

Chapter 1

Doing the Work of Representation, Nova Scotia Style

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Defining representation has been a central theoretical concern in much of the political science literature focusing on women and politics. Simplifying Hannah Pitkin's formulation (1972), researchers have distinguished "descriptive" representation from "substantive," the former meaning that women appear among those elected, the latter pointing to resulting change in policy outcomes that is more favourable to women. Tabulating the number of women present in elected office — descriptive representation — is important worldwide as a driver for measures promoting women's participation. However, neither activists nor theorists consider mere presence, however necessary, to be sufficient. The real goal has to be substantive representation in the form of policy impact, and this, unfortunately, is elusive. Political insiders and most analysts are convinced that the presence of women makes a critical difference in policy terms, but scholarly research has been unable thus far to find it. Women's interests and corresponding women-friendly legislative outcomes remain hard to define, hard to identify and relatively infrequent (Dahlerup 2010). A symposium was able to agree only on what Karen Beckwith calls a "meta interest" for women, "their full inclusion in political power and governance" (2011: 428).

If neither descriptive nor substantive representation are sufficient, what remains to be considered as either a political problem or a scholarly puzzle? Arguments based on ideas about justice, democratic legitimacy or the use of citizens' talents or experiences are important but hardly specific to the election of women. How shall we make an argument for more women as such to be elected at all? These questions become all the more urgent as women continue to be elected in greater numbers. We are convinced that it is time to return to a strand in the literature that has been neglected. Drude Dahlerup points to a notion of "politics as a workplace," noting that "political life has its social conventions, its tone, its formal and informal rules and norms of cooperation and conflict," which vary from country to country and change over time (1988: 289; 2006: 211–212). This notion of politics as a workplace fruitfully draws our attention to what politicians actually do in the course of their job as an elected representative, and how that job is defined by concrete institutions of government in a particular geographic location at a certain time. What should then be of most interest in relation to women legislators

is, in Dahlerup's words, "their ability to become effective in their work, to perform their tasks as politicians the way they individually prefer, in spite of being a minority inside and outside parliament" (2006: 512).

Dahlerup is in part returning to another of the older strands in the literature on women and society, the reminder that women are still enough disadvantaged that they are effectively, even though not numerically, a "minority group" (Hacker 1951). Her wider argument is, of course, an application to politics of Rosabeth Moss Kanter's suggestion that a larger presence of minorities would gradually affect a workplace in terms of the perception of them and their own performance and power (1977). In this chapter, we accordingly examine the functioning of Nova Scotia's MLAs, examining gender-differentiated experiences as well as those conditions that may have more impact on the women legislators.

The sense of politics as a concrete place of work intersects with Iris Marion Young's call to examine deliberative processes of representation as opposed to the easy indicator of votes on election day or in the legislature. Young calls for holding legislators to account by means of discussions through which citizens re-authorize their legislators in an ongoing, continuous process, in a series of interrelated activities and relationships (2000: 133). Although no currently existing democracy satisfies Young's expectations for deliberative democracy, she usefully turns attention to the work that legislators do in an ongoing way to build and maintain relationships with their constituents.

In a Canadian context, Linda Trimble reminds us to pay attention to how a parliamentary political system actually operates. Strict party discipline in all of Canada's executive-dominated legislatures dooms from the beginning any prospects for women — or indeed any backbenchers — to exercise substantial influence on policy or parliamentary procedures (Trimble 2008: 90–91; Goodyear-Grant and Crosskill 2011). At the same time, unlike legislators elected in multi-member, proportional systems, Canadian legislators each represent a specific riding, where the bulk of representational work occurs. Consequently, through a multiplicity of activities, Canadian constituents hold legislators accountable. In addition, unlike the procedures in many other legislative systems, it is local party activists who authorize candidates to stand for election on their behalf.

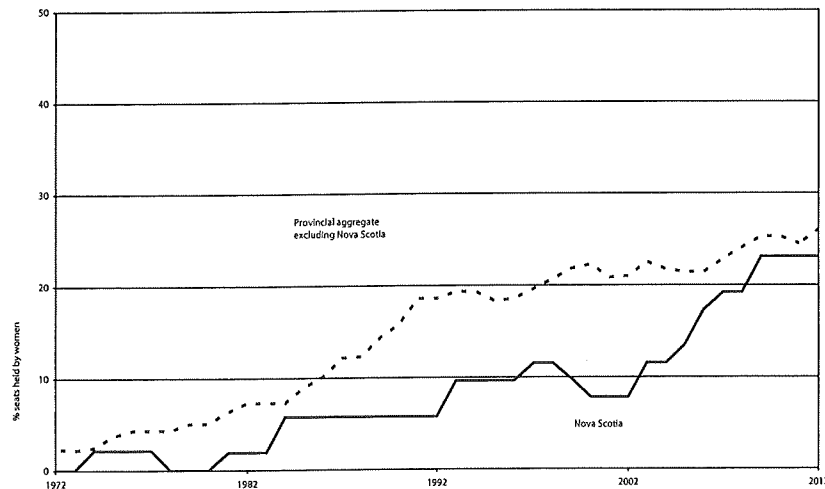
This chapter investigates how women legislators do the work of representation in Nova Scotia. We seek to show how an enlarged minority of women now operates in the Nova Scotia legislature. At under a quarter of the members, women legislators are still a small group in the House of Assembly. Women legislators generally almost never reach the roughly 50 percent they comprise in the population, but they constitute a minority that is steadily, if slowly, increasing worldwide. In the Nordic parliaments, on which Dahlerup based her work, the proportion of women legislators had risen substantially

by 1985 from immediate postwar levels of under 10 percent to as high as 45 percent for Sweden (Dahlerup 1988: 282). By 2012 the average share of women in the five Nordic parliaments was 42 percent (IPU 2012). Although Nova Scotia cannot match such levels, the women representatives here seem able to operate quite effectively inside as well as outside the legislature.

However, the particular circumstances of how the Nova Scotia government came to be elected in 2009 — with a greater number of women included — lays bare an entirely new obstacle. We interviewed all the women sitting in the legislature, including the newly elected NDP MLAs, and they reported that they encounter, in their constituencies, a form of opposition not discussed in the literature. At a time when the Conservatives form the national government of Canada, their provincial cousins, the Progressive Conservatives, benefit from that connection to power. Provincial PC politicians can therefore, in anticipation of winning seats back in the next election, exert local influence to oppose the new NDP members. Though not gender-specific, that sort of opposition seems likely to be particularly difficult for women MLAs to counter, and therefore highly relevant to attempts to increase representation by women in politics. We discuss the problem below, after presenting of some of the less obvious gendered dimensions of legislative life in Nova Scotia.

Perched on the rocky edge of the North Atlantic, separated by a narrow isthmus from the mainland, Nova Scotia is literally on the periphery of national affairs. Until recently, Nova Scotia was notorious for the small

Figure 1.1 Proportions of Seats Held by Women in Nova Scotia, Compared to Other Provincial Legislatures, 1972–2012



Source: Women in the Provincial and Territorial Legislatures, Parliament of Canada <<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/compilations/ProvinceTerritory/Women.aspx>>

percentage of women elected to provincial office (Arscott 1997). Figure 1.1 shows just far it lagged behind the other provinces in the 1980s and 1990s, when women began to be elected in greater numbers throughout Canada. In fact, Nova Scotia did not approach the national average until 2009. Nova Scotia, furthermore, was the last province to appoint a woman to Cabinet (in 1985). Table 1.1 lists the number of women elected and appointed to Executive Council (or Cabinet) by party affiliation since 1978. It yields solid confirmation of a partisan explanation of how Nova Scotia caught up to the rest of the provincial legislatures. In 2009, the people of Nova Scotia elected, for the first time, an NDP government. The NDP had long sought out women candidates, so that the rise of the New Democrats brought greater numbers of women into the House with every election, to the point that the province caught up to the national average in terms of women elected (23 percent in 2011).¹

Nova Scotia is a small province, with a population of just under one million people. The province was in economic decline for much of the twentieth century, with a persistent pattern of high unemployment, out-migration of young people and delayed urbanization. Historical reliance on manufacturing, fishing, forestry and mining proved precarious during an era of free-trade agreements, globalization and low commodity prices. In that context, the federal government's cuts to transfer payments and general spending intensified an already dire economic outlook. By the second decade of the twenty-first century, however, those years of retrenchment and structural

Table 1.1 Women Elected and Appointed to Executive Council, Nova Scotia, 1978–2009

Premier	Governing Party	Election	Women Elected			Women in Executive Council
			NDP	PC	Liberal	
Darrell Dexter	NDP	2009	9	0	3	4
Rodney MacDonald	PC	2006	5	3	1	3
John Hamm	PC	2003	4	1	1	1
John Hamm	PC	1999	2	3	0	1
Russell MacLellan	LIB	1998	5	0	1	3
John Savage	LIB	1993	1	0	4	2
John Buchanan	PC	1988	1	1	1	1
John Buchanan	PC	1984	1	2	0	1
John Buchanan	PC	1981	1	0	0	0
John Buchanan	PC	1978	0	0	0	0

adjustment were largely in the rearview mirror, as a surge of prosperity in Canada carried the province along with it.

This background is essential to understanding political life in the province. Size matters. Politics operates on a remarkably accessible scale in a small province with little in-migration from abroad or elsewhere in Canada and with a legislature of fifty-two members. And it sometimes seems as if almost everyone who is politically active has a politician somewhere in the family tree and can claim some sort of lineage, some more prestigious than others. Politics on such an intimate scale yields transparency in the sense that, methodologically, scholars can fairly easily observe, identify and evaluate processes and practices of representation. Much as there are few secrets in a small town, there is less complexity to cloud the analytical lens in a small legislature. This context has important implications for how — and how successfully — women legislators do the work of representation. Furthermore, an improved understanding of their political situation may also shed light on the challenges facing women elsewhere in the world, in political settings that are similarly rural, small-scale and on the economic periphery (Carbert and Black 2003: 78).

This chapter is based on interviews conducted in 2011 with the twelve women elected to the Nova Scotia House of Assembly in 2009, four of whom became Cabinet ministers. Material was selected for the chapter on the basis of being novel — not simply confirming existing research — gender-specific and also universal, in the sense of being applicable to political systems other than Nova Scotia's.² We do not reproduce material that is either idiosyncratic or sensitive because of the small number of women interviewed. The NDP's ongoing effort to communicate its agenda and achievements to the general public was a dominant message from the interviews with NDP representatives, but that issue belongs to a different study. So too does any detailed discussion of the "aspirant" quota (for candidacies, in the NDP) that has led to Canada being included among those more than one hundred nations that have gender quotas in place (Matland 2006: 289).

Extraordinary Women from Ordinary Lives

The women who sit in the Nova Scotia House of Assembly are remarkable individuals, yet in most cases their lives prior to being elected are not particularly noteworthy. What distinguishes them from the general population is an exceptional zeal for the public good. This point is substantiated by our interviews with women legislators and examination of public material related to their backgrounds. Table 1.2 contains a list of the women elected in 2009, giving constituency name, the year first elected to the provincial legislature and occupation.

A few generalizations arise from the life stories of women in the Nova

Scotia legislature. The first is that partisan identification is remarkably fluid here. These women grew up with various versions of the traditional “family vote,” where partisanship is effectively inherited. But they often shifted after becoming politically involved. The NDP was the principal beneficiary, and it is worth noting that the provincial PCs lost three women (Karen Casey, Diana Whalen and Maureen MacDonald) who originally worked for the party. Whalen served on a PC riding association and Casey, who later joined the Liberals, was initially elected as a provincial PC member and even served in the Cabinet. Senior NDP Minister MacDonald had her formative, disillusioning political experience working on Flora MacDonald’s failed 1976 bid for leadership of the PCs. Such movement from one party to another suggests that a “red tory” tradition — traditional British conservatism combined with support for the welfare state and state-directed ventures in the economy — continues to be more durable in the Maritimes than elsewhere in Canada (Conrad 2010: 59; Horowitz 1966). Three other women MLAs (Becky Kent, Marilyn More, Denise Peterson-Rafuse) were non-partisans who came out of municipal politics. They were personally recruited to join the New Democrats after having been unsuccessfully courted by other parties as well. Five women out of the twelve (Pam Birdsall, Vicky Conrad, Ramona Jennex, Michèle Raymond, Lenore Zann) were exclusively New Democrats from early adulthood.

Table 1.2. Women Elected, Nova Scotia June 2009

	Party	Provincial electoral district	First elected	Occupation
Karen Casey, Hon.	PC; Lib	Colchester North	2006	Teacher and education administrator
Kelly Regan	Liberal	Bedford – Birch Cove	2009	Broadcaster
Diana Whalen	Lib	Clayton Park	2003	Management consultant
Pam Birdsall	NDP	Lunenburg	2009	Potter and small business
Ramona Jennex, Hon.	NDP	Kings South	2009	Teacher
Michèle Raymond	NDP	Halifax Atlantic	2003	Editor and researcher
Maureen MacDonald, Hon.	NDP	Halifax Needham	1998	Social Work professor
Vicki Conrad	NDP	Queen’s	2006	Market - gardener
Marilyn More, Hon.	NDP	Dartmouth South – Portland Valley	2003	Teacher
Denise Peterson-Rafuse, Hon.	NDP	Chester – St. Margaret’s	2009	Public-relations consultant
Becky Kent	NDP	Cole Harbour-Eastern Shore	1997	Small-business
Lenore Zann	NDP	Truro – Bible Hill.	2009	Actor

Years before forming the government in 2009, the NDP was already diligently recruiting quality candidates for its expected majority victory. One politician remembers how surprised she was to be recruited in 2007:

I got a telephone call from Mr. Dexter's office (when he was leader of the Opposition) to meet with him. It was out of the blue. I agreed to meet with Mr. Dexter, thinking that I could help volunteer on something. And so, he asked me if I would consider running as a candidate, and we also set up meetings with some of the other women in the NDP so I could get a perspective from a woman to what it was like to be in politics.

Her experience helps to explain why the NDP elects more women — it is not just a matter of the ideology or procedures of a social-democratic party. The party sought out women specifically, recruiting all across the province those women who had come to their attention as potential candidates. The NDP's criteria for candidates were both remarkably eclectic and particularly well suited to the actual situations of women who could be recruited as provincial candidates in Nova Scotia. A woman MLA who had been part of the recruitment activities told us that the NDP sought candidates rooted in their communities, who could be effective there after the election of an NDP government. The municipal political arena, in particular, attracted NDP attention, to the extent that party officials even approached municipal women leaders who had run as candidates for other parties. She also said that they did not particularly want members of the "old left." The Liberal Party also recruited Whalen and Regan, but it did not seem to have embarked on a province-wide candidate search of the scale and scope as the NDP.

We should also note that only two of those interviewed (MacDonald and Zann) have not married nor had children. Birdsall, Kent, Conrad, Whalen, Regan, Casey, Jennex, More, Peterson-Rafuse and Raymond raised families while active in politics; Kent, Conrad and Regan had children still in school as of 2012. Evidently, for these women, family responsibilities were not the barrier to becoming involved politically that sources in the United States contend (Thomas 2010: 120). Indeed, two NDP women (More and Kent) told us that their children's organized activities brought them into public life. Ramona Jennex, who was appointed to Cabinet immediately after the election, related that her son Fraser strongly urged her to run:

I called all my children to say that I was thinking about running. They grew up around me being involved in politics; they knew if it was another election, there goes mom again. Fraser was so affirming: "Go to town, mom. Why haven't you done it already?"

Finally, although almost all of these women MLAs had been in the paid labour force prior to being elected, it was their community involvement that propelled them in public office rather than any of their occupational qualifications or achievements. The relatively low-profile occupations of Nova Scotia's women backbenchers were listed as the following: management consultant, school administrator, community volunteer, market gardener, potter and small business-owner. Lenore Zann might be considered an exception to the extent that she had an international profile as an actress (which brought her some notoriety during the election), but her family's deep roots in the provincial NDP, more than her professional accomplishments, propelled her into politics. In any case, what career ever prepares a person to be a politician?

In general, these Nova Scotia legislators seem to have come to power by the older model of entry into politics via community service and municipal politics — a model exemplified by such women as Abbie Lane of Halifax, who moved from a wide range of volunteer activities to be alderperson from 1951 to her death in 1965 (Fingard 2005: 26–28; Fergusson 1976). Such a route into politics is presumed to have become obsolete with the rise of more career women with full-time jobs in the professions (Kirkpatrick 1974). What was old was new again in Nova Scotia; parties seem to have become willing to welcome or even solicit the nomination of such women at the provincial level. Diana Whalen was a member of the Halifax Regional Council when she agreed to run for the Liberal Party. By this time, community activists were also playing a role in political party organizations, both in their own ridings and province-wide, rather than confining themselves to women's branches or sections. A number of our interviewees noted that after working for other candidates (in Karen Casey's words) "it seemed like a natural progression" to run for office themselves.

The trajectories of these elected women should be read as a cautionary tale against adopting all of the findings in the political science research coming from the United States. There, the scale of political life is so much larger, and at the same time the nomination process is essentially self-starting. Perhaps as a consequence, much of the research on women and electoral politics operates on the principle that there is an "occupational pipeline" that candidates pass through (Lawless and Fox 2005). The theory is that there must be substantial numbers of women who have achieved senior positions in, principally, law or business, before they will aspire to the more competitive and prestigious job of elected official. We should not unquestioningly accept the assumption of the "pipeline" that only high-powered, successful professionals are ambitious or qualified for public office. Elected office is remarkably democratic in Canadian provinces. It is useful to be reminded that both of the most recent former premiers of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were teachers prior to entering politics. In this connection, we would like to

emphasize our view that the Nova Scotia women elected are exceptional. We do not know them intimately, but to the extent that we have met them all and know some of them personally, we can say that they are outstanding for their charm, dedication to the public good, intelligent grasp of complex public policy issues and tenacious drive to achieve. Yet these traits could not have been predicted from their occupational achievements and their intensely local profiles prior to being elected. Nor would we expect such aspects of character to be visible without closer examination of their lives; we have here a warning about the limitations of the public documentation of the type researchers are often forced to rely on.

The Work of Representation in the Legislature

As expected, our interviewees bemoaned the excessive antagonism of public proceedings in the Nova Scotia legislature. On the whole, they preferred the more cooperative processes of House committees and informal one-on-one meetings. And they recoiled from the contrast as well as the seeming discontinuity. Is this truly a gendered preference or not? It would certainly seem that the scale of politics in Nova Scotia — both province-wide and in the legislature itself — would be likely to exacerbate reactions that have been noted among women in other legislative contexts (Byrne 2009: 101). The women in the House, less integrated into Nova Scotia's relatively small and therefore especially cozy male ambiance, might be expected to experience its areas of formal antagonism, such as question period, as the more shocking. One NDP backbencher did make a novel and unexpected point in this regard, however. For her, question period is instructive because hearing ministers explain policy under pressure fleshes out for her even her own party's position. She said that not all MLAs are familiar with all the issues, and, as she reminded us, Cabinet ministers do not sit and chat with backbenchers about policy.

More than the rather ritualized hostilities of question period, the surprising physicality of the whole job of legislator produced reactions with a gendered dimension. The Nova Scotia legislators we interviewed spoke to an entirely unexpected aspect of working in the House. Built in 1819, the Nova Scotia House of Assembly is a small building where legislators share cramped desks, washrooms and cafeteria, and the two parties face off less than twenty feet apart. One NDP backbencher spelled out the implications of working in such close quarters: "Most MLAs are large men who have a history in sports and it's how they use their body language. There's a lot of locker room stuff." A tiny woman, she felt overwhelmed by the bodily presence of so many large men as everyone squeezed in around each other. Another MLA expressed much the same sentiment, underlining just how much time caucus spent with each other in and out of the House. One is hard pressed to think

of another occupation which requires such continuing physical proximity among adult men and women. Combat soldiers or police officers, perhaps? One MLA agreed that caucus resembled a group marriage, in the sense of a physically close, long-term commitment.

But this is not just a matter of size or of numbers; rather, it reflects a gendered dynamic of relative power. Do the women and men experience this close physical proximity the same or differently? Men might well find it warmly convivial. By contrast, our interviews suggested that the outnumbered women experience it as irksome and vaguely oppressive. Possibly the physical dimension of life in the House would be less overwhelming if there were relatively more women present. Would it begin to feel less like a locker room, where bodies jostle deliberately against each other, and more like, say, a co-ed gym, where bodies do not? The numbers are not yet anywhere near where we can tell.

The Work of Representation in the Constituency

One of the results of studying women in politics is to illuminate the process of politics writ large. In the following sections we discuss dimensions of constituency work that have little or no gender loading, but whose importance was underlined by the interviews we did with women members. We speculate, however, on the greater vulnerability of women politicians.

There can be no doubt that studies of women and politics have neglected the work of representation in the constituency between elections.³ We were struck by the fact that all the women legislators interviewed spoke of constituency work as centrally important. They were uniformly devoted to their constituents, sometimes to a surprising extent. In fact, Becky Kent objected to extended evening hours in the House, not because it interfered with her family responsibilities to her teenage boys, but because the extended sittings interfered with her ability to attend community events in the constituency. Diana Whalen (who also had teenaged children) said the same thing, irked that she could not commit beforehand to attending events.

Of course, any politician's parliamentary career depends on success in the district where they must eventually face the voters again. Karen Casey, who was first elected in 2006, made this clear as she spoke of the difficulty in finding a balance between her responsibilities to the province as a Cabinet minister and her responsibilities to her rural constituents as an MLA. "The night I was sworn in as a minister," Casey said, "a very wise, seasoned supporter said to me, 'Don't you forget, there are no votes for you in Halifax.'" It was a lesson she has apparently taken to heart; on the landing page of her website, the banner reads "Karen delivers," followed by an extensive list of funding for projects that she brought to the constituency.

It was exactly this dimension of constituency work — bringing govern-

ment money into the district — that surprised another new rural member:

When you're first elected, people assume that you know every grant and that you know where their grant is in the pecking order. This would be grants like fixing the fire hall, a new community centre, the new roof for the Legion. It's just crucial, and people think that if they talk to the MLA, then it's a done deal, but you have to explain that you can't just write a cheque.

Since becoming elected, she has worked hard to learn more about the forestry industry, which is crucial in her district.

Such comments indicate that legislators have to become entrepreneurs, in the sense of identifying and implementing a role for themselves in the constituency. This role is a synthesis of what their constituency needs and the individual skills they bring to the job. Provincial policies determine the bulk of the governing party's MLAs' prospects for re-election, but the success of each legislator's entrepreneurial venture will also make a significant contribution.

Overall, the interviewees spoke in a more uniform way about their work in the House than they did about their work in the constituency. There is what could be called an in-House "script" calling for more civility and mutual respect in the House and a "script" bemoaning MLAs' inability to get a message out of what one legislator called "the bubble of Province House" to the general public. Such aspects of politics as a workplace are well established in the political science literature and the media. By contrast, our interview material on constituency work supports Canadian research institute Samara's novel findings in a series of "exit interviews" (2011). As they left federal office, members of Parliament reported their frustration at there being no set job description for what to do in the constituency. Instead, politicians have to make it up as they go along — some more successfully than others. Likewise, our Nova Scotia legislators reported that, on being elected, they found themselves, to the surprise of some, searching for the projects and profile that would suit their idiosyncratic skills and that could also be appealing to their particular set of voters. For example, actor Lenore Zann made it her mission to promote the performing arts and related industries in Truro and the province as a whole.

Wars of Attrition in the Constituency

Asking legislators directly about their work in the district brought to light yet another dimension of political life that goes undocumented in the political science literature: partisan snares to be found in the constituency. Such hazards are even more significant when women are elected to represent constituencies outside major urban centres, as is now increasingly likely to

occur. Across Canada, women are still less frequently elected from rural districts both nationally and provincially — amounting to what has been dubbed a “rural deficit” of elected women (Carbert 2010). As a result, any substantial increases in the number of women in legislatures or the House of Commons will have to depend on the election of women in more rural districts. This is precisely what happened in the Nova Scotia 2009 election, when seven women MLAs from metropolitan Halifax were joined by five from rural ridings. The result, for the latter, was that the usual difficulties of representing a dispersed, economically fragile, non-urban population were exacerbated by the local partisan problems that were not anticipated.

Across Canada, the NDP has tenaciously advanced from one small success to another, until those small advances have cumulated into larger victories. Yet, in view of the comments made by interviewees, the NDP breakthroughs in rural constituencies may be precarious. Contrary to the overall impression in the scholarly work and the national media, partisan competition does not get transferred to the legislature between elections and remain isolated there. Even as politicians play the game of ritualized political theatre in question period, back in the district another game continues. It is entirely informal, unscripted and perhaps more venomous.

The way in which the provincial office operates in the federal/provincial interface adds an element to the mix that has not been appreciated. The five NDP women who were elected in 2009 to represent provincial districts outside of the Halifax metropolitan area are now the MLAs for areas that have historically, even before Confederation, been Tory territory. More specifically, in each of these districts, the new NDP MLA had defeated a provincial Progressive Conservative MLA. In addition, four of those provincial districts were still held in 2009 by a federal Conservative MP in the larger, overlapping federal riding. All those MPs were well established incumbents at the time of the 2009 provincial election; they were then re-elected in 2011 and will remain in federal office until at least 2015. These sitting Conservative MPs exercise considerable prestige and influence in the area because of their familiarity with the operation of power and their role in the federal governing party. They have, for example, the ability to direct stimulus spending locally or to name appointees to national boards and agencies. Moreover, the provincial PC legislators defeated in 2009 continue to be active in public affairs; some of them intend to stand in the next provincial election for the district they previously held. To further complicate the interpersonal dynamics of partisan competition, one of the defeated PC MLAs (Judy Streach) is married to the sitting Conservative MP for the overlapping district. In other provincial districts, a local “crown prince” was reportedly waiting in the wings. Elsewhere, the standard personal rivalries within any riding executive took on an ominous tinge when officers of an NDP riding association were accused of continuing

to harbour Tory loyalties and were subsequently removed from office (Speller 2011: 24). Furthermore, apart from particular interpersonal relations and family legacies of power and influence that are unique to each constituency, we can take for granted some of the dynamics of constituency-level public affairs. Both the local business community and the local weekly newspapers, can, by inclination and long-term familiarity, be expected to align themselves to — if not coincide with — the local Tory establishment.⁴

The new rural NDP backbenchers spoke of opposition, sometimes extending to outright sabotage, that affected their ability to operate successfully in the constituency. Subtle undercutting could take the form of whispered slights, of neglecting to copy on correspondence, of widely distributing correspondence that was presumed to be private or of invitations for constituency events “accidentally” not being delivered to the MLA. One NDP member recalled going to a Chamber of Commerce meeting because she had heard, through the grapevine, that the federal Conservative candidate would be campaigning, even though an election had not been called. When she entered the room, there was an immediate shuffling of campaign material to avoid letting her see that this particular meeting was more about rallying the Conservative troops than discussing regular Chamber business. Interviewees told of Progressive Conservative MLAs defeated in the 2009 election who are out there campaigning in preparation for the next election, every day, at every public event to which sitting members are invited. One woman said of such opposition:

I definitely feel it. When I enter a room, I feel it. I’m their MLA, but sometimes, their [local small business establishment] tone with me can be curt or condescending. I hear the comment “one-term-wonder.” That’s the game of politics, unfortunately, that people get entrenched in party loyalties.

Another interviewee expressed her frustration at the local paper’s willingness to feature photographs of the MP, smiling as he took personal credit for expenditures that were routinely allocated across the country. She was convinced that such media practices amounted to partisan collusion; in any case, the net effect was the same in terms of harming her prospects for re-election.

Such subversive tactics are certainly not new in Nova Scotia. One of the first two NDP MLAs, Paul MacEwan, reported similar opposition in the constituency. Shortly after MacEwan’s election in 1970, he stormed “violently” out of a community meeting. Objecting to the presence of the defeated MLA at the meeting, he protested that he should be the only provincial politician to speak, and he claimed that the meeting was organized by the Liberal riding executive “to promote the Liberal political persuasion” (MacEwan 1970).

These tactics did not injure MacEwan's political career; he went on to serve for thirty-three years in the Nova Scotia legislature.

It is apparently more difficult than anticipated for newly elected members representing a new party to break through and establish themselves. Will the new NDP MLAs be able to entrench themselves over the next few elections in the face of informal partisan opposition? NDP women may well have a rougher time of it than NDP men, if only because women are perceived to be more vulnerable targets for this sort of intimidation, and thus incur more of it. NDP men representing newly NDP seats in rural Nova Scotia from the 2009 election may also have a precarious hold on their districts, but a perception of "toughness" might be a deterrent to the sort of treatment that was described to us by the women. Should the new NDP MLAs follow Paul MacEwan's very masculine example, dramatically and publicly confronting their local rivals?

Today, in Canada, newly elected women legislators are likely to be affiliated with a party new to power. For the time being, most incumbents are men and the inertia of incumbency delays the entry of new candidates — of whom proportionately more are likely to be women — into the legislature. When a government is defeated, more opportunities open up for women candidates to be elected — but how do new members entrench themselves in office? The task is surprisingly difficult. As the NDP backbenchers from rural Nova Scotia spoke about their efforts to establish themselves as the incumbents in their districts, they made us aware of the larger question of how difficult it is for a new party to establish itself.

The dynamics of partisan competition at the interface of rival federal/provincial parties cannot be unique to Nova Scotia. There is reason to expect that the machinery of any federal governing party, whether Liberal or Conservative, will be brought to bear on provincial competitors (Esselment 2010; Koop 2011). Even if federal and provincial wings of the same party are not as closely linked together as they tend to be in the Maritimes, they share a common rival. In particular, the experience of these NDP legislators in Nova Scotia holds important lessons for the NDP women elected for the first time in Quebec. In the 2011 national election, fifty-eight new NDP members were elected in that province, all in districts where no NDP candidate had ever before been elected. Twenty-seven of those MPs were women, only one of whom had held public office before. The Parliamentary Press Gallery can be expected to scrutinize the new MLAs' skills in question period and evaluate their every misstep on the Hill. Meanwhile, back in the constituency, they can be expected to face a separate — and possibly more daunting — set of challenges. From what we have learned from Nova Scotia, it seems likely that more entrenched organizations of, for example, the Parti québécois will be working in the constituency to undermine the novice legislators.

Such dimensions of partisan competition are fair game, part and parcel of the democratic process. No more than any other politician can the women newly elected for the NDP expect to be insulated from opposition on the grounds that they're working for the "good of the community." But two sets of conclusions arise from this discussion, the first scholarly and the other activist.

Conclusions

To begin with, we suggest that scholars of Canadian politics in general and women in Canadian politics specifically should direct further research to politics at the constituency level. This is where much of the work of representation occurs. We heard in the interviews very little of resistance to the new MLAs *as women* than we might have predicted. We cannot tell yet what impact their presence might have on the other parties, in some form of "contagion from the left." We certainly found discomfort of the sort predictable for women in a male-dominated environment (particularly, unexpectedly, in relation to the physicality of the situation). Most importantly, looking at constituency work, we were alerted to other, unexpected forms of resistance to their presence.

There have been repeated calls to restore civility and decorum to the proceedings of legislatures, in particular by reducing the level of personal combativeness and antagonism during question period. Feminist scholars and media pundits have joined this chorus, arguing that less partisan venom in legislatures would make politics more appealing to potential women candidates (Trimble and Arscott 2003: 135). Our interviews indicate that, by comparison to the overlooked partisan competition in the district, the operation of the House seems congenial and collegial. In the House, MLAs sit in solidarity with their caucus colleagues on the backbenches to enact a ritualized theatre of question period. Whatever the decibel level of the heckling, the proceedings are highly formalized, under the supervision of the speaker and observed by the press gallery.

In the district, MLAs are on their own. The informal but vicious partisan opposition that politicians told us about there is bound to exist in a political structure that combines the single-member electoral district with a federal system. These pressures became apparent through our interviews and are particularly virulent as a result of the combination of circumstances here in Nova Scotia: (1) a historically large cohort of women newly elected with a surge of popularity for a government whose party has never formed the government before in this province or nationally; (2) defeated sitting members who continue to be active with the dominant national party; and (3) a local establishment that has traditionally been associated with the defeated provincial party and the currently dominant national party. Under these

circumstances, newly elected women could viscerally experience their vulnerability — it was real.

There are now very few nations with a majoritarian, single-member electoral system. The international discussions about increasing the proportion of women in legislatures have, understandably enough in that context, devoted little attention to them (but see Murray et al. 2011). The relationship to a particular constituency that is seen as both the advantage and the burden of our electoral system became evident as a key element of the situation of these newly elected women — hence our interest in how these women politicians create roles for themselves at the constituency level, where the resistance to them principally manifests itself. This is part, a crucial part, of the workplace that is politics. Those who wish to see more women in political roles in Canada, as well as those who study such things, should pay attention.

Our final point relates directly to activists. Paradoxically, the situation of newly elected NDP members implies greater opportunities for democratic engagement. Our interviewees' comments point to how sympathizers can support their MLAs or MPs between election campaigns. Where an established party's machine continues to be effective even after electoral defeat, as is the case in rural Nova Scotia, the obvious answer is to develop an equally effective ongoing machine for any newer party. Individual supporters can build up riding associations as well as attend public meetings, write letters to the editor and speak out on behalf of their representatives. For MLAs and candidates, the work of politics and the tasks of representation evidently continue between elections. So too should citizens' job of supporting — or opposing — them.

Notes

1. A more detailed account of this transition, including historical numbers, is available in Carbert and Black 2012.
2. MLA interviews were conducted by Louise Carbert in May 2011. The authors thank Ian Stewart for his advice.
3. An exception is Carbert's 2006a work on Liberal women in the rural West. For local campaign effects during national election, see Carty and Eagles 2004.
4. Anthony Sayers reported a similar pattern for British Columbia in 1988: "The Tory association is simply the particular form that these relations take at election time" (1999: 37).