

# Women in New Brunswick Politics: A province at the back of the pack<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

In the September 2010 New Brunswick provincial election eight women representing 14.5 per cent of the seats in the legislative assembly were elected. While 8 women was slightly better than the 7 that were elected in the previous election, it by no means represented a high water mark for women's representation in the province. This occurred in 1999 when 10 (18 per cent) of the 55 seats in the New Brunswick Legislative assembly were held by women. Since that election the representation of women dropped to levels witnessed in the late 1980s and have not improved substantially from one election to the next. Thus while New Brunswick sat in the middle of the pack in terms of provincial political representation of women in the mid 1990s (Desserud 1997, 256) it has now fallen into last place.

This paper examines the political situation of women in New Brunswick and attempts to account for why so few women have been elected in this province in recent years. In doing this it examines the impact of the party system, the electoral system, role models, and the presence of advocacy organizations such as the NB Advisory Council on the Status of Women and Equal Voice on women's opportunities and success (or lack thereof) in New Brunswick election campaigns. It concludes that the traditional two party system along with a single member plurality electoral system are the primary explanations for why women's representation has remained so low in New Brunswick. It remains optimistic, however for the potential for change given the recent appearance of Equal Voice and the attention it and the poor representation of women received in the months leading up the last provincial election.

## Background

New Brunswick, Canada's only bilingual province is the home of almost 730,000 individuals, a population similar to that of the city of Edmonton. The three main cities in the province and their surrounding communities each have only between 85,000 and 125,000 people meaning that a large percentage of the population lives in small towns or rural communities. While the rural economy has been driven by forestry, mining, fishing and mixed farming, the urban economy varies from city to city. The economy of Saint John, the largest city, was traditionally based on its port and heavy industry such as oil refining and paper mills although it has diversified in recent years to telecommunications; Moncton's economy has developed around its role as a commercial, transportation and distribution centre; and Fredericton, the province's capital city has been dominated by government, universities and the military.

The northern portion of the province is predominately French speaking Acadian (26.9 percent), whereas the south is comprised mainly of individuals of English, Irish and Scottish ancestry (60 percent). Other ethnic identities have increased in recent years, but remain limited. The First Nations population is also small (around 10,000) and is located primarily in the north and along the St. John River. As a result, the major demographic cleavage in the province is language, with the population divided north/south on linguistic lines. These linguistic identities are overlaid by religious identities as religion continues to play an important role in New Brunswick. Over half of the population identify themselves as Catholics and another approximately 30 percent identify as Protestants (Baptists, United Church of Canada, Anglicans and Pentecostals).

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The rural, cultural and economic make up of New Brunswick with its high emphasis on primary or blue collared work helps in some part to account for its slow progress towards women's political equality. As has been noted by Louise Carbert (2006, 2009) in her work on rural women's participation, rural or predominately rural ridings are less likely to see women running as political candidates. This is accentuated by the tendency for women's representation to be low in traditionalistic cultures where there is an "emphasis on the continuity of elite control in social, economic and political affairs" (Darcy Welch and Clark 1994, 56). For much of its history it has been possible to classify New Brunswick as a traditionalistic culture with its clear class divisions and social hierarchy, along with the presence of a small number of families who hold the key economic and political decision making positions within the province.

In addition, the Liberal party, like the Democratic Party in the American South, has been presided over by working class Irish Catholics in the South or French Acadians in the North. These blue-collared, working class cultures are traditionally male-dominated and often provide for limited roles for women (Darcy, Welch and Clark 1994, 56). Furthermore, the French-English divide in the province has focused attention away from other identity based cleavages. Finally, the ridged two party system has until recently resisted efforts of the New Democratic Party, a party that is more open to women's political representation (Young 2002), to gain a foothold in the province.<sup>2</sup> Together, these factors have meant that there has been little pressure from within the political system to take efforts to become more inclusive.

## **Women's Political Representation in New Brunswick**

### ***Members of the Legislative Assembly***

Save for a period in the 1990s, New Brunswick has lagged behind other provinces in terms of the representation of women. It was the 7th province to grant women the right to vote 1919 and the 9th (2nd last) to grant them the right to run for provincial office 1934. The first woman to run for a seat in the provincial legislative assembly was Dr. Francis Fish, a Conservative, who ran unsuccessfully in the election of 1935. Less than a handful of women stood for provincial office over the next few decades and it was not until 1967 that Brenda Robertson made history by becoming the first women elected to the Legislative Assembly of New Brunswick.<sup>3</sup> In 1970, she became the first female cabinet minister in the province, appointed by Progressive Conservative Premier Richard Hatfield to the Youth portfolio.

In the 20 years following Brenda Robertson's first election (1967-1987), only 3 other women were successful in New Brunswick politics. In 1974 Robertson was joined in the Legislative Assembly by Liberal Shirley Dysart (1974-1995) and in 1978 by Progressive Conservatives Mabel DeWare (1978-1987) and Nancy Teed (1978-1987). With the McKenna Liberal sweep in 1987 the number of women in the Legislative Assembly almost doubled, jumping from four to seven. While all three PC women lost their seats, six new women joined Dysart on the Government benches. As can be seen from Table 1, since

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<sup>2</sup> This two party system may be weakening as a result of the surge in support for the NDP in the province during the 2011 federal election.

<sup>3</sup> In a 1964 by-election Margaret Rideout won a seat in the House of Commons for the riding of Westmoreland. She replaced her husband who had died of a heart attack while in office and successfully doubled his vote from the previous year despite having been challenged for the Liberal nomination by 10 men.

1987 the number of women elected to the Legislative Assembly has ranged between a low of 7 (1987, 2003, 2006) and a high of 10 (1991 and 1999). The New Brunswick election that took place in September 2010 saw eight women elected bringing the percentage of the seats held by women in the Legislative Assembly to 14.5, slightly better than in the previous election, but not a significant enough increase to change the province's position at the back of the pack of all Canadian provinces in terms of gender representation.

**Table 1: Women's Political Representation - The Numbers**

Election	Candidates		Elected		
	Number of Women	Percentage of Women	Number of Women	Number of Seats	Percentage of Women
1935	1	1	0	58	0
1939	0	0	0	58	0
1944	0	0	0	58	0
1948	1	0.1	0	58	0
1952	0	0	0	58	0
1956	0	0	0	58	0
1960	0	0	0	58	0
1963	2	2	0	58	0
1967	3	3	1	58	2
1970	3	2	1	58	2
1974	13	7	2	58	3
1978	13	7	4	58	7
1982	19	10	4	58	7
1987	31	17	7	58	12
1991	52	23	10	58	17
1995	47	21	9	55	17
1999	46	24	10	55	18
2003	34	19	7	55	13
2006	33	20	7	55	13
2010	72	31	8	55	15

While the focus of this chapter is on politics at the provincial level, it should be noted that the situation federally and municipally is just as disturbing. In 2004 two women represented New Brunswick in Ottawa representing 20% of the Members of Parliament. In 20011 there was only one female New Brunswick MP (10 %). In 2001 women made up 23 per cent of city councillors and that number has only increased to 27.6 per cent in 2010 having dropped from a high of 28.6 in 2008. The situation for female mayors is no better at 16.5 per cent having only increased by 2 percentage points since 1992.

**Table 2 – Women’s Success in the Different New Brunswick Parties (1970-2010)**

<b>Party</b>	<b># of Female MLAs</b>	<b>% of Over All Female MLAs</b>		<b>Total # of MLAs</b>	<b>% of Party’s MLAs who were Women</b>
Progressive Conservative	17	51.5		146	11.6
Liberal	14	42.4		148	9.5
NDP	1	3		3	33.3
CoR	1	3		9	11.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>306</b>	

As Table 2 indicates, since Robertson's election just over 40 years ago, 17 (51.5 per cent) of the women who have been elected to the Legislative Assembly were members of the Progressive Conservative party. A slightly smaller number, 14 (or 42.4 per cent), were members of the Liberal Party. Both the NDP and the Confederation of Regions parties elected one female MLA, each representing 3 percent of the overall number of women elected. These numbers are not surprising given that the Conservatives had won 7 of the 11 elections since 1970 holding office for 25 of those years. The Liberals had won only 4 elections, forming the government for only 15 years. However, what is more unexpected is that a slightly larger percentage of Progressive Conservative MLAs have been women. Almost 12 per cent of the Progressive Conservative Members of the Legislative Assembly over the past four decades have been women, whereas less than 10 per cent of the Liberal MLAs have been women.

### ***Candidates***

The greater number of Progressive Conservative women in the Legislative Assembly is not the result of the party running more female candidates than their competitors. As Table 3 indicates, the Conservatives and the Liberals have run about the same number of candidates, and in five of the last eight elections the Conservatives have been the party to run the fewest female candidates. It should be noted though that the Liberals have generally only been one or two candidates ahead in any given election. This trend reflects the fact that the two parties are classic brokerage parties sharing similar ideological space and distinguishing themselves from each other more by their personnel than by their policies. Both, over this period have situated themselves to the right of centre and as such are less likely to nominate women than are parties of the left. The fact that the both the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals have a poor record in nominating women to run for public office speaks to the competitiveness of many of the races in the province and the regular shifting of power between these two dominant parties.

**Table 3 – Female Candidates by Party (1982-2010)**

	Conservatives		Liberal		NDP		CoR		Green		Other*		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
1982	6	10.6	3	5.2	9	16.6					1	10	19	10.2
1987	6	10.3	7	12	16	27.6							30	16.3
1991	8	13.8	9	15.5	25	43.1	10	20.8					52	23.2
1995	5	9.1	8	14.5	20	36.4	5	19.2			8	47	47	20.7
1999	10	18.2	9	16.4	24	43.6	1	5.5			2	22.2	46	23.5
2003	9	16.4	9	16.4	15	27.3					1	11.1	34	19.2
2006	8	14.5	10	18.2	15	31.3							33	20.9
2010	14	25.4	12	21.8	18	32.7			23	45.1	5	28.6	72	31.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>19.82</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>20.1</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>42.6</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>100</b>

\* The "Other Party" category includes the Parti Acadien (1982), the Natural Law Party (1995 and 1999), The Grey Party (2003) and the People's Alliance of NB (2010). The minor parties frequently do not run full slates and their percentage is calculated with the actual total number of candidates presented.

This classical two party system in which power is shared between the Conservatives and the Liberals provides an important explanation for New Brunswick's dismal record in electing women. While the New Democratic Party has participated in elections in the province it has never been particularly strong and has never had more than two members sitting in the Legislative Assembly at a time. This political weakness on the party of the left has meant that what Lisa Young (2002) has termed "the dynamic force" in Canadian politics has been absent in the province. Even though over the past twenty-five years between 27 and 44 percent of the NDP candidates have been women, their weak standing in the polls has meant that the other parties have been able to ignore their example. Indeed as Sonia Pitre's ( work has shown, the Progressive Conservatives and Liberal parties in New Brunswick have no formal regulations to assist women in running for riding nominations. As a result, until the most recent provincial election, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals had run female candidates in over 20 per cent of their seats.

As can be seen from the data in Table 3, little change has occurred in the total number of women running for election since the mid 1990s. The substantial jump in the number of female candidates in the 2010 election can be attributed primarily to the appearance of the Green Party on the political scene. The Greens, like the NDP are more ideologically predisposed to promote equality within their party; they are also a new party and politically weak making it unlikely that they will win a seat and thereby bringing less power and prestige to their candidates. As Bashevkin (1993) long ago noted, women are less likely to be found in more competitive positions within political parties that are strong. The result is that they are often run as sacrificial lambs in what might be considered lost cause ridings (Brodie 1985). This helps to explain as well why minor parties such as the Parti Acadien (1982), the Natural Law Party (1995 and 1999), The Grey Party (2003), and more recently the People's Alliance of NB (2010) or the Green Party, have generally run a proportionately larger number of women than the more established parties. Even the CoR party which successfully competed for seats in 1991 had a higher number of female candidates than the PCs or the Liberals despite its more right-wing and individualistic attitude to politics and rejection of the idea that the numeric representation of women was an issue of concern.

Along with the lack of ideological pressure on the two main political parties, factors such as the single member plurality (SMP) electoral system, and the challenge of incumbency also contribute to the poor representation of women. The SMP electoral system leaves a high degree of autonomy over who gets nominated to run for a political party to the local riding associations. Winning a nomination in a competitive riding is one of the greatest barriers to getting more women elected. Winnable seats are highly sought after and party selectorates often decide in advance of nomination meetings who should be the chosen candidate. Plurality systems make it possible for each constituency to determine that the best candidate is a male, something unlikely to happen in a more proportional system where party lists can receive greater scrutiny and therefore pressure to ensure better balance. It is for this reason that the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women recommended that the electoral system be changed during the public hearings of New Brunswick Commission on Legislative Democracy in 2004 (NBASW 2004).

Unfortunately, despite the fact that the Commission eventually recommended changing the provincial electoral system to a Mixed Member Proportional system, there has been little movement in the province to consider this option (NBCLD Report 2004). The Commission's recommendations fell to the wayside after the 2006 election that saw the Bernard Lord Government fall to Shawn Graham's Liberals. The Liberals had little interest in electoral reform and even with the return of the Conservatives to government it is unlikely that any change will occur.

The issue of incumbency is also an important factor in the low number of women elected in New Brunswick. In any given election only a few sitting members decide to retire from politics which means that the most "winnable" seats for any given party are already taken. And, given the statistics for New Brunswick, they are probably taken by a man. In the 2010 provincial election, only seven of the 55 ridings did not have an incumbent running in them. In six out of the seven ridings the party who had held the seat in the previous election replaced the incumbent with a man. In the seventh, a riding in which the female incumbent had crossed the floor from the Conservatives to join the Liberals, she was replaced by another woman. This meant that any woman who was running as a non-incumbent was running in a riding that her party had not won in the previous election. This makes it difficult to increase the number of female candidates and more importantly MLAs. If parties increase the number of female candidates that they run, but only run them in ridings where the party is less likely to win, there is little chance of increasing the overall number of female MLAs. This is what happened in 2010. Unless there is a major turnover in seats, such as occurred during Frank McKenna sweep in 1987 in which even those candidates who are not expected to win won, or unless there is a concerted effort on the part of the Progressive Conservatives and Liberals to replace incumbents with women, any increase in the number of women elected is likely to be incremental in nature.

The data in Table 4 represent the number of terms in office held by the male and female MLAs in the various New Brunswick political parties. They indicate that a substantial portion of MLAs hold their seats for multiple terms. At the same time they demonstrate that both the Progressive Conservative and Liberal female MLAs tend to have shorter political careers than their male counterparts. This is particularly the case for the Liberal MLAs as almost 43 per cent of female MLAs are defeated after just one term in office compared to 29.1 per cent of the male MLAs. It should be noted that an even larger number of both male and female Conservative MLAs are defeated after just one term; however the gender gap in this experience is much smaller.

**Table 4 – Term Lengths for MLAs**

		<b>1 term</b>	<b>2 terms</b>	<b>3 terms</b>	<b>4 terms</b>	<b>5 or more</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Progressive Conservatives</b>	Women	9 (52.9%)	3 (17.6%)	2 (11.8%)	2 (11.8%)	1 (5.9%)	17
	Men	61 (47.3%)	17 (13.2%)	18 (13.9%)	20 (15.5%)	13 (10.1%)	129
	Difference	5.6%	4.4%	-2.1%	-3.7%	-4.2%	
	Total	70	20	20	22	14	146
<b>Liberals</b>	Women	6 (42.8%)	3 (21.4%)	4 (28.6%)	0	1 (7.1%)	14
	Men	39 (29.1%)	34 (25.4%)	31 (23.1%)	14 (10.4%)	16 (11.9%)	134
	Difference	13.7%	-4%	5.5%	-10.4%	-4.8%	
	Total	45	37	35	14	17	148
<b>NDP</b>	Women				1 (33.3%)		1
	Men	2 (66.6%)					2
	Total	2			4		3
<b>CoR</b>	Women	1 (12.5%)					1
	Men	7 (87.5%)					7
	Total	8					8

What is evident from these data is that about 10 per cent more women than men in both parties remain only one or two terms in the Legislature before they are removed from office. This suggests that they are more electorally vulnerable, and more likely to run in ridings where their party is less guaranteed to win. The flip side of this observation is that a similarly disproportionate number of men (8 percentage points more for the PCs and 15 percentage points more for the Liberals) are like to run in constituencies that are electoral strongholds for their party. This pattern leads to the conclusion that Erickson’s findings from two decades ago that parties run female candidates in seats where they are traditionally less successful still holds true (Erickson 1991). This remains one of the primary reasons that the numbers of successful female candidates remains still quite low in New Brunswick.

### **Role Models**

With so few women holding seats in the Legislative Assembly there have been few female role models in New Brunswick politics. Those who have served as leaders of political parties or as members of provincial cabinets have tended to follow patterns found elsewhere in the country. Leaders hold their leadership positions when their party held little power in the Legislative Assemblies or when their party had been electorally decimated (Bashevkin 2009 ). Similarly women have tended to play a limited role around New Brunswick’s cabinet table, and when they do, they hold traditionally feminine portfolios or ones that brings with them little power and influence.

## ***Party leaders***

Given the small proportion of female MLAs in past New Brunswick Governments it is somewhat surprising that five women have served as Party Leader; Louise Blanchard (1981) for the Parti acadien; Shirley Dysart (as Interim leader in 1995) for the Liberals; Elizabeth Weir (1988-2005) and Allison Brewer (2005-2006) for the NDP; and Barbara Baird-Filliter (1989-91) for the Progressive Conservatives.

The election of Louise Blanchard to the leadership of the Parti acadien made her the first female leader of a political party in New Brunswick. However, since the Parti acadien was a minor party in decline at the time of her election, little attention has been given to her accomplishment (see Desserud 1997). The Parti acadien was created in 1972 to promote bilingualism and social and educational reform for the Acadian community. Blanchard was its fourth leader and ran unsuccessfully in the 1982 provincial election. Despite running candidates in several elections the party was unable to win any seats and it eventually ceased its political activities after the 1982 election, dissolving officially in 1986.<sup>4</sup>

Shirley Dysart was the first woman to lead a party in the Legislative Assembly. She held the position as interim leader of the Liberal Party for several months in the mid 1990s filling in for Ray Frenette, a previous interim leader who had thrown his hat into the leadership race that eventually saw the election of Frank McKenna. The Liberals were the Official Opposition to Richard Hatfield's fourth majority government and only held 18 of the 58 seats in the legislative assembly.

Barbara Baird-Filliter took over the position of leader of the New Brunswick Progressive Conservatives after the crushing defeat of the party in the 1987 election by Frank McKenna's Liberals. She had never held a seat nor run for office herself, but as a woman under the age of 40, and a family lawyer with no direct links to the former Hatfield government, she represented a fresh start for a party that had lost every seat in the Legislative Assembly. However like other female party leaders she suffered from intense and critical scrutiny that portrayed her as "a lightweight, unable to understand complex issues" (Desserud 1997, 273). Within a year and a half she had resigned citing poor advice and a party that needed a scapegoat to blame for its disarrayed state (Desserud 1997, 273) and while she was reluctant to attribute her experiences to sexism and a male dominated political culture, her experience both within her party and with the New Brunswick media are similar to that experienced by women elsewhere (see Everitt 2003, Robinson and Saint-Jean 1991, 1995).

As might be expected, the New Democratic Party is the provincial party with the greatest experience with female party leaders. This fits with the party's reputation for greater openness to female candidates as well as its weak electoral status in the province (Bashevkin 2009). It first selected Elizabeth Weir in June 1988, in the aftermath of the McKenna sweep. Weir won her seat in Saint John in 1991 by a slim margin, and managed to hold on to her constituency until she decided to retire from politics in 2005. She was an important force in New Brunswick politics, however for the duration of her term in office she was the only NDP MLA in the Legislative Assembly. In June 2005, she was replaced by Alison Brewer, Canada's first openly homosexual party leader (Everitt and Camp 2009a, 2009b). As Everitt and Camp note, Brewer's experience as party leader was affected by her status as a woman and as a lesbian (2009a, 2009b). She was not given credit for her previous experience and was frequently incorrectly presented as a single issue candidate. Not unexpectedly, given her party's limited support in the

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<sup>4</sup> Blanchard's mother Mathilda Blanchard had been the first woman to run for the leadership of a political party in New Brunswick, running against Richard Hatfield for the leadership of the Progressive Conservative Party in 1969.

province she failed to win her seat in the 2006 provincial election and resigned as party leader shortly thereafter.

### **Cabinet**

Along with leading political parties, female politicians have been able to serve as role models through their positions as Cabinet Ministers. The need for a government to present itself as inclusive of diversity has meant that since Brenda Robertson was first appointed to Cabinet in 1970 there has been at least one woman around the cabinet table. In 1978 she was joined by Mable DeWare and in 1982 by Nancy Teed. During the McKenna years the numbers grew from 2 women in his first cabinet to 5 in the cabinets established after the 1991 and the 1995 elections. This meant that during this period five of the seven women in the Liberal caucus had a seat in Cabinet.

**Table 5 – Women in Cabinet**

Premier	Year of Election	# of Women in Cabinet	# of Women in Governing Caucus	% of Women in Governing Caucus in Cabinet
Hatfield	1970	1	1	100
	1974	1	1	100
	1978	2	3	66.6
	1982	3	3	100
McKenna	1987	2	7	28.6
	1991	5	7	71.4
	1995	5	7	71.4
Lord	1999	3	8	37.5
	2003	5	5	100
Graham	2006	2	4	50
		1	4	25
Alward	2010	5	8	62.5

When Bernard Lord defeated the Liberals in 1999, six of the seven Liberal women were defeated, but eight new Conservative women were elected. Elizabeth Weir, Leader of the provincial NDP was re-elected to the seat she had first won in 1991 and made up the 10<sup>th</sup> woman in the legislative assembly. Despite having more women in their caucus the PC government only had 3 women in their first Cabinet. Although the number of Progressive Conservative women dropped to 5 after the 2003 election all 5 women were appointed to Lord's second cabinet.

The low point for women in New Brunswick came with the election of the Shaun Graham Liberal government in 2006. Only 7 women were elected – 3 Liberals and 4 Progressive Conservatives, although Joan-McAlpine Stiles crossed the floor from the PCs to the Liberals a few months after the election. This gave Graham only 4 women to potentially appoint to Cabinet and he chose two, Carmel Robichaud and Mary Schryer. Eventually Robichaud was dropped from Cabinet and between December 2008 and May 2010 before he appointed Cheryl Lavoie as a Minister of State, New Brunswick had only one female cabinet Minister, the poorest representation it had had in 30 years. With the election of the David

Alward Conservatives in 2010 the number of women in the government caucus increased once again giving Alward the opportunity to appoint 5 of his 8 female MLAs to Cabinet.

Simply looking at the numbers of women in cabinet would lead on to conclude that save for the Shaun Graham interlude New Brunswick's premiers have done a fairly good job of appointing women to cabinet over the last 40 years. The Progressive Conservatives under Richard Hatfield set the example by having all three of their female MLAs sitting in Cabinet during his last government. Bernard Lord repeated this experience in his second government in the mid 2000s and Frank McKenna and David Alward surpassed this number with 5 women sitting around their cabinet tables in 1995-1999 and 2010 respectively. The chance of a woman who sits on the government side of the Legislative Assembly being appointed to cabinet would appear to be stronger than in other provinces (for a comparison see Studlar and Moncrief 1997). Indeed as Studlar and Moncrief (1997) have pointed out, "women have done better, proportionately, in cabinet appointments than in legislative elections" (73).

However, it is not just the position as a cabinet minister that is important. It is the responsibility and the profile that comes with that position that allows a female cabinet minister to be a role model. As work by other scholars has indicated (Bashevkin 1993, Studlar and Moncrief 1997), women have tended to have less influential positions in cabinet (eg. Local government or Environment) or hold portfolios that are "housekeeping files" (Ministers of State) or ones that are stereotypically gendered such as Family and Community Services, Status of Women, or Seniors. While Desserud (1997) argues that this was not necessarily the case in New Brunswick, a 40 year review of the various cabinet portfolios held by women in successive New Brunswick governments suggests otherwise. It becomes clear that they are frequently appointed to the less prestigious and lower profile areas of responsibility or portfolios.

**Table 6 - Portfolios held by Women in New Brunswick Cabinets**

	<b>High Prestige</b>	<b>Medium Prestige</b>	<b>Low Prestige</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Masculine</b>	* Deputy Premier (1) * Int. Gvt Affairs (1)	* Labour (3) * Transportation (1) * Fisheries (1) * Solicitor General (1)		8 (10 %)
<b>Neutral</b>	* Justice/Attorney General (2)	* Energy (3) * Public Safety (1) * Supply & Services (1) * Housing (2) * Human Resource Dev. (2) * Post-Secondary Education (5) * Environment (7)	* Family & Community Services (11) * Aboriginal Affairs (1) * Tourism (1) * Non Profit Organizations (3) * Local Government (8)	47 (58.8 %)
<b>Feminine</b>	* Health (5) * Education (3)	* Income Assistance (2)	* Status of Women (7) * Seniors (4) * Childhood (3) * Literacy & Adult Ed (1)	25 (31.3 %)
<b>Total</b>	12 (15 %)	29 (36.3 %)	39 (48.8 %)	80

Adopting a classification of portfolios used by Krook and O'Brien (2011) that distinguishes between Masculine, Feminine and Neutral Ministries Table 6 indicates that 31.3 per cent of the portfolios held by women were in Feminine areas such as Health, Community and Social Services, Children, Seniors and the Status of Women, whereas only 10 per cent of their portfolios were in the Masculine ministries such as Deputy Premier, Labour, or Solicitor General.<sup>5</sup> Not one woman has ever served as Minister of Finance or Economic Development.

In terms of the prestige of the portfolios women were far more likely to be found in low prestige cabinet positions (48.8 percent) than in high prestige positions (15 per cent). When they were in more powerful portfolios they tended to be responsible for the more traditionally feminine areas of Health and Education. As a result, while women have held cabinet positions in New Brunswick since the early 1970s their overall presence has not been large, nor have they held a prominent place in the public eye as their portfolios have seldom been high profile or powerful. This has limited their ability to serve as important role models for other women considering a future in politics.

### **Discussion**

This review of the situation of women in political office in New Brunswick makes it clear that the province is one of the laggards in the country in terms of women's representation. It falls at the back of the pack in terms of seats held by women in the Legislative Assembly. Given the more traditionalistic political culture, a political discourse that sees representation more in terms of language or religion than in terms of gender, a high degree of incumbency and the lack of internal pressures to see that parties party reform their structures to make them more open to women it is unlikely that the province will change its status in the near future. While the situation for women is better in the NDP and the Greens than it is in the PCs or the Liberals, the strong two party system mean that it is possible for the later two parties to ignore the example of their more egalitarian rivals and feel unashamed about their poor records.

In the early 2000s Premier Bernard Lord established a commission to examine democratic structures in the province and possibilities for improving them. This provided a chance for academics (Everitt and Pitre 2005, Cross and Young 2005), the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women (NBACSW 2004) and other interested parties to speak to the issue of the representation of women and make recommendations for changes to the system that would increase the opportunities for women to be politically involved. The most substantial proposal for change involved changing the electoral system to a Mixed Member Proportional system. However, the Final Report of the New Brunswick Legislative Democracy Commission included several of recommendations including: greater tax refunds for parties who ran female candidates in at least 35 per cent of their seats (20 candidates); the requirement that parties file biannual reports on measures taken to increase the representation of women to be published by Elections New Brunswick; and the active recruitment and appointment of women to agencies, boards and commissions (NBCLD 2004). Unfortunately, the Conservative government did not move quickly on these recommendations and they were completely ignored by the Graham Liberal government when it took office in 2006.

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<sup>5</sup> Krook and O'Brien (2011) categorize masculine portfolios as those that "address issues that were traditionally associated with the public sphere and/or with men as a group, including ministries like agriculture, defense, finance, foreign affairs and conversely labor" (13). Feminine portfolios were those that had historically been linked to the private sphere and/or the roles and responsibilities of women including education, health, children and women's affairs. The Neutral portfolios were those that did not conform to either of the other two categories and included responsibilities for justice, housing or the environment.

One reason that the political parties have been able to ignore the issue of the province's low representation of women is that there have been few external pressures on them challenging them to change. Feminist organizing in the province has focused more on grassroots politics than on electoral change. The New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women has worked hard over the years to raise the issue through its role as an agency for consultation and study and over the years it has helped to supplement and support the limited number of female voices in the Legislative Assembly, serving to keep women's concerns in the public eye. However, even though it has gathered research, advised governments and made recommendations to bodies such as the Legislative Democracy Commission, it remained limited in its ability to take on adversarial stances. In March 2011 its excellent work was terminated as the Alward government announced it was disbanding of the Council as part of its budget cuts.

One recent occurrence that may have a positive impact on women's representation was the establishment of a New Brunswick chapter of Equal Voice in the fall of 2009. This is a multi-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women to politics. After a spate of media attention about the poor representation of women in the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly the chapter quickly grew to almost 80 members. In its first year it hosted a training session to prepare women to seek the nomination and run in the 2010 provincial election. This was a well attended event drawing more than 70 women from across the province representing all different parties. Several participants used this experience as a springboard for subsequent Band Council elections, the 2010 provincial election, and the 2011 federal election. The organization has issued challenges to provincial parties asking them to commit to recruit more female candidates, commented on results of elections at all levels and intends to continue to provide opportunities for women to develop their skills and credentials to successfully compete for office at all levels of government. With this organization still in its infancy it is difficult to assess the degree to which it will be able to work with the parties to increase attention to the need to elect more women. Indeed with the demise of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Equal Voice New Brunswick will need to shoulder more of the load.

## **Conclusion**

Canada prides itself as being a democracy. We have universal suffrage. We have free and fair elections and we have majority rule with a constitution that protects minority rights. However, one of the hallmarks of a democracy is that it is representative of the diversity and of the interests of its citizens. In this case New Brunswick fails the democratic test. Women remain significantly underrepresented in the Legislative Assembly and in key leadership roles in all branches of government. Their political advancement has been hampered by a political culture preoccupied with regional, linguistic and to some extent religious differences, a party system and patterns of party support that shifts power between two centre-right political parties and a weakly organized women's movement that has not place a priority on electing women to public office.

Change when it has occurred, is the result of unexpected swings in party support whereby women running in ridings where their party is not expected to win are unexpectedly swept in to office. Unfortunately as was the case in 2010 when six new PC women were elected to provincial office, electoral upsets also mean that the four Liberal women, who were also located in swing seats, were defeated. As a result, New Brunswick remains at the back of the pack in terms of women's representation in Canada.

## Appendix – Information Box

### FIRSTS FOR WOMEN

***Year(s) most women got the vote and right to stand for election:*** 1919

***Year Aboriginal women got the vote:*** 1963

***Year women first ran for office:*** 1935

Name: Dr. Francis Fish

Party: Conservative

Years served: Not elected

***Year a woman was first elected:*** 1967

Name: Brenda Robertson

Party: Progressive Conservative

Years served: 1967-1982

***Year first woman selected to Cabinet:*** 1970

Name: Brenda Robertson

Party: Progressive Conservative

Portfolio: Minister of Youth                      Minister of Health

Years served: 1970-1974                      1978-1982

***Year first woman selected as party Leader:*** 1981

Name: Louise Blanchard

Party: Parti acadien

Years served: 1981-1982

### CURRENT POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AT A GLANCE

***Women in the Legislature:*** September 27, 2010, 8/55 14.5%

***Women in Cabinet:*** 5, September 27, 2010

#### ***Women party leaders***

Name: Louise Blanchard

Party: Parti acadien

Years served: 1981-1982

Name: Shirley Dysart (Interim Leader)

Party: Liberals

Years served: 1995

Name: Elizabeth Weir

Party: NDP

Years served: 1988-2005

Name: Barbara Baird-Filliter

Party: Conservative

Years served: 1989-91

Name: Allison Brewer  
Party: NDP  
Years served: 2005-2006

***Women Lieutenants Governors***

Name: Margaret Norrie McCain 1994-1997  
Name: Marilyn Trenholme Counsell 1997-2003

***Advisory Council on the Status of Women***

Year created: 1975  
Year disbanded: 2010

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