



Equal Voice Women in Canadian Politics Backgrounder

What is Equal Voice?

Equal Voice is a multi-partisan non-profit organization devoted to the still-bold idea that more women must be elected to every level of government in Canada.

Some of Canada's most prominent women politicians -- all groundbreakers in their time -- serve as members of Equal Voice's Advisory Board: Former Progressive Conservative Prime Minister, Kim Campbell, Conservative Senator Pat Carney, former Liberal Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps, Former Mayor of Ottawa and NDP MP Marion Dewar, former Ontario Progressive Conservative Minister Janet Ecker, former Liberal Minister Judith Erola, former Mayor of Toronto Barbara Hall, Former leader of the NDP and MP Alexa McDonough, former leader of the NDP Audrey McLaughlin, former leader of the Ontario Liberals Lyn McLeod, former Progressive Conservative Minister Flora MacDonald, Liberal MP Anita Neville, Liberal Senator Lucie Pépin, and Conservative Senator Nancy Ruth.

For biographical information on Equal Voice's Advisory Board, please visit:
<http://www.equalvoice.ca/idx.php?rl=195>

Equal Voice Contact Information:

Ann Wicks
Executive Director
Cell: (613) 294-0872
Email: awicks@equalvoice.ca

Raylene Lang-Dion
National Chair
Cell: (613) 355-3428
Email: rlang-dion@equalvoice.ca

Canada is Falling Behind on Women's Representation

Canada's international ranking on the Inter-Parliamentary Union, "List of Women in National Parliaments," has recently slipped again to 48th in the world.¹ Despite enjoying economic prosperity and political stability, Canada now has fewer women in parliament than most of Europe and many less developed countries such as Mauritania, Uganda, Rwanda, Afghanistan and Iraq.

To level the playing field, many parliaments and political parties are implementing well funded national action plans to reduce the barriers by recruiting and training women candidates, offering family friendly work environments, introducing proportional representation, electoral financing reforms, setting targets, constitutional reforms, and public awareness campaigns.

¹ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

Women's Representation in the House of Commons has not increased in over a decade

The representation of women in the House of Commons has reached a plateau of 20.8 per cent with only 64 women sitting as Members of Parliaments. Similarly, the glass ceiling for women in municipal² and provincial governments hovers around 21 per cent.³

The numbers of women in the House of Commons has not dramatically increased since 1993 when we saw a jump from 13.3% to 18%.

Since the 2000 election, the number of women elected to the House of Commons has hovered around 20% and even decreased following the 2006 election.

Election	Total Number of Seats	Seats Held by Women	Proportion of Seats Held by Women
1984	282	27	9.6%
1988	295	39	13.3%
1993	295	53	18%
1997	301	62	20.6%
2000	301	62	20.6%
2004	308	65	21.1%
2006	308	64	20.8%

Source: Parliament of Canada web site.

The Current Composition of the House of Commons:

Political Party	Women Elected	Total MPs	% of Women MPs
NDP	12	29	41%
Bloc Québécois	17	51	33%
Liberal	21	101	21%
Conservative	14	125	11%

Source: Parliament of Canada web site

² Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "Getting to 30% by 2026," page 1. Available at: <http://www.fcm.ca/english/policy/wreport.pdf>

³ Linda Trimble and Jane Arscott, *Still Counting*, Broadview: 2003, page 43.

Women still encounter barriers when seeking elected office

Women still encounter barriers when seeking elected office: stereotyping and perceptions of women's roles and abilities; few women role models; media imbalances in the treatment of women politicians, family commitments; masculine political environment, failure of political parties to bolster women candidates, finances and exclusion from informal party networks.⁴

We have studied this issue to death. We need less talk and more action:

- Canada has already had two Royal Commissions documenting the need for more women in politics and barriers for women: the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing.
- Florence Bird's findings still hold true today: (page 349 Bird Report):
"a number of impediments to women seeking candidature; in particular prejudice in the constituency associations, inadequate financial resources and limited mobility...Women who have been successful at the polls confirm that winning the nomination is a more formidable hurdle than winning the election."

Political parties are the gatekeepers to elected office and can be catalysts for change:

- Women are less likely to win nomination meetings because of financial constraints, limited access to informal networks, and subtle or overt opposition from within party networks.⁵
- The power of incumbency can also be a barrier to women seeking public office. Given that incumbent Members of Parliament have a better chance at seeking re-election and few ridings elect a new MP in any given election, the power of incumbency can serve to reinforce parliament's current composition.
- The lack of women elected or appointed to top political jobs serves as a visible indication of how women are undervalued in society.

Women are more educated but still make .72 for every dollar that men make:

- Statistics Canada has also documented that women continue to hold a disproportionate share of household and family responsibilities.⁶ This can serve to limit their ability to participate in public affairs and reinforces the social roles assigned to each sex. Given that working environment in the House of Commons is not family friendly, many women are excluded. This should change.
- Women see the way female politicians are treated in Ottawa and they get the message – politics is a man's game and you are not welcome. This should change.
- Despite the fact that the majority of all university graduates are women,⁷ women working full time still make .72 cents for every dollar that men make.⁸ Women who are visible minorities are on average more educated and make even less.⁹ Given that women are not paid as much as men, they start out in a less favourable financial position than their male colleagues. Women have a smaller amount of disposable income to make political donations or finance election campaigns.

⁴ Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* (2004), 37: 1029-1030 Cambridge University Press.

⁵ Manon Tremblay and Linda Trimble. *Women and Electoral Politics in Canada*. Oxford, 2003, Page 5.

⁶ Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060719/d060719b.htm>

⁷ Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/200410/mafe.htm#d>

⁸ Statistics Canada. <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/060307/d060307a.htm>

⁹ Statistics Canada: *ibid*.

Canadians want more women elected

- Polling conducted by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada revealed that 90 per cent of Canadians want more women elected.¹⁰
- During the 2006 election, Equal Voice tracked the number of women candidates nominated by each political party. The numbers reveal that Canadians are more than willing to elect women candidates when given the choice. For instance, the NDP ran 41% female candidates and 35% women were elected. The Liberals ran 25.6% of female candidates resulting in 21% female MPs. The Conservatives ran 12.3% female candidates ended up with 11% female MPs.
- This combined with strong polling numbers indicating that Canadians want more women to hold elected positions and the large pool of educated women to draw from, provides the opportunity for political parties to make a difference.
- Political parties can catalysts for change. All that is required is political will on the part of party leaders to make a difference.
- The Conference Board of Canada says that the lack of CEO commitment impedes women's advancement in the workplace and that women still face barriers in their advancement.¹¹ The same is true for politics.

Candidates Nominated and Elected by Political Parties – 2006 Election								
Political Party	Total Candidates		Male Candidates		Female Candidates		% Female Candidates	
	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected	Nominated	Elected
Bloc Québécois	75	51	52	34	23	17	30.6%	33%
Conservatives	308	125	270	111	38	14	12.3%	11%
Liberals	308	101	229	80	79	21	25.6%	21%
NDP	308	29	200	17	108	12	35%	41%
Green Party	308	0	236	0	72	0	23%	0%

Gender Balanced Government is Good for Canada

- Canadians have decided that fairness and equality are important values.
- We have decided that democracy should be genuine partnership of men and women. We have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that reinforces this belief by guaranteeing equality for women. Despite these values, women still encounter barriers to public office.
- Canadians need to ask their political leaders: is it just for the voices of half the population to be excluded from power? What are you going to do about it?
- Canada has made international commitments to change this. Now we need action from our political parties and government. At the United Nations World Conference on Women, Canada committed to "take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making" and to "increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership."¹²

¹⁰ Canadian Research and Information Canada, New Release, "Canadians Want More Women in Elected Office," Available online at: http://www.cric.ca/pdf/cric_poll/portraits/portraits_2004/eng_dem_reform_2004.pdf

¹¹ http://www.conferenceboard.ca/press/2001/womens_advancement.htm

¹² <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingdeclaration.html>

Women in politics can make a difference:

- Polling shows that women care about different issues. The United Nations says that a critical mass of at least 30% women is needed before legislatures produce public policy representing women's concerns and before political institutions begin to change the way they do business.
- UNICEF released a report advocating for more women in politics because legislatures with more women produce better policies to fight child poverty.¹³
- The World Bank released report indicating that governments with more women legislators are more productive. The report concludes "women are effective in promoting honest government and national parliaments with the largest numbers of women have the lowest levels of corruption."¹⁴
- The Conference Board of Canada says that companies with more women represented in senior management and corporate boards are more productive and produce higher rates of return.¹⁵
- The Economist magazine commented recently:
"Women remain perhaps the world's most under-utilized resource...A recent study¹⁶ found that American companies with more women in senior management jobs earned a higher return than those with fewer women at the top. This might be because mixed teams of men and women are better than single-sex groups at solving problems and spotting external threats."

What is Equal Voice Doing?

- Equal Voice launched our **National Awareness Campaign** aimed at increasing media awareness on women in politics, publicizing our Getting to the Gate online campaign school, tracking female participation in Canadian political parties, tracking women candidates nominated to run in the upcoming federal election, and promoting the incorporation of gender sensitive courses in high school social studies programs in at least two provinces.
- **Getting to the Gate Online Campaign School** – bilingual and free of charge;
- The **Ontario Challenge** Public Awareness Campaign: Equal Voice issued a challenge to the three leaders at Queen's Park who all agreed to run more women candidates in the upcoming election. With their statements, the leaders sent a strong message that they want more women elected. This resulted in a **5% increase** in the numbers of women elected - in just one by-election.
- The **Canada Challenge** Public Awareness Campaign: Equal Voice issued a challenge to the four federal leaders asking them to run more women candidates in the next federal election;
- **Equal Voice Regional Chapters and University Campus Clubs:** aim to increase public awareness, hold events with women politicians, provide networking and mentoring opportunities, and host campaign training schools;
- Equal Voice **tracks the numbers of women candidates running during elections;**
- Equal Voice advocates for **electoral reform** to increase the numbers of women elected.

-30-

¹³ http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/The_State_of_the_Worlds_Children_2007_e.pdf

¹⁴ The World Bank, "Are Women Really the Fairer Sex? Corruption and Women in Government" Online at: http://www.wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2000/08/26/000094946_0008120532266/Rendered/PDF/multi_page.pdf

¹⁵ <http://www.conferenceboard.ca/documents.asp?mext=374>

¹⁶ <http://www.catalyst.org/files/exe/fpexe.pdf>