per district instead of one, the party can balance their ticket by nominating both a man and a woman. There are strong indications of just such a pattern in Prince Edward Island. Women first broke through in PEI in 1989, when female representation jumped from three (9.4%) to eight (25%). Seven of the eight women elected in 1989 were Liberals swept in when the party won both seats in their district (every winning Liberal woman was running in a district where the other Liberal candidate was a man). The one additional woman elected in 1989 was a PC incumbent who retained her seat despite her party losing the other seat in the riding.

In summary, there is strong statistical evidence that women have had a harder time breaking through in the Atlantic provinces than in the rest of Canada. The different electoral structure in Prince Edward Island provides an explanation for PEI differing so strongly from the other Atlantic provinces.

Gender Representation by Parties: Candidates

This and the next section delineate the broad patterns of representation by gender and party across all 10 Canadian provinces in the 1975-1994 period for candidates and MLAs. First, we need to understand the basic contours of representation through elections in the Canadian provinces. Table 2 presents that information by gender for candidates for the three major parties (Liberal, Progressive Conservative and New Democratic) for each year for 1975-1994 in numbers and percentages. Figure 1 gives a graphic presentation of three-year rolling averages for these parties.

Both the table and figure show that the proportion of candidates has risen, albeit slowly, in all three major parties to the point where women constitute nearly one third of the NDP candidates, about one fifth of the Liberal candidates and one sixth of PC candidates by the early 1990s. Although the New Democrats experienced a dip at the end (1992), 469-92; Richard Engstrom, "District Magnitudes and the Election of Women to the Irish Dip," Electoral Studies 6 (1987), 123-32; Richard E. Matland, "Institutional Variables Affecting Female Representation in National Legislatures: The Case of Norway," Journal of Politics 55 (1993), 737-55; and Mark A. Jones, "Increasing Women's Representation via Gender Quotas: The Argentine Ley de Cupos," Women and Politics (forthcoming).

In any given year, only a few provinces hold elections. In some years there is only one or no provincial election. The three-year rolling averages give a better idea of general trends since they encompass elections in six to nine provinces (see Appendix for details). Three-year averages, however, do not encompass all provinces since some will only have elections every fourth or fifth year. Other provinces can have more than one election within a three-year period. While individual year data are only presented from 1975 forward, data from 1973 and 1974 have been used in calculations of the 1975 and 1976 three-year averages.
of the 1970s, they have clearly been the leaders in women's candidacies throughout the period under examination. Their position was enhanced by the plateau in female candidacies maintained by the other two major parties from the late 1970s until the mid-1980s, while the NDP increased representation during the early 1980s. Even though the Liberals and PCs increased women's candidacies beginning in the mid-1980s they have not been able to close the gap between themselves and the NDP.

**TABLE 2**

**FEMALE PROVINCIAL LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES BY MAJOR PARTY: 1975-1994**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Liberal %</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>Progressive Conservative %</th>
<th>(N)</th>
<th>New Democratic %</th>
<th>(N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>(331)</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>(341)</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>(332)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>(110)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>(178)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>(182)</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>(181)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>(203)</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>(203)</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>(155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>(167)</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>(199)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>(194)</td>
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<td>10.4</td>
<td>(338)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>(234)</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>(234)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9.8</td>
<td>(235)</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>(285)</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>(224)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>(52 )</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>(13 )</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>(57 )</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>(52 )</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>(52 )</td>
<td>26.9</td>
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<td>13.8</td>
<td>(298)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>(224)</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>(265)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>(270)</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>(248)</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>(288)</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>(188)</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>(188)</td>
<td>31.9</td>
<td>(188)</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>(109)</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>(109)</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>(109)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>(292)</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>(169)</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>(167)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>(187)</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>(187)</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>(187)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>(195)</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>(127)</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>(199)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>(219)</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>(219)</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>(210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>(125)</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>(36 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why has the NDP promoted women more actively than the other parties? The answer is complex, but certain elements stand out. First, the egalitarian ideology of the NDP made them more amenable to arguments that women had been systematically denied access, and to the notion that *positive actions*, such as the adoption of explicit goals and affirmative action policies with respect to candidates, were needed to redress these inequities. Second, the party attracted a fair number of leftist feminists who were willing to work actively and support the
party, but demanded greater representation as a quid pro quo. Third, as a third party trying to break the dominance of the PCs and Liberals, the NDP actively looked for issues on which they could attract new voters. The issue of women's rights was one that made ideological and political sense. The NDP has actively attempted to win women's support not just through more equal representation, but also through support for employment equity and reproductive rights policies.

FIGURE 1

FEMALE CANDIDATES BY MAJOR PARTY, 1975-1994:
ROLLING THREE-YEAR AVERAGE (as percentages)

The Liberals have been less inclined than the NDP to advocate adoption of women candidates to meet a particular group interest. But in the mid-1980s, they too began to nominate more women, and have continued to do so slowly. The Conservatives show a more erratic pattern, with an overall upward incline in the late 1980s. We have argued elsewhere\(^3\) that on the national level there has been macro-contagion in the adoption of female candidates in Canada, with the other parties following the lead of the NDP. Although we cannot demonstrate it on the basis of the data here, it is a plausible hypothesis which explains the observed provincial trends.

Discernible upward trends for the regional parties are also found. The PQ has gone from low levels of women's candidacy in the late 1970s (6.4% in 1976) to modest levels in the early and mid-1980s (13.1% in 1981; 15.6% in 1985) to a big leap forward in 1989 (26.4%). As a party generally on the left, the PQ has supported women's candidacies as a part of its programme, but unlike some NDP provincial parties, it has not instituted formal party goals for representation. Also, with the PQ's emphasis on the issue of independence, support for women has been far less visible for them than it has been for the NDP. Meanwhile, Social Credit, in this period a party of the right, never got above 10 per cent women nominees until the election of 1991, when they jumped to 27 per cent of nominees. “Other” parties were more erratic, starting at a level similar to the major parties in the 1970s, then actually moving downward in female candidates in the early 1980s, only to rise again later. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, all parties were nominating women at higher, sometimes much higher, rates than only a few years earlier. Overall, women made slow but persistent progress in most parties, with the exception of their accelerated push in the NDP.

Gender Representation by Parties: Legislators

Table 3 and Figure 2 provide data by gender, party and time period for those elected to provincial legislatures. Among the three major parties, there was relative equality in percentage of female legislators in the late 1970s, but by the early 1980s the NDP moved into a clear lead. They maintained this by increasing the proportion of women elected in the 1990s, when women were one quarter of NDP MLAs. The two other parties essentially maintained a level of women MLAs around 5 per cent, with the Conservatives having slightly more than the Liberals, until the mid-1980s, when first the Liberals and subsequently the Conservatives began to elect more women, to a point in the early 1990s where both were in the mid-teens. Overall, the NDP has widened the gap between their percentage of women provincial legislators and those of the Conservatives and Liberals, even as all three increased.

Of course, nominating women is one thing, electing them is another. Comparing Figures 1 and 2 we see the trend lines are lower for each party in Figure 2. Women are a greater proportion of candidates

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32 Data on regional and minor parties, principally Social Credit in British Columbia and the Parti Québécois in Quebec, are not presented in the tables for reasons of space. Full results are available from the authors on request.

33 These numbers do not include all candidates for other parties. We only considered candidates for other parties who polled at least 5 per cent of the vote in the riding.
than they are of elected MLAs. Nevertheless, as more women have become candidates for the major parties, more have been elected.

TABLE 3

FEMALE MLAs BY MAJOR PARTY, 1975-1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Liberal % (N)</th>
<th>Progressive Conservative % (N)</th>
<th>New Democratic % (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>5.9 (68)</td>
<td>3.2 (158)</td>
<td>7.3 (96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>7.7 (26)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>2.9 (35)</td>
<td>4.4 (91)</td>
<td>3.6 (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>3.2 (62)</td>
<td>4.3 (93)</td>
<td>0.0 (48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>0.0 (30)</td>
<td>6.3 (128)</td>
<td>14.8 (27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>4.5 (89)</td>
<td>4.6 (130)</td>
<td>12.5 (56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>2.7 (37)</td>
<td>8.1 (234)</td>
<td>0.0 (12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18.2 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>0.0 (6)</td>
<td>4.8 (42)</td>
<td>33.3 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>10.6 (161)</td>
<td>4.5 (89)</td>
<td>11.5 (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>11.1 (27)</td>
<td>9.6 (136)</td>
<td>16.1 (93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>15.0 (153)</td>
<td>6.3 (16)</td>
<td>15.8 (19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>12.5 (40)</td>
<td>7.4 (54)</td>
<td>21.4 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>15.5 (161)</td>
<td>12.2 (82)</td>
<td>18.8 (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>16.3 (43)</td>
<td>16.0 (50)</td>
<td>25.5 (94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>17.2 (64)</td>
<td>0.0 (13)</td>
<td>26.2 (107)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>13.0 (138)</td>
<td>16.9 (77)</td>
<td>25.0 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>17.0 (47)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A couple of facts stand out when looking at women MLAs elected by regional parties. One, being a competitive party with substantial electoral strength in the province is critical to getting women elected. Two, women’s representation levels among MLAs strongly mirrors women’s representation among candidates. In British Columbia, as long as Social Credit was one of the two major contenders, it elected women in only slightly fewer numbers than it nominated them (8.5% in 1986, at the peak). But when Social Credit fell to being the third party in election results and in representation in 1991, it failed to elect any

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34 In the 20-year period being considered, there were 47 provincial elections and only 31 independent and other party representatives elected. This is less than one representative per election. We believe the data are too weak to be able to say anything meaningful about these cases.
women among its handful of legislators, despite its 27 per cent female nominees. The Parti Québécois' position as one of the two main parties in its province has enhanced its ability to elect women. We also see a very strong correlation for the PQ between the proportion of women nominated and the proportion elected. The figures for the PQ delegation which was female was 5.6 per cent in 1976 (6.4% of candidates), 6.3 per cent in 1981 (13.1% of candidates), 17.4 per cent in 1985 (15.6% of candidates), 27.6 per cent in 1989 (26.4% of candidates) and 19.5 per cent in 1994 (22.4% of candidates).

FIGURE 2
FEMALE MLAs BY MAJOR PARTY, 1975-1994:
ROLLING THREE-YEAR AVERAGE (as percentages)

Gender Representation by Parties: Competitive Seats
We now consider one of the most popular hypotheses in the literature of gender politics, in Canada and elsewhere, that parties may not nominate women for competitive seats in the same proportion as they do male candidates. The assertion is made that women are largely nominated for hopeless districts. In the United States, for instance, it has been argued that women did not increase their numbers in the House of Representatives in the 1970s and 1980s because they did not get as many open-seat nominations as one would expect if there were no
gender bias. Open seats have been important for women in federal politics in Canada too, if not to the same degree as in the US. Whether women are receiving their fair share of competitive seats can be measured in a number of ways. One is to see whether the proportion of male and female candidates who actually win is equivalent. This, however, runs into a serious problem. Overwhelmingly incumbents are male, and incumbents, even in the volatile Canadian system, tend disproportionately to get re-elected. Therefore just looking at these proportions would show that men are more likely to be elected, while in fact the results may really be due to incumbency. To avoid this problem, we look at the proportion of male and female non-incumbents who win elections. Non-incumbents are made up of three different types of candidates: successor candidates running in a district where the party has held the seat but the incumbent has stepped down; candidates running for open seats with no incumbents running for any party; and candidates running against a sitting incumbent of a different party. All ridings where the party is running an incumbent are removed from the analysis.

Table 4 presents comparative success rates of men and women non-incumbents for all five parties previously discussed, both across the entire time period and in chronological blocks of three, four or five years, with between eight and thirteen elections held in each period. Difference of proportions tests yield the statistical significance noted in the table.

The results show that, across the entire period, there is evidence that female non-incumbents had poorer seats than men in both the Progressive Conservative party and the Parti Québécois. It is noteworthy, however, that these overall biases result from different patterns when broken down into distinct periods. In the mid-1970s, there is statistical evidence that both the PC and NDP were discriminating against female


38 The data were pooled into distinct time periods in order not to bias the results regionally, depending on which provinces held elections in any particular year. In creating the time blocks the desire to include all provinces in a block was balanced against the desire to have the time periods be relatively short so it would be reasonable to assume they are part of the same "era." Several variations in groupings were tried, and they do not significantly affect the results reported.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Liberal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2,219 (20.2)</td>
<td>535 (12.5)</td>
<td>520 (9.6)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>494 (20.2)</td>
<td>330 (45.2)</td>
<td>340 (24.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>419 (17.4)</td>
<td>70 (7.1)</td>
<td>80 (3.8)</td>
<td>93 (17.2)</td>
<td>77 (40.3)</td>
<td>99 (18.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,578 (26.6)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>447 (28.4)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>335 (46.3)</td>
<td>233 (25.8)</td>
<td>214 (12.6)</td>
<td>349 (14.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>245 (18.8)</td>
<td>40 (12.5)</td>
<td>42 (40.5)</td>
<td>41 (17.1)</td>
<td>48 (10.4)</td>
<td>74 (16.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NDP</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,979 (12.2)</td>
<td>416 (11.8)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>445 (6.7)</td>
<td>455 (12.8)</td>
<td>287 (1.7)</td>
<td>376 (26.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>592 (12.0)</td>
<td>68 (4.4)</td>
<td>108 (6.5)</td>
<td>121 (12.4)</td>
<td>112 (0.9)</td>
<td>183 (24.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SC</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>372 (18.6)</td>
<td>109 (22.6)</td>
<td>119 (6.7)&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>72 (48.6)</td>
<td>6 (0.0)</td>
<td>66 (3.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42 (9.5)</td>
<td>6 (16.7)</td>
<td>8 (0.0)</td>
<td>7 (42.9)</td>
<td>0 (0.0)</td>
<td>21 (0.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PQ</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>361 (39.3)&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>97 (62.9)</td>
<td>49 (44.9)</td>
<td>56 (8.9)</td>
<td>81 (12.4)</td>
<td>78 (56.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>86 (26.7)</td>
<td>7 (57.1)</td>
<td>13 (30.8)</td>
<td>15 (13.3)</td>
<td>29 (13.8)</td>
<td>22 (40.9)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<sup>a</sup> Statistically significant difference at the .05 level (two-tailed test).

<sup>b</sup> Statistically significant difference at the .01 level (two-tailed test).
non-incumbents in the quality of the ridings for which they were able to secure nominations. Social Credit and the PQ clearly were not discriminating. By the early 1980s, female non-incumbents in both the NDP and PC were able to get quality nominations on about the same basis as men, but the Liberals appear to give women less favourable seats to contest.\textsuperscript{39} No indications of making women “sacrificial lambs” has occurred in any of the five parties examined after the early 1980s, and sometimes women appear to have received slightly better seats than men, although not to a statistically significant extent.

The overall pattern of PC and PQ discrimination against women on the provincial level does not demonstrate present-day bias, because it pools results from very different periods. For the Conservatives, it results from the large initial gap in the success ratio of male and female non-incumbents, which later periods of equality did not completely erase. Note that in the 1990s, female PC non-incumbents actually won slightly more seats than their male counterparts. Even though the Liberals were inimical to women for a longer period, their gaps were not as large. The difference between male and female non-incumbents for the whole period is also narrowed because the periods of increasing female candidates coincides with improved fortunes for Liberal candidates. Liberal non-incumbents do better from 1987 onward. Because there are more women and fewer men running in these later years, the percentage winning for the whole period shows a gap of only 2.8 per cent, despite the gap between successful male and female non-incumbents being greater than that in all five periods.

The Parti Québécois presents the curious case of a significant statistical effect indicating unfavourable treatment for women overall, but not in any particular period. These results can be explained as being the reverse of those of the Liberals. In the earlier periods, all PQ candidates did well, but these candidates were overwhelmingly male. Later, in the mid- to late-1980s, when the PQ had many more female candidates, virtually all of the party’s non-incumbents performed poorly. The result is an apparent bias towards men, but when one examines time periods the PQ women do as well as the men.\textsuperscript{40} In fact, in the 1985

\textsuperscript{39} The Liberal party is close to showing a pattern of bias in the mid-1970s, too. The difference of means test for the 1975-1978 period is statistically significant at the .11 level. If the 1975-1982 periods are pooled, the test shows a statistically significant difference in the probability that a female non-incumbent would win for the Liberal party.

\textsuperscript{40} There is one possible exception to this. As Pelletier and Tremblay found (“Les femmes sont-elles candidates dans des circonscriptions perdues d'avance?”), our general result is one of no discrimination. Like Pelletier and Tremblay, however, we find that in the 1981 Quebec election there was some evidence (in our case, almost reaching statistical significance at the .05 level) that the PQ did not provide women with their fair share of winnable seats. This result, however, is both
and 1989 elections in Quebec, PQ female non-incumbents did better than male non-incumbents, albeit at statistically insignificant levels. The 1994 election was not a triumph for PQ women. The absolute number of female MLAs increased, but their proportion of both MLAs and candidates decreased. There is a noticeable, but statistically insignificant, gap between the success ratios of male and female non-incumbents.

Of the three types of non-incumbents, being a successor candidate and running in a district which the party has previously held is obviously the most coveted. The party has proven its ability to win in these districts. Successor candidates for the three major parties won 58 per cent of the seats they contested, while open-seat candidates and true challengers won only 14.7 per cent. Women may have won fewer seats than men in the earlier periods either because they were running as challengers rather than as successors or because, within each riding type, they were nominated in less competitive ridings.

Different parties show different patterns of bias. For the Liberals from the mid-1970s through the mid-1980s, women were far more likely to run in an open seat or against an incumbent than in a riding where a Liberal incumbent had stepped down.\footnote{The period 1983-1986 represents an interesting one. In Table 4 the gap between successful male and female non-incumbents is sufficiently small that it is not statistically significant for any party. Yet there is a clear gap in successor candidates for those years, which seems to indicate that, for this test, this period is more appropriately grouped with the earlier period than with the later one.} From 1975 to 1986, women were only 6.7 per cent of successor candidates, while they were 14.0 per cent of candidates running against incumbents or in open seats (this difference is statistically significant at the .01 level). From 1987 through 1994 there was a marked change, with women being equally represented in both groups (21.9 per cent of successor candidates, 20.6 per cent of open seat and true challengers).

The NDP exhibits a pattern similar to the Liberals, with women in the 1975-1986 period less likely to run in ridings where the party had held the seat. Women were 10.1 per cent of successor candidates, but 18.7 per cent of open-seat and challenger candidates (this difference is statistically significant at the .05 level). After 1986 there was both a dramatic upward jump in women’s candidacies in general and a shift from the earlier period, with women actually being more likely to run as successors than in open seats or as opponents to incumbents. Women were 42.3 per cent of successors versus 30.6 per cent of open-seat and challenger candidates (because of the small sample size this difference is not statistically significant).

\footnote{The period 1983-1986 represents an interesting one. In Table 4 the gap between successful male and female non-incumbents is sufficiently small that it is not statistically significant for any party. Yet there is a clear gap in successor candidates for those years, which seems to indicate that, for this test, this period is more appropriately grouped with the earlier period than with the later one.}
For the Conservatives, surprisingly, there is no pattern of discrimination across riding types. In all periods women were just as likely to run as successors, in open seats, and against incumbents. For the PCs, women’s poorer showing occurs because within each riding type women were less likely to receive nominations in districts where the PCs did well. This phenomenon is especially apparent for open seats and challengers. For 1975-1986, 25.4 per cent of PC men running against incumbents or in open seats won, while only 14.3 per cent of PC women won (this difference is statistically significant at the .01 level). Once again, over the past decade the picture is markedly different, with males winning 7.4 per cent of the contests for open and challenger seats and women winning 7.8 per cent of these seats.

Our analysis shows women tended to get nominations in poorer quality ridings from the mid-1970s through the early- to mid-1980s. For the NDP and Liberals this bias is demonstrated by women gaining far fewer successor nominations in the early periods. For the Conservatives, it shows up as women running in districts where the PC candidate ran poorly. It is worth emphasizing, however, that over the past decade there is no cross-provincial evidence that any party is biased against women in distributing its nominations for winnable seats either across riding types or within those types. Any continuing differences in the probability a female candidate will become an MLA are due to the hangover effects of incumbency, which have historically benefited males.

**Implications and Conclusions**

In this first cross-provincial, cross-time analysis of gender differences in electoral politics, we have some rather provocative findings. As Brodie has contended, it appears that major parties in Canada, even the NDP, were slow to open their selection processes to give women a fair

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42 Consistent with the findings in Table 4, neither the PQ nor Social Credit show any systematic bias in terms of type of riding or in quality of riding within the various categories for any period.

43 For the Liberals and the NDP within this category, variance is fairly limited; men and women tend to do just about as well when compared in the same type of riding (successor, open seat or opposing an incumbent). The one exception to this is Liberal candidates in the 1975-1978 period, where women ran in substantially weaker ridings when running against incumbents or in open seats.

44 This finding contrasts markedly with those of Pippa Norris, Elizabeth Vallance and Joni Lovenduski in “Do Candidates Make a Difference? Gender, Race, Ideology and Incumbency,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 45 (1992), 496-517. In the United Kingdom, they found that women were only 10 per cent of successor candidates (inhabitants in their vernacular), but 25 per cent of challengers. This may help explain why women’s representation in the Canadian provinces is substantially higher than in the British House of Commons.
chance at nominations in winnable seats, at least during the early years of more women wanting such nominations. Instead, women had better chances of getting competitive seats in regional parties, that is, their political opportunity was greater in those parties. Even so, it must be acknowledged that these parties provided only limited opportunities for women, not because of discrimination, but because they either were confined to a particular province or had little chance of electing anybody, male or female.

We must be careful before asserting that these results are incontrovertible evidence that parties consciously shunted women into non-competitive constituencies. First, that assertion imputes a level of central party control which is inconsistent with most descriptions of the nomination process. In Canada, the nomination process is highly decentralized, with each riding association deciding whom to nominate with relatively little intrusion from the central organization. Second, at least as plausible as a party conspiracy argument is one that more attractive seats induce better potential candidates to step forward, and in the earlier periods these stronger candidates were often men.

Several scholars have argued that female competitors have had fewer political resources than men. Nominees tend to have higher education levels, higher incomes and greater representation among the independent professions than the population as a whole. Women have been systematically lacking in all these areas. In districts where the party was expected to do poorly and nominations were not attractive, even limited political resources may have been sufficient to win nominations. Often candidates are recruited to run by local party organizations and have no opposition to their nominations. In constituencies where the party was expected to do well, nominations were attractive and women with limited political resources might have lost to more powerfully situated men. The change in this trend across parties in the 1980s may be an indication that women are narrowing the gap in terms of those attributes which typically describe a nominee. Female labour-force participation rates, levels of education and representation in the independent professions have all increased over the past 20 years.

A second plausible explanation, and one we find more probable, is that women are politically mobilized to a greater degree in the 1980s and 1990s than they were in the 1970s and early 1980s. This mobiliza-

45 Brodie, *Women and Politics in Canada*, 21, 124
46 Bashevkin, "Building a Political Voice."
47 As one of the anonymous reviewers for the JOURNAL correctly pointed out, there is some danger of this argument falling prey to an ecological fallacy. While women as a whole have lower levels of education, income and professional employment, at the level of the nomination meetings it is entirely possible to have individual women candidates who score as high as any male candidate on all of these characteristics.
tion had led to greater power both inside and outside the political parties. The number and strength of independent women's groups has increased significantly over the past 20 years.48 A watershed event in the mobilization of women in Canada was the concerted push for the inclusion of a gender equality clause in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the early 1980s. Women have also increased their representation in internal party organizations in the 1980s, and have been able to push the parties into developing specific activities designed to promote or increase women's participation. These include setting either official or unofficial goals for proportions of women candidates, running workshops designed to recruit and aid female candidates and providing special funding for female candidates. While these actions fall short of insuring equality, it is apparent that the major parties' willingness to consider female candidates has improved markedly.

Nonetheless the data do show that it took the provincial party organizations of all major parties some time to meet the challenge of second-wave feminism in Canada, at least as it applied to candidacies for political office. This may help explain the persistence of the "sacrificial lambs" hypothesis in Canadian gender research, although by the mid-1980s the general empirical results indicate that it had disappeared. The New Democrats clearly addressed the issue through an affirmative action policy that was implemented, but, with less fanfare, so too did the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals.

More study is needed of the social and political influences on provincial and federal women's representation. Especially interesting are possible explanations for the federal parties, particularly the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives, responding with greater alacrity to the demand for improved representation by women than their provincial counterparts.49 One possible explanation is that demands for greater


49 One explanation for the relatively equal levels of representation at the national and subnational level, although intuitively appealing, can be ruled out. Ontario and Quebec together account for almost 60 per cent of the federal MPs, and for only 35 per cent of the provincial legislators. If women were better represented in these largest and most urban provinces, then the difference in weighting between the federal and provincial levels might explain why provincial representation has tended to lag, or at best equal, federal representation. While plausible, when we modeled provincial representation of the nation as a whole so that Quebec and
representation may have been heard and heeded to a greater degree at
the federal level than the provincial level in the early 1980s. Because
of greater federal electoral volatility and the potential for a "gender
gap" in the early 1980s, it is possible that the federal parties felt greater
pressure on the issue of women's representation than did the provincial
parties. Bashevkin argues that for English-speaking Canada, most
women's groups, starting with the battle for women's inclusion in the
Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the early 1980s, tended to
concentrate their political efforts on federal rather than provincial poli-
tics. In 1984, increased federal attention was drawn to women's
issues when one of the three debates among the three party leaders in
the election campaign was devoted exclusively to "women's issues."

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s there has been a slow but
steady increase in the number of female candidates and MLAs. That
increase was substantially quicker in the second decade than in the
first. It appears that all the major parties have come to accept women's
demands for some representation as legitimate, and have tried to insure
that more women are elected. It remains to be seen whether representation
continues to increase as the parties move toward true equality, or
whether representation instead will reach a plateau and stabilize near
the present levels.

Appendix

Table 5 below shows the number of MLAs elected in provincial elec-
tions from 1975 to 1994.

Ontario contributed the same percentage to provincial MLAs as they do to the
federal House of Commons, we find this does not result in major changes in
women's representation. Although there would usually be a few more women,
overall representation among provincial MLAs would basically follow the same
contours as the actual growth of provincial representation.

Sandra Burt, "Women's Issues and the Women's Movement in Canada since
1970," in Alan Cairns and Cynthia Williams, eds., The Politics of Gender, Eth-
nicity and Language in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986),
111–69.

There were more genuine federal three-party contests than provincial; such con-
tests are, ipso facto, more unpredictable for parties. The votes of women, or
indeed any undecided group, are more coveted in such a party system. Most pro-
vincial seats, and indeed most provincial party systems as a whole, tend to be

Bashevkin, "Building a Political Voice."
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