

VIEWING WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH A RURAL ELECTORAL LENS

Canada as a Case Study

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Urban–rural cleavages go to the heart of the distinctions between more and less women-friendly electoral districts in Canada's national and provincial legislatures (see, e.g., Moncrief & Thompson, 1991). Similar patterns have been reported in the United States (e.g., Palmer & Simon, 2008, p. 213). Much of the effort to understand these distinctions has concentrated on the positive impacts of various attributes of metropolitan settings—high levels of education, a thriving professional class, active women's interest groups, and so forth (Brodie, 1985; Matland & Studlar, 1998). Far less effort has been directed to understanding what it is about rural districts that hinders women's election to public office. Readers are typically left to frame it as an absence of those positive metropolitan attributes, leaving the impression that the tendency to exclude women is a relic of uninformed traditionalist attitudes. Some recent studies have brought a rural perspective to this topic, with results indicating that something far more concrete and ongoing is holding back women's candidacy and election outside major urban centers.

To provide context for a discussion of Canadian women's political leadership, Figure 15.1 illustrates the proportions of seats held by women over the past 4 decades in the House of Commons and in provincial legislatures.¹ Both proportions rose nearly in tandem during this period, from a base of less than 5% during the 1960s. Increases were most rapid during the 1980s, but the rate of growth slowed during the 1990s, as levels reached the 20% mark. Both curves reached a plateau thereafter. The federal election of 2008 brought a small increase, as did the most recent provincial elections, but by no means large enough to declare a breakout from the plateau.

Districts outside Canada's metropolitan centers have played a major role in holding back the numbers. It can be said, as a rule of thumb, that a metropolitan district is at least twice as likely as a rural district to elect a woman. As seen in the next two sections, this ratio has persisted over several decades despite substantial increases in the number of women elected overall. Moreover, the shortfall in women elected is not restricted to remote, highly rural areas but rather extends throughout Canada's towns and small- and medium-sized cities, which, taken together, comprise nearly half of the country's population. It is found in every region, and it crosses party lines. As such it is arguably the largest factor limiting the number of women in Canada's legislatures. Proportions of seats held by women in urban metropolitan districts are now typically higher than 30%, in some cases substantially so. Hence it would be unrealistic to expect large cities to raise the national level significantly in the near future. Canada's more rural districts would need to elect greater numbers of women to break through the recent pattern of stagnation.

It turns out that even in rural districts, the election of women is limited primarily by the low numbers of female candidates running for parties that have a chance of winning. Where are the potential candidates, and why aren't they stepping forward, either on their own accord or at the urging of others? Potential candidates themselves are uniquely positioned to answer these questions but are more difficult to find than elected, or even defeated, candidates (see, e.g., in the U.S. context, Lawless & Fox, 2005). Results of case studies involving interviews with rural women leaders in two regions of Canada are summarized in terms of three categories of barriers to candidacy: a

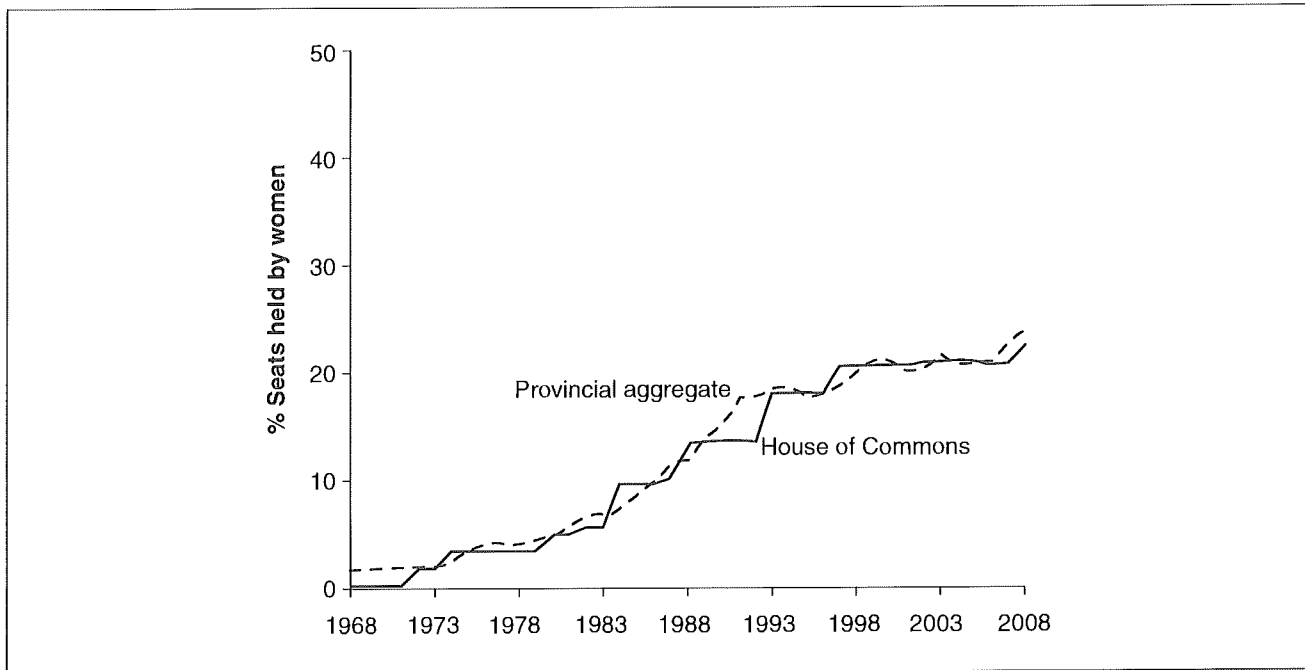


Figure 15.1 Proportions of Seats Held by Women in Canada's National and Provincial Legislatures, 1968–2008

SOURCES: Based on data from Parliament of Canada: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Lists/Members.aspx>; <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/compilations/ProvinceTerritory.aspx>.

strong reluctance on the part of the women themselves, intense competition from male rivals, and resistance by local elites to recruiting more women. Insights from the interviews are employed to identify what circumstances make some rural districts more women-friendly than others and to consider the potential for application beyond rural Canada.²

The Rural–Urban Divide of Women in Canada's House of Commons

Louise Carbert (2009b) tracked the election of women to Canada's national parliament over three consecutive elections from 2000 to 2006, to show that the rural–urban divide is a strong, pervasive, and durable effect that is independent of regional and partisan distinctions. She noted that the electoral boundaries of almost all of Canada's 308 federal districts are drawn in such a way as to distinguish unambiguously between districts that are located in urban metropolitan areas of Canada's largest cities and those that are not. Canada's recent population demographics have resulted in a roughly even split between these two classes of districts. This feature allowed Carbert to order the districts according to population density and compare the more urban half to the more rural half.

Figure 15.2 shows the overall rural–urban comparison of women elected in Canada's 2000, 2004, and 2006 elections and also adds the results from the subsequent election in 2008. All four elections show a stark contrast between the two halves of the list. For example, in the 2008 election, women were elected in 31% (47 of 154) of the most densely populated constituencies in major metropolitan centers. In the more rural half, women won in only 14% (22 of 154) of the districts. This result closely parallels the results found in the preceding three elections. In all cases, the more urban districts were more than twice as likely to elect a woman as were the more rural ones. The robustness of this pattern is underscored by the fact that these four elections produced a wide range of partisan results: a Liberal majority government in 2000, a Liberal minority in 2004, and Conservative minorities in 2006 and 2008. As seen in Figure 15.1, the overall number of women elected did not change very much during this period.

Was it really half of Canada's districts that created this deficit of female members of Parliament (MPs)? Or was the shortfall confined to the most sparsely populated, highly rural areas? To address these questions, Carbert subdivided the two halves of federal electoral districts, again according to population density, and compared the proportions of women elected to each quartile of districts.

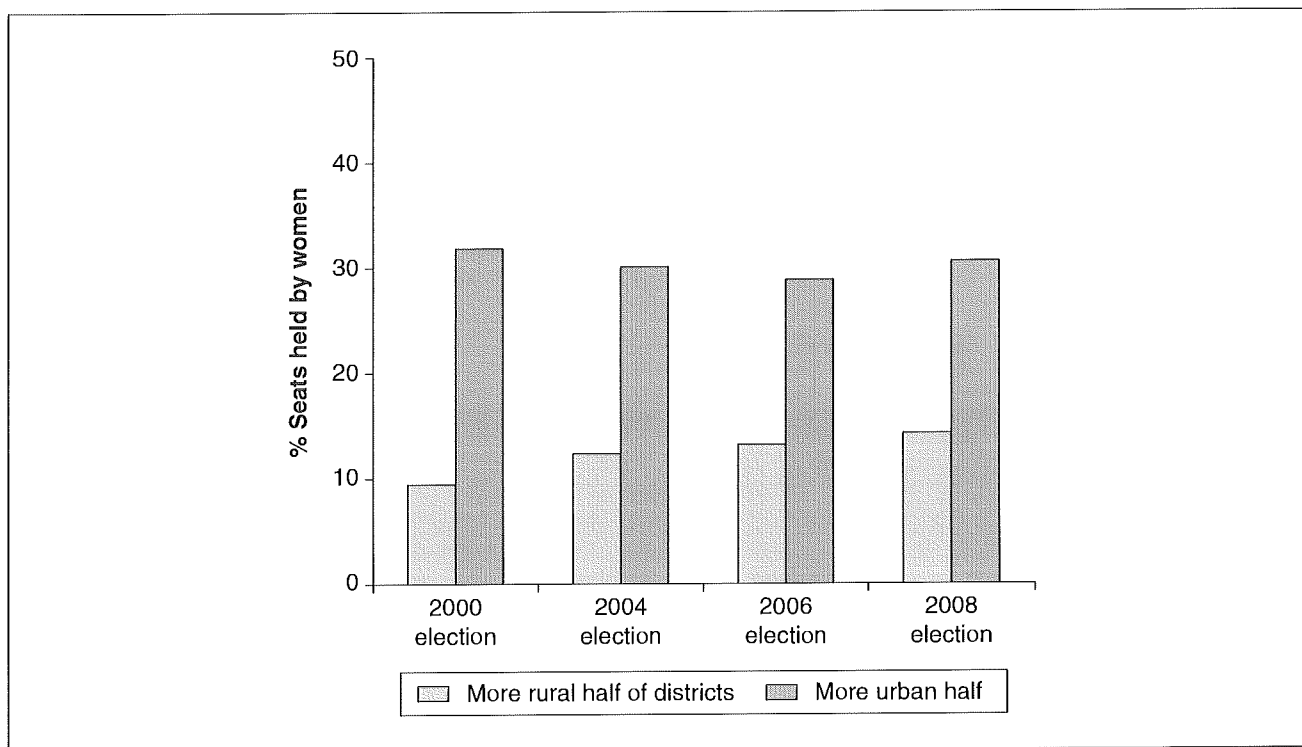


Figure 15.2 Rural–Urban Contrast in Proportions of Seats Held by Women in Canada’s House of Commons, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008

SOURCES: Based on data from Parliament of Canada: <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Lists/Members.aspx>; <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/compilations/ProvinceTerritory.aspx>.

In each election, the number of seats held by women increased monotonically as one moves through the quartiles from most rural to most urban. While the most rural quartile elected the fewest women, the shortfall in the second-sparsest quartile was almost as strong, as the number of seats held by women never exceeded half that found in the most urban quartile. Hence the shortfall of women MPs extends throughout the more rural half of districts, comprising 46% of Canada’s population. These more detailed tests showed that the probability of a woman being sent to Ottawa during the past decade has decreased with increasing rurality of the district and that breaking down the federal districts into two equal halves yields a reasonable picture of the rural–urban divide.

The enormous scope of the rural shortfall of women elected may surprise some readers who have come to think of rurality as a marginal—and shrinking—component of Canada’s population demographics. A well-known census fact from Statistics Canada is that four fifths of Canadians live in urban settings and only one fifth in rural areas. To put it facetiously: How can so few cause so much damage? The answer is that not many people realize that Statistics Canada’s definition of rural is so restrictive that communities of just 1,000 people qualify as urban. Within the 80% urban portion, large numbers of Canadians live in towns

with populations between 1,000 and 10,000 and in small- and medium-sized cities such as Quesnel, British Columbia, Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and Truro, Nova Scotia. Another census fact seemingly at odds with a 50/50 split in electoral districts is that nearly two thirds of Canadians live in census metropolitan areas (CMAs). Here it is important to note that all CMAs include substantial rural areas and that some of them, such as Chicoutimi-Jonquière in Quebec, are for many purposes not grouped among Canada’s major urban centers. Hence the percentage of Canadians living in urban settings in the major centers is somewhere in the mid-50s, depending on which cities are included.³ The percentage living outside the big cities is only modestly smaller—in the mid-40s. There is a nearly equal balance of federal electoral districts representing these two groups of voters, because rural voters are somewhat overrepresented in Canada. An average voter in Canada’s more rural half of districts has, in effect, about 1.1 votes, compared to 0.9 for the average voter in the more urban half. Carbert considered the impact of rural overrepresentation and estimated that transforming to strict representation by population would likely result in two or three additional women in Canada’s House of Commons. However, she also argued that this sort of electoral reform is unlikely to occur.⁴

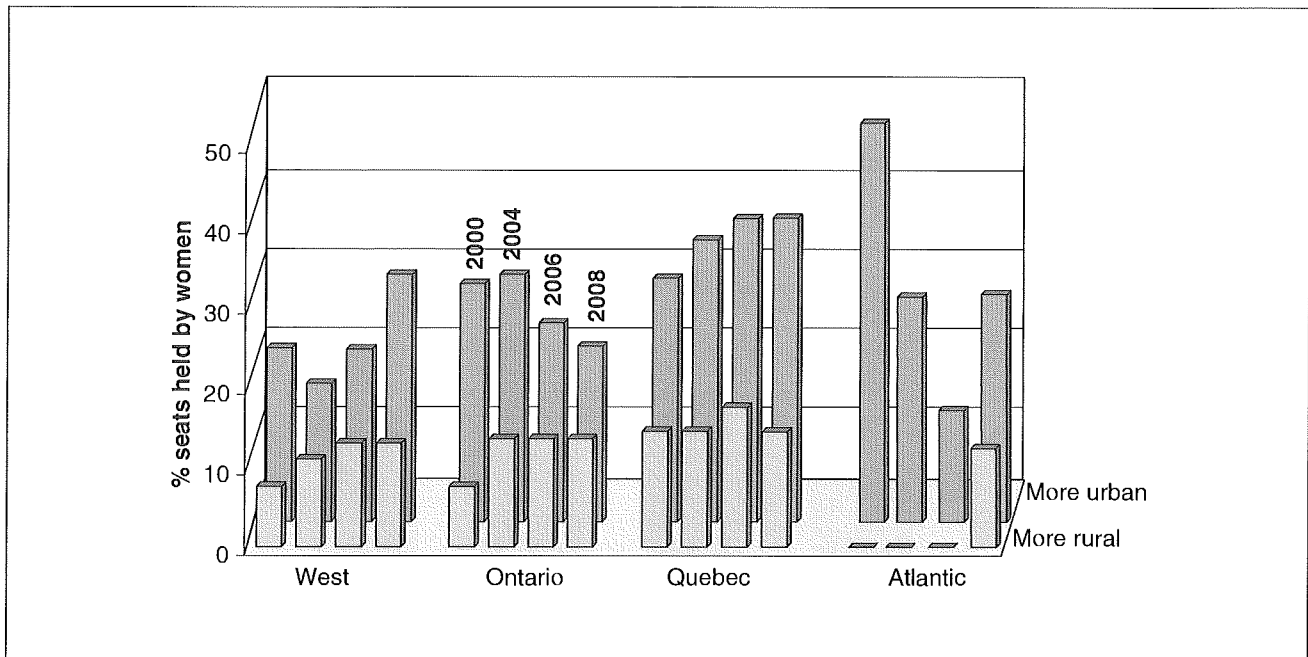


Figure 15.3 Rural–Urban Contrast in Proportions of Seats Held by Women in Canada’s House of Commons, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008

SOURCES: Based on data from Elections Canada, Voter Information Service database: <http://www.elections.ca/scripts/pss/FindED.aspx>; Historical 301 Electoral Districts database: http://www.elections.ca/scripts/edwa301_historical/Default.asp.

No analysis of national politics in Canada can ignore regional distinctions. It is true that some regions are more rural than others and that the regions vote differently. These considerations raise the question as to whether regional distinctions might explain away the rural deficit of women elected. Breaking down the election results simultaneously by region and by rurality shows that the answer is “no.” Figure 15.3 illustrates regional results for the same four federal elections. For example, in the four western provinces in 2008, women won 14% (7 of 50) of the seats in the more sparsely populated group, compared with 33% (14 of 42) in the more urban districts.⁵

The overwhelming pattern in this figure is that in every region in all four elections, the proportion of women elected in the more urban districts is far above that in the more rural ones. This means that the rural deficit in the election of women extends to every region of Canada. To be sure, there are regional variations in the proportions of women elected overall. The important point here is that these differences do not take away from the enormous rural–urban divide that has persisted in every region over four elections.

Nor can one ignore the effect of partisan preferences. It is well known that Conservative Party support is concentrated in rural areas, and previous studies have shown that

this party is less hospitable to women candidates than are the other major parties (Young, 2000, pp. 179–182). Do partisan preferences explain away the rural deficit of women elected? To address this part of the puzzle, the parliamentary caucuses of Canada’s two leading national parties—the Liberals and Conservatives—were each divided into two groups, according to whether MPs were from the more urban or more rural half of districts.⁶

Figure 15.4 illustrates the results. For example, in the 2008 election, the Conservative Party won 95 seats in the more rural half of districts, and 13 of these were won by women; this yielded 14% for the Conservative rural proportion of female MPs. By comparison the Liberal rural proportion was lower, as only 6% (1 out of 17) of the more rural districts that voted Liberal sent a female MP to Ottawa. The other bars in the figure show that this result was not an anomaly, as in each of the four elections, the Liberal rural proportion was somewhat lower than the Conservative rural proportion. Hence neither of the two parties that have governed Canada has been able to elect high proportions of women in the more rural half of districts. The real difference between the two parties in regard to electing women has occurred in the more urban districts, as the darker bars in the figure show that the Liberal metropolitan caucus has featured much greater gender balance.

Carbert also analyzed the sub-caucuses of Canada's two other major parties at the national level—the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois. She found that although both of these parties have brought elevated proportions of women overall to Canada's House of Commons, their female MPs too have come overwhelmingly from metropolitan districts. For example, in 2008 nearly half of Bloc's metropolitan seats (10 of 23, or 43%) were won by women, compared to fewer than one fifth of that party's more rural seats (5 of 26, or 19%). Clearly some parties are more hospitable overall to women than others. But it is equally important to recognize the pervasive rural headwind felt by all parties, which has impeded the election of women outside Canada's largest cities.

Does this headwind originate with the voters, or with the parties themselves? To address this question, Carbert divided party candidates into two groups, according to whether the candidate's constituency was in the more or less densely populated half of Canadian districts. She found that it was crucial to take party competitiveness into account, because a disproportionate number of women candidates in the rural districts ran for parties that stood no chance of winning that seat, in part due to the high incidence of incumbents running for reelection in rural

districts. (Why incumbency should be higher in rural districts is an important question, and is discussed later, in the context provided by interview results.) After excluding lost-cause candidacies, a strong rural–urban contrast emerged in women's competitive candidacies, on the same scale as in the election results. Carbert concluded that the election of women is limited primarily by the small numbers of female candidates who contest winnable seats. Voter hostility toward women candidates plays, at most, a secondary role. Numerous quantitative studies over several decades have reported this same effect overall in Canada and elsewhere (see, e.g., Darcy, Welch, & Clark, 1994, p. 73; Lovenduski, 2005, p. 64; Tremblay, 2009).

One of the main avenues for achieving significant gains for women in Canada's House of Commons would be for the major parties to groom and cultivate women's leadership, particularly in rural districts, with the goal of raising the number of candidates in winnable ridings.⁷ As far back as the 1980s, political parties have gone to some lengths in the effort to improve their public image with regard to increasing the number of women candidates (Erickson, 1998, p. 233). However, it is difficult for a party's central leadership to impose affirmative action measures because

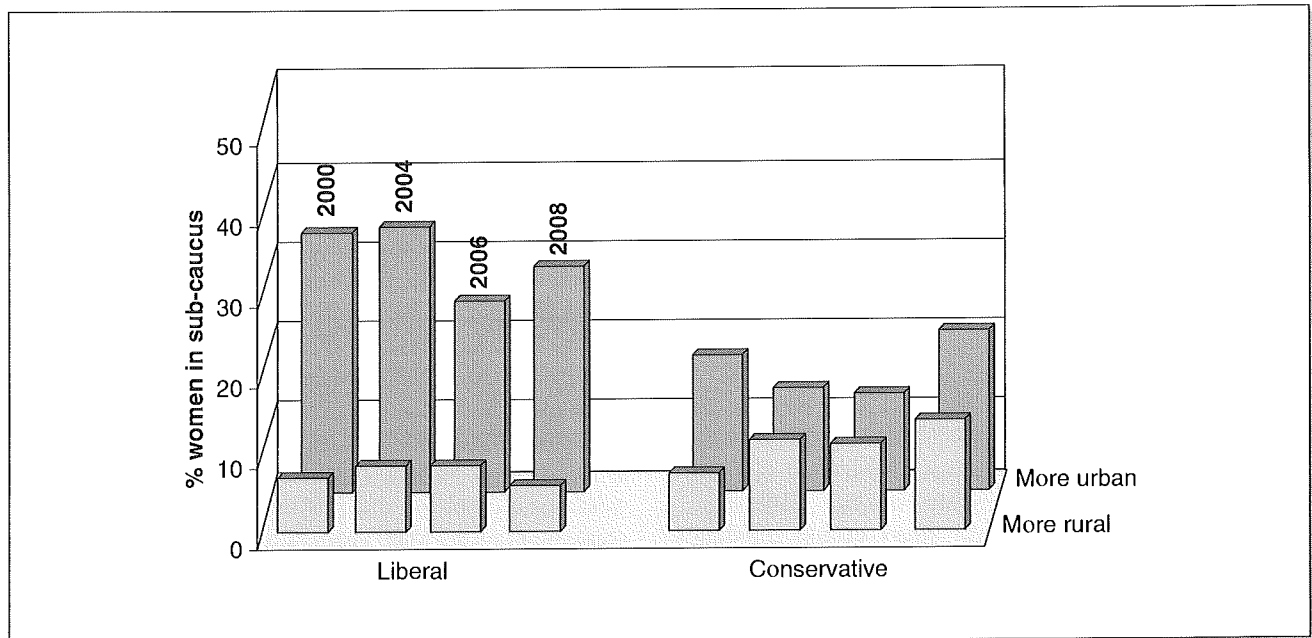


Figure 15.4 Rural–Urban Contrast in Proportions of Seats Held by Women in Canada's House of Commons, for the Two Leading National Parties, 2000, 2004, 2006, 2008

SOURCES: Based on data from Elections Canada, Voter Information Service database: <http://www.elections.ca/scripts/pss/FindED.aspx>; Historical 301 Electoral Districts database: http://www.elections.ca/scripts/edwa301_historical/Default.asp.

candidate recruitment and nomination have traditionally been the purview of local-district party executives. This can lead to tension with central party leadership, especially in rural districts, where a greater focus on local issues insulates riding (district) associations from national agendas (Carty & Eagles, 2005, p. 149).

At first glance, it might seem that cross-party cooperation among elected women should have potential to bring about significant change. However, cross-party cooperation is difficult in Canada's legislatures because party discipline is so strict, and partisan rivalries are so bitter. This helps to explain why it never arose formally until 1990 and why it was so short-lived thereafter. From 1990 to 1993, at the national level, there was a cross-party Association of Women Parliamentarians that was, in some regards, comparable to the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues in the United States.⁸ In 1993, the governing Progressive Conservative Party chose a new leader, Kim Campbell, who governed briefly as Canada's first (and to date only) woman prime minister.⁹ Her achievement was overshadowed by the fact that her party was already poised for defeat in the national election later that same year (Bashevkin, 2009a, p. 115). During the subsequent 13 years of successive Liberal Party governments, the Women's Liberal Commission emerged as a cohesive and vital force in promoting feminist objectives inside that party (Young, 1997, p. 101). Partly as a result of their activities, three consecutive Liberal Party leaders have publicly targeted at least one third of the party's slate of candidates to be women. As discussed earlier, however, these efforts have had little impact on women elected in rural districts. After 2006, Canada's government was formed by the Conservative Party, which has rejected the principle of targeting or other direct positive measures to increase women's candidacy and election.

In 2006 a group of women legislators established official Canadian representation (region) in the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, which is a network within the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. This organization includes women from provincial legislatures. It enables elected women to cooperate across party lines outside of their home legislatures (L'Ecuyer, 2007).

There has been a surge of nonpartisan (or in some cases multipartisan) activity to promote women's leadership since Status of Women Canada was restructured in 2006 with a greater focus on promoting women's leadership. Various organizations have responded to this funding opportunity by staging campaign schools and workshops across the country, including rural areas. A prominent example is Equal Voice, founded in 2001 by a group of influential journalists, pollsters, academics, and partisan insiders, with a mandate to promote women's election to all levels of government. In Quebec, there is the example of Femmes, politique et démocratique. Both organizations are comparable in some regards to the National Women's Political Caucus in the United States.¹⁰

The Rural–Urban Divide of Women in Canada's Provincial Legislatures

The preceding section summarizes the current patterns of women's election at the national level. A brief survey of earlier studies of provincial legislatures shows that much the same patterns have prevailed for some decades at both levels of government, even as overall proportions of women elected have risen substantially. It also summarizes the interpretations that earlier studies applied to explain these patterns.

Brodie's (1977) study of Canadian provincial members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) between 1950 and 1975 found a strong metropolitan concentration among the women elected. She attributed this tendency to a larger pool of well-educated and professional women, and to more cosmopolitan voters (p. 13). She also noted a regional effect, highlighting the barriers to women presented by high rates of male incumbency and entrenched partisan patterns in the Atlantic provinces in particular. She surmised that a traditionalist political culture presents obstacles for aspiring women who wish to enter politics there.

Gary Moncrief and Joel Thompson (1991) performed a quantitative comparison of a 1988 "snapshot" of provincial legislators by categorizing districts according to whether or not they were located in urban communities with populations of at least 50,000 (p. 834). They found that the proportion of seats held by women was more than 3 times as high—19% versus 6%—in the more urban versus the more rural subset. They also broke down their results by political party and found a metropolitan concentration of women among the seats won by each party, despite the fact that some parties were far more women-friendly than others overall (Moncrief & Thompson, 1991, p. 835). Carbert (2006) later performed a similar analysis, using a 2003 snapshot of the Atlantic provincial legislatures, and found the same result—a rural shortfall of women elected, across party lines (p. 13). She found that Atlantic cities elected substantial numbers of women (27%), just as did cities in other parts of Canada. But more people in Atlantic Canada live outside the urban centers than is the case in other regions, so that the rural districts dominate, giving a lower proportion of women elected overall.

Richard Matland and Donley Studlar (1998) attempted to sort out a variety of factors thought to influence women's election at the provincial level. They applied regression models to 20 years of data on female provincial legislators, from 1975 to 1994, divided into five separate time periods. Their strongest result involved rural–urban distinctions. They divided districts into three categories, according to whether they were located in metropolitan communities with populations over 500,000; or in urban settings with populations between 50,000 and 500,000; the remainder being categorized as rural. They found that a strongly significant association with their metropolitan variable in all time periods and also a strong significance

for their urban variable from 1983 on. These results indicate a progression in which increasing numbers of women are elected as one moves through the rural–urban spectrum from most remote to most metropolitan. Their model estimated that metropolitan districts were roughly twice as likely to elect women than were rural districts.

Matland and Studlar surmised that urbanization serves as a proxy for high education levels and high labor-force participation by women. To them, education fosters tolerance for women's aspirations and provides well-qualified women to feed both the pool of potential candidates and women's interest groups that promote women's empowerment. By implication it is the relative absence of these opportunity-creating attributes that constitutes a barrier to women's candidacy and election in rural districts. As will be described in later sections of this chapter, interviews subsequently carried out in rural Canada have revealed that in addition to these absences, there are other important features of rural public life that present substantive barriers.

Another relevant result is that women were significantly less likely to win races in which the incumbent returned to the ballot. Matland and Studlar also tested for a separate Atlantic-region distinction, to see whether a regional traditionalist culture exerts an additional barrier. However, they found that once rurality and incumbency were accounted for, there was no further Atlantic-region distinction. Evidently whatever about Atlantic Canada that impedes women's candidacy and election is largely accounted for by the high degree of rurality and the high levels of incumbency found in that region.

A curious result emerged in relation to electoral systems. Beginning in the 1980s women were much more likely to be elected in districts that sent more than one representative to the legislature, especially in rural districts, such as in Prince Edward Island. Evidently the female pool of potential candidates was not too small to supply these elevated levels of women's candidacy and election, even 20 years ago. The multimember arrangement was subsequently eliminated by electoral "reform" in all provinces. Matland and Studlar concluded that by eliminating multimember districts, Canadian provinces created barriers to women's candidacy and election. They left unanswered the question of why rural riding associations would be eager to gender-balance their tickets in dual-member districts but not consider women equally in single-member rural districts that are otherwise similar. This question is revisited later in this chapter, in light of interview results in rural Canada.

During the lead-up to the elimination of multimember seats in Prince Edward Island, that province's Advisory Council on the Status of Women (a provincial government agency) developed a presentation to submit to the legislative committee. Its members debated whether to recommend that dual-member districts be retained, and they stipulated to elect one man and one woman. However, they could not agree and decided not to address how the

elimination of dual-member districts would affect the number of women elected. Instead, the submission focused on a recommendation to reduce patronage in government hiring, on the grounds that this practice overlooked qualified women (Dianne Porter, former chair of PEI Advisory Council on the Status of Women, personal communication, July 6, 2009). More recently, there has been a series of independent and unsuccessful referenda on electoral reform to bring a greater degree of proportional representation through the introduction of multimember districts.¹¹ Provincial chapters of Fair Vote Canada played a major role in spearheading these proposals, employing the promise of increased numbers of women elected as a central component of their arguments in each case (Pilon, 2007).

First-Hand Perspectives From the Pool of Potential Candidates

Interview Studies With Rural Women Leaders

The finding that voter hostility is not responsible for the rural shortfall of women elected turns the focus away from the vote itself, and toward the recruitment and selection process. Asking why a rural riding association did not choose a woman as its candidate invokes issues that go far beyond the closed-door vote that completes the nomination process. Far more to the point are the difficult and open-ended questions about events that preceded the nomination meeting: Who else could have been chosen instead of the eventual candidate? The pool of potential nominees goes beyond those who actually put their names forward. A good deal of research has addressed, and attached varying degrees of importance to, the role of party gatekeepers in excluding women as candidates in different settings (Lawless & Fox, 2005; Niven, 1998; Palmer & Simon, 2008; Sanbomatsu, 2006). Who was qualified and available but was not groomed? Whose qualifications went unrecognized? Far less effort has been directed to the more difficult supply-side questions. Do rural districts produce too few qualified women to supply a significant number of women candidates? Another possibility is that some women might exclude themselves: Who was qualified but unwilling to step forward? Until recently little was known about the pool of potential candidates in rural Canada.

Carbert's field-based research attempted to address this gap in knowledge by gathering together small groups of rural women community leaders and interviewing them about their experiences and perceptions of leadership, public life, and running for elected office. In all she conducted 14 group interviews with 126 women in the Atlantic region, and 19 group interviews with 115 women in the western region, during the period 2000 to 2003. Each session lasted approximately 2 hours. Questionnaires revealed that the

interviewees were well-educated, well-employed women with strong records of leadership and volunteering—in short, just the type of women who would be included in the pool of potential candidates, but who, for the most part, were not running for elected office (Carbert, 2003, 2005, 2006).

Many of Carbert's findings can be organized in terms of the supply of, and demand for, women candidates. The very fact that she was able to go to almost any small town and find several well-educated, well-employed women with substantial experience in public affairs confirms that there exist sufficient numbers of qualified rural women leaders to supply significantly more female candidates outside Canada's largest cities. This helps to explain why riding associations in rural dual-member districts had little difficulty, even in the 1980s, finding additional women candidates for provincial office as soon as they felt like balancing their tickets.

Here one needs to exercise care in defining who is qualified. Certainly there are far fewer women lawyers and other professionals in rural districts than in urban metropolitan districts. The inappropriateness of that measure is exemplified by the fact that two of Atlantic Canada's provincial premiers in 2009 were rural men who worked as physical-education teachers prior to entering electoral politics. A career in politics is not the exclusive prerogative of lawyers and other professionals in rural districts in Canada, either at the provincial or national level.¹² Carbert avoided the pitfalls of assuming that the stepping-stones into politics are the same for rural women as for metropolitan women or men, by asking local organizations to identify prominent women leaders in their communities and by interviewing them. More than half worked in public-sector jobs; others were managers or business owners, but few were lawyers or other professionals.

Although the size of the pool of potential candidates was favorable to increased women's candidacy, the interviews revealed profound constraints, both on the supply side and on the demand side, limiting how many moved from being potential candidates to actual candidates. They provided first-hand accounts of strong reluctance on the part of the women themselves, of intense opposition by male competitors, and of resistance by local elites to recruiting more women. As outlined in the following three subsections, the open-ended focus-group format of the interviews allowed Carbert to probe the underlying reasons behind these constraints, moving beyond stereotypes of rural traditionalism.

Women's Reluctance to Run

An alarming majority of rural women leaders who were interviewed, especially in Atlantic Canada, expressed strong reluctance to stand for elected office. This reluctance was not typically linked to competing family responsibilities or traditional gender roles. Most had made satisfactory accommodations with their families, which

allowed them to take on jobs and at the same time carry on an astonishing level of voluntary service. Many expressed pride in their energy and their ability to juggle multiple responsibilities. Neither was it framed in terms of self-doubt or lack of personal ambition. Reluctance was more commonly framed by these women in terms of the dangers of partisan affiliation to their careers or to their family's business. Some cited a public-sector prohibition on involvement in partisan politics. Although formal restrictions barring public servants from running for political office have in most cases been lifted, interviewees reported the persistence of an informal barrier, in which partisanship is considered to be unprofessional within public-sector workplaces. This barrier affects women disproportionately, because most of the best jobs for professional women in rural Canada are in the public sector. Even in the private sector, interview comments revealed that running for the wrong party can actually cause a loss of customers or contracts or the loss of a job. Conversely if a government contract is won by a business owned by a politically active woman or her family, community members may suspect that it was won on the basis of partisan connections, to the detriment of that business.

Some of the most strongly articulated deterrents to electoral aspirations involved a pervasive and deeply held disdain for past and ongoing forms of patronage—the giving of employment, grants, contracts, and other government perquisites on the basis of partisan affiliation. Most of the examples cited did not involve illegal behavior such as bribery or other forms of criminal corruption. However, there was a broad consensus among interviewees that they would not make moral concessions to perpetuate what they perceived as an unfair and dysfunctional system. Interviewees especially disapproved of direct intervention by elected officials in the allocation of public funds, a practice that was revealed by knowledgeable insiders to occur regularly in their districts.

The overwhelming sense that emerged from the interviews was just how important politics are in rural Canada and how seriously its residents take issues such as partisanship and the allocation of public resources. To people living in fragile economies with declining populations, these are not games but rather the vital stuff that sustains lives and communities. Rural politicians are often expected to take an active role in attracting external public-sector resources to benefit the local economy and provide subsistence for individual constituents in need. In extreme cases of economic fragility, their role can verge on that of a patron to dependent clients. Although the words *patron* and *patronage* come from the same root, there is an important distinction. The term *patron* is used to capture the durable relationship of obligation with a vulnerable electorate pinning its hopes for economic sustenance on one representative. Although patrons are often in a position to engage in patronage practices in the course of carrying out their responsibilities, and sometimes do so, it is the

dependency relationship with the electorate that makes them a patron (Hopkin, 2006, pp. 406–412).

On one hand, interviewees expressed appreciation for the personal contributions made by these long-serving local male politicians. On the other hand, however, many women leaders—especially those close enough to the center of power to know how it is exercised in their communities—rejected the idea of themselves running for elected office in a system of which they disapproved. For example, some interviewees presented a well-articulated critique of a long-standing jobs-for-votes arrangement, in which they saw the interests of a few well-connected insiders being traded against long-term prosperity, under the guise of community economic development, by effectively trapping young people in unskilled seasonal work to the benefit of local enterprises.

The comments by the women leaders interviewed led Carbert (2009a) to develop a political-economy analysis of rural women's leadership, focusing on the perceived role of elected representatives in the economic context of their particular districts. A common thread in prior election-based research has been to presume that the job of a political representative is the same for all districts, and then infer that there is a rural–urban distinction in judging whether any local woman is suitable for that same job. Carbert's interview results turn this conceptualization upside down. She found no evidence of distinct rural traditionalist attitudes and no evidence of exhaustion of the pool of potential candidates. Rather, she found that the job is very different in rural versus metropolitan districts, in ways that deter women's candidacy. Granted, the patron role is antiquated. But interviews indicate that its persistence in rural Canada, long after it largely disappeared from metropolitan districts, is not due to traditionalist attitudes but rather due to economic circumstances and how they interact with Canada's political system. According to this interpretation, metropolitan districts and rural districts use the same political system to pursue their distinct economic self-interests, with very different results.

Male Competitors

Interviews with women leaders in rural Canada revealed disdain for the political fray among both women and some men (as revealed in comments about their husbands and male relatives). Reluctance to take on what is expected of politicians in nonmetropolitan districts evidently whittles down the recruitable component of both the male and female sub-pools of potential candidates. Clearly though, there remain sufficient numbers of willing men to fill the available spots. In many cases, the smaller pool of qualified women leaders is effectively whittled down near to zero recruitable members, that is, those who are willing to stand as candidates.

The few women left who are willing to run for elected office often face intense competition from highly motivated men. Some interviewees who had tried their hand at politics

described vicious nomination battles and dirty tactics, which they linked to the prestige of the position. In economically distressed areas, elected representatives hold positions of considerable power and prestige, by virtue of their influence over a substantial proportion of the overall local economy, as well as their relatively high salaries in relation to others in their communities. These features make the job particularly desirable for ambitious men looking for their best opportunities. These results are in accordance with the work of David Lublin and Sarah Brewer (2003) on the dearth of women in southern U.S. legislatures, who found that “women are most likely to win public offices in areas where men do not want the jobs” (p. 391).

To put a personal face on relative salary, consider one of Canada's most glamorous political couples, in the context of the two very different federal districts they represented. Belinda Stronach is heir to the Magna automobile-parts conglomerate, one of the world's wealthiest women, and a personal friend of former U.S. President Bill Clinton. In 2003, while still a complete political novice, without having ever held public office, Stronach contested, and lost, the leadership race for the newly merged Conservative Party. She subsequently held the seat of Newmarket-Aurora, in suburban Toronto, from 2004 to 2008. Stronach became romantically involved with Peter MacKay, who had led the Progressive Conservative Party before it was absorbed in the merger. MacKay had grown up in the party and had effectively inherited his father's seat of Central Nova, in rural Nova Scotia. Their relationship ended dramatically in a late-night crisis in 2006, when Stronach defected to the governing Liberal Party (Bashevkin, 2009b, pp. 74–77). As elected members of Parliament, both Stronach and MacKay earned the same base salary of \$141,200 in 2004 (Parliament of Canada, 2004). Prospective competitors compare this salary to those in other top jobs available to them locally, outside of political office; others view the prestige of the salary in the same light. Although no specific measure of top salaries is readily available by district, they can be presumed to scale with average incomes and asset values. In Stronach's suburban district the average personal income, according to the most contemporary census, was \$41,874, and the average dwelling was worth \$259,482. In MacKay's rural district the corresponding amounts were far lower, at \$23,769 and \$79,838, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2005). Measures of employment earnings paint much the same picture. For example, the average earnings of an employed individual in Aurora, Ontario, was \$49,864, as compared to \$25,464 in Truro, Nova Scotia (Statistics Canada, 2007). These numbers are consistent with the general impression that an MP's salary is at the very top of the spectrum in rural Nova Scotia, but merely competitive with other professional salaries commonly available in suburban Toronto. In this context it makes sense to view MacKay's prestige as deriving primarily from his political office and Stronach's as deriving more from her family's wealth.

The finding that the high prestige of the job plays an important role in preventing women from becoming candidates in rural districts seems at first glance to be at odds with the results of Matland and Studlar (1998), who found a null result for their prestige variable in Canada's provinces (pp. 124, 128). The discrepancy arises in how prestige is defined. Matland and Studlar combined absolute salary and district population to create their prestige variable. In contrast, Carbert's interviews highlighted how high the salaries and perquisites seemed in comparison to other salaries available locally. In addition, the degree of influence and discretion a politician is expected to exercise over the local economy often runs opposite to the number of people in the district.

Gatekeepers and Incumbency

Openness to change on the part of local elites is also crucial to the chances of a woman being nominated as a candidate, and this too depends on what a politician's role is perceived to be. Interviews in Atlantic Canada in particular revealed a number of conventions that seemed surprisingly old-fashioned and ritualized. One of the most important manifestations is a preference for recruiting candidates for elected office from particular families who had produced politicians in previous generations. Deference to incumbents and leading families can be a convenient way to avoid open feuds arising from excessive competition. It can also help to maintain a consistent flow of jobs and development funds, if those leading families can be counted on to draw on their experience and political networks to that end (Savoie, 2000, p. 119). Its pervasiveness helps to explain high incumbency rates in Atlantic Canada, where it is common for sons to inherit their father's seat.

Leading political families have daughters and daughters-in-law as well. However, interviews described instances in which more promising young women were overlooked in favor of their reluctant brothers. The preference for leading families in rural Canada is typically an expression of a broader aversion to political innovation, and the immediacy of the perceived need to nurture fragile economies attaches a tangible risk to the idea of change, even seemingly minor change. The tendency to inertia is not strong enough to propel a grossly unsuitable candidate into office. It is just strong enough to tip the balance in close races and deter serious challengers from entering a race.

This is not to say that women from leading families are shut out of politics altogether. Some of them have realized their ambitions by moving away to large cities. For example, Anne McLellan represented Edmonton-Centre (a metropolitan district in Alberta) and served as a cabinet minister in the federal Liberal government from 1993 to 2006. She had grown up on a farm in the Maritimes, in an influential Liberal family. As another example, Lisa Raitt was elected to represent Halton (a suburban metropolitan district in Ontario) in 2008 and was selected as a cabinet

minister in the federal Conservative government. She had grown up in the small city of Sydney, Nova Scotia, where her father had been an alderman and a union official. The same profile of small-town girls from politically active families going away to university, and entering public life there, is frequently found among women legislators at the provincial level as well.

While these conventions contribute to a lower probability of women being nominated and elected, it is difficult to argue that they are backward manifestations of traditionalist attitudes, considering that they have demonstrably contributed to the survival of rural communities on the edge. Of course it can be claimed, as did a good number of interviewees, that these same conventions also ensure that those communities remain on the edge and that a different approach might have brought greater vibrancy. Moreover, the quality of democracy is compromised by their persistence. Despite these criticisms, local elites in many rural districts have decided on an ongoing basis that employing a patron-like model for selecting candidates is their best strategy in the current political system. This makes the prospects for increasing women's candidacy and election in rural districts all the more challenging. Traditionalist attitudes can be educated out of people, but the rational judgment that a traditional political strategy continues to be economically functional cannot.

Interviews in rural Canada also help to understand why Matland and Studlar found that dual-member rural districts were far more likely than single-member districts to elect a female MLA. When districts are not asked to pin all of their heightened expectations on one representative, the patron function is necessarily diminished. Indeed one could even suggest that the job was typically split between the patron function and administrative function. A balanced ticket of a man and a woman aligns the interests of a rural district riding association with central party leadership, as all parties seek to improve their image, including, to varying degrees, their overall gender balance.

Are Some Rural Districts More Women-Friendly?

That her interviews were carried out in two regions allowed Carbert (2009a) to distinguish among different rural areas based on economic circumstances. The economies of most of Canada outside its major centers are characterized by resource-extraction industries. Single-commodity resource reliance makes communities particularly vulnerable to ecological crises and the economic booms and busts that follow the violent swings in commodity prices determined by global markets. A long secular slide in commodity prices beginning in the 1970s left most of rural Canada in economic decline through the 1990s. The timing of this slide matches closely the period when women made

substantial electoral gains in metropolitan districts. Based on what has been learned about economic impact on women's political prospects, it seems likely that bad timing in global markets exacerbated the rural deficit in women elected that emerged during that period.

More recently, resource industries have experienced a series of rapid changes. At the time of the interviews from 2000 to 2003, some industries, such as energy and base-metals mining, had rebounded sharply, whereas others, such as fishing and pulp and paper, continued to languish. Consequently, some rural areas, most commonly in the West, had begun to experience what seemed like an economic boom, while others, both in the West and Atlantic Canada remained relatively stagnant.

Carbert observed that some of the constraints on women's candidacy were less pronounced where the economy was accelerating and reasoned that they may be substantially diminished by a prolonged resurgence of the dominant local industry. First, when public-sector expenditures are relatively less important compared to private-sector activity, community expectations of a representative become less heightened. Furthermore, patronage practices, though always present, become less relevant. A politician's job may come to resemble less of a patron and more of an administrator who tries to keep infrastructure in step with economic growth and who may even set limits on growth. Many of the women leaders interviewed in rural Canada indicated that they would be more eager to take on this sort of role.

A good example of a woman politician taking this approach to her elected office is Melissa Blake, mayor of Wood Buffalo municipality, better known as Fort McMurray—home to the Alberta oil-sands industry. Blake had been working in the private sector, as an administrative professional for Syncrude, when first elected mayor in 2004 at the age of 35. She described in an interview her efforts to expand hospitals, schools, water treatment plants, recreational facilities, and affordable housing, to keep up with rapid population increases. She was not seeking funds to fuel, or even to act as a catalyst for, the local industry and was more likely to seek contributions from the private sector than to provide funds to it. When a rapid decline in the price of oil brought a slowdown to the oil-sands industry in the wake the global financial crisis of 2008, Blake described a sense of relief “to have this opportunity to move our infrastructure forward” to catch up with the overly rapid growth that had taken place in the private sector (Tougas, 2009, p. B1).

Local elites, too, might come to view the role of a political representative as less stereotypically masculine. When development funding is no longer the main focus, it becomes less important for incumbent politicians to remain in office and for their successors to be drawn from prominent political families who have long-standing ties and networks. In any case, an influx of newcomers tends to disrupt established local hierarchies, and so the idea of a “leading family” diminishes in importance. When the

economy is doing well, a greater variety of job opportunities open up for educated women, and promising candidates can be recruited from the private sector, thus escaping the public-service prohibition on partisanship. And when prospective women leaders are cutting their teeth on volunteer projects in a growing community, their efforts are more likely to meet with success and appreciation. By contrast, a number of interviewees in declining communities described a sense of futility in their volunteering efforts. Finally, if the job of a politician were not quite as powerful and prestigious, relative to other jobs available locally, an ambitious woman might be more likely to win the nomination.

That all these effects arise simultaneously, and reinforce each other to promote women's leadership amounts to a positive synergy. Carbert concluded that rural communities with thriving economies and growing populations present opportunities for a motivated political party to break through the stubborn pattern of low numbers of women elected in nonmetropolitan districts.

Future Directions

Recent studies of women's leadership in rural Canada have detailed how the specific relationship between political representatives and their constituents is influenced by economic circumstances and affects everyone who is involved in determining whether a woman stands as a candidate for elected office. When a politician's role is perceived as more of a patron, and less of an administrator, (a) prospective women candidates are less eager to put their names forward, (b) local elites are less open to change when recruiting nominees, and (c) male competitors find the job more desirable.

A natural question arises whether these findings might be applied outside rural Canada. The contrasts drawn among rural areas with distinct economic circumstances suggest that extrapolation might be possible. One interesting line of inquiry would be to look for variations among all Canadian districts, including metropolitan districts, in how the local economic structure influences the role of their elected representatives and try to relate that to women's candidacy and election.

It is tempting to imagine a quantitative operationalization of the patron perception of a politician's job. One might consider a simple measure such as the ratio of public-sector to private-sector components of the district economy. However, this approach is unlikely to capture the political dynamics described earlier. Cities typically have universities, military bases, government offices, and so forth. For example, the public-to-private sector ratio in Halifax, the largest city in the Atlantic region, is at least as high as in the region overall (Beaudin, 1998, p. 47). Nevertheless most of the expenditures there involve relatively stable program spending. Moreover, individual MPs

and MLAs in Halifax districts are not perceived to significantly influence the expenditures of the Department of National Defense, the universities, or the Port Authority. The continued vitality of these pillars of metropolitan economies does not rest on the choice of elected representative, and the voters and riding associations know it. The crucial issues are whether the representative is seen to influence what public resources come to the district, to what degree he or she controls how they are allocated within the district, and how badly the district needs those resources. Although these concepts are very real to local elites and attentive voters, finding a quantitative operationalization may not be simple.

If economic self-interest is to blame, and not rural traditionalist attitudes, the question arises whether metropolitan districts might elect fewer women if a change in circumstances were to alter what they required from their elected representatives. After all, the patron function largely disappeared from major urban centers before women made substantial electoral gains there, so there is no real precedent for the female patrona. The global financial crisis that emerged in 2008, and the ensuing global economic slowdown, may provide an unhappy opportunity to find out. When entire economies become fragile, when entire industries turn to governments for bailouts to sustain them through a period of instability, and when elected representatives are expected to make tough choices to save one corporation and not another, to set conditions on the allocation of taxpayer-funded support, and to become directly involved in trying to keep as many jobs going as possible and as many people in their homes as possible, are politicians metamorphosing into patrons? If so, and if that process were to filter down to the district level for long enough, recent advances in understanding rural women's leadership suggest a potential for politics in general to become more of a man's game. From that perspective, a timely return to economic and financial stability holds the prospect for yet another benefit: maintaining and building on the gains that women have achieved in political leadership over the past few decades.

Notes

1. All seats in the 10 provincial legislatures are equally weighted in the provincial aggregate shown.

2. Although the quantitative illustrations of the rural-urban distinction presented here are restricted to national and provincial legislatures, the interview studies have application to local government as well. The rural-urban spectrum of women's election to municipal councils has not yet been systematically compiled across Canada. Limited studies of portions of the spectrum suggest that the same pattern found at the national and provincial levels holds at the local level as well. For example, Trimble (1995) found that significantly higher proportions of women sat on the councils of Canada's 14 largest cities than on the next tier of 74 smaller cities (p. 97). In addition to the general trend of decreasing

presence of women on council with increasing rurality, Elisabeth Gidengil and Richard Vengroff (1997) found a rise at the extreme end of the spectrum representing the tiniest communities in their study of Québec municipalities. They attributed this rise to the fact that the councils of these smallest municipalities control few resources, so that seats on council are not perceived to hold much power. Gidengil and Vengroff highlighted the overall slow progress in rural areas with the warning that "it is easy for the level of representation achieved in a handful of major Canadian cities to deflect attention from the larger picture" (p. 536).

3. Carbert's "more urban" half of districts based on population density comprise 54% of Canada's population, closely matching Statistics Canada's urban metropolitan segment. While her "more rural" half of districts includes people living in technically urban settings of smaller cities and towns, it also contains substantial rural areas. Furthermore the boundaries of these districts are typically drawn to keep away from the urban areas of major metropolitan centers. One could argue that the shortfall of women MPs should not be called a "rural deficit," but rather a "nonmetropolitan deficit" or even a "rural, town, and small- and medium-sized city deficit." However, these terms, in addition to being cumbersome, fail to convey the basic pattern, which is that women's parliamentary representation decreases with increasing rurality.

4. Canadian court rulings have upheld the practice of rural overrepresentation, on the principle of "effective, not necessarily equal representation." Furthermore, some of the most extreme cases of overrepresentation are located in four constitutionally protected districts in Prince Edward Island and a few remote districts with substantial aboriginal populations. Hence any initiative to implement a principle of "one person, one vote" would confront deeply entrenched political and constitutional issues.

5. The western region is somewhat more rural than Canada as a whole. Hence 50 of its 92 districts are in the more rural half of districts nationally.

6. The 2000 election preceded the merger between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservatives that formed the Conservative Party. These two caucuses were combined in compiling the 2000 results shown.

7. In Canada the term *riding*, originating from Yorkshire, England, is commonly used interchangeably with *electoral district*.

8. Unlike the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues in the United States, the Canadian Association of Women Parliamentarians did not direct its efforts to policy issues, but instead served as a forum for mutual support and proposed remedies to improve women's access to elected office, notably changes to campaign-finance regulations (Young, 1997, pp. 92-93).

9. The New Democratic Party of Canada has also chosen two women leaders: Audrey MacLaughlin (1989-1995) and Alexa McDonough (1995-2003). Neither served as prime minister because that party has not governed at the federal level. At the provincial level, a larger number of women have led mainstream political parties, including a few that stood a competitive chance to govern. All but one of these parties were defeated; that exception is the Liberal Party of Prince Edward Island, led by Catherine Callbeck, who served as premier from 1993 to 1996. It is cause for concern that there is an emerging pattern for parties led by women to go down in defeat, presenting the potential for claims that women's leadership is, in part, responsible (Bashevkin, 2009b, pp. 44-52; Trimble & Arscott, 2003, pp. 98-99).

10. Unlike in the United States, campaign finance regulations in Canada allow donations only from individuals and thus do not allow organizations like Equal Voice to raise funds for candidates.

11. In 1997 the territory of Nunavut voted on a proposal featuring dual-member districts that would require both a man and a woman to be elected. Prince Edward Island held a referendum on a mixed-member system in 2005. British Columbia held two

separate referenda on a system featuring a single transferable vote in 2005 and 2009. Ontario held a referendum on a mixed-member system in 2007. All referenda were nonbinding, but politically decisive. All were defeated.

12. Bashevkin (2009a) has gone even further, to question whether the occupational pipeline thesis is at all relevant in Canadian public life, for both men and women, whether rural or metropolitan (p. 117).

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