

**Women in the 2005-2006 Canadian Election  
Children, Women, Inclusion and the Reserve Force of Voters**

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Looking at the election campaign of 2005-2006 it would not be out of line to say that this was the “baby election.” By the end of the first week the issue front and centre was babies and toddlers and who was best able to look after these Canadian children. In his kick off speech the night his government fell, Paul Martin emphasized the efforts of the Liberal government to set up a national early childhood education and child care program (CBC Television, 2005). In week one of the campaign, the Conservatives responded with its own child care plan as Stephen Harper announced an \$1,200 annual payment to families for each child under 6 years of age. Parents would decide how to spend the money (CBC Radio, 2005). Debate raged between the parties over which plan was the best and the party leaders took all the opportunities available to gingerly, if not tenderly, carry babies in front of proud parents and cavort with precocious daycare toddlers. It could be proclaimed that the central issue of the campaign was child care, and by association this was therefore a campaign focussed on women's issues.

On November 29<sup>th</sup> and for the next three days, the press discussed gender representation in the election. John Grey writing a reality check column for the CBC television website reminded Canadians of the promises made by Paul Martin;

A little more than two years ago, as he was headed for coronation as leader of the Liberal party, Paul Martin made a couple of astonishing statements. Looking ahead to the election that took place in June 2004, he said: ‘We cannot go into this election campaign unless we have the largest number of women candidates in Liberal riding history.’ Enthused, he explained, ‘We have to go out across this country and, in riding after riding, recruit young women who want to dedicate themselves to the public service.’ What he wanted, he said, was that the number of women in the Parliament of Canada should be representative of the country as a whole: ‘That means 52 per cent.’ (Grey, 2005)

During the second English language debate, the issue of gender representation and inclusion was once again raised. In response to a question by Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe, then Prime Minister Paul Martin stated that, while he would not support proportional representation, more women were needed in the House of Commons. New Democratic Party leader Jack Layton, agreed that more women, minorities and aboriginals were needed in Parliament for better representation and to change the tone of the House. Conservative leader, Stephen Harper was silent except to say he did not support PR (CBC Television, 2006).

Given the discussions of child care and women's representation one would have expected that the election of 2006 might be a break through for women in terms of numbers and issues. It wasn't. The purpose of this paper is to examine the role of women and women's issues in the Canadian election of 2005-2006. Closer exploration of the participation of women as candidates and the issue content of the 2005-2006 election campaign shows that women were actually lacking from the election campaign. This has significant ramifications for the recognition of women as full-citizens. What we do see is a campaign where women were not constructed or recognized as full-citizens but rather were more characteristic of "a reserve force of labour" which some parties attempted to mobilize and others preferred to see demobilized.

## 1. The Numbers

Looking solely at the numbers of women participants, while not a step back from the 2004 campaign, neither was the 2006 election a step forward. Compared to the 1993 campaign which saw the highest number of female candidates (see Table 1) and successfully elected candidates the numbers indicated a substantial decline in women candidates. Going into the election in December 2005 women held 21.1 percent of the seats in Canada's House of Commons and 35.2% of Senate seats (Newman and White, 2006, p. 97). According to the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU 2005), Canada ranked 38<sup>th</sup> out of 185 countries in terms of the percentage of women in national elected legislatures (the worldwide average was 16% in 2005). This was a slide from 21<sup>st</sup> place after the 1997 election. On January 24, 2006 a day after the election, 64 women had been elected to the House of Commons a loss of 1, and women made up 20.8% of the Parliament. Canada now ranked 44<sup>th</sup> worldwide (IPU 2006).

**Table 1: Women Candidates in Canadian Federal Elections, 1968–2006**

	1968	1972	1974	1979	1980	1984	1988	1993	1997	2000	2004	2006
<b>Candidates</b>	36	71	137	195	217	214	302	476	408	373	391	380
<b>Elected</b>	1	5	9	10	14	27	39	53	62	62	65	64
<b>Percentage</b>	.4	2.0	3.4	3.5	5.0	9.6	13.2	18.0	20.6	20.6	21.1	20.8

Source: Newman & White, 2006, p. 114 and Elections Canada

Neither was the level of participation of women as candidates significantly increased. In 2004 of the 999 candidates nominated by the Bloc Quebecois, Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic Parties, 225 or 22% were women. Of those 225, 65 were elected to the House of Commons (see Table 1). Similarly in 2006, out of a total 1,634 candidates, 380 were women and 1,254 were men (Elections Canada, 2006). Of the 999 mainstream party candidates, 248 (25%) were women and 751 were men (see Table 2)<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In addition to the 545 candidates running for minor parties (124 women), there were 85 candidates running as independents and 5 candidates with no affiliation (no gender breakdown given). (Elections Canada, 2006).

The following observations can be made regarding women's participation as candidates in the 2005-2006 election campaign. With the exception of the Yukon Territory (2 of 4 candidates), the greatest percentage of women candidates was found in Newfoundland where 32% of the candidates were female. Quebec was second, 26% of the candidates running were female. Manitoba was ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> with 26% of candidates. The remainder in descending order were Alberta (23%), Ontario (22%), British Columbia (21%), P.E.I. (21%), Saskatchewan (20%), New Brunswick (16%), and Nova Scotia (12%). While not represented in every riding, women candidates were found in every province and territory (See Table 3).

**Table 2: 2004 Federal Election -- Number of Candidates and Winners by Political Affiliation and Sex,**

	Candidates			Elected		Success Rate	% Women in Caucus as of June 2005
	Men	Women	% Women	Men	Women		
NDP	212	96	31.2	14	5	5.2	26.3
BQ	57	18	24.0	40	14	77.8	25.9
Liberal	233	75	24.4	101	34	45.3	25.6
Conservative	272	36	11.7	87	12	33.3	12.2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>22.5 (avg)</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>65</b>		
% successful				31.3%	28.9%		

Source: Newman & White, 2006 p. 117; Elections Canada <http://www.elections.ca>; Parliament of Canada <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

**Table 3: 2006 Federal Election -- Number of Candidates and Winners by Political Affiliation and Sex**

	Candidates			Elected		Success Rate	% Women in Caucus
	Men	Women	% Women	Men	Women		
NDP	200	108	35%	17	12	11%	41%
BQ	52	23	31%	34	17	74%	33%
Liberal	229	79	26%	81	21	27%	21%
Conservative	270	38	12%	111	14	39%	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>751</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>64</b>	26%	
% successful				31%	26%		

Source: Elections Canada <http://www.elections.ca>; Parliament of Canada <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

However, the percentage of women running in a province was not an indication of success for women candidates. The 32% of candidates in Newfoundland did not result in women's electoral success and no women were elected. Women fared particularly poorly in the Maritimes, with only one woman elected, Alexa McDonough, former NDP leader, in Halifax.<sup>2</sup> In the core of the Prairies, Saskatchewan and Alberta, women were also less successful taking only 14% of the ridings in Saskatchewan and 7% in Alberta<sup>3</sup>. Women were most successful in Manitoba and Quebec winning 29% of the ridings in both provinces. One quarter of the ridings in British Columbia were won by women and in Ontario women took 22% of the ridings.

**Table 4: Provincial Distribution of Women Candidates in the 2006 Federal Election**

	Candidates	# women candidates	% women	# successful women	Provincial %
Newfoundland	28	9	32%	0	0
P.E.I.	19	4	21%	0	0
Nova Scotia	51	6	12%	1	9%
New Brunswick	45	7	16%	0	0
Quebec	427	113	26%	22	29%
Ontario	564	125	22%	23	22%
Manitoba	75	18	24%	4	29%
Saskatchewan	65	13	20%	2	14%
Alberta	141	32	23%	2	7%
British Columbia	205	43	21%	9	25%
Yukon	4	2	50%	0	0
N.W.T	5	1	20%	0	0
Nunavut	5	1	20%	1	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1634</b>	<b>374</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>21%</b>

The concentration of successful women candidates in central Canada, Manitoba and British Columbia is interesting because it points to a rural-urban divide in the participation and support for women candidates in elections. The participation of women as candidates in urban ridings did appear to be confirmed in Greater Toronto. According

<sup>2</sup> While it is not within the scope of this paper to address the party affiliation of women candidates, it should be noted that of the 9 women candidates in Newfoundland only one ran as a Conservative (defeated by a Liberal) and one as a Liberal (defeated by a Conservative), the remaining seven ran under the banner of the NDP (4) and the Green Party (3). In PEI women ran either as Green Party (4) or New Democratic candidates (4). In New Brunswick three women ran as New Democrats, three as Green Party candidates, the remaining woman candidate ran as a Liberal but was defeated by the incumbent male NDP member.

<sup>3</sup> Again it is useful to note the distribution among the parties. In Saskatchewan the two successful women were both Conservatives, the remaining candidates included 2 Liberals, 3 Green Party candidates, 1 Communist, 1 Canadian Progressive Party, and 5 New Democrats. In Alberta the two successful women candidates were both Conservative, the remaining candidates included 9 Liberals, 11 New Democrats, 6 Greens, 2 Marxist-Leninist, 1 Communist and 1 Canadian Progressive Candidate.

to the Toronto Star (Carniuol, et.al., 2006) a day after nominations closed the percentage of women running as candidates was higher than the national percentages. In the 45 seats that made up the GTA the Liberals were running 16 women. This represented 36% of the Liberal candidates and was 10% greater than the Liberal national total. The NDP ran 14 women or 31% of its candidates and the Conservative 6 women or 13% of their GTA candidates (Carniuol, et.al., 2006). It certainly appeared that women, particularly Liberal women were better represented as candidates in the GTA than they were across the country. There was a slightly higher percentage of women run in urban ridings and they did appear to more successful. Of the 64 women elected to Parliament in January 2006, 36 or 56% of them had won in urban ridings. When success rates are compared between women's urban and rural campaigns, in urban areas women had a 25% success rate and in rural areas that number fell to 17% see Table 4). The numbers from the 2006 election certainly raise questions regarding the urban support for women candidates that might be worthwhile to further investigate (as a start for this project see, Moncrief and Thompson, 1991; Gidengil, Hennigar, Blais and Nevitte, 2005; from the U.S., Bolzendahl and Myers, 2004; DeLeon and Naff, 2004).

**Table 5: Women Running in Urban Ridings in the Federal Election of 2006**

	Urban Ridings	Urban Candidates	Women candidates in urban ridings	%	Women elected in urban ridings	% or women elected
Nfld	2	28	9	32%	0	0
P.E.I. <sup>4</sup>	1	6	0	0	0	0
Nova Scotia	4	18	2	11%	1	100%
New Brunswick <sup>5</sup>	2	9	2	22%	0	0
Quebec <sup>6</sup>	27	159	46	29%	9	41%
Ontario <sup>7</sup>	62	334	75	22%	15	65%
Manitoba	6	33	9	27%	2	50%
Saskatchewan	7	34	9	26%	2	100%
Alberta	17	86	20	23%	2	100%
British Columbia	15	87	19	23%	5	55%
<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>794</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>56%</b>

Urban ridings were based on the call out boxes on the Elections Canada Map of Canada available at <http://www.elections.ca/intro.asp?section=cir&document=index&lang=e&textonly=false>. The GTA ridings are based on the categorization by the Toronto Star.

<sup>4</sup> Of the four women candidates in PEI none ran in Charlottetown.

<sup>5</sup> Women candidates made up 16% of the total candidates running in New Brunswick, the 2 women who ran, one in Moncton and one in Saint John represented 22% of the urban candidates.

<sup>6</sup> Montreal, Quebec City and Gatineau.

<sup>7</sup> Urban riding include the GTA, Ottawa, Hamilton, London, and Kitchener-Waterloo.

The tendency of women to represent urban ridings certainly would appear to fit with the urban-rural split and the central Canadian concentration in support for the Liberals compared to the Conservative Party. The Liberals, NDP and Bloc Quebecois certainly had more significant numbers of women candidates than did the Conservative party (see Table 2) and not surprisingly more women candidates were elected from those parties. When the votes were tallied, 64 women were elected to the 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 14 in the minority Conservative government, 21 in the Liberal opposition, 17 in the Bloc Quebecois caucus, and 12 in the NDP caucus (see Table 2). According to Equal Voice, a civil society organization advocating and lobbying for increased women's representation in Parliament, "the overall success rate of female candidates was 16.5 percent, whereas the success rate of male politicians was 19.5 percent." (Black, 2006) Looking at the success rate within the gender groups 26% of all women candidates were successful, while 31% of all male candidates were successful (see Table 2).

While the numbers are evocative of the position of women in the elections and their inclusion of women in decision-making power, what they say regarding access to full citizenship is somewhat limited and must be qualified. Such an examination emphasizing the numbers of candidates and representatives is predicated on a mirror approach to representation rather than a substantive approach. "Mirror representation represents a theoretical view that holds that to be truly representative, a legislative body must reflect the groups it represents in the same proportion to their numbers in society" (Newman & White, 2006, p. 101). There are good arguments to support representation numbers proportionate to the numbers of a group in society, such as bringing more diversity in the issues brought forward in the legislative body, ensuring greater accountability to disadvantaged and minority groups, providing role models women and minorities, and as the party leaders agreed changing the tone and behaviour of the House of Commons (CBC. 2006).

However, criticism can be raised regarding mirror or descriptive approaches to representation. The addition of more women or minorities does not automatically guarantee that they will speak for and on behalf of women and minorities. As a result, there is nothing to say that greater representation would be "for women" or overtly feminist. For example, Party affiliation is generally a more significant predictor of voting among Canadian representatives, particularly among Conservative women and New Democratic men (Tremblay and Pelletier, 2000). Actually as Tremblay (2000) concludes from reviewing the work of Scandinavian feminist scholars on assemblies where quasi-parity exists and her own work in Canada, "it is less the fact of being a woman than being a feminist which is the best guarantee for the political representation of women. ... The capacity of political women to represent women depends less on their sex than on their ideas" (p. 341). In short, to understand the political role and full citizenship of women one must focus not only on the numbers of women representatives, it is also necessary to examine the substantive ideas that are put on the political table by both women and men.

## **2. The Issues**

One way to examine the substantive inclusion of women in an election campaign is to explore the policies and issues that figure during the campaign. While it is

reasonable to argue that all issues have an impact on the lives of women (as they do on all society), certain policy areas are more likely to be considered women's issues and associated with women's concerns than others. It has been found that women are more likely to support certain positions on particular policies and that those political concerns are much more likely to be directed to issues of social policy (for example see, Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau, Neviite, 2003; O'Neill 2001). Social policy made and directed by the state creates policy regimes that significantly impact on the links between gender agency and power.

Social policy is indeed centrally concerned with conflicting demands on the working mother and the likelihood that without a male partner she will be poor. Social policy also contributes to shaping her understanding of herself and her identity as a sexual being, as a social actor and citizen, and as a person who is like or unlike others in the same social category, locality, nation, or transnational group. The politics of social policy are equally broad ... ranging from the rights and obligations of claimants to unemployment benefits and proposals for maternity leave for female employees to the cost of medical indemnity insurance to doctors and the health care system, the access of women without male partners to assisted reproduction, and the welfare of children detained with their asylum-seeking parents (Shaver, 2002, p. 205).

Therefore the discussions at the beginning of the campaign regarding child care and representation struck the observer as being very hopeful for the inclusion of women's issues in the election. However, was this actually the case? What did the party platforms of the three major national parties promise women? While women and women's concerns were included in the party platforms of all three major national parties, they were in consideration with other groups rather marginal.

In the Liberal Party Platform document, *Securing Canada's Success*, the Party promised to "...Safeguard human and minority rights through steadfast commitment to Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms;... Make the Liberal plan for early learning and child care a permanent element of the national fabric; create a truly accessible and inclusive Canada so that persons with disabilities and others who may be disadvantaged do not want for equal opportunity; ... Extend Canada's positive influence in the world through actions and financial commitments to promote peace and security, democracy and human rights, elimination of poverty, and respect for the rule of law in economic and political affairs;..." (Liberal Party of Canada 2006, 6) In the message from Paul Martin that opened the platform document voters were reminded of the work done on a national Childcare policy by the Liberal government in the run-up to the election. "We have worked to create a national program of early learning and child care, reaching agreements with all 10 provinces and investing in affordable, quality care and teaching – creating real choice for parents and ensuring that future generation of Canadians are given the best possible chance to succeed (Liberal Party of Canada, 2006, p. 2). Other than a desire for "a Canada that is progressive and generous, concerned not only with economic prosperity but with fairness, solidarity and social justice," (p. 2) Paul Martin's letter had nothing explicit to say about half of the Canadian population.

Explicitly women were mentioned in the following areas: In the section on economics and demography, ‘Succeeding in a World of Giants,’ support for women small business owners was addressed,

Women entrepreneurs face three challenges in particular: financing, information and skills development, and networking. ... [T]he Liberal government has been addressing these issues – e.g., the Business Development Bank has created a \$25 million fund specifically for women to expand their business and to seek new market opportunities outside Canada... Industry Canada’s Network for Women Entrepreneurs in Ontario provides web portal access to a wealth of business information for women, in addition to personalized mentoring services (pp. 44-45).

This support included addressing maternity and parental benefits “Women business owners still face challenges, particularly balancing work and family responsibilities. ... A liberal government will immediately begin consultations with organization representing the self-employed toward designing a maternity and parental benefits program that best suited their diverse need (Liberal Party of Canada, 2006, pp. 44-45). Hence, the platform came back to the Liberal’s Early Learning and Child Care initiative.

In the section entitled, ‘Building the Canada We Want’ the Liberal Platform discussed the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in terms of francophone rights, the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Section 15, same-sex marriage and disabled persons. However, it was within the discussion of disabled persons and an aging population where women were once again explicitly mention.

The Liberal vision of an inclusive and accessible Canada encompasses not only those who must cope with disability or a mental or physical illness, but also those friends and family members who provide care. ... the implications of our ageing population are nowhere more evident than in the area of unpaid caregiving. More and more women, our traditional caregivers, are in the workforce and families are smaller and more dispersed. ... These voluntary commitments make an enormous contribution to Canada’s social fabric and assume a large responsibility that would otherwise have to be borne by publicly-financed social and health-care service” (pp. 59 -60).

The solution offered was a family leave program within the Employment Insurance framework.

At the end of an 84 page long document, explicit reference to half of the Canadian population was made 17 times. Explicit reference to children occurred 19 times, while variations of the word child (child, children, childhood, and childcare) occurred 52 times (see Table 6). There were three mentions of youth.<sup>8</sup>

The Conservative Party platform, *Stand Up For Canada*, emphasized five points for the campaign: accountability, opportunity, security, families, and communities. The

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<sup>8</sup> Granted the term men or men’s appeared only twice, but as the universal norm the lack of specific mention is not as significant.

final section which addressed issues of national unity, federalism, the fiscal imbalance, international commitments, and fairness in democracy proposed an elected Senate, better distribution of representation between the provinces, fixed election dates, free votes in the House, increasing the power of Parliamentary committees, and transparent and unmanipulated nomination meetings (p. 44). It did not explicitly discuss women's representation and in fact such a position could work against the efforts to put more women into Parliament by eliminating the ability of parties to appoint women to the Senate (where women have greater representation) or to run them in safe-winnable seats.

Specific mention of women was found in the Party's law and order policy proposals. Protecting women and children from sexual predators and sexual violence was an explicit concern, "Families should be able to raise their children without fear of sexual predators in our communities. Women should be able to live without fear in any Canadian city. But under Liberal governments we have seen slap-on-the-wrist sentences for sex offenders, while Canada has become a haven for internet child pornography, and the Liberals have refused to raise the age of consent to prevent adults from exploiting young teens" (Conservative Party of Canada, p. 24). In *Standing up for Security*, the Conservative Party promised to

[e]nd conditional sentences ("house arrest") for serious crimes, including designated violent and sexual offences, weapons offences, major drug offences, crimes committed against children, and impaired driving causing death or serious injury. Create presumption of dangerous offender designation for anyone convicted and sentenced to federal custody for three violent or sexual offences. ... [And] [c]reate mandatory consecutive sentences (instead of concurrent sentences, as is usually the case) for select multiple violent or sexual offences" (p. 24).

One section that pointed to a definite impact on the status of women in Canada was the proposal to "limit growth of spending on grants and contributions and in government departments and agencies" (p. 17). This committed a Conservative government to limiting the growth of spending on federal and contribution programs and by federal departments and agencies (other than National Defence and Indian Affairs). This indicated that programs and funding run out of the Status of Women's department would most likely be even more under threat. On September 25, 2006, this promise was put into effect with the announcement of a 5 million dollar reduction to the budget<sup>9</sup> of the Department of the Status of Women Canada and a change in mandate removing the term "equality."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> This cut to the budget is significant as it was later announced by the Minister of Heritage, Beverly Oda that the reduction was to the budget of the department in light of departmental inefficiencies. This did not entail a cut to the funding given out to the department if the funding applications were clearly for community endeavours that showed tangible, substantial and practical results communities. Funding for primarily research based projects was no longer available and universities were no longer eligible to apply for funds, while applications from private and for-profit agencies would now be considered.

<sup>10</sup> A comparison of the mandate and funding criteria of the Status of Women's Women's Program found on-line from May 2006 to March 2007 found that the appearance of the word equality went from 27 occurrences in May 2006 to **one** in March 2007 (Newman, 2007, [http://web.archive.org/web/20060519070136/www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/funding/wp/wpguidetxt\\_e.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20060519070136/www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/funding/wp/wpguidetxt_e.html) and [http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/funding/wp/wpguide\\_e.html](http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/funding/wp/wpguide_e.html)).

However, the dominant platform associated with women's issues was the section, "Stand up for Families" stating that

The family is the building block of society. Healthy families provide the love and support to raise the next generation of Canadians, and care for the aged and infirm. But families need support and recognition from government. Parents need help with child care choices so they can balance work and family life. ... Only the Conservatives believe in freedom of choice in child care. The best role for government is to let parents choose what's best for their children and provide parents with the resources to balance work and family life as they see fit – whether that means formal child care, informal care through neighbours or relatives, or a parent staying at home (pp. 30-31).

Standing up for Canada was a shorter document than the Liberal Party platform; it totalled 47 pages. Women were explicitly mentioned twice (there were no occurrences of the words women's or woman). Children received 15 mentions with variations on the word child occurring 38 times. Youth accounted for 9 explicit references (see Table 6).

According to the NDP platform, the party was committed to getting results for people and families. The table of contents presented a focus on children and childcare, aboriginal peoples and seniors. There was no specific mention of women. In the Parliamentary agenda set out on page 27, the following promises were made, "In the next Parliament, we will also work to deliver on the following priorities: jobs, childcare, housing, new Canadians, seniors, ending violence, renewal and peace and security." Regarding health care there was a commitment to increasing "the number of nurses, nurse practitioners and health care providers" and giving nurse practitioners more responsibilities (p. 14). In recognizing the special needs of seniors and Canada's aging population, the NDP also recognized women by "supporting an expanded caregivers program where caregivers, usually women, would receive up to one year of Employment Insurance while caring for a sick or elderly family member and where caregivers are recognized and not penalized when CPP/QPP benefits are calculated" (p. 38). The needs of aboriginal women were also addressed in the section 'Honour Canada's obligations to First Nations, Métis and Inuit people,' in as much as their property rights and physical safety were concerned. "Respecting implementation of the inherent right to self-governance by creating legal space and recognition for the legitimacy and jurisdiction of indigenous government ... and by promoting supporting systems of governments that have the support of communities and nations, including ... matrimonial property (p. 22); And "Making Canada safe for First Nations, Métis and Inuit women, wherever they are by taking immediate action on the recommendation of the Amnesty International Stolen Sisters Report and by supporting efforts of native women to develop healing centres and educational and training opportunities" (p. 22).

Protecting all Canadian women was addressed on page 39 where the NDP stance on law and order stated, "violence against women, as well, remains a crucial concern, as we are reminded every December 6<sup>th</sup>. We must continue to strengthen programs to reduce and to prosecute domestic violence" (p. 39). In the promises to revitalize democracy, the NDP made explicit reference to proportional representation as a solution to "[the] problems of regional, ethnic, gender and political imbalance that Canada now faces"(p.

26). Finally the economic prescriptions made in the NDP Platform explicitly mentioned women in terms of equality, “Ensure fair wages and working standards, including: Increasing the minimum wage to \$10 an hour for workers under federal jurisdiction. And an important step towards fairness for women, implementing the recommendations in the Pay Equity Task Force Final Report” (p. 31). The growing gap between rich and poor was seen of particular consequence for women seniors, “the gap between rich and poor is growing. And while living standards for seniors generally have improved... poverty among the elderly women continues to be a problem” (p. 37).

For the NDP Platform explicit reference to women amounted to 10 occurrences in a 45 page document, compared to 21 uses of the word child and 55 for variations on the word child. Youth amounted to 9 (see Table 6). It is also interesting to note that while both the Conservative Party and NDP platforms addressed violence against women, only the NDP Platform made reference explicitly to December 6<sup>th</sup> and to violence against aboriginal women. This is significant because the 2005-2006 electoral campaign overlapped with commemoration of the December 6<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre and a Inter-Provincial Territorial Minister Conference on the Status of Women held December 13<sup>th</sup> 2005 which confirmed continuing commitment to address violence against women and in particular violence against aboriginal women.

While it is fair to say that a) party platform documents are meant to address all Canadians and not single out any specific group, and b) all election issues will be of concern to and have an impact on women, it is interesting how specific concerns and groups do jump out of such documents. In the case of the party platforms and the campaign when it came down to one issue associated with women, the issue was Child care. And, when it came to a specific group that was the target of such policy debates, it was children and to lesser extent aboriginal peoples.

**Table 6: WORD OCCURENCE IN PARTY PLATFORMS**

	Conservative Party Standing Up for Canada Federal Election Platform 2006	Liberal Party Securing Canada's Future	NDP Jack Layton Getting results for people Platform 2006
Women (incl. Women's and woman)	2	17	10
Children (single word)	15	19	21
Child (incl. child, children, childhood, childcare)	38	52	55
Youth	9	3	9
Aboriginal	16	51	9
First Nation	1	8	12
Men (incl. Men's and man)	1	2	1

Senior (incl. Seniors and elderly)	1	3	6
Minorities (incl. Ethnic and new Canadians)	2	1	7

This focus on childcare was significant because rather than being a campaign about women, the 2005-2006 campaign was focused on children and a debate over how the state should provide for an appropriate childhood for Canadian children. This did not necessarily include women. Women and women's issues were for the most part missing from the campaign, a fact picked up in an article that appeared in a freelance column in *The Hamilton Spectator* in mid-January of 2006.

Coalition [for Women's Equality (CWE)]<sup>11</sup> member Bonnie Diamond of the National Association of Women and the Law says: 'Women are being left behind by federal policy and so far in this election our policy issues are not featured by parties and candidates.' It would appear women's equality issues have fallen off the political agenda despite national and local research that confirms that the 'face of poverty' is overwhelmingly that of a woman. However, the issue is usually framed within the context of 'child poverty,' as if to say children who are poor live alone. The silence on women's equality issues in the election debate is painfully deafening. (Myrie, January 16, 2006).

This silence on women's equality issues and a discourse on child poverty and children in general fits with a trend in the relationship between the Canadian state and women identified by Alexandra Dobrowolsky (2004) and Jane Jenson (Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004). This is a trend where women have disappeared from social policy making and the social policy regime particularly when it comes to childcare.

### 3. From Childcare to Early Childhood Education

As Dobrowolsky and Jenson (2004) recount, at the beginning of the 1980s the discourse<sup>12</sup> on child care "claimed universal child care in the name of social justice and

<sup>11</sup> The Coalition formed during the election and released a women's campaign guide, 'Still in Shock.' The coalition included the Native Women's Association of Canada, YWCA, National Association of Women and the Law, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women, and Federation des femmes du Quebec (Myrie, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> The term discourse is important in this context as it refers to a language of needs which Nancy Fraser (1990) points is a central element in the creation of social provision and the welfare state. "It is an idiom in which political conflict is played out and through which inequalities are symbolically elaborated and challenged. ... In my approach ... the focus is *the politics of need interpretation*. ... [I]t is the implications of needs claims in contested networks of in-order-to relations that I call attention to when I speak of the politics of need interpretation. Thin theories of needs that do not undertake to explore such networks cannot

of equality of the sexes” (p. 161). It was the result of the struggles undertaken by women during the 1970s partly in light of the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (1971) to achieve universal childcare thereby helping to ensure women’s economic and political equality. Through the 1980s and 1990s state policy shifted from child care to child poverty as the welfare state transitioned through the neo-liberal role back of state social provision to the “social investment” state. The discourse became one that sought to ensure that the less fortunate were to be socially included and no-one would fall between the cracks of society. The less fortunate did not mean women in general, but rather encompassed those seen to have the most need and be truly deserving of state protection – children and aboriginal people.<sup>13</sup> “... increasingly, children and youth are invoked, but they seldom have a gender, ethnicity, race or other significance save for perhaps Aboriginal youth.” (Dobrowolsky, 2004, p. 189). If women were included they were most likely to be a specific group – senior women.

As a result the discourse of child care policy had been itself transformed from universal child care as a way of ensuring women’s equality to provision for children’s development as citizens. In this emergent discourse of “investing in children” child care morphed into investment in child development and then into early childhood education. This discourse was certainly front and centre in the Liberal Party’s proposed child care policy, where it was specifically named a National Program of Early Learning and Child Care. The emphasis of the plan as outlined in the Liberal platform was provision of state care for children in the crucial developmental stage of their lives:

In Canada today, there are over two million children under the age of six. These early years are the most crucial years of their lives – when practically every second brings a new experience, a new chance to learn and grow. This is when much of a child’s future is decided. Parents are at the centre of their children’s lives, and no one else can do what they do. But not all parents can – or should feel they have to – do it all on their own.

To provide a vitally important additional measure of support for families, 18 months ago the Liberal government made an election commitment to make early learning and child care a national reality – a great national endeavour on the same scale as the creation of Canada’s public health care system (p. 28).

The Martin government responded ... by committing \$5 billion over five years for a pan-Canadian early learning and child care initiative founded on the QUAD principles – Quality, Universally inclusive, Accessible and Developmental. These principles speak to early learning and child care that is open to all children without discrimination, that is accessible and affordable for all parents; and that is of high quality in supporting a child’s development (Liberal Party, 2006, p. 29).

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shed much light on the politics of need... they assume that it is unproblematic who interprets the needs in question and from what perspective and in light of what interests; they thus overlook the fact that who gets to establish authoritative, thick definitions of people’s needs is itself at political stake (Fraser, 1990, pp. 199-202). This idea is taken up by Jenson in her work on recognition and citizenship (Jenson and Phillips, 1996; Jenson and Papillon, 1997; and Dobrowolsky and Jenson, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> While not within the rubric of this paper the infantilization of aboriginal peoples as a social category is an interesting note to make.

Rather than emphasize universal childcare as a means to bring about economic equality, or to even lessen the burden of care on women to allow equal access to the public sphere, the program aspired to support the full and appropriate development of the child. Women were not the centre of this program, children were.

The statement included promises of national quality oversight and accounting, “A National Quality Framework will be developed as the basis for guidelines and evidence based benchmarks for future programming” (Liberal Party, 2006, p. 30). When read with the sections immediately following, “Broader Access to University and College” (p. 30) and then “Enhanced Work Place Skills,” (p. 32), there was little question of what the National Quality Framework would be intended to measure – the development of Canadian children into educated and employed citizens or the prototypical worker citizen.

Like the Liberal platform, the New Democratic Party’s document closely followed its discussion of a national childcare program with discussion of the party’s education proposals.

The NDP has fought for years alongside women, early childhood education experts and parents for a national commitment to quality child care. ... Jack Layton and the NDP will work in the next Parliament to: Introduce a National Child Care Act, legislation that will firmly establish a framework for a national child care and early learning system with a permanent commitment for the federal government. It will establish standards for a network of high-quality, licensed, non-profit care for our children (p. 34)

In fact in the introduction to the platform document childcare and education were combined into one statement of purpose.

We’re proposing a national child care program so that parents can have the choice of quality child care when they have to be at work. And, we’ve got common-sense proposals to increase the accessibility of post-secondary education and training – to give young people a good start in building their future without being forced to mortgage their future (p. 2).

The one platform that did not appear to conflate childcare with childhood education was the Conservative Party’s.

A conservative government will introduce a family support policy that gives parents a true choice in child care.

A conservative government will

- Provide families a new \$1200 per year Choice in Child Care Allowance for each under six, to be taxable in the hands of the spouse with the lower income starting in 2006. This will be in addition to the current Canada Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement, and the Childcare Expenses Deduction. The Choice in Child Care Allowance will let parents choose the childcare option that best suits their family’s needs.

- Help employers and communities create child care spaces in the workplace or through cooperative or community associations by allocating \$250 million a year in tax credits to employers who cover the full cost of creating spaces. ... (p. 16)

However, giving parents choice did not mean the proposals were women centred. While provision of choice recognized that many women need childcare that does not fit the full-time, full-year, nine-to-five work model, i.e., that care needed to accommodate shift and part-time work, it was not a plan set to achieve economic equality. It was instantly apparent that given the costs of licensed and regulated childcare the \$1,200 per year would not come close to covering childcare expenses. The amount promised could only possibly come close to covering costs if parents chose informal care arrangements. Combined with the statement on “Standing Up for families,” the plan looked intended to facilitate and support continuing privatization of childcare -- “informal care through neighbours or relative, or a parent staying at home” (Conservative Party of Canada, 2006). Childcare would continue to fall to female caregivers in the home whose work would not be recognized as inherently public and hence productive.

Where the Conservative platform spoke of children in its childcare policy proposals was a promise of tax breaks and incentives for engaging children in physical activity.

A Conservative government will:

Commit to spending at least one percent of total federal health funding annually on physical activity including amateur sport and programs for school age children such as the Awards of Excellence program.

Commit to spending at least one percent of total federal health funding annually on physical activity,

Allow the parents of young people under 16 years old who register their children in programs that promote physical fitness to claim a federal tax credit on spending up to \$500 a year per child spent on registration fees and memberships  
(Conservative Party of Canada, 2006, p. 16).

The Conservative vision would provide for appropriate childhood development through physical education, combating childhood obesity (a moral panic that had recently appeared in media reports), and ensuring that Canadian children would be physically able and healthy citizens – ‘healthy body, healthy mind.’

To quote Dobrowolsky (2004, p. 192), “thus the discourse proliferates in relation to eliminating child poverty, early childhood development and support for parents, but we don’t not hear anything about reinstating universal family allowance or establishing a national child care system” (Dobrowolsky, 2004, p. 192). During the 2005-2006 election campaign, in the debate regarding childcare children were well spoken for, but women and the issue of women’s equality were absent. In previous elections, “Although the women’s movement certainly had to struggle to be heard in the past, there was still a sense that women’s groups’ representative should be consulted in policy making and that women’s issues could be debated at election time” (Dobrowolsky, 2004, p.192). In this election even though childcare was debated and the Conservative Party in its childcare

proposals promised something akin to a universal family allowance for children under six, women's issues were not really debated.

#### 4. Reserve voters?

Where does the reserve force of voters fit into all this and when do women's issues make an appearance? Women explicitly make their appearance the day after the 2<sup>nd</sup> English leadership debate when it became abundantly clear the Liberal Party was losing, and losing badly. It is the point of the election campaign when the Liberal Campaign make clear reference to the Conservative Party's and Stephen Harper's position on abortion and a women's right to choose. By association and sometimes explicitly the Liberal Party questioned the Conservative Party's commitment to the Charter of Rights and Freedom generally, Section 15 of the Charter, and the political consensus established after *Regina versus Morgentaler*.

Prior to mid-January, media coverage of reproductive rights, and foetal rights had been limited to the lobbying efforts of Mary Talbot, an Edmonton woman whose pregnant daughter had been shot and killed, to have the law changed so police could pursue murder charges for the killing of an unborn child. She had staged a protest at a rally for Stephen Harper in Edmonton (McLean, December 18, 2005) and had approached Conservative candidates in Alberta. The coverage, aside from a story in the National Post regarding Marjory LeBreton's defusing of Talbot's protest at the rally and arranging a private meeting with Harper (National Post, December 19, 2006), had been limited to local media coverage in Edmonton. The response of all the parties was to leave the issue of foetal rights and associated concerns regarding reproductive rights alone.

That was until Monday January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2006 the night of the second national English Leadership debate when Paul Martin questioned Harper on his commitment to the Charter of Rights and Freedom.

Paul Martin painted a bull's-eye on Stephen Harper in Monday's election debate and fired off a flurry of dire warning to voters that a Conservative government would eliminate tax cuts, slash social programs and threaten the Charter of Rights. With polls looking ugly for the Liberals and campaign time running out, Martin is hoping to reverse the Tory tide by giving moderate voters second thoughts about Harper. He went after the Conservative Leader on a range of fronts, accusing him of bad-mouthing Canada in the U.S., and warning voters that the Conservatives would kill plans for a national child-care scheme and threaten other social programs ....(Canadian Press, Monday January 9, 2006).

In the days following, this attack would be specified to question Harper's commitment to the Charter and explicitly a "woman's right to choose." The media coverage illustrated the new Liberal Party tactic.

...with less than two weeks remaining before the Jan. 23 vote, the parties focused most of their attention on stemming Tory momentum – which polls suggest has resulted in a nine-point Conservative lead nationally over the Liberals. ... Martin warned Wednesday that Harper's refusal to support the Liberal initiative to

revoke the notwithstanding clause was based on Tory intentions to reopen controversial morality issues such as a women's right to choose an abortion and same-sex marriages (Johnson, Can West News Service, January 11, 2006)

The Liberal leader used a speech in Toronto to repeat his now-familiar refrain that Harper would gut social programs, threaten constitutional rights and create a "fend-for-yourself" society. Then he added a new warning about a secret Tory agenda: 'Members of Mr. Harper's party have promised right-wing conservative groups that, if they are elected, they will ensure parliamentary votes on a woman's right to choose, on same-sex marriage and on other social issues, Martin declared. He also suggested that Harper wants to retain the power to use the Constitution's notwithstanding clause so he can wield it as a 'hammer' to overrule the courts on issues such as abortion (O'Hanlon, January 11, 2006).

Prime Minister Paul Martin continued to attack his Conservative rival yesterday, labelling Stephen Harper as a right-wing zealot who secretly plans to use the controversial notwithstanding clause to ban abortion. ... Martin pledged in the heat of Monday night's debate that his first priority if re-elected will be to eliminate the prime minister's access to the notwithstanding clause. He said Harper has refused to support the plan because if elected a Conservative government will use the "dangerous" tool to impose fundamentalist, right-wing beliefs on Canadians" (Rubec, January 12, 2006)

The appearance of Dr. Henry Morgentaler warning Canadians not to vote for the Conservatives and the establishment of a cross-party coalition of pro-life Members of Parliament for the most part represented by Elsie Wayne (Conservative) and Pat O'Brien (Liberal) added fuel to the fire the Liberals were attempting to set under women and socially progressive voters.

That women are more prone to vote on issues of social policy and hold more liberal political attitudes is clear in the research on Canadian political opinion". "Canadian evidence on the gender gap in opinion suggests that women and men, based on their differing political values, have different political priorities and preference. The issues on which the gaps appear include nuclear weapons and defence, government spending, welfare policies, and the welfare system in general. "Across a number of issues, women are more 'liberal' in their political outlook" (O'Neill, 2001, p. 47). Gidengil, Blais, Nadeau and Nevitte (2003) have found that "there are certainly indications that men tend to be little more conservative than women when it comes to issue of moral traditionalism, but the differences are nowhere near large enough to justify referring to a cultural backlash on the part of Canadian men"(p. 154). This was definitely the case regarding same-sex marriage. They also found evidence of a gender gap "in opinions on both feminism and gender-related questions more generally" (p. 154). Even these small differences, they concluded, could have important implications for party fortunes.

This feature of Canadian political attitudes appears not to have been lost on the Liberal Party. The focus on reproductive choice was a touch-point to force debate to issues that would bring the social conservative elements of the Conservative Party to the

fore. Such scare tactics had worked in 2004, and once again in the 2005-2006 campaign the Liberals attempted to mobilize a constituency that was more socially progressive and committed to feminism and gender-related questions – women.

The other parties responded in an attempt to downgrade the significance of the issue in the campaign, and in their way attempt to demobilize any possible movement of women and social progressives to the Liberal Party.

“Harper slams ads, denies plan to reopen abortion debate,” “Harper also dismissed Martin’s speech Wednesday accusing the Tories of having a secret agenda to trample minority rights including a right to an abortion. ... Harper also insisted that he would not reopen the abortion debate. ‘A Conservative government will not be bringing forward, will not be supporting, and will not be debating the abortion laws in this country. I’ve been clear on that and, frankly, I think that’s put the matter to rest’” (CBC, January 11, 2006).

“NDP Leader Jack Layton dismissed Martin’s statements as scare tactics. Martin ‘has nothing left to say to Canadian other than to tell them that unless they vote Liberal, the sun will not rise, spring will not come, and volcanoes will destroy the earth,’ Layton said while campaigning in Hamilton, Ont (Johnson, CanWest News Service, January 11, 2006).

It is here that we can make a claim regarding the reserve force of voters. For the most part, women’s issues were missing from this election, as the Hamilton Spectator commented, the “Silence is deafening on women’s equality issues in this campaign” (Myrie, 2006). The lack of any attempt to significantly up the number of women as candidates also pointed to an absence. Children were present and men, as usual, were ubiquitous. However, women only explicitly appeared when it became clear that in a crisis their voters were necessary for the Liberal Party. In the final count, while it was enough to keep the Conservatives to a minority government, it was not enough to save the Liberal Party from defeat.

Unfortunately, at this point, it is not within the scope of this paper to examine explicitly women’s voting motivations in this election. To substantiate this claim what is needed is a breakdown of urban versus rural voting attitudes, as it appears it was the central Canadian and urban voters that voted for the Liberals and the NDP. It was also the case, as was pointed out in the first section, that many of these voters were more likely to support women candidates. To add to this it would be worthwhile to examine issue tracks in previous elections to establish if this pattern has occurred in other elections or if the 2005-2006 election campaign was a ‘one-off.’

If it is the case that women represent a reserve force of voters called upon to support certain parties facing electoral defeat and then for the most part relegated to the margins of electoral campaigns when no crisis presents itself, this does have significance for women’s full-political citizenship.

## Conclusion

An examination of both the numbers and the issues of the 2005-2006 Canadian federal election demonstrates that from either a descriptive or substantive viewpoint women are a marginal force in Canadian electoral politics. If we consider political citizenship as a base requirement for attaining full-citizenship in modern democratic states, then it still looks as women have some way to go. Yes, women have political rights; they can run for office and they certainly can vote, but if they are not numerically and substantively fully included in the electoral process they cannot be said to have full political citizenship. In the 2005-2006 federal election campaign, women appear to have been significantly marginalized, their numbers nominal and their issues neglected, redefined in a way that defined them out of the equation, and finally, only having a presence as voters to be mobilized in crisis. This situation does not bode well for women's full-political citizenship.

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