
The Nomination of Women in the 2010 New Brunswick Election

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Of the 236 candidates in the 2010 New Brunswick provincial election, 71, or about 30%, were women. This represented a significant increase over the number of female candidates in previous provincial elections. This article looks at a number of factors that may have contributed to the change. It is based in part on interviews conducted over a one month period with candidates from the Liberal, Conservative, New Democratic and Green parties. The candidates interviewed were Francophones aged 50 to 65. Three of them were from urban areas, one from a rural area.

There are at least six factors that may have accounted for the increase in the number of women candidates in the 2010 New Brunswick provincial election.

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.”¹ 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 Advisory Council on the Status of Women 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 adopted a gender equality

policy for their nomination process based on the policy in the federal NDP’s constitution.² 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 one candidate during the interviews, women are made to feel very welcome in the party. The party even has a 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.” She felt, however, 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 interviewed expressed the same viewpoint—their particular parties had 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 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.

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Measures Taken by Women's Organizations

On the subject of under-representation by women in politics, the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 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," has clearly been the foremost independent 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 August 2010, one section of which deals essentially with the question of individual and institutional measures for promoting women's participation in politics.³ 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. 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.

While the efforts of women's organizations did have some influence on women running in the election, institutional factors must also be considered.

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 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.

One candidate, felt that her brother's experience in federal politics had become a reference point; she saw him as a mentor when she began her efforts to find a niche in the Conservative Party.

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."⁴ 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 helps lacking 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 coming. 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 interviewed 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, one of the candidates, 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.

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. 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.⁵

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%.⁶ 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.”⁷ 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 the 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?” The majority heartily agreed that the new alignment did afford various opportunities. However, there was one dissenting opinion: “Personally, I do not 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.” 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. Those who ran for the Green Party and the NDP were not primarily interested in getting elected. Said the Green Party candidate, “The people of New Brunswick are not sure what they think of the new ideas. We did not have that many resources. It is hard to imagine people voting for third parties. And our campaign was not very big compared to the other parties.”

Personal Motivation

In the words of one candidate interviewed: “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.”⁸ In fact, most of the women who entered politics were in their 50s or over. With no more child-rearing to do, they could now involve themselves in this time-consuming work. The level of training and social environment also seems 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰

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?” all of them pointed to a strong family history influence. One 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. Political involvement by brothers was also cited as a factor piquing the interest of two candidates. Their brothers mentored them, 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.” One candidate insisted that she was prepared to press on even though this was her second attempt at winning a seat for the provincial Liberals.

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.¹¹ Primarily in constitutional states, there have been a number of changes in the liberalizing of women and their status. 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."¹² There is also the feeling that a woman must prove that she can do the job, as one candidate 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 one candidate said, "women do not want to turn into men when they go into politics. Female values should be appreciated and blended in with male values." 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 and position."¹³ According to one candidate, "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." As these examples show, there is indeed a difference between male and female politicians.

Observations and Conclusions

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. 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.

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 the election remains questionable.

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."¹⁴ We also noted that fixed-date elections aided in the mental and 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.

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, 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.

Notes

1. Final Report, New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy, 2005, p.114. www.gnb.ca/0100/FinalReport-f.pdf
2. Jean-Mari Pître, *l'Acadie Nouvelle*, Caraquet, September 9, 2010, p. 3.
3. CCCF, *Les femmes à l'Assemblée—Un recueil de textes portant sur les femmes et l'Assemblée législative du Nouveau-Brunswick*, Fredericton, 2010.
4. Final Report, Commission on Legislative Democracy in New Brunswick, *op. cit.* p. 65.
5. CCCF, *op.cit.*, p.17.
6. Jean-Mari Pître, *op. cit.* p.3.
7. Maurice Duverger, *La participation des femmes à la vie politique*, UNESCO, Paris, 1955, p. 82.
8. Mariette Sineau, *Des femmes en politique*, Economica, Paris, 1988. p.49.
9. Manon Tremblay, *100 questions sur les femmes et la politique*, Remue-ménage, Montréal, 2008, p. 199.
10. 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 Acadien," *Femmes et pouvoir : réflexions autour d'Olype de Gouges*, Éditions de 'Acadie, Moncton, 1995, p. 267.
11. Mariette Sineau, *op.cit.* p. 47.
12. *Ibid.* p. 57.
13. *Ibid.* p. 84.
14. 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.