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Nominations of Women in the 2010 New Brunswick Provincial Elections

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The Canadian Study of Parliament Group (CSPG), as part of its efforts to foster knowledge and understanding of Canadian parliamentary institutions, is sponsoring the annual National Essay Competition. College and university undergraduate and graduate students in any discipline across Canada are invited to submit essays on any subject matter broadly related to Parliament, legislatures or legislators. The winning essays are made available free of charge, in both official languages, on the CSPG Web site. The views and opinions contained in these papers are those of the authors and are not necessarily reflective of those of the CSPG.

Essay

Introduction

"A woman has the right to mount the scaffold. She must possess equally the right to mount the speaker's platform."¹ So reads the well-known quotation from Article X of the *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* [Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen] by Olympe de Gouges, a political militant and pioneer in the feminist movement during the time of the French Revolution. Motivated by a desire for change and a more equitable future, these activist women, whose numbers included Madame de Gouges and many others, launched a crusade the ultimate goal of which was to achieve representation for women in politics. Also worthy of note was the dedication to the feminist cause shown by certain men at the time, including Poullain de la Barre, Condorcet and others. Looking back at the great contributors to gender equality, it is interesting to trace the path taken from the time of the Enlightenment to our day in the furtherance of the cause of women.

While it is clear that women have been able to obtain more rights and visibility than in the past, there remains some work to be done, primarily in the political realm. Under-representation of women in politics is a problem in most countries and their territorial components. We will be looking at this issue in our research. My interest in the subject of women in provincial politics began just before the beginning of the university session when, looking at the candidates' signs along the roadside and voting for the first time in New

¹Paul Noack, *La Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne*, 1993 ; in Shannon Hartigan, Réa McKay et Marie-Thérèse Séguin, *Femmes et Pouvoir: Réflexions autour d'Olympe de Gouges*, Moncton, 1995, p.280.

Brunswick's provincial election in September 2010, I was surprised to see how many more women there were running in this election compared to previous ones. I began to take an interest in the subject of women in provincial politics generally. More specifically, I set out to discover why more women decided to run in this election. In the next section I will outline the issues and boundaries of my research and look at various additional elements of interest.

Issues

Looking at the New Brunswick election of September 27, 2010, I was shocked at the end of August to see the number of women candidates. "Why so many women this time compared to previous elections?" I asked myself. Of the 236 candidates in this provincial election, 71, or about 30%, were women.² Hence, in a nutshell, the focus of my research: "What were the main reasons for the increase in the number of women running in the New Brunswick election of 2010?" The reasons may lie in a number of factors.

We can obtain some insights from various authors who have looked at the issue of political representation by women. As noted by Maurice Duverger in his book, *La participation des femmes à la vie politique*, the number of women candidates and the likelihood of their being elected depends on the openness of the political parties— i.e., whether they are well positioned on the priority list and whether they are allowed to run in a strong constituency.³ While Duverger takes an institutional viewpoint, Mariette Sineau focuses on the motives of

² Jean-Mari Pitre, "Plus de femmes que jamais sont candidates au N.-B. – Il y a toutefois encore beaucoup de place à l'amélioration," [More women candidates than ever in N.B., even though there is still much room for improvement], *l'Acadie Nouvelle*, Caraquet, September 9, 2010, p.3.

³ Maurice Duverger, *La participation des femmes à la vie politique*, UNESCO, Paris, 1955, pp.77-79.

women for getting into politics: innovation, passion, social programs and their importance, etc. She believes that women enjoy a greater measure of freedom because conflicts between the private and public spheres have diminished, and women have been able to become more involved in politics.⁴ While women now enjoy a minimal presence on the political stage, their numbers must greatly increase if they are to really function on the same footing as men. Looking further at the motivational aspect, Manon Tremblay notes that women politicians are interested in the ethical questions. Their values are on the left of the ideological spectrum, which brings them into the orbit of reformist parties.⁵ A third perspective is taken by Anne Décerf and Marie-Thérèse Séguin, who look at the concept of identity with the exercising of women's power within the Acadian community. On the one hand, they note that the women were encouraged to exercise a form of power by their fathers, who at one time discharged political responsibilities in Acadia. On the other hand, influential women have a tendency to control the dynamics among work colleagues through values handed down by their mothers.⁶

Government agencies, including the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women, have also looked at this phenomenon in a manner more directly related to our topic. One section in a collection of texts looks at possible ways of increasing the number of women in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly (May 2010). This section has much to say about why women choose to pursue a career in politics. Moreover, the final report of the Commission on Legislative Democracy in New Brunswick will be an important instrument in looking at the

⁴ Mariette Sineau, *Des femmes en politique*, Economica, Paris, 1988, p.169.

⁵ Manon Tremblay, *100 questions sur les femmes et la politique*, Remue-ménage, Montreal, 2008, p. 203

⁶ Anne Décerf and Marie-Thérèse Séguin, directed by Shannon Hartigan, Réa McKay and Marie-Thérèse Séguin, "Quand les femmes s'intéressent à l'exercice du pouvoir en Acadie," *Femmes et pouvoir: réflexions autour d'Olympe de Gouges*, Éditions d'Acadie, Moncton, 1995, p.267

question of fixed-date elections, an electoral innovation used for the first time during this election. This change will certainly have an impact on the candidacy of women. Based on the information gathered from the above-mentioned works, we deduce that the research should focus on two specific approaches: one institutional and the other centred on the motives and perceptions of the players.

Two techniques—a review of the literature and the conducting of semi-structured interviews—were used to collect the coherent information required for my research topic. The first consisted primarily in analysing pertinent documents. These include books on political representation by women in the West and, in some cases, in Acadia, newspaper articles on last September's provincial election in New Brunswick, a collection of texts from the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the websites of the provincial parties and of Elections NB, and the final report of the provincial Commission on Legislative Democracy. Looking at the variety of sources and the timeliness of the topic, it would be difficult to base our arguments on just one of the written sources. Better to enrich the content by a synthesis of the various components. Thus we have broadened our horizons in the interest of providing a more cogent argument.

Our second method of gathering information consisted in interviewing female candidates who ran for various parties. Here we looked for four candidates from the four political parties—Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic and Green—who obtained 5% or more of the popular vote in New Brunswick. Over a one-month period, we conducted four interviews with candidates from the four parties and from various regions to provide as broad a cross-section

as possible. The candidates were Francophones aged 50 to 65. Three of them were from urban areas, one from a rural area. Fictitious names were used to protect confidentiality—we chose Gabrielle, Élise, Audrée and Pauline. The candidates' sociological and political profiles were also among the criteria used in selecting the sample. Finally, while centred on the relevant indicators, my questions were broad enough to allow flexibility in the responses.

Hypothesis

We believe that the increase in the number of women candidates in the New Brunswick provincial elections of 2010 was the result of a number of interrelated factors, chief among them institutional mechanisms and the motivations of the women themselves.

Indicators

Our research project is centred on six indicators: the measures taken first, by the political parties and second, by the women's organizations probably provided incentives to women to run in the election. Third, the fixed-date reform proposed by the Commission on Legislative Democracy in 2005 and adopted in 2007 undoubtedly had a positive effect on the recruiting of candidates by the political parties and on the decision-making of those who ran. Fourth, the emergence of two new provincial parties, the Green Party in July 2008 and the People's Alliance of New Brunswick in May 2010, may have attracted women candidates by reason of the greater diversity of political ideals. Fifth, personal motivation continues to be an important criterion in understanding why women are interested in securing political power. Sixth, sexism in politics undoubtedly plays a part in the decision by some women to run for office.

Development of themes

1- Measures taken by the political parties

Because of their nomination process, the political parties are the real determinants of the composition of the Legislative Assembly. As shown by the research of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women [ACSW] and the recommendations of the final report of the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy, "apart from the electoral system as such, the nomination process of the parties must be regarded as the greatest obstacle."⁷ [translation from French]. In other words, a party's attitude and culture can encourage women to run for office, and an open-minded approach will give them an opportunity to obtain the nomination. While a number of strategies, including financial incentives for the parties, encouragement, awareness raising and fixed-date elections were proposed by the ACSW to encourage the political parties to nominate more women candidates, only one, the fixed-date election, was implemented. However, two parties have made innovations in recent years. Although it was not included in their platform, the provincial NDP also adopted a gender equality policy for their nomination process based on the policy in the federal NDP's constitution.⁸ Rather than institutionalizing a gender equality action plan, the Liberal Party, through the National Women's Liberal Commission, has set up the Tony Barry Fund to encourage women to get involved in the political process and to reward outstanding dedication to public service. As noted by Audrée during our interview, women are made to feel very welcome in the party. The party even has a

⁷ Final Report, New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy, 2005, p.114. www.gnb.ca/0100/FinalReport-f.pdf

⁸ Jean-Mari Pitre, *op.cit*, p.3.

team involved primarily in recruiting women: "A good deal of effort was put forth in the previous election to find and include women in the party."⁹ However, she felt that women must be persuaded to enter politics of their own accord, not by special measures.

As far as the openness of the parties was concerned, all the candidates expressed the same viewpoint—their particular parties had all made progress by increasing their awareness and encouraging them to run for office. Many felt that young women running for office were not getting a lot of support from the parties in managing work and families. They also pointed to the increasing interest in politics among young women. While some progress was noted, the political parties still had to some work to do encouraging women to run for office and raising their awareness. Looking to the future, the candidates interviewed felt that incentives should be put in place to make political life more attractive. For example, a greater emphasis might be put on family life in relation to politics. Mentoring might be another useful innovation. Female values must be promoted without disregarding male values to make politics a field more accessible to everyone. Let us now look at measures taken by women's organizations to raise women's awareness, to encourage them and to increase their participation in politics.

⁹ Summary of interview with Audréé, question 3.

2- Measures taken by women's organizations

As attested by various publications and public meetings on the subject of under-representation by women in politics, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women (ACSW), an "organization created by a provincial statute mandated to advise the government and draw the attention of the public to issues of concern to women"¹⁰ [translated from French], has clearly been the foremost organization standing for the defence and support of women in politics in recent years. A collection of texts on women in the Legislative Assembly was published in May 2010, one section of which deals essentially with the question of individual and institutional measures for promoting women's participation in politics. It offers a number of tools for women seeking information on political involvement: an on-line course, audio recordings, audio-visual documents, kits and handbooks.¹¹ At the institutional level, the organization has a number of suggestions for political parties and government. However, the question of nominating women pertains more to the strategies of the parties; it is suggested that they institutionalize the process of seeking potential candidates through a more solid approach to diversity, that they establish a quota system and that they provide financial compensation for women nominated by a given party.

In the interviews, only one candidate stated that the regional and provincial women's organizations were of assistance in their political efforts or helped them to better understand the issues. The other women affirmed that, as activists and party workers of long standing, their

¹⁰ CCCF, *Les femmes à l'Assemblée—Un recueil de textes portant sur les femmes et l'Assemblée législative du Nouveau-Brunswick*, Fredericton, 2010, Table of Contents.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

decisions were motivated more by a personal passion for politics. While acknowledging that they received encouragement from certain groups, they did not feel that these organizations as such were the deciding factors. Rather, they were convinced that their past experience and their contacts played a key role in the decision to launch into an election campaign. Gabrielle, for example, felt that her brother's experience in federal politics had become a sort of reference point; she saw him as a mentor when she began her efforts to find a niche in the Conservative Party.¹² Therefore, while the efforts of women's organizations did have some influence on women running in the election, institutional factors, such as the introduction of fixed-date provincial elections must also be considered.

3- Fixed-date elections

When the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy tabled its final report in 2005, its mandate was "to examine and make recommendations on instituting fixed election dates for provincial general elections while proposing a fixed election date and procedures best suited for our province."¹³ A consideration of the final report on this section reveals two advantages for women in the introduction of fixed-date elections. First, the new initiative allows citizens lacking the necessary finances or time to mobilize in preparation for elections. Second, with an exact date in mind, "Political parties would be in a better position to attract qualified candidates willing to serve as MLAs, knowing that they could better plan their career and personal lives around the certainty of when an election was

¹² Summary of interview with Gabrielle, question 4.

¹³ Final Report, Commission on Legislative Democracy in New Brunswick, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

coming.¹⁴ This new institutional provision will place women in a better position, since they will be able to plan and apply long-term strategy and better reconcile family and political life. The effect will be one of confidence-building.

When asked about the fixed date, most of the candidates agreed that this innovation enabled them to prepare well in advance, which allowed them to learn about election procedures and develop a network of contacts. However, Élise, one of the candidates interviewed, pointed out that she ran for office in response to political events that had taken place in recent years, in particular the sale of New Brunswick Energy and the close ties between the government and the Irving empire.¹⁵ In another vein, none of the women said that the fixed-date election had anything to do with their choice of party affiliation. The latter was determined well ahead of time for a number of reasons, such as family perspective, values, convictions, contacts and so on. We will return to this point further on. Thus it is clear that the fixed-date provincial election benefited candidates by giving them an opportunity to make their choices and to launch their election campaign more effectively. In addition, there were more women in this election—30 percent of the total number of candidates, as opposed to 24 percent in 1999, the previous high.¹⁶ While the fixed-date election is seen as one of the main reasons for the increase in women candidates, consideration will be given in the next section to an institutional factor, namely the broad spectrum of political parties involved in the election—we shall now consider the emergence of two new parties and the impact this had on women's involvement.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.67.

¹⁵ Summary of interview with Élise, question 6.

¹⁶ ACSW, *op.cit*, p.17.

4- The emergence of new political parties

Various observations can be made in connection with the emergence of two new political parties—the Green Party (July 2008) and the People's Alliance of New Brunswick (May 2010)—during these elections. Since the People's Alliance is of such recent vintage, we did not interview any of its candidates. Having focused specifically on female recruitment, the Green Party had 23 women among the 51 candidates on the slate—no less than 42%.¹⁷ The Green Party had the highest number of women running for office, just ahead of the New Democrats' 18 candidates. As noted by Maurice Duverger, "the nature of a political party is the most important variable impacting the number of female candidates, with two kinds of parties seeming to exercise the strongest attraction: parties of the Left (socialist and communist), on the one hand, and Christian parties on the other."¹⁸ [translation from French] Interestingly, while there are no Christian parties in New Brunswick, the highest recruitment of women did in fact occur in the left-leaning parties, i.e. the Green Party and the New Democrats. Although no official institutional measures were taken by them to attract women, there is a correlation between the ideals of these parties and the values most cherished by women.

One of my ten interview questions was, "do you believe that the existence of third parties – the NDP, the Green Party and the People's Alliance—played a part in the nomination of greater numbers of women in last September's election?"¹⁹ The vast majority heartily agreed that the new alignment did afford various opportunities. However, there was one dissenting viewpoint:

¹⁷ Jean-Mari Pitre, *op.cit*, p.3.

¹⁸ Maurice Duverger, *op.cit*, p.82.

¹⁹ Interview questionnaire.

Gabrielle answered thusly: "Personally, I don't think it changes anything. Women are becoming increasingly liberated from the drudgery of the home and are progressing toward a future more in line with their needs."²⁰ In her view, the explanation lies in the liberation of women. While this candidate offered a different viewpoint, it should be noted that the three others saw the emergence of third parties as providing a wider choice. In addition, their ideals coincide far more with a woman's way of thinking. The variety of parties is a reflection of democracy at the provincial level. I made a surprising observation concerning these third-party candidates: those who ran for the Green Party and the NDP were not primarily interested in getting elected. Said Green Party candidate Pauline, "The people of New Brunswick are not sure what they think of the new ideas. We didn't have that many resources. It's hard to imagine people voting for third parties. And our campaign wasn't very big compared to the other parties."²¹ Having examined the institutional factors and their considerable impact on the nomination of women in September's provincial election, let us now consider two other factors: motivation and perception.

5-Personal motivation

"In both modern and traditional societies, women who have passed the child rearing age are far less subject to male control and can now go on into previously proscribed activities."²²

[translation from French] In fact, most of the women who entered politics were in their 40s or over. With no more child-rearing to do, they could now involve themselves in this time-

²⁰ Summary of interview with Gabrielle, question 8.

²¹ Summary of interview with Pauline, question 9.

²² Mariette Sineau, *op.cit*, p.49.

consuming work. Level of training and social environment are also seen to influence a woman's career path. All of the candidates except one had undergraduate or graduate schooling. Manon Tremblay noted that women politicians are more educated than other women—they are among the *élite*.²³ Not surprisingly, then, most of the women who ran for office had a substantial career behind them along with an above average level of postsecondary education.

It can also be said that holding a position of power has an influence on a woman's identity. Do women in such positions tend to identify with their father or their mother? Anne Décerf and Marie-Thérèse Séguin have reached some convincing conclusions on the exercising of power by women in Acadia. On the one hand, the authors find that the women were encouraged to exercise a form of power by fathers who were involved in the community, regardless of the importance of their role. On the other hand, the way in which women control the dynamics among work colleagues is influenced more by values handed down by the mother.²⁴ In our interviews, there was a definite influence on all the candidates by the family, in particular by the father and one of the brothers. When asked, "Do you remember what led you to take an interest in politics?"²⁵ all of them pointed to a strong family history influence. Audrée affirmed that her family had always been interested in politics. Her father was a town councillor and was heavily involved in the Liberal Party in his day.²⁶ Political involvement by their brothers was also cited as a factor piquing the interest of two candidates. Their brothers mentored them,

²³ Manon Tremblay, *op.cit*, p.199.

²⁴ Anne Décerf and Marie-Thérèse Séguin, *op.cit*, p.267.

²⁵ Interview questionnaire.

²⁶ Summary of interview with Audrée, question 1.

helping to point them in the right direction by way of advice and important contacts in the political machine.

Focusing more on the actual objectives of the candidates, we note that, motivated by a desire to change the way politics are conducted, their interests lie more in the social areas. Two interviewees—the Green Party and the Conservative Party candidates—felt that the emphasis should be placed on poverty, literacy, the aging population and people with special needs. The NDP candidate's main priorities were preserving the Crown corporations and dealing with the frustration with the neo-liberal approach of the Liberal Party that led to the NB Energy debacle, and creating pay equity legislation for the people of New Brunswick. Finally, the Liberal candidate had a special interest in regional development: "There should be closer contact between the municipal and provincial levels in business and economic development."²⁷ Aurée insisted that she was prepared to press on even though this was her second attempt at winning a seat for the provincial Liberals. Having looked at the motivational aspect, we shall now turn our attention to perception as related to gender in the political context, and how this can influence the behaviour of women seeking to get involved in politics.

6- Gender-related perception

As suggested by the chapter title in Mariette Sineau's book, *Des femmes en politique*, our everyday perception of others has become fraught with change.²⁸ Primarily in constitutional states, there have been a number of changes in the liberalizing of women and their status.

²⁷ Summary of interview with Aurée, question 2.

²⁸ Mariette Sineau, *op.cit*, p.47.

Women are able to express themselves freely through the mechanisms available in public life. However, it can still be difficult to overcome gender-related perception barriers. In politics, a traditionally male domain, the situation is even more complex for women. "It has often been said that to succeed in politics, a woman must create an aura of reassurance. One who is married and has a family is seen to be normal and non-threatening, the type of person a woman should be."²⁹ There is also the feeling that a woman must prove that she can do the job, as Gabrielle found when working with her primarily male support group. She observed a certain wariness at the beginning when the time came to work as a team, and had to show her character and her competence, after which a solid feeling of confidence took root. One also commonly hears the misconception that women in politics tend to try to act like men, setting aside their own values and ways of doing things. But according to the candidates interviewed, women do not wish to emulate males. As Pauline said, "women don't want to turn into men when they go into politics. Female values should be appreciated and blended in with male values."³⁰ This issue of gender-based perception is still unresolved. However, one must not think that all men are anti-feminists; some of them are supportive of women and respectful of the differences between the genders.

One regularly hears women criticizing male ambition in politics. "In both politics and professional life, careerism is a common practice among men ... For women, the most unpleasant aspect of political life lies in this type of violence inherent in the struggle for power

²⁹ Mariette Sineau, *op.cit.*, p.57

³⁰ Summary of interview with Pauline, question 11.

and position."³¹ [translation from French] Élise alluded to this when she said, "a number of women submitted their names to affirm their presence in the third parties, but not just to win, unlike the men, who entered with a focus on winning."³² As these examples show, there is indeed a difference between male and female politicians. Having set out the indicators at the beginning, it is now time to look at my hypothesis in light of the analysis we have conducted.

Critique of the hypothesis

Having interviewed four candidates from different political parties and having read extensively on the topic of how women are perceived in politics, we can now draw some conclusions. First, our opening hypothesis is proven to be highly pertinent. The increase in the number of women nominated in New Brunswick's provincial election was the result of a number of interrelated factors. By looking at the institutional angle and the behaviour of the players, we were able to identify the elements related to our research topic and also explore two completely different avenues. In sum, however, it is difficult to ascribe the increased participation by women to one primary cause. Given that this is a new trend in our province, there may be a number of principles involved. We must therefore explore as many avenues as possible in our search for valid findings. Second, the candidates did not feel that there was much of an impact from the measures taken by women's organizations. Does this mean that the organizations are ineffective, or that the people running them are lacking an awareness of the subject of women in politics? This question, although interesting, was beyond the scope of our research. The impact of women's organizations on the increased participation by women in

³¹ Mariette Sineau, *op.cit*, p.84

³² Summary of interview with Élise, question 8.

the election remains questionable. Third, it would have been interesting to draw a comparison between research done on the other provinces in this regard. The political culture is quite different from one place to another, which may explain the progress made in Quebec, British Columbia and other places. It would be interesting to conduct a comparative study on this theme. In sum, looking at these three aspects, we can confirm the opening hypothesis, minus the input of women's organizations, since they do not seem to have been a major factor in encouraging women to participate.

Conclusion

The increased involvement by women candidates in the New Brunswick provincial election was due to a number of interrelated factors. The current political situation and the crossing of traditional boundaries have led to a growing interest in political careers among women. Institutionally, we saw that the political parties are encouraging women to participate in a number of ways. The initiative usually originates at the federal level and is then applied provincially. While the influence of women's organizations was small, one cannot disregard the pressures applied by them on government authorities. It is unfortunate that New Brunswick, unlike Quebec, with its Groupe Femmes, Politique et Démocratie (GFPD), has no official mentorship program. The Quebec organization aspires "to create a basis for interaction in a mentoring relationship centred on developing personal confidence and on a realistic perception of public life and of political identity on the part of the aspiring female candidate."³³

[translation from French] We also noted that fixed-date elections aided in the mental and

³³ Martine Blanc and Christine Cuerrier, *Le mentorat en politique auprès des femmes: un mode d'accompagnement prometteur*, Éditions du remue-ménage, Montreal, 2007, p.100.

logistical preparation of women desiring to enter politics. Apparently the positive changes brought about by the final report of the New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy resulted in a larger number of women candidates in this election. Finally, the presence of a number of third parties helped to attract more candidates, given the diversity of political ideals presented by them. The largest number of candidates was seen in the third parties of the Left.

Motivational sources and gender perceptions, discussed above, were also seen to attract women to politics. Career, social environment, age, desire for change, social interest and perseverance are all important factors. Gender perceptions are of tremendous importance in the consolidating of women's ambitions. Some of these include the following: women do not pursue politics in the same way as men; they do not take a careerist approach, as men do, and they often have to prove themselves before men will believe that they are capable of doing the job.

Having analysed the results, we see a need to broaden our horizons. While the numbers show that there has been progress, more needs to be done to arrive at an equitable representation by the second sex. What other measures need to be put in place to encourage women to participate in the political arena? A number of people believe that the solution is institutional—changing the voting method or setting quotas. Even if political involvement on their part is facilitated, women need to become more aware of the possibilities and to understand that politics can bring them considerable benefits, both professional and social.

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