

Essay Award Winner 2000

"The Influence of Political Culture on the Political Participation of Women in Two Provinces: A Case Study of New Brunswick and Saskatchewan"

by Erin Tolley

Observers of Canadian governance tend to paint a homogeneous portrait of women in politics, but region has a significant impact on the political participation of women. Indeed, the presence of women in provincial politics is as varied as the provinces are diverse, which is illustrated by the cases of Saskatchewan and New Brunswick. In Saskatchewan, women tend to seek political posts and as a result, several females hold key posts in their Legislative Assembly. In New Brunswick, women appear to be reluctant to abandon conservative traditions in favour of feminist ideals, and largely remain outside of the political realm. There are common barriers that may discourage women's political participation or limit their electoral success in both provinces,⁽¹⁾ but this is not the focus of this paper. Rather, using empirical data, this paper will illustrate, first, that there are significant variances in the political participation of women in Saskatchewan and New Brunswick. Second, using three theories of political culture, namely the staples tradition, the fragment theory, and the formative events approach, it will argue that differences in regional political culture have contributed to this disparity among the two provinces.

Historically, women in Saskatchewan have had a greater presence in provincial politics than women in New Brunswick and, in general, Saskatchewan's political arena appears to be more receptive to the inclusion of women than New Brunswick's political arena. The citation of several statistics illustrates this. First, Saskatchewan women were enfranchised and could stand for election in 1916 while women in New Brunswick were not enfranchised until 1919 and could not stand for election until 1934.⁽²⁾ The rights to vote and to stand for office are significant in countries, such as Canada, where voting and running for office are integral components of democratic governance.⁽³⁾ Provinces that denied women access to the most primary forms of political participation fostered the belief that women do not belong in politics and should not have a voice.

Moreover, women in Saskatchewan ran for office 16 years before women in New Brunswick, and electors in Saskatchewan sent a woman to provincial office some 48 years before electors in New Brunswick did the same.⁽⁴⁾ As a result, women in Saskatchewan have had a presence, albeit not continuous, for 81 years, while women in New Brunswick have occupied the Legislative Assembly for only the past 33 years.

Interestingly, however, the first woman was selected to New Brunswick's cabinet in 1970, while Saskatchewan did not follow suit until 1982.⁽⁵⁾ While it would appear that women in New Brunswick, once having entered the political arena, were more successful than women in Saskatchewan in achieving positions of power and influence, this is an oversimplification. As Don Desserud reveals, "[Although] women have been appointed in unprecedented numbers to [New Brunswick's] cabinet, they have, more often than not,

been appointed to positions best associated with the 'woman as nurturer' role, such as Education, Childhood Services, Income Assistance, and now, Family Affairs, and seldom to key decision-making posts, such as Finance."(6) In Saskatchewan, however, the portfolios of female cabinet ministers have included prestigious ministries such as Government Services, Social Services, Status of Women, Liquor and Gaming, as well as Finance.(7) An examination of the portfolios of female Cabinet Ministers in the current governments of both provinces affirms this observation.(8)

In this way, the appointment of women to cabinet positions in New Brunswick has reproduced, in the political arena, the social division of labour based on gender. Heather MacIvor argues that the gendered division of labour has existed "throughout human history" and specifies "a narrow range of tasks that women may legitimately perform, all of them domestic."(9) Electing more women to office will not significantly improve their representation if female politicians are not placed in key Cabinet posts. The segregation of women into traditional policy areas only fosters their tokenism.

The possibility of women transcending this tokenism in the political arena is influenced by a number of factors, region being one of the most commonly overlooked. While observers of women's political under-representation have tended to focus on institutional barriers, economic impediments, and social influences as the causes of the dearth of women in politics, very few have examined the effects of regional differences. Thus, it is the intent of this paper to do so.

A region is a geographical territory whose boundaries encompass a single political culture. Canada is typically divided into the Western, Ontario, Quebec, and Atlantic regions, each of which can be distinguished by their different political cultures. Nelson Wiseman writes that a region's political culture is based on "deeply-rooted, popularly-held beliefs, values, and attitudes about politics. Culture is pervasive, patterned, cross-generational, enduring, and relatively stable."(10) Although political culture is, in some ways, a subjective entity, Wiseman provides us with three ways to examine political culture. These are Wiseman's own staples tradition, Louis Hartz's fragment theory, and Seymour Martin Lipset's formative events approach. We will look at each of these in turn, focusing specifically on their application to Saskatchewan and New Brunswick.

Wiseman's staples tradition posits that the political, social, and economic institutions of a province are defined by the raw resources which are extracted from that region.(11) Wiseman writes, "From a political economy perspective, provincial political cultures reflect the interplay of economic forces which envelop them." He thus believes that "differences in provincial economic cultures may be said to drive differences in provincial political cultures."(12) According to Wiseman, differences in staples production between New Brunswick and Saskatchewan will contribute to differences in political culture and, more importantly for our purposes, differences in the political participation of women.

Forestry is New Brunswick's leading industry, contributing more than \$2 billion annually to the economy and employing more than 16,000 people.(13) Indeed, the government of

New Brunswick views forestry as "the backbone of New Brunswick's economy." (14) According to Wiseman's staples theory, the economic significance of forestry in New Brunswick will be politically significant. Forestry is traditionally viewed as a man's occupation and as a result of this masculinization, women are generally absent. In 1998, Canada's forestry industry employed 77,000 people; only 9,000 of these, or 12 per cent, were women. (15) We can assume that women would make up a similar proportion of employees in New Brunswick's forestry sector. As a male-dominated industry vital to its province's economic prosperity, forestry, according to Wiseman's staples tradition, transposes masculinity onto the political culture. That is, the staples tradition posits that the subordination of women in forestry, New Brunswick's principle staple, impels their subordination in politics.

On the other hand, Saskatchewan's staple, farming, has fostered an egalitarian and cooperative political culture. Today, Saskatchewan has "42 per cent of the arable land in Canada," but in its early days the land was new and unharvested and thus, there was much work to be done. (16) Through agriculture, women were given a significant role in the Prairie economy from the outset because their labour was needed to cultivate and harvest the land. (17) Agriculture is now the province's largest resource industry and it employs more than 14 per cent of its population. (18) While data are not available on the proportion of women employed in Saskatchewan's agricultural sector, Canadian women as a whole compose 33 per cent of those employed in agriculture in the country. (19) Women are therefore more visible in agriculture than in forestry. The staples theory suggests that the visibility of women in, and their importance to, the farming industry will be transposed upon Saskatchewan's political culture thereby encouraging their presence and success in politics.

The fragment theory, developed by Louis Hartz, is another method for analysing political culture and as Wiseman observes, it hypothesizes that "the politics of new societies are shaped by the older societies from which they come." (20) In this way, the political culture of a region is determined by the ideological backgrounds of its settlers. Hartz has identified five waves of immigration, each bringing people of different backgrounds and ideologies to the country. (21)

As a result of its pivotal coastal location, both the first and second immigrant waves brought settlers to the area which we now call New Brunswick. The first wave brought "quasi-feudal conservatism" from France to New France and Acadia, while the second wave brought Americans who were British Loyalists and who tended to espouse Toryism and elitism. (22) These two waves of immigration, which brought staunch conservatives and Tories to New Brunswick, have had a lasting influence on the province which continues to retain an unmistakably conservative political culture, enveloping "localism, tradition, caution, stability, social order, hierarchical religions, and elitism in the economic and political realms." (23)

Conservatism, as an ideology, has been somewhat inhospitable to women's political participation. Indeed, Conservative parties in Canada have committed themselves to a policy of "equal treatment of all citizens" (24) and thus, make few provisions to encourage

female candidacies.(25) This is problematic, given the historical disadvantages which women have faced in the political arena. This is significant in New Brunswick where Conservative parties have had much success. Indeed, since 1952, the Progressive Conservative Party has held office more than any other party, forming a government for 25 of the last 48 years. The current government is also Conservative.(26) According to Hartz's theory, New Brunswick's conservative roots pervade its political culture and will affect the political participation of women. This effect is often negative.

The fourth wave of immigration brought settlers to Western Canada in three parts. The first of these "ripples," as Wiseman refers to them, came from Britain and brought many immigrants who subscribed to "Britain's emerging labour-socialist politics . . . who were open to . . . promises of socialism."(27) The second ripple came from the United States, bringing populist-loyalists who settled largely in Alberta.(28) The third ripple saw the immigration of Eastern Europeans, most of whom could not speak English and who, "in order to avoid suspicion and to gain acceptance, . . . deferred ideologically and . . . bred a second generation that assimilated some of the prevailing values."(29) As a result, Eastern European settlers tended to adopt the socialism of British immigrants or the populism of American immigrants, firmly establishing these ideologies on the Prairies.

These foundations are visible today in Saskatchewan where social democratic ideology is firmly entrenched in its political culture. Social democratic ideology espouses cooperation, planning, and equality and is the cornerstone of the New Democratic Party. The NDP's predecessor, the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, has firm roots in Saskatchewan as its founding document, the Regina Manifesto, was drafted there.(30) Indeed, the CCF/NDP has held office in the province for 32 years of the last 48 years and is currently in government.(31)

While inequality was present in the early CCF, the party permitted women to play a more active role than the Liberal or Conservative parties.(32) Gradually, the few feminists within the CCF forced the party "to address some crucial questions of gender inequality" and by the second World War, the CCF had increased its involvement in women's issues, promoting the concerns of female wage-earners and encouraging discussion about the role of women in postwar reconstruction.(33) Moreover, the provincial women's committees had become well-organized and highly skilled fund-raisers. As a result, a small number of women were given jobs as party organizers and increasing numbers of women ran for provincial office under the CCF banner with some success.(34) Today, the NDP in Saskatchewan carries on the egalitarianism of the CCF, introducing day care initiatives, equal pay legislation, policies on domestic violence, and pushing for healthcare reform.(35) Moreover, the NDP is said to be "the party most strongly committed to increasing the presence of women in party and elected offices."(36) Hartz's fragment theory posits that Saskatchewan's social democratic roots will deeply influence its political culture. Coupled with the historical success of women in the CCF/NDP, this has had a positive impact on women's political participation in the province.

The final framework for examining political culture is Seymour Martin Lipset's formative events approach. Lipset hypothesized that there are events within a culture's history that

define its political culture.(37) While Lipset's analysis looked at events that defined entire nations, his approach can be used to describe the formation of political cultures in provinces. Two formative events that are pertinent to an examination of women's political participation in New Brunswick and Saskatchewan are New Brunswick's existence as a pre-Confederation entity and the immigration of domestic workers to the Prairies. We will look at these in turn.

New Brunswick was a founding province of Canada, but predated Confederation. New Brunswick's provincial constitution was defined in Letters Patent to Governor Thomas Carleton in 1784.(38) However, as Wiseman points out, constitutionalism may also be defined as "the date of 'reception' of British laws," in which case, New Brunswick's courts have ruled the year 1660 "as the reception point for English statutes."(39) Thus, some 200 years before Confederation, New Brunswick had an entrenched system of laws, political institutions, and social practices, as outlined in its formal constitution.(40) In this system, the role of women was marginal. They were expected to adhere to rigid social expectations, had few legal rights, and could not vote or hold office. By Confederation, these practices had existed for centuries and were not likely to change easily. Thus, when women were formally enfranchised in 1918, they faced, in New Brunswick, centuries-old traditions and ideas about women, an obstacle that was not encountered by women in newly federated provinces.

Saskatchewan, for example, was created as an act of Parliament in 1905, just 38 years after Confederation and thus, in comparison to New Brunswick, is a very young province.(41) Most of the province's inhabitants had arrived during a massive wave of immigration that had begun some 15 years earlier. As Wiseman points out, "The prairie population exploded from about 100,000 in 1881 to two million in 1921."(42) As a young, newly populated province, Saskatchewan did not have established political institutions or traditions. Moreover, it was created just nine years before women were given the franchise and at a time when women's issues were gaining influence.(43) Saskatchewan did not have to overcome the impediment, which New Brunswick has encountered, of erasing centuries of tradition to embrace a more equitable attitude toward women.

A second formative event is the immigration of domestic workers to Canada. Between 1911 and 1921, more than 54,300 domestics immigrated to Canada from Britain, Ireland, and France. Of these, 4 per cent were employed in Atlantic Canada, while 32 per cent were employed on the Prairies.(44) While most domestics worked in deplorable conditions and their contributions tend to be overlooked, their impact on women's political participation, particularly on the Prairies, was significant.(45) First, domestics were different from many Canadian women because most were unmarried and therefore had relative independence. This was not the case for married women who were considered their husband's property and had few rights independent of him.(46) Unmarried women, on the other hand, were financially and legally independent, and they often enjoyed many of the same rights as men.(47) Given the number of domestics who immigrated to the Prairies and their relative autonomy, these women would have had a significant role in the emerging discussions on the role of women in politics.

Second, with a domestic to assist her with her household tasks, the woman of the house was able to occupy herself with other pastimes, such as political activism. As Jean Cochrane points out, middle and upper-class women, who often had more than one servant, would frequently participate in political meetings in the afternoons, an impossible luxury for women who did not have domestic workers.(48) Thus, in areas, such as Saskatchewan, where there was a considerable influx of domestic workers, women were given the time to pursue political activism. In areas, such as New Brunswick, where the presence of domestics was not as visible, many women would not be afforded this opportunity.

Using three different analytical approaches to political culture, namely the staples tradition, the fragment theory, and the formative events approach, this paper has illustrated how differences in the political cultures of New Brunswick and Saskatchewan have contributed to differences in the political participation of women. For women, merely possessing the desire to participate is insufficient. Indeed, as this paper has argued, women must overcome the barriers of history, of tradition, of attitudes, and of culture. In New Brunswick, these barriers are comparatively greater than in Saskatchewan and thus, the political participation of women in that province has been significantly hindered.

Notes and bibliography

- (1) The most commonly cited barriers to women's political participation, regardless of region or level of government, are the single-member district simple plurality electoral system, the cost to run, the strain on family life, the intervention of parties, voter bias against female candidates, and socialization which discourages women from seeking elected office.
- (2) See Louise Carbert, "Governing on the Saskatchewan Side of the Border," *In the Presence of Women*, Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997) 154; and Don Desserud, "Women in New Brunswick Politics," *In the Presence of Women*, Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997) 254.
- (3) See Robert A. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 109-111. Dahl argues that effective participation and voting equality are necessary criteria in a democratic process. If people are unable to express their preferences or are not given "an equal opportunity to express a choice that will be counted as equal in weight to the choice expressed by any other citizen," democracy does not exist. By this standard, Canada's early system of government was not democratic because it did not give women the ability to express their preferences, nor did it give them an opportunity to express a choice that would be counted equally with the choices of others. See also Dahl, 221.
- (4) In Saskatchewan, Sarah K. Ramsland ran in the 1919 election and won. While a woman ran in New Brunswick's 1935 election, she was defeated and it was not until 1967 that Brenda Robertson ran in a New Brunswick riding and won. See Carbert, 154; and Desserud, 254.
- (5) Carbert, 154

(6) Desserud, 256.

(7) Carbert, 254.

(8) New Brunswick's 15-member Cabinet presently contains two women. One holds the Environment portfolio, while the other holds the Municipalities and Housing Portfolio. While women compose 18 per cent of New Brunswick's legislature, they compose only 13 per cent of Cabinet and are thus under-represented in the province's most powerful and prestigious positions. See Government of New Brunswick, "Executive Council," (18 March 2000). In Saskatchewan, there are 19 Cabinet Ministers, including five women who hold non-traditional posts such as Economic and Cooperative Development, Labour, and Property Management, as well as the traditional Health and Status of Women portfolios. Since female legislators compose 22 per cent of the Saskatchewan legislature, but 26 per cent of the Cabinet, women are slightly over-represented in Cabinet. See Government of Saskatchewan, "Cabinet," (10 May 2000).

(9) Heather MacIvor, *Women and Politics in Canada* (Peterborough: Broadview, 1996) 24.

(10) Nelson Wiseman, "Provincial Political Cultures," *Provinces*, Christopher Dunn, ed. (Peterborough: Broadview, 1996) 21.

(11) *Ibid.*, 22.

(12) *Ibid.*, 23-24.

(13) See Rank Dyck, *Provincial Politics in Canada* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1996) 168; and Government of New Brunswick, Department of Natural Resources and Energy, "Forests," (24 March 2000).

(14) Government of New Brunswick, Department of Nature Resources and Energy, "Forests." (15) Calculations by the author. Data found in Statistics Canada, "Employment by Detailed Industry and Sex," (24 March 2000).

(16) Dyck, 432.

(17) Wiseman, 43.

(18) Calculations by the author. Data found in Statistics Canada, "Distribution of Employed People, by Industry, by Province," (24 March 2000).

(19) Calculations by the author. Data found in Statistics Canada, "Employment by Detailed Industry and Sex." We can assume that this composition would be roughly equivalent in Saskatchewan.

(20) *Ibid.*, 30.

(21) *Ibid.*, 32.

(22) *Ibid.*, 33.

(23) *Ibid.*, 41.

(24) While the Conservative Party is committed to equality of treatment, it does provide funding to assist female candidates with their campaigns. However, Janine Brodie argues that these funds merely scratch the surface of obstacles faced by female candidates. See Janine Brodie, "Women and the Electoral Process in Canada," *Women in Canadian Politics: Toward Equity in Representation*, Kathy Megyery, ed. Vol. 6 of the Research Studies of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991) 37.

(25) In an interview with Gord Campbell, a field organizer for the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada, I asked what the Progressive Conservative Party was doing to encourage the success of women in politics. Mr. Campbell replied, "Nothing."

When asked to elaborate, he stated that "the PC party believes in the equal treatment of citizens, groups and provinces." Telephone interview with Gord Campbell, Saskatoon SK, February 28, 1999.

(26) Frank Feigert, *Canada Votes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989) 160-161; and telephone correspondence with René Ouellette, Constituency Assistant to Marcelle Mersereau, Member of the New Brunswick Legislative Assembly from Bathurst NB, May 14, 2000.

(27) Wiseman., 34.

(28) Ibid., 34.

(29) Ibid., 35.

(30) Joan Sangster, *_Dreams of Equality_* (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 1989) 91.

(31) Feigert, 278-279; Chief Electoral Officer, *_Saskatchewan's 22nd General Election: Report of the Chief Electoral Officer_* (Regina: Chief Electoral Office, 1991); and Chief Electoral Officer, *_Saskatchewan's 23rd General Election: Report of the Chief Electoral Officer_* (Regina: Chief Electoral Office, 1995).

(32) Sangster, 100.

(33) Ibid., 25; 194-197.

(34) Ibid., 206-208.

(35) Carbert, 157; and Jean Cochrane, "Women in Canadian Politics," *_Women in Canadian Life_*. Jean Cochrane and Pat Kincaid, eds. (Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1977) 64. (36) Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, "In the Presence of Women:

Representation and Political Power." *_In the Presence of Women_*. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997) 7.

(37) Wiseman, 24.

(38) Ibid., 147.

(39) Ibid.

(40) See Ibid.

(41) Ibid., 149.

(42) Ibid., 35.

(43) Carbert, 154.

(44) Figures from Marilyn Barber, *_Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada_*, (Saint John: Keystone, 1991) 4-7.

(45) Cochrane, 7.

(46) Ibid., 8.

(47) Ibid., 8.

(48) Ibid., 9.

Bibliography:

Arscott, Jane and Linda Trimble. "In the Presence of Women: Representation and Political Power." *_In the Presence of Women_*. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Barber, Marilyn. *_Immigrant Domestic Servants in Canada_*. Saint John: Keystone, 1991.

Brodie, Janine. "Women and the Electoral Process in Canada." *_Women in Canadian Politics: Toward Equity in Representation_*. Kathy Megyery, ed. Vol. 6 of the Research Studies of the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1991. 23 vols.

Campbell, Gord. Telephone interview. Saskatoon SK. February 28, 1999.

Carbert, Louise. "Governing on the Saskatchewan Side of the Border." *_In the Presence of Women_*. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Chief Electoral Officer. *_Saskatchewan's 22nd General Election: Report of the Chief Electoral Officer_*. Regina: Chief Electoral Officer, 1991.

—. *_Saskatchewan's 23rd General Election: Report of the Chief Electoral Officer_*. Regina: Chief Electoral Officer, 1995.

Cochrane, Jean. "Women in Canadian Politics." *_Women in Canadian Life_*. Jean Cochrane and Pat Kincaid, eds. Toronto: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 1977.

Dahl, Robert A. *_Democracy and its Critics_*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Desserud, Don. "Women in New Brunswick Politics." *_In the Presence of Women_*. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble, eds. Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997.

Dyck, Rand. *_Provincial Politics in Canada_*. Scarborough: Prentice-Hall, 1996.

Feigert, Frank. *_Canada Votes_*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

Government of New Brunswick. Department of Natural Resources and Energy web page. "Forestry."