

Who Cares? Canadian Attitudes About Women in Politics

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Abstract

In November of 2008, 69 women were elected to the Canadian House of Commons, representing 22.4% of the 308 sitting Members of Parliament. Despite this record high number of women elected to the House of Commons, the number of men elected to parliament still far exceeds that of women. Furthermore, the ratio of men to women in the House continues to vastly over-represent the ratio of men to women in the Canadian population. Scholars have pointed to a number of factors that influence the presence (or lack thereof) of women in politics (Bashevkin 1985; Burns et al. 1997; Elder 2004; Erickson 1993; Gidengil & Everitt 2000; Hooghe & Stolle 2004; MacIvor 2003; Sanbonmatsu 2006; and Schlozman et al. 1994). Very few studies, however, focus on the attitudes of voters themselves in explaining women's representation in parliament (see, however, Bennett & Bennett 1999 and Jennings 2006). This paper aims to fill the gap. Longitudinal analysis of voters' attitudes in Canada during elections over the past decade (1997-2008) suggests that neither men or women are particularly concerned about the number of women in parliament, nor do they believe that policies or regulations should be introduced to increase the number of women candidates put forward by Canadian political parties. We argue that the relatively low number of women elected to the House of Commons is closely linked to the lack of concern about the issue on the part of the Canadian public. Simply put, people don't care, so women aren't there.

Introduction

As has been identified by scholars of Canadian women in politics, the recent history of women as Members of Parliament in Canada can be described as stagnant and resting at a plateau for almost two decades. Federally, there has been little increase in the number of female MPs since 1993, when the number jumped from 13.3% to 18%, and the percentage has hovered around 20% since the 2000 election (Equal Voice 2008). While the 2008 election marked a record high number of women elected to the House of Commons, it has still not significantly risen above the plateau that has been observed over the past ten years, and women in Canada continue to be dramatically underrepresented in the federal legislature.

As data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2010) indicates, the average number of women in legislatures world-wide is about 19%. Regional averages, however, indicate that there is substantial variation across countries, with Nordic countries averaging at approximately 42%, and Arab countries averaging at around 10%. While a number of scholars have provided compelling reasons for the lack of women in legislatures, we focus on a less frequently discussed issue that may provide some explanation for why women aren't present in equal numbers—equal either to men, or to their proportion in the population. We examine the attitudes of eligible voters in Canada over a ten year period (1997-2008), to assess the extent to which voters care about issues of gender equality—in the home, in society in general, and in the House of Commons in particular.

We find that not only do Canadians not perceive the issue of women's equality and representation to be particularly important, but that the impact of attitudes about women's representation on vote choice are largely negligible. On a basic level, equality is not really an important issue, nor does it really have an impact on the decision to vote for women in Canada.

Women in the House of Commons and Attitudes About Gender Equality

Trimble and Arscott (2003) argue that the number of women sitting in legislatures across Canada has reached a plateau, a political variant of the glass ceiling that has been observed in women's employment. A longitudinal examination of the number of women who have both served as candidates for election as well as those who have been elected to the House of Commons over time illustrates this trend.

<Figure 1 about here>

As Figure 1 indicates there have been significant increases seen in the number of women candidates and MPs during the 1970s and 1980s, moving the dismally low numbers when women first entered the House of Commons in the 1920s closer to a *slightly* more respectable 20%.

A more detailed analysis of these trends in recent years, however, demonstrates that there exists a marked stalling of the number of women MPs in Canada from 1997-2008, which corresponds loosely to the number of women who have stood as candidates over the same time period.

<Figure 2 about here>

While the trend line in Figure 1 indicates a drastic upward slope over time, Figure 2 more clearly depicts the flat lining that has occurred more recently. As parties have continued to marginally increase the amount of women they put forward as candidates for the House of Commons, there has been a corresponding marginal increase in the number of women elected to the national legislature. Acknowledging the existence of this plateau and attempting to understand its prevalence in the Canadian political atmosphere is an important first step. The real issue, however, is why this plateau has come to exist—what happened after the rapid increases in the 1970s and 80s? We believe that by analyzing the attitudes of voters on the issues of women in politics, gender equality, as well as feminism more generally, it may be possible to uncover new understandings regarding why more women aren't being elected to this country's federal legislature.

While there has been significant scholarship on the many factors influencing the presence or invisibility of women in formal politics (Bashevkin 1985; Burns et al. 1997; Elder 2004; Erickson 1993; Gidengil & Everitt 2000; Hooghe & Stolle 2004; MacIvor 2003; Sanbonmatsu 2006; and Schlozman et al. 1994), little has been written that specifically integrates voter attitudes with the numbers of women elected to representative institutions themselves (although see Goodyear-Grant 2010, who examines the impact of attitudes about women's role in parliament on the decision to vote for women in the 2004 Canadian election). By using the attitudes of individuals gathered by the Canadian Election Studies of 1997-2008, it is possible that this paper begins to merge the existing literature on the lack of women in the House of Commons with more personal understandings of what gender equality, feminism, and women in politics mean to Canadians. This information may then be used not only to analyze where women fit in the formal political structure of Canada, but also help answer other pervasive questions about the role of women in this country, both inside and outside the formal realm of politics.

Existing literature about voters' attitudes about women in politics is relatively small, and the vast majority of existing work in the field focuses on the American case. This literature is important for this research however, particularly when considering ambivalence as a key reason why there are so few women MPs in the House of Commons.

While the concept of the gender gap has typically focused on the differences between men and women in how they vote, how they feel about policy issues, and how they participate politically, Jennings (2006) and others have identified a fourth area where a gender gap is evident: the attitudes and beliefs about women in political life. Jennings argues that in the American political arena, "there has by

now been sustained and widespread exposure to the idea of gender equality in the public sphere” (2006: 217) that has led to a decrease in the existence of a gender gap in the opinions and attitudes of women and men on women in political life. Jennings (2006) suggests, however, that the ambivalence seen by men in his analysis combined with increasingly different political interests between women and men may lead to the maintenance or even an increase of the gender gap with regards to attitudes towards women in politics.

The argument posited by Jennings (2006) belongs to a broader academic literature surrounding the attitudes of the public towards women in political life. Bennett and Bennett (1999) give three main explanations for differences in opinions about gender equality in politics: sex role socialization, structural factors, and situational factors (34). In their analysis of American national survey data from 1974-1996, they suggest that it is structural and socialization factors that have the greatest impact on attitudes, while demographic factors like sex are less important. They argue that regional socialization is the largest factor influencing attitudes about gender equality in politics, as those raised with more traditional backgrounds and cultures typically hold conservative views that are less approving of women in politics (Bennett and Bennett 1999: 39). While they generally find demographic factors to matter less, they do argue that age is a significant predictor of opinion about political gender roles, as “younger people are slightly more likely to express modern views than are older people” (Bennett and Bennett 1999: 39).

Others have suggested more gender-specific explanations of views on women in political life. In their early work on politics, public opinion, and women, Poole and Zeigler (1985) identify the existence of a class bias in the women’s equality movement (15). While not directly related to the issue of women in politics, the concept that socioeconomic status plays a mitigating role in deciding how women feel about their own equality in political participation contrasts with the views of Bennett and Bennett (1999) and others who feel that socialization is a more important factor. Poole and Zeigler (1985) suggest that middle and working class women drove the women’s equality movement, and that both the lower-class and elite class were not as concerned about the equal role of women in modern society. If this is indeed the case, then it is important to examine the role of socioeconomic status in addition to sex when examining the attitudes of individuals about women in politics.

In their examination of gender differences in political attitude expression, Atkeson and Rapoport (2003) found that women were more likely than men to respond with “don’t know” to closed-ended survey questions about policies, candidates, and groups, and they suggest that differences in political socialization have maintained ambivalence and apathy among. They suggest that because of the importance of socialization, female role models such as female political candidates are essential to “helping other females overcome societal stereotypes of female political indifference and inactivity” (Atkeson and Rapoport 2003: 517). While this may serve as explanation for why women may not feel strongly about

the importance of having women in Canada's Parliament, it does not explain the attitudes of men regarding women's role in politics.

Kathleen Dolan (2004) finds that women tend to "be somewhat more likely than men to say that more women in office would make a positive difference" (46), shedding additional light on attitudes of women about the role of women in politics, but provides little information about the attitudes of men on this issue. Wirls (1986) points to the importance of incorporating men's values when interpreting the causes of gender gaps, but for the most part, it is the values of women that get the most attention.

Some scholars have looked at the role of feminism and voters' favourability towards feminists as another key aspect to understanding voters' preferences and opinions regarding women in Canadian politics. Indeed, the impact of feminism may trump that of sex, and may help to illuminate the underlying causes for men's attitudes as well as women's. Conover (1988) finds that feminists are unique in their basic values and orientations, and that feminists account for a large portion of gender gaps in political attitudes. Relatedly, in their examination of the American case, Plutzer and Zipp (1996) suggest that there exists a strong correlation between gender identity and voting for women candidates, particularly when the candidate is perceived to be feminist. They attribute much of this relationship to the 1992 "year of the woman" in the United States, but their results are nonetheless relevant to the (non)election of Canadian women candidates as they suggest a particular connection between vote choice and attitudes towards feminism.

While this relationship remains nebulous in the existing literature, largely due to a lack of consensus surrounding the definition of feminism and a difficulty in empirically measuring what it means to be politically feminist, it is essential to consider the question of feminism when analyzing the attitudes of Canadian men and women on the issue of women in the House of Commons, particularly as it may lead to better understandings of why women are so underrepresented in the federal legislature.

Gidengil et al. (2003) have recently considered the question of feminism from a Canadian perspective in their discussion of gender as a cleavage in the beliefs and preferences of Canadian voters. Their study suggests that there is no significant gender gap on the issue of feminism and gender equality in Canada, and that views about feminism and gender equality "do not lend much support to the notion of a backlash on the part of men" (150). However, they do note that women "were much more likely to agree that having more female MPs is the best way to protect interests" (150), but did not necessarily see the lack of women in federal politics as a serious problem. Goodyear-Grant (2010) takes this one step further, and examines the impact of attitudes about the proportion of women MPs in the House of Commons on the decision to vote for women in the 2004 election. Her findings are mixed, and suggest that women who find it problematic that women are underrepresented in parliament are more likely to vote for women,

while men who are concerned about the underrepresentation of women are less likely to vote for women.

These results point to a need to look at the ambivalence about the election of women to the House of Commons among both male and female voters in Canada, and they suggest that favourability towards feminism and issues of gender equality more generally may be an important element in explaining the lack of growth in female representatives in the legislature. The existing literature illuminates the fact that there has been little research or concrete evidence shown to explain exactly why neither men or women are concerned about the small number of women in government, or why there is little public support for legislation requiring minimum numbers or percentages of women candidates to be put forth during elections.

The literature on attitudes about women in politics to date suggest that there is a dearth of data that includes the attitudes of both women and men on the issue, as well as little concrete evidence to tie voter attitudes directly to the number of women seen in legislatures. In the following section, this paper attempts to address these issues, and assesses whether or not voters' sentiments towards women in politics, gender equality, and feminism affect their vote choice, and in particular, their decision whether or not to vote for a female candidate on election day.

Data and Analysis

To examine voters' attitudes about gender equality, women in legislatures, and feminism, as well as the impact of those attitudes, we use data from the Canadian Election Studies from 1997-2008. These five elections provide a reasonable amount of information about attitudes about gender equality, since a total of 14 related questions are included at least once in an election study during that time period. Our approach is three-pronged. First we examine voters' attitudes about these issues in general, noting trends and assessing some of the factors that influence their attitudes. Second, we examine the impact of these attitudes on vote choice across all elections in this period. Third, we focus on the most recent (2008) election, and examine the impact of attitudes on voters' decisions to vote for a female candidate. Throughout it all, we also assess the role of voters' levels of political sophistication, in order to assess the extent to which more knowledgeable voters think and behave differently from less knowledgeable voters. Previous studies indicate that voters are not a homogeneous group, and that political sophistication not only has an important influence on vote choice and issue attitudes in general, but may influence the impact of factors such as gender (Bartels 1996; Bittner 2007).

Table 1 lists the 14 questions probing respondents for their attitudes about women's place in politics and in the home, along with the year in which they were included in the election study. Some questions are included in only one year, while others are included in each election study. We tracked the average

response to each over time, in order to get a sense of voters' general attitudes about the role of women in politics and society.¹

<Table 1 about here>

As Table 1 indicates, there is no question for which respondents are in perfect agreement about the need for greater equality. The highest scores come in response to the need for minimum numbers of women candidates put forward by political parties, in the 2004 (0.823) and 2006 (0.800) general elections. Average values overall range from a low of 0.108 (in response to the suggestion that affirmative action be used in hiring processes) to a high of 0.823, with most values falling somewhere around 0.5. An average of 0.5 suggests that approximately half the population feels that gender equality is not very important, something which seems surprising in an established democracy like Canada. In fact, in many cases, "pro-woman" attitudes have actually decreased over time. Respondents are less supportive of easier access to abortion than they were in 1997, are less supportive of "doing more for women," and more likely to agree that "we have gone too far in pushing equal rights." Unfortunately, it is not possible to track attitudes on all of the various questions, so getting a more complete picture of attitudes over time is difficult.

It is also the case that not all voters feel the same way about women's equality. When we examine attitudes more closely, it becomes apparent that there are gender gaps (women often hold different views about these issues than men do) as well as sophistication gaps (those who are more politically sophisticated hold different attitudes than those who are less sophisticated).² Figure 3 graphs the results of difference in means tests, comparing the values of women to those of men, on the same 14 questions found in Table 1, while Figure 4 does the same for political sophistication.

<Figure 3 about here>

The 14 questions about the role of women are split into three groups: attitudes towards women in the family, in politics and society in general, and in parliament. Values that fall along the zero line would indicate that women and men do not differ at all in their attitudes. Positive values indicate that men are more liberal or

¹ Each variable was coded on a 0-1 scale, with 1 representing the most liberal or "pro-woman" attitude, and 0 representing the attitudes the least supportive of equality for women. Thus in the case of the question "How much do you think should be done for women," the higher the average, the more respondents felt that more should be done for women. In contrast, in the case of the question regarding the extent to which respondents agreed with the statement, "Society would be much better if women stayed home with their children," the higher the rating, the more respondents disagreed with this perspective.

² An index based on responses to factual questions was used to build the political sophistication measure. Each of the election studies in this analysis include a number of questions tapping into respondents' level of knowledge about political events and figures, including identification of party leaders, of Canadian political events, as well as party leaders and institutions of other countries. The index was composed by summing the number of correct responses each respondent gave to questions, and then rescaling it on a 0-1 scale, where a score of 1 reflects a perfect score and a score of 0 means the respondent was not able to answer any of the questions correctly.

“pro-woman” in their attitudes than women are, and negative values indicate that women are more liberal on a given issue than men. As the data indicate, of the ten questions for which there are statistically significant differences between women and men, women hold more liberal attitudes than men 80% of the time. For two questions, men have more liberal answers than women do: attitudes about women and childrearing, and sympathy towards feminism. While on average respondents are not generally supportive of affirmative action or quotas to raise the number of women in either good jobs or parliament, women are more in favour than are men. These differences are not surprising, given that women are more disadvantaged by gender inequality than are men, and that women have generally found to be more progressive in their attitudes in comparison to men (Gidengil et al. 2002).

When we run the same statistical analysis, comparing the 25% of respondents who have the highest levels of political sophistication to the 25% of respondents with the lowest levels of political sophistication, very different patterns emerge.

<Figure 4 about here>

We expect that those with higher levels of political sophistication will be more progressive or “pro-woman” in their attitudes than those who are less sophisticated. Past research has shown that those with higher levels of education tend to be more progressive and more inclined towards the accommodating of cultural differences and the needs of groups in society (Johnston et al. 1992). Other scholars suggest that the less sophisticated simply have different attitudes than those who are more sophisticated, and consider different types of factors when determining how to vote (Bartels, 1996; Bittner 2007; Roy 2009). These data support the idea that those who are more sophisticated have different values than those who are less sophisticated, but they are not necessarily more liberal or progressive in the way we would expect from Johnston et al.’s results. Negative bars reflect more progressive attitudes among the more sophisticated, while positive bars reflect more progressive attitudes among the less sophisticated. Of the 14 questions about gender equality, 11 have statistically significant differences between high and low sophistication groups. For six of those, the more sophisticated are more progressive in their attitudes (negative bars), while for the other five, the less sophisticated are more progressive).

Paradoxically, while those who are more sophisticated are more likely to agree that it is a problem that there are substantially more men than women in the House of Commons, they are less likely to believe that affirmative action or quotas should be implemented to encourage higher numbers. They are also less likely to believe that discrimination poses a problem for women on the job market, and less likely to think that more should be done for women. In contrast, when it comes to “social” or “family” values, they are more progressive than those who are less politically sophisticated: they are less likely to believe that women should stay home with children, less likely to support the need for traditional family values, and more likely to support easier access to abortion. They are also more likely to be supportive of feminism and feminist groups. What this leaves us with is

a sense that the more politically sophisticated appear to be more likely to support *liberal notions* of democracy—closely linked to formal equality, rather than believing in taking action to ensure substantive equality.

In order to better understand the types of factors that might lead to greater levels of support for women's equality, the 14 questions were used to construct three indices: a family values index, a political values index, and a quotas & parliament index. These indices were then regressed on a wide variety of socio-demographic variables in order to determine what "types" of people might be more or less likely to support women's equality on these three dimensions. Table 2 lists the results of OLS regression analyses, with each index as a dependent variable, coded on a 0-1 scale. All independent variables are also coded on a 0-1 scale, either as binary variables (0/1) or discrete variables (e.g. political interest and income).

Different factors affect attitudes towards each of the three indices. Those respondents who are more highly educated have more progressive attitudes on the family values index, as do Protestants and those who claim to have no religion at all. Those who are more interested in politics are also more likely to hold more progressive attitudes about gender equality in the household, as are respondents from Québec. Partisans of all major parties are more likely to hold more progressive attitudes (compared to partisans of "other" parties), as are non-partisans. Finally, those who reside on the prairies, those who are older, those who are married, and homemakers tend to hold less progressive attitudes on this measure.

<Table 2 about here>

When it comes to the political values index, demographic factors have a slightly different influence on attitudes: women hold more progressive attitudes, as do those who are more interested in politics, as do those from Atlantic Canada. Liberal, Bloc, and NDP partisans are more likely to hold "pro-woman" attitudes on this measure," as are non-partisans. Those who are married, protestants, and those living in the prairies are less progressive in their attitudes towards women's political equality. When it comes to the role of women in parliament and attitudes about affirmative action and quotas, those who are older are slightly more progressive, as are partisans of all parties. Catholics and Protestants are both less likely to hold progressive attitudes on this measure in comparison to those belonging to other types of religions.

The data presented in Figure 4 about the role of political sophistication in influencing voters' attitudes about equality suggests that more in-depth analysis is required. Table 3 replicates the analysis presented in Table 2, by level of political sophistication. Noteworthy is the fact that for each index measuring attitudes towards some aspect of gender equality, more socio-demographic variables have an impact on attitudes among the more sophisticated than they do among the less sophisticated, suggesting that the more sophisticated consider a larger number of factors overall when deciding how they feel about these issues.

Among the more sophisticated, women are more likely to hold more progressive attitudes on the family values index, as are those with higher levels of education. Sophistication also increases the impact of income and no religion, while among Protestants, only the less sophisticated are more likely to hold progressive attitudes on this measure. Only among the more sophisticated does being interested in politics, being from Quebec, being a Liberal, an NDPer, or being a non-partisan increase the extent to which an individual will hold progressive attitudes. While all Bloc supporters are more progressive in their attitudes on this measure, political sophistication increases this propensity. In contrast, political sophistication decreases the extent to which homemakers, those who are married, and those from the prairies hold progressive attitudes.

<Table 3 about here>

When it comes to attitudes on the political values index, sophistication increases the likelihood that women hold more progressive attitudes, and decreases the likelihood that those from Atlantic Canada will hold more progressive attitudes. It also changes the direction of attitudes among homemakers: less sophisticated homemakers are more progressive in their attitudes about women's equality in society, while more sophisticated homemakers are less progressive in their attitudes. We cannot explain this effect, but think that it may have something to do with the possibility that more politically sophisticated homemakers may feel that they "chose" to stay home but had other options, while those who are less sophisticated may have opted to stay home out of necessity and may feel that more equality in society is necessary. This is simply a guess, however, and we have no evidence to support this hypothesis. Being a partisan of a major party (or a non-partisan) only has an impact among the more sophisticated, and generally leads to more progressive attitudes on this index. Income and retirement status leads to less progressive attitudes amongst the less sophisticated, and general interest in politics leads to more progressive attitudes amongst the less sophisticated.

Political sophistication leads to different types of attitudes amongst different demographic groups in relation to quotas and the place of women in parliament as well. Among the less sophisticated, those with higher levels of education are less progressive in their attitudes, as are those from BC, while those who are older are slightly more progressive, as are Conservative partisans. Among the more sophisticated, both Catholics and Protestants are less likely to hold progressive attitudes on this measure, while partisans of major parties and non-partisans are all more likely to support the idea that more women should be in parliament, and that quotas might be a good idea.

Taking the data presented in Tables 2 and 3 together, it seems that there is no generalizable conclusion that can be made about the impact of socio-demographic group membership on attitudes about women's place in politics and society. It does seem that both partisans of major parties and non-partisans are generally more supportive of women's equality than are partisans of "other" parties. The question is, do these attitudes influence vote choice?

Tables 4 and 5 present the results of multinomial logistical analysis, in which vote choice was regressed on partisanship, demographic variables, and the three indices measure attitudes about women's equality. Table 4 does so based on the choice set available outside of Quebec (that is, it looks at voters' decisions to vote for either the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the NDP, or an "other" party), while Table 5 includes Quebec and the option present in that province of voting for the Bloc Québécois. In both sets of analyses, the reference category is a vote for the Conservative Party, thus the data presented indicate the impact of the independent variables on the propensity of a voter to vote for one of the other parties over the Conservative Party.

<Table 4 about here>

As Table 4 indicates, different variables influence a voters' decision to vote for each party. Partisanship is important: Conservative partisans are less likely to vote for any of the other options, while NDPers are just over 12 times more likely to vote for the Liberal Party, and over 51 times more likely to vote for the NDP compared to partisans of "other" parties. Non-partisans are also more likely to vote for either the Liberal Party or the NDP than they are to vote for the Conservative Party. Liberal partisans are over 31 times more likely than partisans of "other" parties to vote Liberal, and 4 times more likely to vote NDP. Demographic variables also have an impact: women are approximately 1.5 times more likely than men to vote for either the Liberal party or the NDP over the Conservative party. Region of residence also influences vote choice, as Atlantic Canadians are early 1.4 times more likely than those from Ontario to vote for the Liberal party, while those from BC are almost equally more likely to vote for the NDP.

The influence of attitudes about women's equality is mixed. Those who feel most strongly about the need for greater women's equality (scoring a 1 on a given index) are more likely to choose to vote for either an "other" party, the Liberal party, or the NDP, over the Conservatives. Attitudes on both the family values index and the political index affect vote choice, while the index measuring attitudes towards quotas and the role of women in parliament has no effect. Those who have more progressive attitudes on the family values index are just over twice as likely as those who score a 0 to vote for an "other" party and the Liberal party, and two and a half times more likely to choose to vote for the NDP over the Conservative party. Those who have more progressive attitudes on the political values index are nearly 5 times more likely to vote for an "other" party, just over 3 times more likely to vote for the Liberal party, and nearly 8 times more likely to vote for the NDP rather than choosing the Conservative Party. Attitudes about equality and women's issues more generally do affect vote choice, but attitudes about women's equality in parliament have no influence outside of Québec.

When we look at vote choice including respondents from all provinces (including Québec), similar patterns emerge. Liberal partisans are 28 times more likely to vote for the Liberal Party, and 4 times more likely to choose the NDP over the

Conservative Party. NDPers are nearly 13 times more likely to vote for the Liberal party and nearly 61 times more likely to vote NDP. Bloc supporters are nearly 5 times more likely to vote Liberal than Conservative, and 26 times more likely to vote for the Bloc Québécois compared to partisans of “other” parties. Women are approximately 1.4 times more likely to vote for either the Liberal Party or the NDP compared to men, which is about the same as it was when we examined vote choice outside of Québec only.

<Table 5 about here>

Perhaps most interestingly, when we include voters from Québec in the analysis, attitudes about equality continue to influence vote choice, but attitudes about women’s role in parliament and quotas have an influence as well. Those who have more progressive attitudes on the family values index are 2.8 times more likely to vote for an “other” party, 1.9 times more likely to vote Liberal, and 2.5 times more likely to vote NDP. Those who have more progressive attitudes on the political values index are 4.6 times more likely to vote for an “other” party, 3.5 times more likely to vote Liberal, 9 times more likely to vote NDP, and 5 times more likely to vote Bloc. Those who have more progressive attitudes on the quotas and parliament index are nearly 1.3 times more likely to vote Liberal, and 1.4 times more likely to vote NDP. Those who are more progressive in their attitudes about women’s issues are more likely to choose to vote for parties other than the Conservatives.

The real question is whether the influence of attitudes about women’s equality extends as far as leading Canadians to vote specifically for women candidates. The data suggest that the answer is no. In order to assess the extent to which supporting women’s equality led to a vote for a woman candidate, we merged data available from the Canadian Parliament website (Parliament of Canada) about which parties ran female candidates in the 2008 elections. We matched this information with the vote choice variable included in the CES from 2008, and created a new variable which indicated whether the individual voted for a woman or not, regardless of which party the woman ran for. We then regressed this variable on a series of independent variables, including partisanship, region, and attitudes about women’s equality. Table 6 presents these results.

<Table 6 about here>

Independent variables were introduced in steps, as indicated by each of the four columns in the Table. Column one presents the impact of partisanship and region, column two includes sex and education, column three includes the three indices created, and column four replaces the indices with the variables included in 2008 on their own. As the table indicates, partisanship had no impact on whether or not individuals opted to vote for a woman. Column one indicates that non-partisans are less likely than partisans of “other” parties to vote for a woman, but this effect disappears when other variables are added. Voters from BC and the prairies were more likely to vote for women candidates in 2008, and this effect remains even when other variables are included in the model. Education has an impact, leaving

more educated respondents more likely to vote for women, but this effect disappears when the variables measuring attitudes towards women's equality are included in the model.

The indices on their own have no impact on vote choice, and when we break the indices down into their component parts, only the feminist thermometer has an influence on a voter's decision to choose a woman. Those who feel more warmly or positively towards feminists are 2.2 times more likely to vote for a woman over a man. In determining whether or not an individual will vote for a woman, how he or she feels about women's place in the home, abortion, women's place in parliament, or even quotas, have little effect. What matters is how the individual feels about feminists. These data seem to support those of (Conover 1988) who suggested that feminist identification was the determining factor influencing whether or not individuals would vote for a woman. While the thermometer rating does not measure the extent to which an individual perceives him or herself to be a feminist specifically, it does seem likely that those who perceive feminists positively are also probably feminists themselves.

This effect is strengthened when we examine the decision to vote for a woman by level of political sophistication. Table 7 replicates the analysis presented in Table 6, comparing the decision-making process of the 25% of the respondents who were most politically sophisticated to the 25% of respondents who were the least sophisticated. Those who fall somewhere in between are left out of the analysis.

<Table 7 about here>

As Table 7 indicates, among the least sophisticated, none of the independent variables, including the feminist thermometer, have an impact on an individual's decision to vote for a woman. Among high sophisticates, Bloc partisans are over seven times more likely to vote for a woman (this effect did not appear in the original analysis), those from the prairies are nearly three times more likely to vote for a woman (the effect of residing in BC appears to have disappeared, and must have existed within the group who fall in between the high and low sophisticates), and the impact of the feminist thermometer remains, and has actually increased in its impact: among high sophisticates, those who feel positively or warmly towards feminists are over five times more likely to vote for a woman than those who do not feel positively towards feminists.

These data indicate that generally speaking, there are very few factors that stand out as influencing an individual's decision to vote for a woman, regardless of the party she represents. Attitudes about women's equality in particular have very little influence on the decision to vote for a woman. In 2008, very few individuals felt that legal quotas were desirable to increase the number of woman candidates, and very few wanted to see more of a push for equal rights in Canada. It turns out that these attitudes may not matter for increasing the likelihood that Canadians will vote for women candidates. In 2008, the average rating on the feminist "feeling thermometer" was 0.655 on a scale of 0-1, suggesting that the majority of Canadians do feel positively predisposed to feminists. The data suggest that how

we feel about feminists is the major indicator that determines whether or not we will vote for a woman. Does this mean that feminists are voting for women? Does this mean that it doesn't matter if people don't care about women's role in parliament or women's equality in the home and in society, as long as they like feminists? More research is needed.

Conclusions

The complex puzzle of women's underrepresentation in the House of Commons is virtually impossible to solve with a single study. It is our hope that this preliminary research can provide a stepping stone to further answers about why more women are not being elected to our federal legislature, and about how Canadians feel about both women's representation in parliament, as well as gender equality and feminism more generally.

As can be seen by the data presented, it is difficult to pinpoint an exact attitude or behaviour by Canadian voters that leads them to vote – or not to vote – for a woman candidate on election day. These results confirm findings by Goodyear-Grant (2010). Our analysis provides useful information about the role of political sophistication in shaping voter attitudes, particularly that the more highly sophisticated tend to hold attitudes more in line with notions of liberal democracy, including formal equality, rather than wishing to ensure substantive equality through direct action.

When attempting to understand the effects of voter attitudes on vote choice, however, the case is complicated by many factors, none of which have an overwhelming impact on whether or not voters choose a female candidate over a male one. The role of feminism and Canadians' favourability towards feminists is an essential part of this story, and stands out as one major indicator of this decision, but more research is needed in order to discover what this means for women's equality in Canada and the likelihood that more women MPs will be elected in the future.

With the door open for further study into this matter, these first steps have begun to merge notions of voter attitudes and behaviour with the existing literature on women's political underrepresentation in Canada. It is our hope that the bringing together of these two fields may result in new and provocative answers that help us understand exactly what Canadians think about the lack of women in the House of Commons, and what may be done to increase their numbers in future elections. If it is true that people don't care that women aren't there, what does that say about the state of gender equality in this country? What impact may that have on the ability of women to get elected in coming years? These and other questions resulting from this research must be further investigated in order to more fully understand women's place in the Canadian federal political sphere.

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Tables and Figures

Figure 1

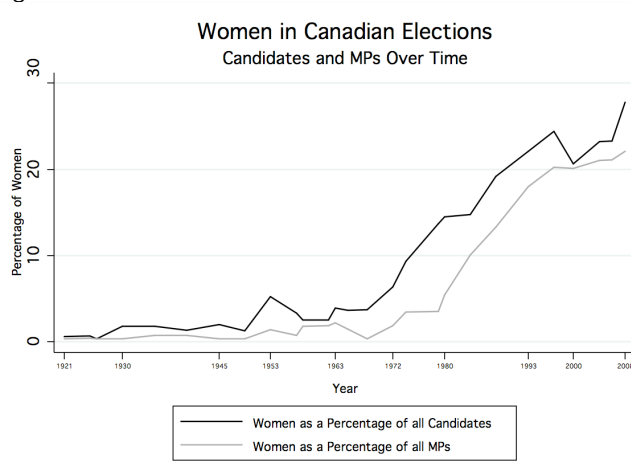


Figure 2

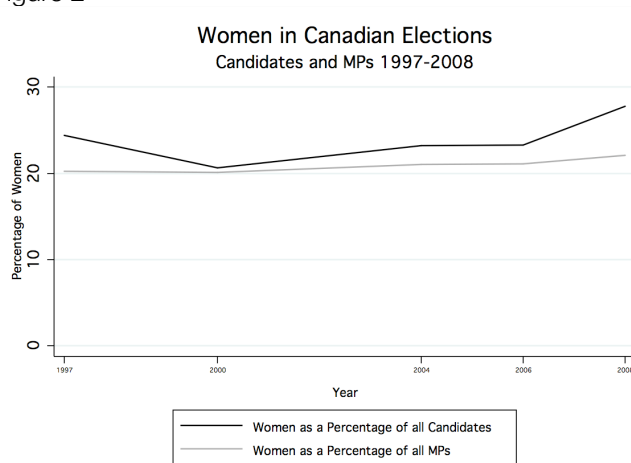
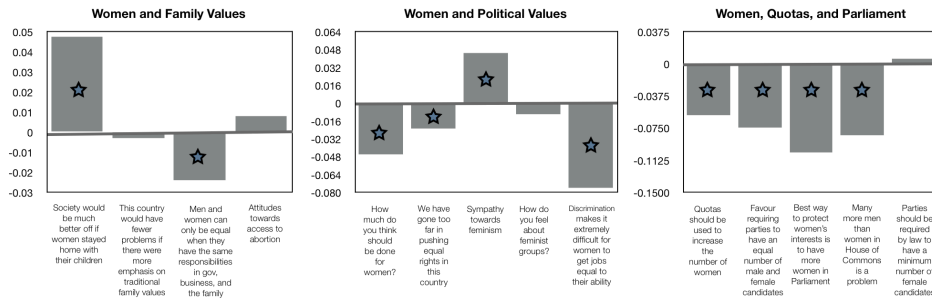


Table 1
Canadian Attitudes Towards Women's Place in Politics and the Home, 1997-2008

	1997	2000	2004	2006	2008
<i>Women and Family Values</i>					
Society would be much better off if women stayed home with their children	0.539	0.534	0.565	0.597	0.591
This country would have many fewer problems if there were more emphasis on traditional family values	0.315				
Men and women can only be equal when they have the same responsibilities in government, business and the family. Or Equality can exist even when men and women have very different responsibilities	0.233				
Now we would like to get your views on abortion. We know that this is a sensitive question. Of the following three positions, which is closest to your own position: one, abortion should never be permitted. Two, should be permitted only after need has been established by a doctor, or three, should be a matter of a woman's personal choice	0.755	0.556	0.649	0.664	0.665
<i>Women and Political Values</i>					
How much do you think should be done for women	0.689	0.720	0.731	0.625	0.642
We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country	0.528		0.568		0.413
When it comes to feminism, are you: 1. very sympathetic. 3. quite sympathetic. 5. not very sympathetic. 7. not sympathetic at all		0.604			
How do you feel about feminist groups?			0.610	0.627	0.655
Discrimination makes it extremely difficult for women to get jobs equal to their ability			0.525		0.520
Quotas should be used to increase the number of women in good jobs OR Hiring should be based strictly on merit	0.108				
<i>Women, Quotas, and Parliament</i>					
Would you favour or oppose requiring the parties to have an equal number of male and female candidates?		0.411			
The best way to protect women's interests is to have more women in Parliament	0.553		0.540		0.564
As you may know, there are many more men than women in the House of Commons. In your view, is this a: 1. very serious problem. 3. Quite a serious problem. 5. Not a very serious problem. 7. Not a problem at all.		0.387	0.309		
Which comes closest to your own view? 1, Political parties should be required by law to have a MINIMUM number of female candidates; or, 2, it should be up to each political party to decide how many female candidates it wants.			0.823	0.800	0.346
Variables coded 0-1 where 1 reflects more "progressive" or "pro-woman" attitudes					
Mean values reported					

Figure 3

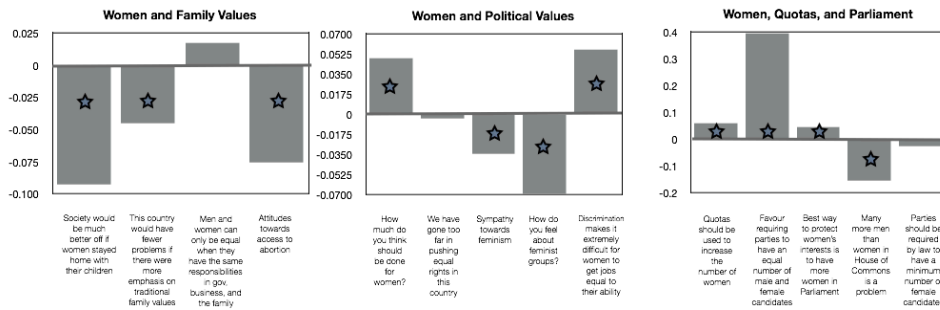
Differences Between Men and Women on Attitudes about Women, Family, and Political Values



Results of difference in means tests: positive values occur when men have more "progressive" attitudes on an issue than women, negative values occur when women have more "progressive" attitudes on an issue than men. Star indicates statistically significant difference.

Figure 4

Differences Between Less and More Sophisticated on Attitudes about Women, Family, and Political Values



Results of difference in means tests: positive values occur when less sophisticated have more "progressive" attitudes on an issue, negative values occur when more sophisticated have more "progressive" attitudes on an issue. Star indicates statistically significant difference.

Table 2
Explaining Attitudes Towards Women's Place in Politics and the Home

	Family Values Index	Political Values Index	Quotas & Parliament Index
Woman	0.001 (0.006)	0.027 (0.004)	0.001 (0.011)
Education	0.036 (0.003)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.006)
Age	-0.002 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.001 (0.000)
Married	-0.042 (0.006)	-0.018 (0.005)	0.002 (0.012)
Homemaker	-0.117 (0.015)	0.003 (0.011)	-0.002 (0.029)
Retired	-0.008 (0.009)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.027 (0.018)
Catholic	0.013 (0.009)	0.006 (0.007)	-0.042 (0.018)
Protestant	0.035 (0.009)	-0.016 (0.007)	-0.083 (0.018)
No Religion	0.128 (0.010)	0.006 (0.008)	0.000 (0.019)
Income	0.038 (0.004)	-0.005 (0.003)	-0.010 (0.008)
General Interest in Politics	0.050 (0.010)	0.041 (0.008)	-0.031 (0.021)
Atlantic	-0.006 (0.009)	0.046 (0.007)	-0.015 (0.019)
Quebec	0.022 (0.009)	0.007 (0.007)	0.025 (0.018)
BC	-0.008 (0.009)	0.006 (0.007)	0.004 (0.018)
Prairie	-0.062 (0.008)	-0.022 (0.006)	0.007 (0.016)
Liberal PID	0.104 (0.013)	0.055 (0.010)	0.208 (0.026)
Conservative PID	0.042 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.010)	0.261 (0.027)
Bloc PID	0.158 (0.016)	0.086 (0.012)	0.200 (0.032)
NDP PID	0.169 (0.015)	0.096 (0.012)	0.219 (0.030)
No PID	0.088 (0.013)	0.054 (0.010)	0.174 (0.027)
Constant	0.410 (0.021)	0.573 (0.016)	0.439 (0.041)
Observations	8708	7253	5045
R-squared	0.16	0.06	0.03

Coefficients from OLS regression analyses presented; standard errors in parentheses

Coefficients in bold significant at 5% or better

Dummies for each election year included in the analysis as control variables but results not shown

Table 3
Explaining Attitudes Towards Women's Place in Politics and the Home, by Political Sophistication

	Family Values Index		Political Values Index		Quotas & Parliament Index	
	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
Woman	-0.019 (0.012)	0.023 (0.009)	0.025 (0.009)	0.030 (0.007)	-0.031 (0.024)	0.012 (0.017)
Education	0.028 (0.006)	0.037 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.025 (0.012)	-0.003 (0.009)
Age	-0.002 (0.000)	-0.002 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.002 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
Married	-0.041 (0.012)	-0.050 (0.010)	-0.017 (0.009)	-0.015 (0.008)	-0.020 (0.024)	-0.023 (0.020)
Homemaker	-0.098 (0.023)	-0.137 (0.029)	0.036 (0.018)	-0.054 (0.022)	-0.025 (0.048)	-0.023 (0.053)
Retired	-0.053 (0.021)	0.010 (0.014)	-0.040 (0.017)	0.008 (0.011)	-0.065 (0.041)	-0.025 (0.027)
Catholic	0.010 (0.019)	0.015 (0.014)	0.020 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.011)	-0.028 (0.038)	-0.066 (0.027)
Protestant	0.044 (0.020)	0.022 (0.014)	-0.016 (0.016)	-0.020 (0.011)	-0.056 (0.039)	-0.116 (0.027)
No Religion	0.089 (0.021)	0.116 (0.015)	0.007 (0.017)	-0.005 (0.011)	0.020 (0.042)	-0.055 (0.028)
Income	0.036 (0.008)	0.045 (0.007)	-0.013 (0.006)	0.001 (0.005)	0.003 (0.016)	-0.010 (0.012)
General Interest in Politics	0.002 (0.019)	0.069 (0.020)	0.042 (0.016)	0.026 (0.015)	-0.060 (0.041)	-0.072 (0.038)
Atlantic	-0.025 (0.019)	0.009 (0.015)	0.058 (0.016)	0.039 (0.011)	-0.027 (0.039)	0.005 (0.028)
Quebec	-0.008 (0.017)	0.034 (0.015)	0.011 (0.014)	-0.014 (0.012)	-0.011 (0.035)	0.042 (0.028)
BC	-0.000 (0.019)	-0.011 (0.013)	-0.000 (0.016)	0.004 (0.010)	-0.097 (0.040)	0.007 (0.026)
Prairie	-0.057 (0.017)	-0.074 (0.013)	-0.021 (0.014)	-0.022 (0.010)	-0.028 (0.035)	0.032 (0.024)
Liberal PID	0.042 (0.034)	0.115 (0.020)	-0.022 (0.027)	0.054 (0.015)	0.072 (0.067)	0.252 (0.041)
Conservative PID	0.015 (0.034)	0.023 (0.021)	-0.049 (0.028)	-0.022 (0.016)	0.161 (0.069)	0.278 (0.042)
Bloc PID	0.102 (0.037)	0.178 (0.026)	0.009 (0.030)	0.093 (0.020)	0.063 (0.075)	0.228 (0.052)
NDP PID	0.052 (0.037)	0.196 (0.023)	-0.014 (0.030)	0.117 (0.017)	0.084 (0.074)	0.251 (0.046)
No PID	0.045 (0.033)	0.094 (0.021)	-0.023 (0.026)	0.058 (0.016)	0.051 (0.066)	0.210 (0.043)
Constant	0.523 (0.045)	0.390 (0.036)	0.646 (0.036)	0.583 (0.028)	0.597 (0.091)	0.546 (0.070)
Observations	2240	3118	1618	2796	1095	2190
R-squared	0.12	0.21	0.06	0.08	0.03	0.04

Coefficients from OLS regression analyses presented; standard errors in parentheses

Coefficients in bold significant at 5% or better

Dummies for each election year included in analysis as control variables but results not shown

Table 4: Impact of Attitudes About Gender and Equality on Vote Choice (outside of Québec)

	Vote for "Other"	Vote for Liberal Party	Vote for NDP
Liberal PID	.742 (0.286)	31.348 (9.607)	4.029 (1.270)
Conservative PID	0.048 (0.022)	0.296 (0.103)	0.244 (0.083)
NDP PID	1.412 (0.679)	12.170 (4.572)	51.372 (18.019)
No PID	0.756 (0.278)	5.434 (1.657)	3.109 (0.956)
Woman	1.035 (0.208)	1.346 (0.148)	1.518 (0.188)
Education	1.246 (0.127)	1.074 (0.059)	1.077 (0.066)
Atlantic	0.546 (0.223)	1.370 (0.221)	1.218 (0.237)
BC	0.937 (0.249)	0.570 (0.086)	1.398 (0.224)
Prairies	1.140 (0.277)	0.451 (0.067)	0.889 (0.145)
Women and Family Values (Index)	2.208 (0.922)	2.121 (0.453)	2.546 (0.629)
Women and Political Values	4.920 (3.099)	3.282 (1.089)	7.932 (3.048)
Women in Parliament	1.508 (0.454)	(0.221) 0.570	1.240 (0.227)

Results of Multinomial Logit Analysis, vote for Conservative Party is reference category.

Relative Risk Ratios reported; standard errors in parentheses

Coefficients in bold significant at 5% or better

Dummies for each election year included in analysis as control, results not reported.

Table 5: Impact of Attitudes About Gender and Equality on Vote Choice

	Vote for "Other"	Vote for Liberal Party	Vote for NDP	Vote for Bloc Québécois
Liberal PID	0.805 (0.271)	28.404 (7.688)	3.939 (1.181)	0.612 (0.292)
Conservative PID	0.103 (0.040)	0.331 (0.103)	0.284 (0.092)	0.316 (0.171)
NDP PID	2.006 (0.880)	12.713 (4.413)	60.853 (20.657)	1.641 (1.257)
Bloc PID	0.511 (0.305)	1.628 (0.870)	4.828 (2.193)	26.306 (12.385)
No PID	1.031 (0.329)	5.315 (1.443)	3.169 (0.935)	1.454 (0.666)
Woman	0.949 (0.165)	1.442 (0.139)	1.419 (0.161)	1.318 (0.253)
Education	1.179 (0.101)	1.090 (0.052)	1.105 (0.062)	0.958 (0.094)
Atlantic	0.531 (0.214)	1.315 (0.208)	1.197 (0.232)	0.000 (41.496)
Quebec	1.524 (0.374)	0.720 (0.101)	0.612 (0.120)	7.71 (5.77)
BC	0.984 (0.257)	0.579 (0.086)	1.421 (0.267)	0.000 (31.243)
Prairies	1.108 (0.264)	0.447 (0.065)	0.895 (0.146)	0.000 (23.744)
Women and Family Values (Index)	2.847 (1.041)	1.880 (0.356)	2.562 (0.591)	1.931 (0.803)
Women and Political Values	2.600 (2.425)	1.880 (0.356)	9.143 (3.216)	4.762 (2.770)
Women in Parliament	1.371 (0.349)	1.297 (0.186)	1.375 (0.230)	1.322 (0.355)

Results of Multinomial Logit Analysis, vote for Conservative Party is reference category.
Relative Risk Ratios reported; standard errors in parentheses
Coefficients in bold significant at 5% or better
Dummies for each election year included in the analysis as control, results not reported

Table 6
Impact of Attitudes About Equality on Decision to Vote for a Woman Candidate

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Liberal PID	0.825 (0.74)	0.796 (0.88)	1.058 (0.14)	1.062 (0.15)
Conservative PID	0.900 (0.41)	0.929 (0.28)	1.025 (0.06)	1.074 (0.18)
NDP PID	0.942 (0.21)	0.934 (0.24)	0.903 (0.24)	0.904 (0.24)
Bloc PID	1.211 (0.63)	1.206 (0.61)	1.865 (1.39)	1.829 (1.34)
No PID	0.586 (2.03)	0.604 (1.91)	0.932 (0.18)	0.972 (0.07)
Atlantic	0.857 (0.83)	0.885 (0.66)	0.734 (1.17)	0.741 (1.13)
Québec	0.972 (0.18)	0.986 (0.09)	1.024 (0.10)	1.168 (0.61)
BC	1.900 (4.44)	1.902 (4.42)	1.631 (2.26)	1.640 (2.27)
Prairies	1.390 (2.04)	1.457 (2.31)	1.733 (2.40)	1.727 (2.37)
Woman		1.037 (0.36)	1.187 (1.14)	1.176 (1.07)
Education		1.201 (3.77)	1.024 (0.32)	0.995 (0.07)
Women and Family Values (Index)			0.773 (0.86)	
Women and Political Values (Index)			1.177 (0.28)	
Women in Parliament (Index)			1.126 (0.45)	
Equal Rights				0.999 (0.00)
Stay Home with Children				0.855 (0.75)
Do More for Women				0.669 (1.04)
Women in Parliament				1.267 (0.85)
Feminist Thermometer				2.243 (2.42)
Legal quotas for parties				0.999 (0.00)
Abortion				0.762 (0.88)
Observations	3024	2992	1093	1093

Logistical Analysis performed; Odds Ratios reported. Absolute value of z statistics in parentheses
Coefficients in bold significant at 5% or better

Table 7
Impact of Attitudes About Gender and Equality on Decision to Vote for a Woman
Candidate, by Level of Political Sophistication

	Low Sophistication	High Sophistication
Liberal PID	0.576 (0.80)	2.247 (1.02)
Conservative PID	0.895 (0.17)	2.095 (0.91)
NDP PID	0.571 (0.74)	1.691 (0.63)
Bloc PID	0.649 (0.54)	7.344 (2.31)
No PID	0.540 (0.92)	1.364 (0.38)
Atlantic	1.061 (0.11)	1.032 (0.09)
Québec	1.611 (1.01)	1.023 (0.06)
BC	1.864 (1.23)	1.424 (1.12)
Prairies	0.764 (0.47)	2.939 (3.34)
Woman	1.772 (1.58)	1.139 (0.61)
Education	1.051 (0.29)	1.020 (0.19)
Equal Rights	1.317 (0.52)	0.782 (0.71)
Stay Home with Children	0.693 (0.87)	0.648 (1.39)
Do More for Women	2.528 (1.16)	0.849 (0.29)
Women in Parliament	1.416 (0.57)	0.755 (0.70)
Feminist Thermometer	2.415 (1.34)	5.185 (3.11)
Legal quotas for parties	1.606 (1.28)	0.865 (0.52)
Abortion	0.440 (1.31)	0.693 (0.82)
Observations	264	557

Logistical Analysis performed; Odds Ratios reported. Absolute value of z statistics in parentheses
Coefficients in bold significant at 5% or better