THE RECRUITMENT OF CANADIAN WOMEN

Rosemary Brown, a provincial legislator and unsuccessful New Democratic Party leadership candidate has stated that to talk of power and to talk of women is to talk of the absence of power as we understand it today.(1) Indeed, few women in Canada occupy influential positions in the business community, institutions of higher learning or the bureaucracy but perhaps the most conspicuous dearth of women's power lies in the political sphere. Although most Canadian women gained the right to participate in government over fifty years ago, the number of women who have actually gained political power is surprisingly low. Since 1919, only twenty-five (25) women have been elected to the federal House of Commons and in the fifty-five (55) years between 1920 and 1975, only sixty-seven (67) women have become provincial legislators.(2)

There are several explanations for the apparent exclusion of women from the political decision-making process. For example, some suggest that the paucity of women legislators is a natural phenomenon, resulting from the time-lag between laws establishing civic equality and the actual realization of this goal.(3) Others maintain that unequal representation is a direct reflection of the more pervasive status-gap between men and women in society as a whole.(4) Jeane Kirkpatrick, a prominent American researcher in the field of women in politics, posits several hypothetical constraints that could exclude women from political office, but she emphasizes that cultural norms and sex-roles are the most salient. Norms and roles mutually reinforce one another by creating the expectation of male incumbency to public office and by assigning social roles to women which are generally incompatible with that of law-maker; i.e.,

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wife and mother.(5)

While the factors serving to exclude women from public office are intrinsic to the study of women in politics, few, if any of the above explanations can be tested directly, and ultimately confirmed or rejected. On the other hand, insight into the political recruitment of women may be gained by identifying the social background and experiential characteristics common to women legislators. Little is known about the pre-incumbency experience of women who break through the traditionally male-dominated political recruitment structures into elective office, the nature of their constituency or their post-incumbency legislative behaviour. Although there can be

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ROBERTA McADAMS, one of the first provincially elected women legislators in Canada. Courtesy of Dr. Simpson Photo Collection, Glenbow-Alberta Institute.

little doubt that research on Canadian women legislators has been discouraged by their scarcity in numbers, these unique political actors have received little more than passing reference in the literature.(6) This descriptive note addresses the gap in the literature by employing the biographic data on Canadian women legislators contained in the Canadian Parliamentary Guides. Information about forty-four (44) women provincial legislators elected in the 1950-1975 post-war period was collected and categorized. Because the biographic notes in the Guides vary in detail, relevant pre-incumbency data were not available for all the cases. Nevertheless, the education, occupation and prior office-holding experience responses obtained are sufficiently similar to support a general description of Canadian women provincial legislators.

Findings

Women in Canada gained the right to vote and to hold public office at the same time in the majority of Canadian provinces. Manitoba became the first province to extend suffrage to women in January, 1916. Similar legislation was passed in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the same year. They were followed by British Columbia in 1917, Nova Scotia in 1918, Ontario in 1919, Prince Edward Island in 1922 and finally, Quebec in 1940. Women in New Brunswick secured the right to vote in 1919 but were not permitted to hold public office until 1934. However, as Table 1 illustrates, female political representation was not immediately realized in many of the provinces. Although in western Canada less than five years passed before a woman was elected to all four provincial legislatures, the time-lag in the eastern provinces was more pronounced. In Prince Edward Island, for example, the first woman was elected to the provincial assembly no less than forty-eight years after the legal barriers to female incumbency were lifted.

Why the western provinces were more receptive to women in politics is not immediately clear. One might suspect that the role of legislator in the west conferred less status and, hence, gen-

Table 1: The History of Women in Canadian Provincial Politics

Province	Legal Right	First Elected	Women elected 1950 - 1975
British Columbia	1917	1918	13
Alberta	1916	1917	9
Saskatchewan	1916	1919	4
Manitoba	1916	1920	4
Ontario	1919	1943	5
Quebec	1940	1961	3
New Brunswick	1934	1967	2
Nova Scotia	1918	1960	2
Prince Edward Island	1922	1970	2
Newfoundland	1925	1930*	0

The two left hand columns in this table were derived from T.H. Qualter, The Election Process in Canada (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

*The Newfoundland woman legislator was elected as a result of a by-election before the province had entered Confederation.

erated less electoral competition than in the affluent and established eastern provinces. On the other hand, women in the older provinces may have experienced more difficulty penetrating the entrenched political party systems and the recruiters' expectations of male incumbency. In the Maritimes, in particular, the parochial "father to son" flavour of political recruitment undoubtedly presented a formidable obstacle for aspiring women.(7) The regional character of early female representation may also have reflected the contrasting political cultures of the eastern and western provinces.

Many western Canadians, being only recent immigrants, could have been exposed to either the suffragist cause, or more radical definitions of political equality in the United States, Great Britain or eastern Europe long before moving to Canada. The Americans, for example, who comprised the largest wave of new settlers in the west, had extended the franchise to women in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho by the late 1890's.(8) In the eastern provinces where traces of the Victorian social order and Toryism were still very much in evidence in the early decades of this century, women were generally not accepted as legitimate actors in the political sphere. Similarly, in Quebec, women were embraced by the rigid paternalism of the church and the civil legal code. Unquestionably confined to the role of child-rearer and moral guardian of the family unit, it was not until as recently as 1965 that married women in Quebec could control their own property, their own bank accounts, or share in the guardianship of their children.(9)

Whatever the contributing factors, the distribution of elected women, shown in Table 1, suggests that the western provinces continue to afford a greater opportunity to women in politics than the eastern provinces. In the 1950-1975 period, thirteen women became provincial legislators in British Columbia, nine in Alberta,and four in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, respectively. Women legislators in the eastern provinces, on the other hand, are relatively recent political phenomena. Three of the five women legislators from Ontario, and six of the nine women legislators from Quebec, and the Maritimes were elected after 1970.

It is frequently noted that political elites possess more prestigious social background characteristics than the average citizen in the polity. Those with higher levels of education tend to participate more, feel more efficacious and exhibit a greater sensitivity to the ideological nuances of politics.(10) Higher status occupations signal achievement and success, training and expertise, and generate personality types who are attracted to jobs of a political nature.(11) The data in Table 2 demonstrates that these rather universal generalizations about political elites also apply to Canadian women provincial legislators. Whereas, ninety-two percent (92%) of the Canadian population achieved secondary school training or less in 1971, ninety percent (90%) of the women legislators reporting their education had training beyond high school.(12) Only two women report secondary school training or less. That only five of the women in the sample obtained more than a general university degree reflects the fact that few women attend graduate or professional schools in Canada.(13)

Women legislators are more likely to have been members of the labour force than women in the general population.

Table 2: Pre-Incumbency Experience of Women Legislators

Experience	Number of Legislators
Education	
Less than 9 years	1
High school	1
And specialized training	13
General university degree	9
Masters	3
Bachelor of Law	2
Data unavailable	15
	N (44)
Prior Occupation	
Teacher	11
Housewife	5
Nurse	3
Lawyer	2
Armed Forces	2
Social Worker	1
Home Economist	1
Businesswoman	1
Telephone Operator	1
Data unavailable	17
	N (44)
Prior Public Office	
Mayor	1
Councilperson/Controller	4
City Commissioner	3
School Board Member	2
	N (10)

Although the percentage of the female population in the labour force has steadily increased from twenty-nine percent (29%) in 1962 to thirty-seven percent (37.1%) in 1972, fully fifty-seven percent (57%) of the women legislators elected between 1950 and 1975 had been gainfully employed prior to their incumbency.(14) Women legislators also appear to have held more prestigious occupations than the majority of working women in Canada. While sixty-three percent (63.7%) of the female working force in 1971 were employed in the clerical, sales or service industries, only one legislator--a telephone operator--was recruited from these sectors.(15) Thirteen of the legislators were involved in characteristically "feminine" occupations such as teaching, home economics and social work, while the remaining were involved in a variety of fields including the armed forces and the legal profession. The data indicate that women legislators are recruited from a prestigious segment of the female population but their occupations are dissimilar to those normally held by political decision-makers. In particular, there is an absence of legal and business expertise. Data from a cross-provincial survey of provincial legislators, collected by H. Clarke, R. Price and R. Krause in 1972, emphasizes this point.(16) Whereas sixty percent (60%) of the larger sample of provincial legislators report previous involvement in law, business or management, only seven percent (7%) of provincial women legislators had similar pre-incumbency experience.

Because women politicians are relatively unique, even at the municipal level, it would be reasonable to expect that few women legislators would have prior office-holding experience. Indeed, in contrast to fifty percent (50%) of the 1972 sample of provincial legislators, twenty-five percent (25%) of women legislators were office-holders prior to their provincial incumbency.(17) However, as Table 2 demonstrates, the offices held were not particularly influential. Only one woman--a mayor--might be considered to have held a prominent position in local government. Yet, given that women politicians are not commonplace at any level of government, it is perhaps surprising that fully one out of every four women legislators report municipal experience. Local government appears to be a stepping stone and training ground for many Canadian women provincial legislators.

Education, occupational status and prior political experience may be necessary conditions for political incumbency, but they are not sufficient conditions. Aspirants to provincial office must first contest the party nomination and secure the support of the local party influentials before waging an election campaign. However, attempting to identify the

provincial political parties that are most likely to recruit female candidates could lead to rather misleading conclusions, particularly if the parties were classified by their name alone. Provincial party systems vary not only in terms of electoral strength from province to province but even more fundamentally in terms of the actual presence, or absence, of certain parties in some provinces.(18) Furthermore, although some provincial parties share a common party name, they often articulate quite different political philosophies. In short, party affiliation really tells us very little about the type of political party that is most receptive to women candidates. Rather, the question posed was whether the woman legislator was recruited to the party in power.

Table 3 indicates that the majority of women, seventy-seven percent (77%), elected in the 1950-1975 period were recruited by the party in power. There are several possible explanations why this should be so. First, in terms of simple probability theory, a woman recruited by the party winning the greatest number of seats has a greater chance of being elected. For this reason also aspiring political women may seek the dominant party's nomination. On the other hand, the party in power may recruit qualified women as "token" candidates in safe constituencies in order to enhance the party's image in the eyes of the more progressive electorate. Given that as recently as 1969, twenty-four percent (24%) of the Canadian electorate were opposed to the presence of women in public office, it may be argued that it is only the dominant party in the province that can risk slating a woman candidate.(19) The history of one party dominance in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, then, may also be a contributing factor leading to the greater participation of women in their respective provincial legislatures.

Although the potential candidate is ultimately endorsed by the central party organization, the onus of recruitment rests with the local party organization. In this respect, Table 3 indicates that urban constituencies are more receptive to women candidates. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the sample were elected in decidedly urban ridings, eighteen percent (18%) in semi-urban ridings and fourteen percent (14%) in rural ridings. It is quite likely that the urban constituency comprises a larger pool from which well-educated and professional women can be recruited. Indeed, all the women legislators with graduate or professional degrees represent urban ridings. On the other hand, it would also appear that a cosmopolitan electorate is more responsive to the aspirations of women candidates.

Intense party competition or high legislature turnover is not characteristic of Canadian provincial politics.(20) It is not surprising then, that women legislators frequently return for two or more terms in the provincial legislative

Table 3: Recruitment Milieu For Women Legislators

Characteristic	Number of Legislators
Party in power	34
Party not in power	10
	N (44)
Constituency	
Urban	30
Mixed	8
Rural	6
	N (44)

assemblies. While one cannot speculate whether the seventeen (17) women serving their first term will return, Table 4 indicates that only eleven percent (11%) of the women legislators were not re-elected either because they did not run again for personal reasons or they failed to get the nomination or they were defeated electorally. Considering that at least ten (10) of these legislators have remained active participants in government for a decade or more, it would appear that women politicians are not transient actors in the provincial political sphere and tend to persist in decision-making roles.

Table 4 suggests that, once elected, women experience rapid mobility in the governing party. Of the forty-four (44) women elected between 1950 and 1975, no less than fourteen (14) were appointed to the provincial cabinet. It is generally agreed that cabinet ministers are selected on the basis of their experience, merit and ability to represent specific interest groups in the electorate. This being the case, it seems provincial governments are becoming increasingly pressured to incorporate women in the decision-making process. Only four of the women cabinet ministers were appointed in the 1950-1964 period, while the remaining ten became cabinet ministers between 1964 and 1975. Nevertheless, there is a suggestion of "tokenism" in the nature of these appointments. For

Table 4: Post-Incumbency Experience of Women Legislators

Characteristic	Number of Legislators
Number of Terms	
First	17
One	7
Two	10
Three	6
Four or more	4
	N (44)
Cabinet Appointments	
Appointed in 1950-1964 period	4
Appointed in 1965-1975 period	10
Total number of appointments	14
Appointed in first term	5
Appointed in second term	5
Appointed in third term	4
	N (14)
Cabinet Portfolios	
Minister without Portfolio	5
Minister of Social Services	4
Minister of Consumer Affairs	1
Minister of Housing	1
Minister of Public Works	1
Minister of Education	1
	N (14)

example, five of the legislators were assigned ministerial status in their first term, before they served a customary backbench apprenticeship. In addition, five of the fourteen became Ministers without Portfolio--posts which do not carry any specific policy-making or supervisory duties. Another six were assigned to stereotypically "housekeeping" responsibilities such as social services, consumer affairs and housing. Only three women legislators secured cabinet posts which are pivotal to the functions of provincial government such as education and public works. One of the latter group served two terms, and the remaining two served three terms in the government before they were promoted to cabinet. The data indicate that many elected women are quickly advanced to highly visible political positions in their respective provincial legislatures but only a few tenured women legislators who have demonstrated their merit through successive re-elections gain influential cabinet portfolios.

Summary

To summarize briefly, women provincial legislators appear to be recruited from a small segment of the Canadian female population which is well-educated and holds semi-prestigious occupations. Their collective occupational expertise represents a variety of interests rather than the predominately legal and business bias that is generally assigned to political decision-makers. Provincial women legislators are most frequently recruited by the party in power, primarily in urban constituencies. Once elected, they tend to secure re-election and frequently experience rapid advancement to junior cabinet posts. Few, however, supervise senior cabinet portfolios.

Although these data offer a preliminary overview of women politicians in Canada, they are perhaps too cursory to grasp the more fundamental questions raised by the dearth of women in decision-making roles. For example, it is apparent that the role of law-maker necessitates educational and occupational expertise, yet the number of women legislators in Canada has not increased as the proportion of women fulfilling these basic qualifications grows steadily. Furthermore, the data does not allow one to broach the possibility that the lack of women in top political positions may have little to do with the availability of qualified women and more to do with the recruiters' attitudes towards women in leadership roles. As James D. Barber perceptively suggests, the potential candidate remains on the sidelines, until, and unless, some practical opportunity presents itself, no matter how strong the candidate's motives, or how ready he (or she) stands to serve.(21) Given that pervasive social norms and ascribed sex-roles have generally discouraged women political candidates and that in Canada, at least, candidate selection is primarily the

responsibility of the local party organization, it seems crucial that future research should be directed towards the opportunities afforded to women in political parties, and to women candidates at both the federal and provincial levels. It will be perhaps only then that we will be able to assess accurately the critical barriers confronting women in the Canadian political system.

NOTES

1. Rosemary Brown, "A New Kind of Power," in Women in the Canadian Mosaic, ed. by Gwen Matheson (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, 1976), p. 291.

2. For a more complete discussion see Canada, The Royal Commission on the Status of Women Report (Ottawa: Information Canada, 1970), p. 339.

3. Maurice Duverger, The Political Role of Women (New York: UNESCO Int. Doc. Service, Columbia University, 1954).

4. Ingunn Means, "Women in Local Politics: The Norwegian Experience," Canadian Journal of Political Science, 5 (September, 1972), pp. 365-388.

5. Jeane Kirkpatrick, Political Woman (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 9-20.

6. The small body of Canadian political literature about women mainly refers to voting behaviour. See Jean Laponce, People vs. Politics (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 210; J. Terry and R. Schultz, "Canadian Electoral Behaviour: A Propositional Inventory," in The Canadian Political Process: A Reader, ed. by O. Kruhlak (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1973), pp. 268-270. For political elites see Harold D. Clarke, Richard G. Price and Robert Krause, "Backbenchers," in The Provincial Political Systems, ed. by David Bellamy, Joh Pammett and Donald Rowat (Toronto: Methuen Press, 1976), p. 217.

7. J. Murray Beck ventures that there may be something in the eastern Canadian character that makes the people feel more secure when they have a father figure presiding over their destinies. See J. Murray Beck, "The Party System in Nova Scotia: Tradition and Conservatism," in Canadian Provincial Politics, ed. by Martin Robin (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 195.

8. Canada, op. cit.

9. Deanne White and Maxine Nunes, The Lace Ghetto (Toronto: New Press, 1972), p. 33.

10. Samuel Barnes, "Participation, Education and Political Competence," American Political Science Review, 60 (June, 1966), pp. 348-353.

11. William Crotty, "The Social Attributes of Party Organization Activists in a Transitional Political System," Western Political Quarterly, 20 (September, 1967), p. 248.

12. 1971 Census of Canada, Statistics Canada.

13. Men received 90.7% of all the earned doctorates and 75.2% of all the Masters degrees awarded by Canadian universities in the 1971-1972 academic year. See Jill Vickers, "Women in the Universities," in Women in the Canadian Mosaic, p. 236.

14. James Bennett and Pierre Loewe, Women in Business (Toronto: MacLean-Hunter Ltd., 1976), p. 18.

15. Ibid., p. 20. 16. See note 6. 17. Ibid.

18. Jane Jenson, Harold Clarke, Lawrence LeDuc, Joh Pammett, "Patterns of Partisanship in Canada: Split Identification and Cross-time Variation," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, San Francisco, September, 1975.

19. The Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, February 19, 1969.

20. Harold Clarke, Richard Price and Robert Krause, "The Effects of Interparty competition on Constituency Behaviour and Role Orientation Among Canadian Provincial Legislators," paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Political Science Association, Montreal, 1973.

21. James D. Barber, The Lawmakers (New Haven: Yale Press, 1966), p. 237.