

Do Political Women Represent Women? Views of Discrimination and Representation Among Female and Male Mayors in Québec*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article was to investigate how Québec female and male mayors perceive the role of women in politics. The basic hypothesis was that gender does influence opinions about the experience of women in local politics. As predicted, female mayors are more likely than their male colleagues to support a feminist point of view. This general conclusion should be qualified, however, since women and men are not systematically polarised on each of the topics, and female mayors differ among themselves.

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that municipal politics facilitate the political participation of women. In effect, being locally-based, this level of government tends to favour the harmonisation of public and private obligations, notably by reducing distances between home and work and absences from the family (Lovenduski, 1986, p215). Moreover, questions of interest for municipal government may be more compatible with what have been traditionally defined as feminine roles, responsibilities, and activities (Andrew, 1984, 1991). Finally, municipal office, being a less competitive and a less desirable level of power for men, should be more winnable for women (Trimble, 1995; Vickers, 1978).

There is, however, no statistical evidence to support the hypothesis that municipal politics encourages the political involvement of women. In Québec, in 1995, there were more female members of the National Assembly (MNAs) than female mayors (18.4 per cent vs 9.0 per cent respectively), and only 19.0 per cent of

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