

WOMEN IN MUNICIPAL POLITICS: BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION
A Review of Programs to Increase Levels of Women in Local Government

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“By any measure, women are only halfway to equal”

Linda Trimble & Jane Arscott “Still Counting”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the time that Canadian women achieved the right to vote, they have struggled to achieve gender parity and to be full participants in the political process. Even after the recommendations from two Royal Commissions clearly outlined political barriers and reinforced the need for more women in politics, gender disparities continue to exist at all levels of government. Some have declared this a 'democratic deficit' that must be remedied.¹

With women representing over 51% of the Canadian population, only 21% of elected municipal officials are female.² Reasons for women's under-representation, the importance of gender equality and the significance of women in governmental decision making must be examined and understood. Theories of gender inequality are offered to explain women's exclusion from politics. Global comparisons are made and alternate electoral systems considered, using Norway as an example.

Numerous barriers to participation are faced by women attempting to enter the municipal arena, and subsequent barriers are encountered once they are elected. These barriers must be overcome in order to narrow the gender gap and increase women's representation in government. Programs specifically designed to address these barriers and increase the level of women's representation have been developed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Equal Voice and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities and introduced to municipalities across Canada.

Analysis reveals that the recommendations from these programs effectively address these barriers. To what extent municipalities adopt or implement these program recommendations to change the political culture that currently exists, will determine the future of Canada's 'equal voice'.

1 FCM: "Getting to 30% by 2026" (2006):2

2 FCM: "Women in Politics: The Big Picture and FCM's Response" (2007):2.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the under-representation of women in Canadian government has been on the agenda since the early 1900s. This fact is emphasized by the writings of many political scientists, both in Canada and other countries. In the male dominated world of Canadian politics, women had to fight to achieve parity in areas such as education and employment. Gradually, society changed to encompass women and their ideologies regarding social programs, public health, housing, and rights for women and children. But still, women's participation in politics remains in the minority and is not reflective of the Canadian population.

According to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM 2006), although Canada may excel in many areas such as human rights, it has lost ground in terms of increasing women's participation in government. Female representation at the municipal level in Canada falls below many South American, African and European countries. At the federal level, only 64 women hold seats in the 308-seat House of Commons, or 21%. Worldwide, Canada lags behind other countries in the number of women involved in the legislature. From a pool of 189 countries, Canada ranks in 49th place, behind Rwanda, Iraq and Uganda. Provincial levels of participation range from 15% in Nova Scotia to 32% in Quebec, with an overall average of 20.5%.³

The FCM cites that although 52% of the population is female, only 21.7% holds political office at the municipal level. In a recent survey of 152 Canadian municipalities, the FCM found that 86% do not have equal numbers of males and females on their Councils, 32% have one woman on Council and 14% have no female councillors.

³ FCM: "Women in Politics: The Big Picture and FCM's Response" (2007):1.

This paper will examine the barriers to participation that women face when attempting to enter municipal politics, and review the programs and recommendations of three recent initiatives that have been developed to increase the level of women in municipal government, from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Equal Voice and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities.

The first section will provide an overview of women in Canadian politics, following the history of the women's movement, with a focus on the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Causes of under-representation will be considered and the importance of gender balance within municipal political systems will be discussed. A conceptual framework will introduce the theories of gender inequality in municipal politics.

The following section will address the need for change within the political system and consider the significance of women in local government. Comparisons to other countries and alternate electoral systems will be presented, using Norway as an example.

Barriers to entry that restrict women's participation in municipal politics will be introduced and the rationale behind each one will be considered. Three programs that were designed to increase the level of female representation will be presented and their subsequent recommendations to remove or reduce these barriers will be analyzed.

In the final section, the future of women in government and actions taken by municipalities will be discussed, and new initiatives to increase the number of women in municipal government will be introduced. Conclusions will suggest the necessary measures required to move forward to achieve political equality.

Much of the literature that examines women's under-representation in Canada focuses on the federal and provincial levels of government. Research specific to the municipal level is less developed, and accessing reliable data is at times difficult.

Currently, there is no central cache from which to draw statistical information or best practices, as the records are held within each individual municipality. There is certainly a need for more information about women and municipal government. This paper will attempt to follow women's struggle for political equality and its impact at the municipal level.⁴

⁴ FCM: *"Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report"* (2004):10.

WOMEN IN CANADIAN POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW

Historical Significance

The political path of women in Canada was most certainly shaped by the early feminist movement, and as we follow the evolution from enfranchisement to present day, we discover a journey met with many barriers and diversions. Both Sylvia Bashevkin (1993) and Sandra Burt (1994) provide a comprehensive history of the political experiences of Canadian women.

The 'first wave' of the women's movement began with women's desire to participate in decision-making and migrated to the demand for the right to vote. Early activist groups also fought to end discriminatory treatment of all women in areas such as education, employment and the family.⁵ Although they had achieved political rights, women remained hesitant to run for office, as the double standard of home/politics balance was brought into question. Barriers to entry emerged, in the form of fierce competition from male candidates, justification of women's personal style or wardrobe and strong protests from the electorate. As women gained formal education and subsequent careers, conflicts between women's traditional roles and social experiences and expectations resulted in a set of new social values.

During the 1960s and 70s, the 'second wave' emerged, and many women's organizations gained prominence. The Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) was created in 1967, chaired by journalist Florence Bird, with a mandate to "inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada" and "to recommend what steps might be taken by the Federal Government to ensure for women equal

⁵ Bashevkin, S.B. *Toeing The Lines :Women And Party Politics In English Canada* (1993):5.

opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society.”⁶ Over a four-year period, the Commission met with women’s groups, researchers and citizens and in all, 470 briefs were formulated. As a result, 167 recommendations were presented to Prime Minister Trudeau in 1970. The ‘Bird Report’ concluded that women encountered inequities on many levels, as compared to their male counterparts, but most notably in regard to their absence from “positions of political influence.”⁷

Following the momentum of the Commission report, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) was formally established in 1972, with a mandate to ensure that the most important recommendations of the RCSW were implemented and that the government was working toward gender equality. In 1973, the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women was established, with the responsibility for conducting research and developing programs and proposals in the field of women’s rights.⁸ This was a time of optimism in the women’s movement, and issues such as day care, equal pay, and pension reform were on the minds of Canadian women. Although some gains were realized, women’s issues were mostly ignored by the prevailing government. In the fifty years since initial enfranchisement, the number of female representatives in the political arena had only increased marginally.⁹

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms was introduced in 1982, and over the next decade, the government and employers came to accept women’s involvement in issues such as pay equity, maternity leave and day care. However, when women began to discuss other issues such as economic policy, their position received less support. Their

6 *Bashevkin, (1993):21.*

7 *Maillé, C. “Women and Political Representation” Canadian Politics (1994):157.*

8 *Bashevkin, (1993):23.*

9 *Bashevkin, 1993):26.*

'sphere of influence' was very narrow, and the lack of female representation remained a concern for women's organizations in Canada.¹⁰

In 1992, the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (the Lortie Commission) initiated a study of Canadian electoral processes. It found that many of the obstacles originally identified in the Bird report lingered, which prevented women from seeking political office in Canada.¹¹ The Commission made a number of recommendations to correct this imbalance and make it easier for women to enter Canadian politics. Since that time, women's groups have put pressure on the government to actively recruit more women, from all walks of life and ethnic backgrounds.

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women

The significance of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women cannot be stressed enough, for engaging women in the process of making positive changes to the existing culture. According to Maureen O'Neill (2001), during her tenure as President of the International Development Research Centre, the RCSW was pivotal in providing women's engagement. She points to the RCSW as a successful project; a vehicle from which to learn valuable lessons, such as "improving our democracy", fully examining the pertinent issues and eventually effecting change. She notes that the findings of the Commission, "the injustices it recorded, the reforms it recommended, the values it affirmed – remain as compelling and relevant as ever".¹²

She attributes three key factors to the success of this Commission. The first is timing. The Commission was struck in 1967, and opened its public hearings in 1968. This was a time of public awareness of citizen participation in government. The second factor, strong leadership, was demonstrated by appointing journalist Florence Bird to the

10 Brodie, (1995):48.

11 Tremblay, M. & L.J. Trimble. *Women and Electoral Politics in Canada* (2003):1.

12 O'Neill, M. "The Future of Canadian Democracy: Lessons from the Royal Commissions" IDRC Speech (2001):1.

Chair. Her intellect and diplomacy allowed her to successfully pursue the objectives of the Commission. Her knowledge of the media enhanced interest in the Commission's work, and she used this to garner public interest. The third factor is citizen engagement. During the inquiry, public involvement was encouraged and was made very accessible. The opinions gathered were integral to the success of the final report. Women had a voice in the process and had provided direction to the Commission.

The effects of the Commission were far-reaching. Women were fully engaged as never before in Canadian public and political life, and the issue of the status of women was "permanently on the political and public policy agenda."¹³ It also provided new research and stimulated new ways of thinking. Questions were being asked that had never been asked before; about education, pay and employment equity and children and families. The success of this Commission was specifically related to "representation and research."¹⁴ As one of the original staff members of the Commission (and later a cabinet minister), Monique Begin noted "It all started with the Royal Commission."¹⁵

O'Neill is not complacent by any means, and admits that work still needs to be done. Although women in Canada have become "full citizens" and have the right to vote, they continue to suffer the "effects of having been excluded from politics for as long as they could remember."¹⁶

13 O'Neill, (2001):1.

14 O'Neill, (2001):3.

15 Kome, P. *Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics* (1985):88.

16 Maillé, (1994):156.

MUNICIPAL ISSUES

Reasons for Under-Representation

Why do women remain under-represented in Canadian government? According to Manon Tremblay (2003), “for all of the work that the feminist movement has done to increase the numbers, they have not developed a theory of representation to guide electoral practices in Canada,” and the issue is not the “subject of any public debate in Canada right now.”¹⁷ Within municipalities, the issue of gender equality is not a main concern, as they struggle to deal with other priorities which are often downloaded from higher levels of government. Groups remain committed, however, to electing more women for two fundamental reasons: to have political representation that more accurately reflects the general population and to ensure that women’s interests are better represented.

To this end, two concepts of representation are presented. The first is ‘descriptive representation’, which focuses on the composition, or *who* is doing the representing -- their characteristics based on race, ethnic group or sex. Ideally, the legislature should mirror the socio-demographic characteristics of the population it represents, and in the same proportion. The second concept is ‘substantive representation’, which focuses on the *activity* -- how the representative feels and acts. Their actions should reflect the needs and interests of their constituency.¹⁸

The research of Stacy Ulbig (2007) exposes a link between the level of trust in government and the gender ratio of municipal politicians. She notes that “political trust is key to democratic success,” and that descriptive representation of women in local government can influence the attitudes of its citizens in the areas of “efficacy, interest,

17 Tremblay & Trimble, (2003):3.

18 Tremblay & Trimble, (2003):3

knowledge and perceived governmental legitimacy.”¹⁹ Many minorities may feel alienated because they have no influence on the governmental process. As these groups become more descriptively represented, however, these feelings diminish. The gender composition of municipal governments may send a clear message about women’s place in a community, and any increases to female representation can result in policies that benefit women. Ulbig concludes that when gender representation is roughly gender equal, then both men and women are more likely to trust local government.²⁰

Two theories are offered that may explain the lack of women’s involvement in politics. The first is the ‘modernization thesis.’ It states that a group’s entry into politics is a type of coming of age, and because women do not have the same public experience as men, they are naïve and are seen to have a lower level of political competence. The second is the ‘dual cultures thesis’ developed by Thelma McCormack. It suggests that women’s non-entry into politics is due to their past political experiences, which result in a different political culture. Women experience obstacles such as exclusion, paternalism and systemic discrimination within the realms of the political world.²¹ A resulting ‘gender gap’ emerges, which is continually reinforced by cultural values in society. And although “women have the right to participate in the electoral process, there is a distance separating them at the mass level from the formal process.”²² The world of politics continues to operate according to ‘masculine norms’ and women have to adjust to that environment. Women are forced to take a smaller role at the informal level, through community-based organizations and practice ‘small p’ politics.

Lawless and Fox’s study (2008) reinforces this sentiment. Their research shows that a significant gender gap exists in how women perceive themselves as potential

19 Ulbig, S. “Gendering Municipal Government: Female Descriptive Representation and Feelings of Political Trust” *Social Science Quarterly* 88:5 (2007):1108-09.

20 Ulbig, (2007):1109.

21 Bashevkin, (1993):40-42.

22 Bashevkin, (1993):61.

candidates for office. In a group of men and women with similar qualifications, women were more than twice as likely as men to believe they were not qualified to run for office. They state that women are not seen as 'political leaders', and they are less likely to be recruited or receive the necessary encouragement to run. Women also have more family commitments than men and have different perceptions of the fairness of the political environment.²³ This gender gap was evidenced in British Columbia, as the former Deputy Premier responsible for candidate recruitment remarked, "Ask a woman to run for office and she'll say, 'Why are you asking me?' Ask a man, and he'll say, 'I can't believe it took you so long to ask.'"²⁴

Why Equality Matters

To build a truly representative democracy, all citizens should be encouraged to participate in and run for public office. Research from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2006) shows that there are "clear benefits for communities and for municipalities when women participate fully" and that the decision making process is more inclusive.²⁵ Increased participation allows women to take more of a leadership role in their communities, and become valuable resources. Informed decision-making often results in increased levels of community support for municipal decisions.

Equal Voice (2007) states that "gender balanced government is good for Canada,"²⁶ because most Canadians feel that fairness and equality are key values, which are reinforced by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Jo Beall (1996) suggests that both men and women make use of and contribute to city life in their own style, and in various capacities, as workers, parents or service

23 Lawless, J. and R.L. Fox "Why are Women Still Not Running for Public Office?" *Issues in Governance Studies* 14:(2008):1

24 Wicks, A. and R. Lang-Dion. "Women in Politics: Still Searching for an Equal Voice" *Canadian Parliamentary Review* (2008):34.

25 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report" (2004): 49.

26 Equal Voice: "Backgrounder" (2007):3.

users. In order for the governance of cities to be “equitable, sustainable and effective,” it should be sensitive to gender issues.²⁷ And to be successful, full participation and citizen engagement must be considered. To reach this goal, Beall endorses an “increase in women’s representation in political structures” through a plan that will “foster gender awareness and gender competence among both women and men in the political arena.”²⁸ This means including women at all levels of government and ensuring that the needs and interests of all parties are addressed and considered in the planning and decision-making cycle.

When women enter government, they are often seen to speak for *all* women, and are not viewed as individuals. But women are not a homogenous group; there is a diversity of women, with varying degrees of responsibilities. It is important to distinguish between people and perspectives. “It is the women and men after all, and not genders, who organize and engage in urban governance and partnerships.”²⁹ Achieving a balance of both men and women in local government “gives meaning to the representative nature of democracy and institutionalizes and legitimizes women’s voices in the sites of power.”³⁰ Women in the municipal sphere can provide valuable advice and can act as role models to other women to get involved in urban governance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: THEORIES OF GENDER INEQUALITY IN MUNICIPAL POLITICS

Systemic Discrimination

Any discussion of the under-representation of women in politics must include the biggest barrier -- systemic discrimination. This type of discrimination is not readily

27 Beall, J. “Urban Governance: Why Gender Matters” *Gender in Development* (1996):1.

28 Beall, (1996):2-3.

29 Beall, (1996):4.

30 Beall, (1996):5.

obvious, or even intentional in some cases. Rather, it is entrenched within the political institutional policies and practices that discriminate against women and minority groups. The 'system' itself excludes these individuals and groups from receiving the same treatment or benefit as other members, and creates barriers to equal opportunities. Chantal Maille (1994) notes that "political institutions were established at a time when women were not considered citizens", and consequently they were "not modified to fully integrate women when they acquired the right to hold office." The culture of politics "perpetuates values and imposes standards which are foreign and daunting to many women," who feel discouraged from embarking on a political career.³¹

Thelma McCormack (1991) concurs, and emphasizes that the Canadian "patriarchal system acts as a countervailing force to gender equality," within a system based on "male authority, male power and male privilege."³² For many years, women's political participation was "selective and fraught with rejection and discrimination. It was only after the Status of Women report that women realized they were the victims of systemic discrimination."³³

She notes that the distinction between the 'public and private spheres,' continues to be discussed, where the public includes society and politics, while the private encompasses the home and family. Men, however, have always "had authority in the private sphere and women have been excluded from the public sphere by law, religion and custom."³⁴

Negative Gender Stereotypes

Systemic discrimination against women is also seen at higher levels of political power. For instance, during the recent U.S. democratic convention, discussion revolved

31 Maille, (1994):159.

32 McCormack, T. *Politics and the Hidden Injuries of Gender: Feminism and the Making of the Welfare State* (1991):3.

33 McCormack, (1991):26.

34 McCormack, (1991):3.

around the two candidates, Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. The race between a black man and a white woman led to this posting on an online blog: “Systemic discrimination against blacks or females – which will prevail in 2008?”³⁵ The campaign was charged with a sense of unfairness against Clinton. The media were fixated on her mode of dress, her cleavage, her tone of voice and her release of emotions during the campaign. Her ‘nagging tone of voice’ was said to have lost her the male vote, and her ‘dumpy pantsuit’ was deemed most unflattering. In Canada, female politicians receive the same treatment. For instance, at a recent government function, a female MP was reported to have ‘looked stunning’ in her black gown with the plunging neckline, while male politicians were not subject to the same ‘sex-typed’ descriptions. Media coverage tends to be male dominated, and it “employs a masculine narrative that reinforces conceptions of politics as a male preserve and treats male as normative...reinforcing the image that politics is something that men do.”³⁶

Wicks and Lang-Dion (2008) suggest that while it is exciting to have a female candidate in the democratic race in the U.S., there remain challenges for women seeking office. They note that the definition of political leadership is based on masculine values. Citing the research of Trimble and Arscott, they find that there is a “persistent observation that women leaders just do not fit,” and women politicians are repeatedly evaluated by their “looks, clothing, relationships, and the tone of their voices – anything but their political skills and acumen.”³⁷ Although many feel that through running for election, Clinton may have smashed some barriers to political participation; there are still several left intact. The end result was that voters chose to support a candidate who “looks more like every other president in U.S. history.”³⁸

35 Holland, F. *Online Blog*, (2008):1.

36 Wicks & Lang-Dion, (2008):34

37 Wicks & Lang-Dion, (2008):34

38 Kantor, J. “Gender Issues Lives on as Clinton’s Hopes Dim”, *Equal Voice*, (2008):1.

Inequality experienced by women in other aspects of society, such as economic and occupational, puts them at a distinct disadvantage when considering politics. A wage gap continues to exist, and Statistics Canada reports that even women who hold more education, are still underpaid as compared to men. Women continue to carry a disproportionate share of household and family responsibilities, which reduces their availability to participate in politics and reinforces the gendered division of labour.

Organizational Culture

Recent attention has been focused on organizational cultures to explain inequality. In current municipal structures, low female representation is the norm. Some people feel that women already have equal rights, and therefore, no changes are needed. Women, however, argue that municipal politics is still a 'man's game' and report problems as they enter this male domain. "Age-old attitudes about a woman's proper place continue to shape women's experience in politics."³⁹

A discussion of gendered organizations highlights the power imbalance and male advantage in many organizations. The four elements of Joan Acker's (1992) 'theories of gendered organizations' can be applied to the Canadian political system. First, a 'gender gap' exists between the work of men and women within the political environment, and women are often subjugated to lesser roles. Next, interactions between both men and women can create either alliances or exclusions, as their communication styles are quite distinct. In the political environment, these interactions can perpetuate a male dominated hierarchy. Third, the existence of gendered symbols perfectly captures the gender divisions that exist within the current political culture. Political leaders are seen to be strong and decisive, rather than kind and caring. The last element is the different perceptions that men and women have about their 'place'

39 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report" (2004):6.

within the organization. They have their own individual understanding of their position and how they should behave within the 'gendered' structure of politics.⁴⁰

Marginalization

Women and ethnic minorities receive similar treatment within the political sphere. Both groups experience exclusion, discrimination, and labelling, yet they continue to strive for inclusion in formal politics, in their quest for equal representation in government. Women who are marginalized due to race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status face even more serious systemic barriers to participation, such as racism, sexism and discrimination. These barriers block them from participating in municipal government and reduce their influence within the community.⁴¹

A survey of low income women in Toronto found similar results, and notes that policy makers did not comprehend the systemic barriers of income, gender and race affecting these women. A prevailing attitude continues to exist that the number of women in political positions will naturally increase. But in fact, the numbers have actually leveled off or declined, creating an "electoral glass ceiling" for women in Canada.⁴²

40 Acker, J. "Gendering Organizational Theory" *Gendering Organization Analysis* (1992):248-60.

41 Young, L. "Women's Electoral Participation" *Bringing Worlds Together Seminar Proceedings* (2002):26-27.

42 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report" (2004):27

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Getting Women into Public Office

Research from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities identifies three central themes that emerge from the discussion of women in politics. First, a meaningful and inclusive consultation process within the community leads to stronger linkages between women and decision-making. Next is the development of policies that consider the differences between men's and women's needs, interests and realities. Finally, it is the dominant beliefs and values that shape the policies and processes within municipalities. Ideas about women's place in society, the value of their input and their right to full participation, can "have a profound impact on whether or not women in their diversity are welcomed in municipal processes and their input valued."⁴³

It is obvious that change is needed to increase the number of women representatives in government. But societies have not really adapted to make it easier for women to participate in politics, and consequently, women remain passive about political life. To allow women to have sustainable political careers, their multiple roles and responsibilities have to be recognized and accommodated by their governments.

Sally Anne Atkinson (1995), former Mayor of Brisbane, Australia maintains "the only way to make change happen is to get women into the mainstream of public office and bureaucracy." Women can bring a wealth of experiences and relationships to the urban environment and can be "effective change agents at the local level on a wide range of issues."⁴⁴ The issue here is not to count male versus female representatives, but to make the necessary changes to the political process to promote more participation by women; and in the end, achieve a true democracy. And for this democracy to be effective, it must be both institutionalized and legitimized by legislation.

43 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report" (2004):16.

44 "Women in the City: Housing, Services and the Urban Environment" OECD Conference (1995):60-61.

In their research into the gains of Canadian women into municipal politics, Gidengil and Vengroff (1997) conclude that over a decade, even with strong women's groups, equity programs and government assistance to support recruitment efforts, women are still vastly under-represented. In municipal politics, "getting women's issues on the municipal agenda requires women to be on municipal council."⁴⁵

A Critical Mass

Research indicates the need for a 'critical mass' of women to influence governance that is responsive to women's needs. A minimum of 15% female representation is required to allow women a 'voice' but it requires a higher percentage of women to effect any substantial changes.⁴⁶ A recent study in the U.S. by Jocelyn Crowley (2006) showed similar results. Those states in which the Equal Rights Amendment was adopted, had *more* than the 15% 'tokenism' level of female representation in their legislatures. Crowley attributes this increase to women's 'political mobilization.' At an informal level, mobilization was very effective to change 'private' views of women in politics. At the formal level, it "challenged the institutions of government".⁴⁷ Women realized that in order to effect change, they had to get involved. The message sent to women was one of 'symbolic equality', reflecting what women's reality should really be.

In those states with representation *under* 15%, Crowley found that women experienced low self-efficacy, felt pressure to perform, were isolated from the necessary networks and forced into gender stereotyped roles by the male majority. Male politicians have a certain expectation and attitude of their female counterparts. And once the women were elected, they faced institutional treatment, which included "silencing,

45 Gidengil, E. and R. Vengroff. "Representational Gains of Canadian Women or Token Growth? The Case of Quebec's Municipal Politics" *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 30.3 (1997):537.

46 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report" (2004):19

47 Crowley, J.E. "Moving Beyond Tokenism: Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment and the Election of Women to State Legislatures" *Social Science Quarterly* 87:3: (2006):530.

excluding, marginalizing, segregating, dismissing, insulting, stereotyping and patronizing” techniques. The male majority treat women as ‘less equal’ in their interactions.⁴⁸

Many women have given up on municipal government as a way of making change; they feel that they can be more effective and exert more influence in areas outside of the municipal process. The municipal system does not accurately reflect their values, and their voices often go unheard and are not considered in making policy. Municipal governments are mainly concerned with roads and infrastructure, rather than social programs that are important to women and their families. Overall, women are disillusioned with municipal government.⁴⁹

SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Changing the Nature of Politics

What are the differences in a government with equal representation? The legitimacy of politics is upheld when any member of society is able to run for office, and under-representation of women and minorities dilutes this legitimacy. According to Manon Tremblay (1998), when women are elected to office, their role is twofold. Not only do they provide positive role models for younger women and act as a symbol of what women can achieve, but they also need to change the male dominated political culture that exists, by changing men’s attitudes, opinions and behaviour.⁵⁰ She suggests that the election of more women “may affect the nature of Canadian politics.”⁵¹ An increase in the number of women would raise the awareness of women’s issues, as these issues would be more visible and the women would be more vocal. But it is not

48 Crowley, (2006):530

49 FCM: “Increasing Women’s Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report” (2004):10.

50 Tremblay, M. “Do Female MPs Substantively Represent Women? A Study of Legislature Behaviour in Canada’s 35th Parliament.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 31:3:436.

51 Tremblay, (1998):463.

women's issues and other interests that bring women into politics, but rather the "shared interest in being represented."⁵² Female politicians play an important role in representing women's issues in Canadian politics. And although women are better represented by having more females involved, the numbers "must surpass the purely symbolic level to achieve the much more fundamental demand of the feminist movement -- gender equity in the political system."⁵³

Richard Ogmundson (2005) examines the importance of social characteristics such as gender, race and sexual orientation on decisions made by those in power. Would the presence of women and racial minorities in political positions be helpful to their constituencies? Research has shown that "gender, race and sexual orientation do have some influence on the attitudes and behaviours of those in key decision making positions" and that "people feel better if they see authority figures with social characteristics similar to their own."⁵⁴ Female legislators certainly have an impact on policy, particularly in the areas such as child support and domestic abuse. Gender differences are also found in areas of education, public office, city managers, judges and unions. Overall, studies have found desirable effects of women in decision-making, including constitutional language, foreign aid and economic development.

How Women Impact Local Government

Research conducted at the municipal level in the U.S. by Susan Abrams Beck (2001) studies the impact of women on local politics. She addresses two main areas: the 'procedural dimension', which looks at how women interact with their constituents, how they communicate with colleagues and how they assume their roles on local councils; and the 'substantive dimension,' which views how policies are changed to

52 Young, (2002):17.

53 Tremblay, (1998):465.

54 Ogmundson, R. "Does It Matter if Women, Minorities and Gays Govern? New Data Concerning an Old Question" *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 30:3. (2005):316.

reflect women's concerns. Beck's findings reveal that the main distinctions between male and female councillors are in their behaviour, their view of politics and in how they perceive their own role. Women tend to view themselves as 'public servants', while men embrace the role of 'politician.' Women gain satisfaction with tangible results and men enjoy the 'processes' of government, such as debating and negotiating.⁵⁵

Some scholars assume that female councillors should be focusing on a 'feminist' agenda, such as pay equity and public health, and therefore act in a substantive way for women, rather than just representing them. But Beck points out that although both women and men may have similar priorities, they treat the issues in a different manner. Women are consultative and consider the impact of decisions on the individual, whereas men tend to act on rationality and pursuing their own preferences. Crowley (2006) notes that in U.S. states with less than 15% representation, female legislators are forced to focus on women's issues, such as policies affecting families and children. Once the percentage moves above the 15%, however, both male and female politicians champion gender issues equally.⁵⁶ As Beck cautions, to fully understand how women impact local government, it is important to consider the existing political culture, as that influences how women perceive their municipality in the bigger political picture.⁵⁷

Two Cities: A Women's Perspective

In 'Tales of Two Cities', Sylvia Bashevkin (2006) contrasts two large cities that have recently undergone restructuring: London, United Kingdom and Toronto, Ontario. London's government was decentralized to 'renew local democracy' within the Greater London Area (GLA), while the City of Toronto and its five surrounding boroughs were amalgamated into a 'Megacity.'

⁵⁵ Beck, S.A. "Acting as Women" *The Impact of Women in Public Office* (2001):49-50.

⁵⁶ Crowley, (2006):530

⁵⁷ Beck, (2001):49-50.

Examining both cities from a women's perspective, she considers the impacts of the restructuring on women's groups and their issues. Through the lens of the citizenship of urban women, she measures the level of women's engagement (e.g. the number of female councillors and mayors), the development of municipal 'femocracies' (e.g. committees, bureaucratic units) and the degree to which women's concerns are incorporated into the planning cycle and official plans.⁵⁸

Under its new regime, the GLA's newly formed council elected over 40% female members, far surpassing most municipalities, and more than the Megacity's 30%. Positive contributing factors included London's more 'friendly' electoral system, no council incumbents and a progressive mayor who was committed to the active recruitment of women. Bashevkin found that the GLA's strong female representation on council had a direct impact on women's issues. Female councillors were to be more aware of women's issues than the male councillors, and could encourage council to consider issues such as childcare, women's safety and affordable housing. Women worked to build consensus in decision-making and were more community oriented.

The centralized structure of the Megacity, on the other hand, didn't particularly attract women to municipal office. With the conservative attitude of the new mayor, fewer available seats and fierce competition, there was less room for women on council, and the number of female councillors dropped from sixteen to thirteen seats. It was clear that the creation of the Megacity "eroded the quality of urban citizenship."⁵⁹ The top-down hierarchical approach was in direct opposition to more community focused, decentralized models that were in place prior to amalgamation. In all, the new Megacity council seemed to be undoing any advances previously made by advocacy groups. The issue of equity was eventually marginalized and became 'buried' in the CAO's office, and

58 Bashevkin, S.B. *Tales of Two Cities: Women And Municipal Restructuring in London and Toronto* (2006):115.

59 Bashevkin, (2006):120.

reports on diversity were basically ignored. Funding was cut to women's safety and anti-violence programs. Overall, the influence of women councillors was far less than it was prior to amalgamation.⁶⁰

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

How Does Canada Compare?

Women's under-representation in politics is not just a Canadian issue. Even in nations that have a strong record on women's political representation, obstacles continue to prevent women's engagement. Bochel's (2000) analysis of municipal female representation in various countries, shows that within the eleven European Communities, representation ranges from 7% in Luxembourg to 28% in Denmark, with an average of 19%. In the U.S. the percentages range from a high of 50% to a low of 6%, in Poland at 11% and in Japan, a paltry 4%. In Norway, however, representation is much higher, with 41% on county council and 31% on municipal councils, although women are still under-represented compared to men.⁶¹

In other countries, women's representation is actually declining. In Australia, for instance, the number of female mayors has decreased, and female representation at all levels has dropped by two thirds. In her review of the municipal environment in Victoria, Australia, Amanda Sinclair (1987) comments that the "forces shaping the participation of women in local government -- entrenched social and economic practices and attitudes -- are slow moving." Things are changing at such a sluggish pace that gender parity on municipal councils would not occur until the year 2040.⁶²

⁶⁰ *Bashevkin, (2006):120.*

⁶¹ *Bochel, C. & H.M. Bochel. The Careers of Councillors: Gender, Party And Politics (2000):114-117.*

⁶² *Sinclair, A., M. Bowman and L. Strahan. Getting the Numbers: Women in Local Government Municipal Association of Victoria (1987):9.*

Zimmerman (1994) concurs, and notes that under-representation is rampant worldwide and that the token representation seen today is “little more than symbolic.”⁶³ He suggests that the ramifications of this under-representation are threefold. First, excluding certain groups from governing agencies may result in issues receiving little consideration during the decision-making process. Second, those groups may feel ‘alienated’ from the political system and laws because they don’t have direct input into its development. Third, through their election systems, countries can either be inclusive to bring their citizens together, or exclusive and pull them apart.

How do other countries deal with gender issues in local government? In the patriarchal Japanese society, women are perceived to have different social backgrounds and motivations from men, and the male/female ratios have remained unchanged for the past 50 years. Japan boasts a mostly male culture and it is considered a positive influence to elect male candidates. Some even inherit seats from their predecessors, or use the benefit of blood ties, marriage ties and strong neighbourhood organizations to help them get elected. Women are encouraged to ‘campaign like men’ in order to be successful, but it may take several decades for things to change. Women councillors in Poland tend to be older, have more education and have worked in professional occupations as compared to the men, who were mainly farmers. There are more women at higher levels of government, and women are better represented in larger towns and cities as compared to smaller villages. This could be a result of strong trade unions assisting during the recruitment process and providing valuable political advice.⁶⁴

Although there is a wide range of experiences, most local councils remain under-represented, and comprise more middle class men than does the population. In order to improve the levels of representation, Bochel recommends that municipalities offer a

⁶³ Zimmerman, J.F. “Equity in Representation for Women and Minorities” *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities Rule*, W. and J.F. Zimmerman, eds. (1994):3.

⁶⁴ Bochel & Bochel, (2000):117-122.

standard level of remuneration, increase their focus on women's recruitment and retention, and utilize quota systems and proportional representation. France provides an example of successful representation, when their municipal representation increased to 47% after their adoption of a gender parity law in 2000.⁶⁵

Electoral Systems

In her review of female representation in democratic nations around the world spanning a 20-year period, Wilma Rule (1994) evaluates various election systems, using a scale ranging from 'women friendly' to 'women unfriendly.' The massive under-representation of females does not symbolize true democracy by any means, nor does it "adequately reflect the preferences of women and minorities."⁶⁶ Women continue to face barriers, created by social bias, such as narrow gender roles, unequal laws and education, discriminatory socio-economic conditions and 'women unfriendly' electoral systems. These barriers are "typically interrelated and mutually reinforcing," and rather than try to change these social biases, it may be easier to amend the laws that control women's social, economic and political opportunities.⁶⁷

Rule finds that the type of electoral system used is the single most important predictor of women's recruitment.⁶⁸ Procedures that offer the most opportunity to women are best, but whether women take advantage of them depends on the context of the country. 'Women friendly' electoral systems include party-list proportional representation, combined proportional representation/party list and two-member districts, while the 'women unfriendly' systems are the single member districts (plurality system).

65 Bochel & Bochel, (2000):117-122.

66 Rule, "Parliaments of, by, and for the People: Except for Women?" *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact On Women And Minorities* (1994):15.

67 Rule, (1994):15.

68 Rule, (1994):16.

Progress toward equal participation is proceeding, but slowly. Electoral reform to 'women friendly' systems is a first step toward equal representation.⁶⁹

Norway

One leading example of a successful proportional representational government is Norway. In 1986, it was the first country to elect a female leader, and female representation totalled 31% in municipalities and 40% in county seats. Jill Bystydzienski (1994) provides an analysis of the necessary factors to achieve "world-record women's representation in government."⁷⁰

Norway has positive historical and cultural factors that are favourable to women's entry into politics. Their history includes a culture with strong ideals of equality and social justice, whose citizens view the government as a trustworthy "equalizer of economic and social conditions."⁷¹ Even though Norway remains a patriarchal society, it co-exists with the ideals of self-sufficient women. Entrenched with a strong expectation of 'organization participation', citizens are accustomed to being involved in political activity.

Norwegian political institutions facilitate women's participation and women's groups are very active in recruitment, especially at the local level. Norway prides itself on using descriptive representation to mirror the population, and candidates are nominated based on their social background, education, occupation, age and sex, to ensure a balanced slate of candidates. Public authorities cover campaign costs, which allow all citizens to participate without financial hardship.⁷²

Norway has a well-organized women's movement dedicated to electing more women to both local and national legislatures. A campaign to elect more women to

⁶⁹ Rule, (1994):26.

⁷⁰ Bystydzienski, J.M. "Norway: Achieving World-Record Women's Representation in Government" *Electoral Systems in Comparative Perspective: Their Impact on Women and Minorities* (1994):55.

⁷¹ Bystydzienski, (1994):56.

⁷² Bystydzienski, (1994):58.

office, which was initiated at the municipal level, resulted in increased awareness and higher level of acceptance of women in government. As a result, female representation on local councils more than doubled.⁷³

⁷³ *Bystydzienski, (1994):59.*

BARRIERS TO ENTRY

Numerous obstacles, both structural and societal, are currently facing women who wish to enter municipal politics. A summary of scholarly works and other research confirm some of the most common barriers [Bashevkin (1993); Bochel (2000); Brodie (1985); Dyck (2005); Equal Voice (2006); Federation of Canadian Municipalities (2004); MacIvor (1996); Maille (1994); Nova Scotia Union of Municipalities (2004); Rule (1994); Young (2002); and Zimmerman (1994)].

Cultural norms: Dominant societal and cultural norms guide the behaviour of groups, and in some cultures, traditions deny women the same access to public office as men. The 'proper' behaviour of women does not include political activism. Women's roles are often held in the 'private sphere,' which discourages them from entering the 'public' political environment. Professional and politically active women often encounter prejudice. In some countries, women officials whose families have a long history in politics, actually enter office only by replacing a deceased relative. Most of these women are well past their child rearing years.

Different socialization patterns: Women are not socialized in a way that prepares them to hold positions of political power. They view politics as a masculine domain, and if they enter, there is a sense that they do not belong there. The sometimes technical nature of municipal business, such as roads, waste and water takes precedence over a focus on social programs. In addition, there is a general lack of awareness and information on how to get involved in municipal government. Women tend to work in traditionally female occupations, and are not encouraged to take on leadership roles, so they are ill-prepared for the political world. The 'eligible pool' of suitable candidates therefore, is smaller. As relative newcomers, women's perception of politics is much different than men's. The idea of joining a strongly controlled elitist environment, full of conflict and bureaucracy, does not appeal to many women.

The political environment: Politics were established well before women had rights to hold office, and since that time, has made no accommodations for the gender roles that women bring to the table. The values and standards of political life are traditionally male, and municipal politics remains an 'old boy's network.' Many municipalities retain non-inclusive policies and practices, where gender discrimination is reported at many levels. The current political culture, one that is adversarial and not consensus building, discourages many women from pursuing political careers. That, along with the fact that the rules of the political game have not changed, disadvantages women as potential candidates.

Negative gender stereotyping: There is a public perception that women cannot make a difference in politics, and this opinion is often perpetuated by the media. The gender imbalance in reporting between male and female politicians is obvious. The behaviour of many women in the public eye is more closely followed than their male counterparts, and they are subject to gender stereotyping and negative media attention, which reduces their credibility. Consequently, women feel frustrated with the system and many give up on municipal government as a vehicle for change. Young women considering entering politics often feel discouraged due to the unequal treatment of female politicians and lack of positive role models. The minimal numbers of women elected provides an indication of the value of women in society.

Lack of necessary local networks: Networking is essential to garner support for any candidate. A strong connection exists between the business, law, finance and medical communities to promote political candidates. In many cases, women don't hold the necessary criteria, such as influence, prestige, money, a higher level of education or a professional career, to participate in financial or power circles. And because of the poor connection between municipalities and women's groups, the level of local

networking is very limited for most women, and they are not in a position to be considered as possible candidates.

Low socio-economic status: This barrier restricts women from securing the necessary funding for campaigns. Campaigns are becoming increasingly more expensive to run, and there is strong competition for campaign dollars. In many large urban centres, a mayoral race can cost the same as a federal or provincial post. The type of employment, income bracket and level of education all impact on the availability of choices for women. Women who work only within the home experience inequities in access to financial resources, but those who are employed are also disadvantaged, as they continue to be paid an average of seventy cents for each dollar earned by men.

Lack of previous political experience: Related experience helps a candidate achieve a political career. Women's experience is often with volunteer associations or women's groups, and if they do decide to enter politics, they are frequently pushed into 'pink collar' positions. Political supporters often discourage female candidates or sacrifice them against stronger male contenders, who are sure to be winners.

Demands of a political career: These demands can clash with women's personal life and family commitments, creating 'role conflict.' The strain of managing the two roles of family life and a political career is very difficult. Women are constrained by the responsibility of home and children, and are often unable to travel for extended periods or spend long hours at work and in meetings. The political rules and operations do not recognize the family issues that women contend with on a daily basis, and therefore many women feel hesitant to enter the political arena. A definite double standard exists; men are not chastised for giving up time with their family to pursue a political career, while women are seen as neglecting their families.

Incumbent advantage: Incumbents have a distinct advantage over newcomers, which causes a competitive imbalance. Fundraising is much easier for incumbents, as

they have secured political contacts and financial backers in place. They may also have support staff that can assist with their promotion during elections, and have the benefit of name recognition from the media. Incumbents are already familiar with the 'rules of the political game' and have existing links to their constituents, giving them a 'lock' on the local election process.

Unfavourable electoral systems: Different voting systems have been evaluated over the years, and conclude that single-member districts (first past the post) favours the majority group, with one exception -- women. Women are disadvantaged by this system as compared to multi-member districts, where voters can cast a ballot for more than one candidate and where women are often selected. A system of proportional representation has been adopted by many countries, to ensure direct representation for women and minorities, and a more representative government. Complex election laws and regulations, nomination requirements, fundraising procedures and tight deadlines can be detrimental to potential candidates.

PROGRAMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Canada, there are several initiatives currently focused on increasing the level of female representation within the municipal political arena. Three of these programs will be reviewed: the Federation of Canadian Municipalities 'Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government,' the Equal Voice 'Getting to the Gate' program and the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities 'Women in Local Government Project.'

Federation of Canadian Municipalities

In 2004, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, sponsored by the Status of Women Canada, initiated a research project to examine the issue of women in local government. With guidance from the FCM National Steering Committee, comprised of academics, councillors, mayors and FCM staff, they gathered information from municipal

governments, women's organizations and over 600 women in six communities across Canada. The results of this project were compiled in a comprehensive report entitled 'Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making.' This extensive document provides a detailed account of the research framework, findings and recommendations for next steps. Their initial research indicated eight key findings, including the reasons why women wish to participate in municipal government, the existence of barriers to participation and the absence of policies that include women in municipal decision making.⁷⁴ The report was accompanied by a companion piece, a 'Resource Kit' to assist municipalities attract more women to municipal politics. The kit outlines best practices and provides examples of success stories of various municipalities. It suggests strategies to help municipalities encourage women to run, and addresses the barriers that currently exist. The kit also reviews the responsibilities of municipal governments, the role of committees and avenues for citizen involvement. Overall, the resource kit offers municipalities a starting point from which to build upon in recruiting more women to their councils.⁷⁵

The outcome of these reports prompted FCM to continue with a second phase of the project, through the introduction of the 'Committee for Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government' with a mandate to "promote and support the participation of women in government."⁷⁶ The specific goals of this committee were to analyse the obstacles to women's participation, to take specific action to reduce these obstacles and to encourage women to participate. Their main objectives were to build political support for a national strategy and to develop a national strategic action plan to increase women's participation in municipal decision-making.⁷⁷

74 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Report" (2004):9-12.

75 FCM: "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Resource Kit" (2004).

76 FCM: "Women in Politics: The Big Picture and FCM's Response" (2007):1.

77 FCM: (2007):2.

Phase 2 began in 2005, and included a Canada wide tour to increase the level of support for women's political participation, through media coverage and building local networks. Research findings from this project were published in a document entitled 'Getting to 30% by 2026.' The goal of 30% representation is derived from a United Nations target as the "minimal percentage of women required for government to reflect women's concerns."⁷⁸ A critical mass of 30% can shift governmental and organizational culture. To reach that target, Canada would need to elect 2,120 more women to municipal office; this translates to an increase of 100 women per year for the next 20 years.

Recommendations from FCM

In the 'Getting to 30%' document, the FCM published a list of sixteen strategies for use by municipal councils to enhance the involvement of women in municipal governments. They attempted to comprehensively address the barriers to participation, as outlined in their initial report.

The FCM presents a listing of recommendations, actions for councils and examples of best practices for municipalities to consider.⁷⁹

- promote community discussion about the role of women in municipal government
- initiate campaign schools within their community
- develop a strategy to recruit women to stand for election and to hold public office
- provide information to the public about how municipal government is organized and how it works
- lower systemic barriers by actively recruiting more women to committees, boards and commissions to ensure gender balance

⁷⁸ FCM: (2007):2.

⁷⁹ FCM: "Getting to 30% by 2026" (2006):5-13.

- stagger or shorten the length of terms to create more vacancies and promote diversity
- develop and enforce a code of ethics to prohibit demeaning conduct toward fellow councillors
- provide training for council members to enhance leadership skills, time management and conflict resolution
- work with employers to develop programs for women interested in running for office
- recognize the contributions of local women who have been leaders in the community
- offer accessible links to resources for women to learn from others
- encourage interest in young people in local politics through programs such as 'councillor for a day' or include a youth as an observer on council
- facilitate internship and job shadowing opportunities for young people, and develop an online mentoring program
- adapt meeting times for council and provide childcare, or provide subsidies for childcare or eldercare
- cap municipal election spending or provide financial support to candidates based on need
- assess the implications for both women and men of any policy that is introduced by council

In addition, the FCM offers a sample resolution (*see Appendix 1*) for councils to adopt to show their support in increasing women's representation in municipal government, and

to “address barriers that impede women’s participation.”⁸⁰ They also provide provincial statistics of male and female municipal leaders, categorized by mayors, councillors and CAO’s (see *Appendix 2*).

Equal Voice

Equal Voice (EV) is a multi-partisan volunteer organization focused on electing more women at all levels of government. It operates many local chapters across the country and is funded by several corporate sponsors and individual donors. Their aim is to achieve a ‘critical mass’ of elected women to reduce exclusionary practices, decrease stereotyping and help change the political culture to be more egalitarian. The EV is governed by an impressive advisory board which includes Senators, MPs and women who currently or previously held political positions. The list includes, among others, Kim Campbell, Senator Pat Carney, Sheila Copps, Flora MacDonald, Senator Lucie Pépin, Janet Ecker, Barbara Hall and Alexa McDonough.

The organization has developed a comprehensive online campaign school, ‘Getting to the Gate,’ which offers a complete package for women interested in entering politics, at any level of government. The school includes background information about gender inequality in Canadian politics, some history of women in Canada and their struggles to achieve parity, barriers to entry and the need for a critical mass. From there, the program takes the user through a series of steps, first to determine the considerations before entering politics, such as funding issues and expected time commitments, outlines basic campaign rules and provides many links to resources and other relevant material. This is an essential process for any woman who is considering entering the political scene.

⁸⁰ FCM “Getting to 30% by 2026” (2006):15.

Recommendations from Equal Voice

In addition to operating their free-of-charge online campaign school, Equal Voice has also launched public awareness campaigns, the National Awareness Campaign, the Ontario Challenge Public Awareness Campaign and the Canada Challenge Public Awareness Campaign. Through the introduction of these campaigns and ongoing initiatives, the EV is working diligently to achieve these objectives:⁸¹

- improve media awareness on women in politics
- increase participation in the online campaign school
- monitor the level of female participation in political parties
- promote gender sensitive courses in municipalities
- challenge both provincial and federal leaders to run more women candidates in the upcoming elections
- introduce regional chapters and university campus clubs to promote women in all levels of government
- provide networking and mentoring opportunities and host campaign training schools
- work on electoral reform to increase the number of women elected
- track the number of women candidates running in elections

Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities

The province of Nova Scotia reports one of the lowest rates of female municipal representation in the country. In 2004, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities (UNSM), with support from the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the YWCA of Halifax, initiated a research project to explore “how to remove barriers that

⁸¹ *Equal Voice “Women in Canadian Politics: Backgrounder”*:5.

hinder women's involvement in local government decision making".⁸² Both the steering committee and the working group included municipal leaders, members from UNSM and the sponsoring agencies, as well as female committee members from various community organizations and regional boards. The goals of this project were to identify opportunities to involve more women in municipal government, engage a diversity of women in consultation of municipal government and to recommend methods of women's recruitment and retention.

The 'Women in Local Government Project' incorporated a review of existing research and initiatives, a survey of Nova Scotia's 55 municipalities, and meetings with six focus groups to gather information on women's experiences and perspectives. Almost 70% of the municipalities responded to the survey, and the findings culminated in a highlights report, 'Untapped Resources,' published in 2006. Results indicated that far too few women in Nova Scotia participate in local decision-making, and identified the many barriers to participation. Initial suggestions to combat these barriers included: to encourage women to run for office; to involve women in a consultative manner in government decisions; to hire more women in municipal administration at senior level positions; and to offer professional development opportunities and training in gender and race awareness for municipal staff.

Women make up more than half of the province's population, but hold less than one in three positions on councils throughout the province. The report clearly showed that to build a "representative and responsive government, more women needed to be involved in municipal politics."⁸³

82 Haggart, E. and K. Vom Scheidt. "Untapped Resources: Women and Municipal Government in Nova Scotia: Highlights Report." *Women in Local Government Project (2006)*:1.

83 Haggart & Vom Scheidt, (2006):2.

Recommendations from the UNSM

Recommendations from this committee focused on seven key areas:

- develop a public awareness campaign designed to: increase awareness of the issue of under-representation; reach out to diverse women and youth and women's organizations; highlight the role of municipal government as a viable career option (targeted at young women), and offer support and informational materials
- offer workshops on diversity, gender analysis and affirmative action
- work with the Association of Municipal Administrators (AMA), to offer staff training in applying a 'gender lens' when developing policies and processes
- coordinate with women's equality-seeking organizations, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and municipal leaders across Nova Scotia to develop and implement an action plan for encouraging women to run for elected office, through such initiatives as information sessions, campaign schools, and presentations by women councillors and mayors
- strengthen the supports for women elected councillors, through orientation programs, mentoring programs and informal networking events
- provide impartial support for municipal staff to deal with workplace conflicts or harassment issues
- request that the Government of Nova Scotia collect voter age and gender information from municipal elections

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE

Although all three of these programs are relatively new, it appears at first glance that their recommendations effectively address the barriers to participation.

A shift in cultural norms could be achieved by offering workshops on diversity, informing the public about the operations of municipal government, initiating a strong recruitment effort to encourage women to hold public office and introducing youth internship programs and mentoring programs. The introduction of campaign schools, the promotion of municipal government as a possible career, the introduction of positive women role models in the community and information about women's role in local government, outreach programs for youth and university campus clubs to promote political participation, all address the issue of differential socialization.

One of the biggest issues is to change the organizational culture of politics. This could be achieved by making municipal government more accessible to citizens, considering both women and minorities when making policy, providing orientation programs for new councillors, offering gender sensitivity courses in municipalities, recruiting more women to serve on committees and boards, and introducing a code of ethics in council to prohibit demeaning conduct. To combat negative gender stereotyping, municipalities could adopt public awareness campaigns and offer workshops on gender analysis and affirmative action. A program for media awareness should be introduced to eliminate the bias in reporting.

Networking barriers can be minimized through networking events, mentoring opportunities, increased support with women's organizations and linking women with the necessary resources to succeed in politics. Socio-economic issues can be handled through the introduction of a cap on election spending and the provision of financial support to all candidates. The lack of previous experience can be addressed through

employer support, mentoring programs, and orientation and training for council members. The provision for gender roles and the demands of political life can be achieved by supporting work-family balance and working with employers to develop programs for women interested in running for office, adapting meeting times for council and making provisions for childcare or eldercare.

To reduce incumbent advantage, the spending cap, along with online campaign schools would be beneficial to allow potential candidates to learn the rules and regulations before deciding to run. Changes to the electoral system, such as staggering or shortening the length of terms to create more vacancies and challenging other levels of government to run more women candidates, could result in additional women in politics.

One of the biggest strengths of each of these programs is their impressive communications plan. The FCM initiatives are presented at their annual conference, which is attended by municipal leaders from across the country. The UNSM project works closely with local and regional associations (Association for Municipal Managers, YWCA, Nova Scotia Women's Advisory Group on the Status of Women). The Equal Voice has an impressive advisory group and is well networked. Partnerships are essential to the success of the programs, and these contacts act as conduits to individual municipalities. And it appears that the message is being heard. However, there is no way to know if municipalities have adopted the program recommendations or strategies unless these organizations conduct follow up sessions.

To that end, all three organizations have requested that municipalities provide them with up to date information after each municipal election or when changes occur within municipal governments. This may be the vehicle for the beginnings of an all-inclusive database to bring the issue of women's under representation to the forefront of every municipal agenda, and the greatest resource available to any political science

researcher. Feedback is desperately needed, so that these associations, networks of women's community groups, municipalities and others can focus their efforts where they are most needed.

MUNICIPAL ACTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Following the release of its 'Getting to 30%' initiative, the FCM has recently introduced two new projects. The 'Toolkit to Municipal Politics' and the 'Regional Champion Campaign' were launched at the FCM's 71st Annual Conference in Quebec City in June 2008. The toolkit provides tangible advice to any women wishing to enter municipal politics. It outlines strategies about how to get involved, what to consider before deciding to run for office, understanding the job, the nomination process, how to fundraise, how to run a campaign and how to deal with the media. The Regional Champions Campaign encourages municipalities to nominate a person to work in their communities to "encourage, support and mentor" women who may be interested in entering local politics. That person will recruit a local team of volunteers as well as other champions in other communities. The desired effect is to have a "national network of champions" that will set up campaign schools, recruit potential candidates and to promote women's participation in local government.⁸⁴

In addition, the FCM has recently adopted a policy statement regarding gender equality and local governance. They have encouraged municipalities to do the same, and several cities (Ottawa, Vancouver and Montreal), have made a formal commitment to gender equality, through the adoption of a charter in their council.⁸⁵

Across the country, programs are being developed to assist municipalities increase their levels of female representation. In Montreal, the Chantier démocratique Task Force developed a 'citizen guidebook,' which provides information about how to prepare to participate in municipal decision making. Ottawa has initiated a program entitled 'For all Women,' which includes a lobby training program for women and

84 FCM "Regional Champions Campaign" (2008) (forthcoming)

85 FCM "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Resource Kit" (2004):10.

women's organizations to learn how municipal government works. They have also recently published a 'gender equality guide.' The Canadian Congress of Muslim Women have worked with FCM to compile a report to assist women in their organization become more actively involved in the municipal process. In the City of Vancouver, four of the eleven councillors are women, and in 2005, they adopted a 'gender equality strategy.'⁸⁶

Several other municipalities have adopted some of the recommendations as outlined by the FCM, or have brought the issue to the attention of council for action. In London, for example, a woman councillor put forward a motion to review the recommendations of the FCM report and integrate the strategies with a focus on more inclusive practices within the city's governance. The motion was referred to the CAO, who reviewed the strategies and the positive practices currently in place. A report was compiled, addressing the areas of policy, research, partnerships, funding, and women's engagement. The report noted that the city "supports the development of a more inclusive community for women in municipal government in many ways" and noted that the report was distributed to all departments to "raise awareness about how to continue to support women's participation in municipal government and municipal decision making."⁸⁷

Equal Voice has had initial success with its challenges to both the provincial and federal governments. It reports that several political parties have already made firm commitments to elect more women in upcoming elections, using various programs and initiatives. Included on the list are the Quebec Liberal Party, the Ontario Liberal Party, the federal Liberal Party, the Bloc Québécois, the Ontario NDP, the federal NDP, the Green Party, and the federal Conservative Party.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ FCM "Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Resource Kit" (2004):19-20.

⁸⁷ City of London "Board of Control Agenda" (June 21, 2006):2.

⁸⁸ Equal Voice "Women in Canadian Politics: Background." (2007):1.

At the federal level, the issue of women's under-representation is most certainly on the political agenda. In 2007, Senator Poulin presented a motion to request that the Committee on Human Rights be authorized to examine gender equity within Parliament. This motion was strongly supported by one of the original members (and only female) of the Lortie Commission, Senator Lucie Pépin. She notes that after all of the work of the Commission and the subsequent recommendations, Canadian women have still not broken through the 'glass ceiling' of Canadian politics. She feels that the status quo is no longer an option and that something needs to be done to rectify this situation.⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

As this paper has explored, the under-representation of women in Canadian politics is not a new problem. The recommendations from the Royal Commission on the Status of Women marked the beginning of a new era to recognize women as equals, but progress since that time in the political arena has been painfully slow. Exclusionary practices, as well as cultural, legal and social barriers to women's participation continue to exist. We should be striving for an inclusive environment in which all citizens are able to participate. Democracy is the target for all levels of government, and municipalities across Canada must make the initiative of equal representation a top priority.

It is too soon to tell if the recommendations proposed by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Equal Voice, the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities, and others like them, will be sufficient to remove or reduce these barriers and to increase the number of more women being elected. While some initiatives can be easily accommodated, such as awareness campaigns or workshops, others will require substantial modifications to existing institutional cultures.

89 Pépin, L. "Gender Equity in Parliament" *Speech* (2007):1.

Barriers to participation will only be removed through major political and cultural changes. Without these changes, it is difficult to imagine any improvement in the number of elected women in Canada. The deterrents to equal participation, such as systemic discrimination, sexism, power gender imbalances and marginalization of women and minorities must be addressed in order to move forward.

Women can, and do, make a difference in government, through the representation of women's issues, by acting as role models, and by providing alternative perspectives in decision-making and policy initiatives. As more women are elected and the numbers reach a critical mass, other women will be inspired to run. This critical mass can lead to long term changes to the Canadian political landscape. With more women involved, stereotyping and exclusionary practices should be decreased. The political culture would migrate to a more egalitarian environment, as the norms and social practices of meetings and procedures begin to change. Women and women's issues would be considered legitimate topics in public policy debate.⁹⁰

Lessons can be learned from looking at the successful practices of other countries and adapting them to our political environment. Changes to the municipal electoral system may be in order to effect any change.

The fight for political equality continues at all levels of government, but at the municipal level, the issues are closer to home for most citizens. At the moment however, "by any measure, women are only halfway to equal."⁹¹

90 *Equal Voice "Women in Canadian Politics: Backgrounder."* (2007):1

91 *Trimble, L.J. & J. Arscott. "Still Counting: Women in Politics across Canada"* (2003)

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Sample Model Resolution for Support from Council

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the following wording be adopted:

WHEREAS in Canada, women's representation in municipal government is 21.4 per cent and women make up just 20.8 per cent of Members of Parliament, placing Canada 44th out of 188 countries for the number of women in national politics;

WHEREAS there is a democratic deficit; one that sees half of our population underrepresented in our political institutions;

WHEREAS we want to close that gender gap because Canada and our communities cannot afford to lose the insights and expertise of half their citizens;
and

WHEREAS we need women in municipal government to reflect the life experiences of women;

BE IT RESOLVED that Council will strive to address the barriers that impede women's participation in our community; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that Council support the Federation of Canadian Municipalities' national campaign to increase the number of women on Council to 30 per cent of the total by 2026.

Source: Federation of Canadian Municipalities: Getting to 30% by 2026

Appendix 2: Male - Female Municipal Statistics 2007

Male – Female Municipal Statistics 2007

| Province | Mayors | | Councillors | | CAOs | |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Alberta | 290 | 58 | 1184 | 377 | 184 | 163 |
| British-Columbia | 148 | 38 | 816 | 379 | 144 | 40 |
| Saskatchewan | 747 | 70 | 3191 | 529 | 252 | 539 |
| Manitoba | 185 | 11 | 843 | 129 | 89 | 107 |
| Ontario | 374 | 72 | 2131 | 713 | 275 | 171 |
| Quebec | 1053 | 165 | 5691 | 1958 | 545 | 675 |
| New-Brunswick | 91 | 15 | 396 | 134 | 52 | 51 |
| Nova-Scotia | 51 | 5 | 294 | 87 | 44 | 11 |
| Prince-Edward-Island | 57 | 20 | 284 | 117 | 25 | 50 |
| Newfoundland | 225 | 55 | 998 | 372 | 65 | 218 |
| Northwest Territories | 26 | 7 | 69 | 48 | 17 | 5 |
| Nunavut | 19 | 7 | 109 | 60 | 21 | 4 |
| Yukon Territories | 5 | 4 | 21 | 12 | 5 | 3 |
| Totals | 3271 | 527 | 16027 | 4915 | 1718 | 2037 |

Source: Federation of Canadian Municipalities