

MORE WOMEN CONSTITUENCY PARTY PRESIDENTS

A Strategy for Increasing the Number of
Women Candidates in Canada?

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to explore the idea that the gender of constituency party presidents makes a difference in the recruitment of women as candidates in federal politics in Canada, notably by examining the attitudes of female and male party gatekeepers towards the presence of women in politics. Two hypotheses inspired us. The first suggests that female presidents are more likely than male presidents to assess candidates using traits more likely to be possessed by women. The second hypothesis proposes that women are more likely than men to support measures for increasing the number of women in politics. The first hypothesis is not confirmed: female presidents do not appreciate feminine traits any more than male presidents. The second is only partly confirmed. Far from being the only variable to influence support for measures promoting women candidates, gender appears to be a secondary determinant when the variables of political party and the feminist consciousness are taken into account. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to neglect the gender variable because, depending on the political party, a woman president can make a difference, especially when it comes to the Right and Centre parties.

KEY WORDS ■ Canada ■ nomination ■ women candidates ■ 1997 Canadian Election

Introduction

In Canada, as in many other democracies of the Western world, public opinion is largely in favour of a greater number of women being elected into public office (International Gallup Poll, 1996). This openness is probably