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Feminist Interventions in Political Representation in the United States and Canada: Training Programs and Legal Quotas

Chantal Maillé

¹ With Hillary Clinton the early front-runner in the 2016 Democratic primary, the United States may join Germany, Brazil, and Argentina as democracies with women as their top leaders. Yet, according to Steven Hill, the alarming reality is that American women are still vastly underrepresented in elected office all across the nation and losing ground when compared to other nations.ⁱ In 2014, women held 18.5% of the seats in the U.S. Congress, 20.0% of the seats in the Senate, and 18.2% of the seats in the House of Representatives. The United States ranked eighty-fourth in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) ranking of women in national parliaments. Thus far, no political party has adopted quotas for the selection of candidates for the House of Representatives or the Senate. Women's representation in the United States Congress is a paradox. By socio-economic and cultural indicators, conditions in the United States are among the best in the world. Yet comparative studies have consistently shown that women's representation in Congress trails that in other advanced industrial democracies.ⁱⁱ

² With women representing 25.1% of delegates elected to the House of Commons, as of the May 2011 election, Canada was ranked fifty-fourth by the IPU. Canada has been stagnating between 20 and 25 percent, and fell from 21.1% in 2004 to 20.8% in 2006. In Canada, there is no natural progression in percentages of elected women from one election to the next that would make equality in gender representation in politics an

eventuality in the short term. For seven months in 1993, Kim Campbell served as Canada's only female Prime Minister, by interim, before being defeated in the national elections of November 1993. Two national political parties have adopted voluntary gender quotas that are in fact targets; they are not binding for the selection of candidates for national elections.ⁱⁱⁱ Political scientist Sylvia Bashevkin writes:

women's political status in Canada is arguably on a rocky path, and likely jolting backward in reverse gear. Boldly stated, the prospects for Canadian women who seek careers in public life seem to be getting worse, not better.^{iv}

³ Although such low numbers of women elected do not appear to be perceived as a major political problem in countries such as Canada and the United States, the issue has been at the forefront of the political agenda in many other countries with similar profiles. France, for example, voted on gender parity legislation in 1999. In this article, I examine Canadian and American women's movements' initiatives to counter the problem of low numbers of elected women in Canadian and American parliaments^v. By examining strategies initiated by American and Canadian women's groups working in the field of women and politics, analyzing documents and reports produced by these groups, and using interviews conducted with organizational spokespeople, I look at the features common to these approaches, such as a strong emphasis on women's training for political office and an absence of mobilization in favor of legal quotas, and investigate the output of this specific form of feminist activism. Canada and the United States share a similar political system, first-past-the-post (FPTP), which has been identified as a system in which the implementation of quotas for women is more complicated.^{vi} It is therefore useful to compare initiatives put forward on each side of the border as illustrations of approaches commonly adopted to increase the number of women elected in this type of electoral system.

1. Quotas and Training Programs

⁴ Electoral quotas have emerged as one of the critical political reforms of the last two decades.^{vii} In a 2006 article on gender quotas and citizenship models, Krook, Lovenduski, and Squires refer to three types of quotas for women in politics: party quotas, legal quotas, and soft quotas. Party quotas are policies adopted by individual political parties, legal quotas are laws passed by national legislatures to regulate the selection of female candidates, and soft quotas are measures that seek to increase women's representation.^{viii} Forty-eight countries have voted to include legislative quotas in their constitution and/or electoral laws.^{ix}

⁵ Considering the effectiveness of legal quotas,^x are there discussions to introduce legal quotas for women in politics in the United States and Canada? Dahlerup and Freidenvall write that quotas are considered violations of liberal democratic principles in these countries.^{xi} However, this argument is far from convincing, particularly if one considers affirmative action programs with quotas in employment and education

that have existed in both countries. Unlike party or soft quotas, legal quotas are passed by governments and parliaments. They can be seen as an indicator of the importance governments attribute to the problem of low numbers of women in electoral office. Party quotas are usually introduced by political parties, which are independent from women's movements, while legal quotas are voted in by governments and could be interpreted as a government response to campaigns led by women's movements. Both Canada and the United States have discussed and implemented soft or party quotas to different degrees, without significant results. In the U.S., the presence of soft quotas has not produced significant gains in legislative representation.^{xii} In Canada, both the NDP and the Liberals have targets that are not quotas. Targets are not binding; there are no consequences or penalties if objectives are not met. The Liberals have a target of 25% of women elected, a measure adopted in 1993. During the 2011 election, 30% of the party's candidates were women, down from 37% in 2008. With only 6 women elected out of 34 MPs (17%) in May 2011, the Liberals are still far from their 1993 target. In 1985 the New Democratic Party adopted a target of 50% women candidates. During the last election, 41% of its candidates were women, compared to 34% women candidates in 2008, but this is still far from 50%. Following the 2011 election, women formed 39% of the NDP caucus. The Conservative Party presented 22% women candidates at the last election and elected 28 women to its 167-member caucus, or 16%.^{xiii}

6 While quotas may be controversial, their increased use to jump start or make historical leaps in percentages of elected women is becoming a global trend.^{xiv} How important are women's movements in determining the type of approach taken to the problem of low numbers of women in national assemblies? An important body of research has been conducted on contexts leading to the adoption of quotas in national parliaments.^{xv} Krook identifies three categories of potential actors in quota campaigns: civil society actors, such as women's movements and women's caucuses within political parties; state actors, such as national leaders and courts; and international and transnational actors including international coalitions and bodies and transnational non-governmental organizations.^{xvi} According to Dahlerup and Freidenvall, the strength of women's groups within political parties and of international, national, and local women's movements, as well as the good faith compliance by political parties, are vital for the adoption of quotas.^{xvii} In contexts such as East and Southern Africa, national women's movements played a central role in the adoption of gender quotas.^{xviii}

7 In the present paper I seek to answer the following questions: How are Canadian and American women's movements approaching the problem of low numbers of elected women? If legal quotas for women in politics are a global trend, are proposals being made in these two countries to adopt legal quotas? What about women's movements and women's groups working to increase numbers of elected women? Are they supportive of legal quotas? My research shows an absence of

mobilization for the adoption of legal quotas in Canada and the United States, and more specifically on the part of American and Canadian women's movements and feminists actively engaged in the promotion of women in politics. Much of the work done by Canadian and American women's movements in the area of women and politics focuses on specific strategies targeted at individual women, with a strong emphasis on training programs. While dozens of countries took the "fast track" approach to the problem of low numbers of women elected in politics by introducing gender quotas for elections,^{xix} American and Canadian approaches to the problem are quite different. This is what I will try to explain in the following pages.

2. The Promotion of Women in Politics in the United States

⁸ The United States seems thoroughly unaffected by the quota movement; proposals for gender quotas have simply not entered into the realm of public debate. Krook identifies three broad features of the American landscape that might help shed light on the absence of support for quotas. Firstly, women lack accurate knowledge of the extent of women's political underrepresentation: a large proportion of Americans, mostly women, overestimate the number of women in Congress, and as a result are unlikely to initiate gender quota campaigns. Secondly, the existence of affirmative action programs in the U.S. and the politicization of claims for underrepresented groups only render any claim for women more difficult. Lastly, while the majority of recent successful quota campaigns in other countries have involved an international component, such as pressure from international organizations, the United States' global hegemonic economic and political position means that it has not been subject to the same international pressures to increase percentages of elected women at the national level.^{xx} In addition to these three factors, Krook questions the possibility of effectively implementing gender quotas in the United States given the first-past-the-post electoral system, which constitutes a significant, though not absolute, barrier to quota implementation.

⁹ To explain why quotas for women in politics are not on the American agenda, Maier and Klausen refer to an American liberal reluctance to believe that specific categories of people should have the right to have their specificity guaranteed through numerically-assured representation.^{xxi} They also mention that a failed campaign for an equal rights amendment (ERA) contributed to a political backlash, and see this scenario being repeated if a parity movement were to be formed in the United States:

At the end of the campaign the fight for the ERA was widely regarded as having helped the Right and hurt the Left, giving birth to a "new right". (...) It is not clear if the parity movement has the potential similarly to stimulate a political backlash capable of undoing the movement and its gains.^{xxii}

¹⁰ Studlar^{xxiii} argues that a quota system for women candidates is unthinkable within the decentralized party system and individualistic political culture of the United States; he identifies the voting system and its associated political institutions as an obvious factor in limiting the numbers of women in the U.S. House of Representatives. Studlar also examines the specific orientation of American research on women and politics, and notes that this research emphasizes social psychological factors to explain why so few women run for elections, something he associates with the individualistic culture of the United States.

¹¹ Could the first-past-the-post electoral system used in the United States be part of the explanation for the absence of mobilization in support of quotas for women in politics? While the FPTP system is not known to facilitate quota implementation, neither does it make it impossible:

FPTP systems do not necessarily preclude the election of more women. Although balancing nominations is impossible, given the presence of single-member districts, parties that resolve to elect more women may devise new practices of candidate selection to accomplish this goal, like all-women shortlists, guaranteeing that whichever candidate is chosen in a particular district will be female.^{xxiv}

¹² In India, a country with an FPTP electoral system, quotas have been part of political life for years. The Women's Reservation Bill, under discussion since 1990, intends to reserve at least 33% of its seats for women at the national level by using rotation: one-third of districts would be reserved for women for each election and these districts would alternate from election to election.

¹³ The reviewed literature suggests many explanations for the absence of support for legal quotas in the U.S. But what about women's movements, identified by Dahlerup and Freidenvall^{xxv} as vital for the adoption of quotas? How are they approaching the problem of low numbers of women in politics? In a series of interviews I conducted with spokespeople from women's organizations involved in the promotion of women in politics,^{xxvi} I found that, by and large, they did not support the strategy of legal quota implementation. Instead, one type of intervention is favored over all others: the identification of women's individual characteristics as the key factor in understanding their underrepresentation in electoral politics. This reasoning can in turn suggest two different sets of explanations, one focusing on psychological determinants and the other referring to socio-economic circumstances. The first explanation is based on the premise that women need to learn about self-confidence and politics in order to overcome the current situation of political underrepresentation. The second is more concerned with mothering responsibilities and women's lack of financial resources necessary for running for politics. Studlar locates the first explanation within social psychology and studies of political ambition that are typical of the prevailing orientation of research on women and politics in the U.S. He nonetheless provides a reading of the U.S. situation in which the electoral system also plays a key role:

The evidence for the influence of the electoral system and its associated political institutions in explaining the low proportion of women in the US House of Representatives has become more compelling as other explanations have lost force. General socioeconomic conditions affecting women's candidacies have improved, yet over the past decade the growth in women's representation has returned to its incremental path. Women are no longer disadvantaged if they ever were, by campaign financial support, thanks to active feminist support groups for them.^{xxvii}

¹⁴The American women's movement has put forward a number of initiatives to combat women's political underrepresentation. The National Organization for Women (NOW) has been involved in the promotion of women and politics through its Political Action Committee (PAC). Although there is also a web of specialized women's groups working to increase numbers of women in elected office, there is no coordinated approach to women and politics programs. Instead, there is a set of organizations and individuals who interface with each other.

¹⁵The Women's Campaign School at Yale University is a non-partisan political campaign training program for women from all countries, although primarily designed for the American system, which trains women to run political campaigns. Every year, Yale's Annual Summer Session brings together women from around the United States and other parts of the world to learn the skills and strategies required to run successful campaigns. For five days, participants are put through an intensive political immersion program designed to teach political skills and strategic assessment. The curriculum is designed to address the particular cultural challenges faced by women in politics.

¹⁶At Rutgers University, the Center for American Women and Politics offers a variety of programs for different groups of women; Pathways to Politics is for teenage girl scouts. Over two weeks, participants meet elected officials and activists and learn about the roles of women in politics. Ready to Run is a non-partisan campaign training program for women regardless of their experience or career. Ready to Run attendees learn about running for office, fundraising and media skills, best practices from experts, and strategies for positioning themselves for public office; receive real-world advice; and gain an in-depth understanding of party politics. Ready to Run also offers three pre-conference programs for women of color, each one designed for women from specific ethnic groups: Latinas, women of the African diaspora, and Asian-American women. NEW Leadership was established in 1991. Aimed at college women, the leadership training program focuses primarily on politics. The NEW Leadership Summer Institute is a six-day intensive residential program that educates college women about politics and policy-making and seeks to inspire them to participate in the political process. Students meet with women in a variety of roles in the public sphere, learn about women's political participation, explore ideas about leadership and politics, and participate in hands-on, skill-building exercises. Students hear from women who are shaping public policy as elected officials, community leaders, and issue advocates. These women serve as role models and mentors. This program has served as a model for other

programs around the country; it now exists on many college and university campuses nationwide and has thousands of graduates. The Women & Politics Institute at American University, founded in 2000, trains women for leadership. The Institute's programs provide participants with the skills necessary to run for public office, pursue a variety of political careers, and develop their leadership capabilities. The project offers graduate and undergraduate certificates in Women, Policy, and Political Leadership. Another of its programs, WeLEAD, connects a group of senior Washington women with younger generations to help them succeed in politics and public service.

¹⁷At Harvard University, the program From Harvard Square to the Oval Office is a non-partisan political training practicum that equips a select group of Harvard graduate students with the training and support they need to help them ascend in the electoral process at the local, state, and national levels. Running Start, which was founded in 2007 and grew out of the non-partisan Women Under Forty Political Action Committee, offers financial support to young women running for federal office. The group was formed when it became clear that the pool of young women considering careers in politics and running for elected office was far too small. From the perspective of those who run the program, young women and girls need to be educated about politics earlier in life and Running Start provides them with the skills and confidence they need to become the political leaders of tomorrow.^{xxviii} Running Start's aim is to demystify the political process and expose young women to politics as a future career. In 2009, the organization received 30,000 online applications for a 50-spot summer intensive training program offering networking, public speaking, and mentorship.

¹⁸One observation that emerges from the interviews I conducted with these group representatives concerns the nature of these initiatives. They all share fundamental assumptions about how the problem of women's underrepresentation in American politics should be interpreted, which in turn influences the solutions proposed to reverse the pattern. Interviewees all agreed that specific training for women interested in running for political office is part of the solution. Most of them also discussed psychosocial factors to explain the current low numbers of women elected in American politics.

¹⁹One interviewee explained that some of the hurdles to women's election to office were life cycles such as childbearing, but she also called on complex psychological factors and biological factors to explain why women do not run for political office. The training program that she runs mitigates these psychological factors by instilling confidence in its graduates: "One of the things we give the women in our program is confidence." Another interviewee locates her program, aimed specifically at teenage girls, in relation to research showing that women were significantly less likely than men to want to run or consider themselves qualified to run for office. She posits that this research suggested that encouraging women's interest in the field of politics at a young age, and

building young women's confidence, would increase their political ambition on the part of women and make them more likely to want to run for office. A woman who runs a program at the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University, states that she sees the Rutgers' programs as contributing to a political culture shift. She identifies her program as one that boosts confidence and provides college women with networking training and real tools, in addition to teaching them about how government functions. For her part, the Executive Director of another program based at an academic institution offers two explanations as to why there are so few women in politics: political structures and gender socialization. She argues not only that American political culture does not support women's political leadership, but that it actively hampers women's success as well. For her, this is why her program provides young women students with skills but while also seeking to demystify the political process so that "they can begin to rebuild their identity so that they see themselves as political leaders." This spokesperson agrees that although women frequently already possess the skills being taught, and thus do not necessarily require all of the courses offered by the program, "They just believe that they do."

²⁰The National Organization for Women (NOW), arguably the most visible American women's organization, has its own strategies to augment the low numbers of women elected at the national level. NOW was and is involved in the promotion of women in national politics, mostly through the Elect Women for a Change program. The goal of increasing the number of women elected in politics has always been important for NOW. The group works to have women elected at every level of political office through candidate endorsement. Electing feminists to all levels of public office is a crucial part of NOW's advocacy strategy for women's rights. In 1968, two years after NOW's founding, its membership empowered the organization to engage in electoral politics as part of its work toward achieving genuine equality for women. In 1977, NOW established its national Political Action Committee. The organization went on to form the NOW Equality PAC to support feminist candidates for state and local office and advocate for or against ballot measures that affect women's rights. Additionally, NOW chapters interested in participating in local campaigns often create their own PACs. The various NOW PACs endorse candidates and raise money for their political campaigns. NOW PACs deploy field organizers across the country to work on campaigns and conduct voter education and registration drives. In 2007, NOW's Political Action Committee endorsed Hillary Clinton for president of the United States and developed the campaign Make History With Hillary, which provided training, tools, and resources to supporters to keep them informed and equipped to work as volunteers to elect Clinton and other feminist candidates.^{xxix}

²¹Political parties have also dealt with the issue of low numbers of women elected at the national level in the U.S. in a similar fashion. Both Democratic and Republican parties have devoted a significant amount of

time to the discussion of quotas for internal party positions; these quotas have thus enabled women to participate to a greater degree in party matters. However, soft internal quotas have not translated into any great gains in legislative representation,^{xxx} nor have they generated a campaign for legislative quotas for women's election in the House of Representatives. The Democratic Party has its own training program for women, Emerge America. Republican women can participate in the Campaign Management School, offered by the National Federation of Republican Women, or the Bergeson Series, both of which train women to participate as leaders in government, electoral politics, community organizations, and the private sector. Furthermore, both political parties have their own funding programs for women: EMILY's List for the Democrats and the WISH List for Republicans. Many other groups and programs provide resources for women in politics on the basis of their position on specific issues, such as abortion. Women in Leadership's mission, for example, is to provide a bi-partisan coalition advocating for the election of strong, moderate, pro-choice women.

²²How does money factor into explaining the kind of programs developed by women's organizations? Many respondents involved in training programs for women identified financial considerations as one of the central features of how candidates must "do politics" within the American system. Training programs also directly address the issue of fundraising, and many organizations, such as EMILY's List, have been created to provide fundraising assistance for women aspiring to run as candidates.

²³In summary, how have women's organizations in the women's movement approached the problem of low numbers of women elected at the national level? There are many forms of intervention, but one of the most visible forms of action undertaken in response to low numbers of women elected nationally consists of training programs for women. What can be concluded from this investigation is that no women's group has put the strategy of legal quotas on its agenda. As a key actor for a potential quota campaign,^{xxx} the American women's movement has not made a commitment in favor of legal quotas for women at the national level.

3. Canadian Initiatives to Increase Numbers of Elected Women

²⁴In the 1970s and afterward, a number of groups dedicated to the cause of electing more women to public office arrived on the scene in Canada: Women for Political Action, the Feminist Party of Canada, Winning Women, the 52% Solution, the Committee for 94, and Equal Voice.^{xxxii} Young notes a recent revival of women's movement activism around women's representation at the national level in Canada.^{xxxiii} At the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women, Canada committed to take measures to ensure women's equal access to and full participation in

power structures and decision-making, as well as increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership.^{xxxiv} Canada shares some political characteristics with the U.S., such as the FPTP electoral system. Canada counts on the work of many women's groups specialized in the promotion of women in politics, but there has never been a national campaign or demands for legal gender quotas or reserved seats. Indeed, not all parties view the representation of women as an issue of democratic concern.^{xxxv}

²⁵ Research in the field of women and politics in Canada has been preoccupied with explaining the disproportionately low levels of election and appointment of women to public office.^{xxxvi} While some parties have worked on different scenarios around voluntary quotas of female candidates, these goals are considered difficult to achieve due to the relative autonomy of local riding associations over the nomination process and what is perceived as strong resistance on the part of political commentators, who tend to see quotas as unfair and anti-democratic.^{xxxvii} In addition to these factors, polls show that concern for women's representation in politics is not widely shared among the population.^{xxxviii}

²⁶ In her 2009 book, Bashevkin puts quotas on her list of proposed initiatives to reverse the "women plus power equals discomfort equation" she considers characteristic of Canada:

A different approach to the stagnant or declining numbers of women in Canadian politics says trying harder is not the answer. In fact, working harder to get to the top has been the main strategy chosen by campaigners in this area since the 1970s, and it hasn't produced measurable advances for the past 15 years. Perhaps we need to try working smarter, rather than harder, using existing geographic quotas in Canada as a guide. What about introducing rules that insist on gender representation – to parallel existing provisions that entrench geographic or territorial quotas in our system?^{xxxix}

²⁷ Although the idea of quotas for women in Canadian politics has been evoked, so far, there has been no national movement demanding the adoption of legal quotas. Among factors proposed to explain the absence of mobilization for gender quotas in Canadian electoral politics, Young identifies features of Canadian political culture, such as the notion that political parties are private entities and the belief in merit over affirmative action:

We have inherited the British notion that political parties are private entities that should not be subject to extensive state regulation. (...) Second, even though the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms explicitly allows for positive discrimination, affirmative action measures tend to collide with a deeply held belief that merit should trump all other considerations in the hiring of employees, including politicians.^{xl}

²⁸ However, contrary to Young's arguments, political parties in Canada are highly regulated and largely state-funded, which makes them far from being private entities. In regard to Young's second argument, one should consider that Canada already has a tradition of state intervention in employment: the Canadian Employment Equity Act implemented in 1995 requires employers in federally-regulated sectors to give preferential

treatment to four designated groups. The purpose of this Act is to correct discriminatory employment conditions experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating individuals in the same way; it also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.^{xli} Young's arguments to explain the absence of quotas for women in Canadian politics appear questionable when put in perspective with facts that contradict this interpretation of Canadian political values.

²⁹What are the leading explanations provided to explain low numbers of women elected at the national level in Canada? Tremblay^{xlii} has argued that women have encountered a glass ceiling in Canadian parliament as a result of two factors: the FPTP electoral system and a laissez-faire attitude on the part of the state and national political parties with respect to women's representation in parliament. For Young, any explanation for the rates of women's representation in the House of Commons must begin with an examination of political parties' practices around candidate nomination.^{xliii} Although Tremblay and Young identify political parties and the electoral system as key explanations for low numbers of women elected in politics, strategies proposed by key players in the field focus largely on interventions aimed at improving women's skills for political recruitment. These are the results of an investigation into actions undertaken by Canadian women's groups on electoral issues.^{xliv}

³⁰The Canadian women's movement has been and remains strong despite massive cuts by the federal government to these groups' funding in the last 20 years. These cuts have resulted in the weakening of important pan-Canadian organizations such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), a central umbrella organization of Canadian women's groups, which has been described as the "parliament of women" for the end of the 20th century.^{xlv} Canada might be living in a post-NAC era, but a number of pan-Canadian women's organizations still exist, such as: RebELLES, the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund (LEAF), the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), and the Canadian Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA), to name only a few with high visibility at the national level, as well as numerous Women's Studies programs and feminist periodicals such as *Canadian Woman Studies* and *Atlantis*. The Canadian women's movement remains visible, although different in form from its 20th-century counterpart.

³¹The movement's visibility and ability to influence Canadian politics from outside formal political structures explains why some feminists have held ambiguous positions with respect to the issue of electing more women in politics. Canadian feminists have been more mistrustful of the state, and have therefore been less inclined to enter state institutions.^{xlvi} The distance taken by some of the most radical elements of the Canadian women's movement towards electoral politics has left this space open for

other women's groups to assume leadership in defining approaches to the problem of low numbers of women elected in politics.

³²In Canada, at the end of the last century, a number of women's organizations were formed to take up the electoral project.^{xlvii} These groups encourage and assist women running for office. A common feature of their proposed approaches to the problem of women's underrepresentation in governments is to target women individually and train them for politics, assuming that low numbers of elected women are linked to individual women and not to structures. In observing approaches adopted by Canadian women's groups working on the issue of women in politics, I found that these groups share a common approach that closely resembles that of American women's groups in the same field. These groups work to increase the numbers of women elected, but do not fight for legal quotas or reserved seats for women. They operate on the hypothesis that it is still women who must adapt or be changed in order to comply with the requirements of a political career. The prevailing form of intervention is training programs designed to help women work on their inadequacies vis-à-vis the political system, be they a lack of competence or perceived lack of confidence, the underlying assumption being that providing women with political skills will result in an increased number of women running for politics and winning elections.

³³Founded in 2001, Equal Voice defines itself as a multi-partisan organization dedicated to electing more women to all levels of political office in Canada and considers the equal representation of women a fundamental question of fairness for women in terms of their access to Canada's democratic institutions. Among other initiatives, Equal Voice works with political parties to increase the nominations of women candidates. The group advocates electoral financing reform to mitigate the money barrier and level the playing field for women. It also encourages women to run for office through programs such as the Getting to the Gate Online Campaign School, which provides practical tools for women of all ages and backgrounds interested in running for public office. EV aims to encourage and equip women to take the crucial step of putting their name forward. To this end, it runs a number of programs "to help women become more comfortable with the prospect of running."^{xlviii} Equal Voice has promoted electoral reform in the past, but in 2014 its major program aimed at political parties has been refocused in these terms:

Equal Voice encourages political parties to be proactive in recruiting and supporting women candidates to run in winnable ridings. Parties may decide to tackle this challenge in different ways and all parties have to identify processes that work for them.^{xlix}

³⁴ Equal Voice has discussed the issue of quotas before, but it was feared that quota implementation for women in politics would generate a backlash so extreme it would constitute a greater hindrance than help for women in the political process. In May 2011, Equal Voice announced that the group was to explore new avenues to elect more women by

considering redress under certain sections of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.¹ However, since then, EV has taken no steps in this direction.

³⁵ Another group, the Canadian Women Voters Congress (CWVC), defines itself as a non-partisan grassroots organization dedicated to educating and empowering women to actively participate in democracy in their communities. Its vision is that all women should have equality of opportunity in the electoral process. The CWVC offers the Women's Campaign School, modeled after the Women's Campaign School at Yale University. The program, offered every year since 1999, is designed as an intensive workshop that explores the political skills, strategies, and tactics required to run a winning campaign. Women of any age who are interested in building their campaign skill base are invited to participate. The program aims to prepare women for all aspects of political life by enhancing their capacity to succeed as political candidates or campaign staff and providing women with a network of alumni contacts. Participants learn how to examine their motivation for running; manage the nuts and bolts of fundraising, budgeting, and campaign financing; strategize a successful campaign; and work effectively with the media.

4. Quebec Feminist Initiatives to Elect More Women

³⁶ In keeping with how political cultures shape social movements, the women's movement in the Francophone province of Quebec is distinct from that in the rest of Canada, organizes separately due to language and identity issues, and has also had an agenda of its own around constitutional issues in the 20th century.^{1a} Aboriginal women also have their own groups to address the specificity of their needs.¹ⁱⁱ Quebec, Canada's only Francophone province, has a women's movement that organizes almost exclusively in French, while the rest of Canada uses English. Quebec feminism is largely oriented towards its provincial government, while the English-Canadian movement works mostly at the national level and orients its demands towards the federal government. Although both the Quebec and English-Canadian women's movements have groups working on issues of electoral reform, the focus in Quebec is primarily on provincial institutional reform, while the English-Canadian women's movement's claim for electoral reform is directed at the federal government. Although the Canadian Charter on Human Rights and Freedoms has been considered a central feature of Canadian culture and an important tool for feminist action by English-Canadian feminists,¹ⁱⁱⁱ the same Charter is totally absent from the agenda and strategy of Quebec feminists.^{1iv}

³⁷ Following the 2014 provincial elections, 25% of elected representatives in the National Assembly of Quebec were women, a significant drop from previous elections. During the fall 2012 election, Quebec elected its first woman Premier, Pauline Marois, who was defeated at the following election in 2014. In 2008, 29% percent of

elected candidates were women; in the 2003 election, it was 30%. It is also interesting to note that in 2007, Quebec Premier Jean Charest decided to implement gender parity in his cabinet by appointing 50% women ministers.^{lv} The principle was maintained for some time but has since been abandoned. The 2014 cabinet was composed of 8 women and 18 men.

³⁸In terms of strategies aimed at increasing the number of elected women in politics, the Quebec provincial government has implemented a program called Decision-making: A Matter of Equality, which has been in operation since 1999. This program aims to increase the number of women occupying decision-making positions in governing bodies by reducing the obstacles preventing them from participating fully in the exercise of power. The program supports projects that train women to occupy political positions and reflect non-stereotyped socialization patterns for women and men. Among other things, the program supports projects proposed by women's groups designed to train women to hold political positions. Projects may, for example, consist of information and training activities that provide women with tools associated with the operating methods of governing bodies or allow them to develop appropriate political knowledge and skills. They may also include the creation of candidate banks or the production and distribution of promotion, training, or communication tools consistent with the program's objectives. A catalogue of activities and publications resulting from the Quebec program *À Égalité pour décider* can be accessed online.

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³⁹Although many women's groups have benefited from this funding program and hundreds of projects have been financed over the past 15 years, one group stands out as a leader in the field: Femmes, politique et démocratie (FPD). This group has developed many programs offering training for women who want to run for politics, such as The School for Women and Municipal Democracy, which has been offered since 2000, and Simulations, offered in 2014 for women who want to run at the municipal level. Women interested in running in elections can benefit from intensive training. Issues addressed through these programs include the candidate and her election campaign, laws and municipal structures, municipal democracy, the elected member, and democratic process in everyday life. Recently, FPD has added governance training sessions targeted at specific groups such as Native, Inuit, or immigrant women. The group has also created the Center on Women and Governance affiliated with a university-level institution, the *École nationale d'administration publique*. This Center is partly funded by the government of Quebec and offers training for women who want to develop skills for politics.

⁴⁰I conducted a series of interviews with groups whose projects were funded through the Decision-Making: A Matter of Equality program and examined documents produced in connection with these projects.^{lvii} In all cases, demanding quotas or reserved seats was not supported, a position

consistent with that expressed by spokespeople for other Canadian and American women's groups. I examined some of the material produced through projects funded by the same program (DVDs, manuals, brochures) and found that the approach in these documents was similar to the one reflected in the Quebec government document on power sharing. Essentially this position states that the low number of women in some power structures is attributable to traditional stereotypes such as family responsibilities incumbent on women, the nature of political power itself (which is less attractive for women because of its roots in adversarial culture rather than cooperative approaches to politics), gender-differentiated education, and socioeconomic gaps between men and women.

5. Canada and Quebec: Similar Approaches

⁴¹In Canada and the province of Quebec, the prevailing form of intervention developed by women's groups to the problem of low numbers of elected women in politics has rested on voluntary strategies, an observation consistent with Bashevkin's analysis. She writes that,

for the most part, informal efforts have implored, exhorted, and encouraged parties not only to recruit more women to senior posts, but also to offer training and mentorship opportunities for prospective activists and to financially assist women candidates.^{lviii}

⁴² Young presents a similar analysis when she suggests that the kinds of reforms that would alter the prevailing patterns of low numbers of elected women at the national level in Canada, such as electoral reform or the introduction of representational quotas, are quite unlikely, so the focus of activists interested in women's representation will continue to be on increasing the supply of women interested in pursuing a political career and encouraging political parties to heighten their efforts to recruit more female candidates.^{lix} Until recently, there was no indication that these groups would move to ask for legal quotas; however, in 2011, Equal Voice and two Quebec groups, Femmes, politique et démocratie and Les PÉPINES, indicated that they were considering moving in the direction of legal measures such as quotas.^{lx} Since then, though, no public action has been initiated in that direction.

6. Conclusion

⁴³In this article, I have reviewed some the most visible initiatives of women's movements working for the promotion of women in politics in the United States and Canada. The leading approach common to the groups studied can be summarized as an attempt at training women for electoral politics in order to impart the skills that will make them good potential candidates, rather than targeting the political institutions that generate exclusion by asking for legal quotas. What is striking in both cases is the visibility and similarity of actions taken by both American and

Canadian women's movements while other potential players, such as political leaders, political parties, and international organizations, were far less involved in strategies to augment the number of women in electoral politics. Women's groups have essentially had free rein to initiate their own strategies. With the notable exception of Quebec, where most initiatives were the result of state funding through one specific program, other programs initiated by women's groups were not part of state interventions in the field. If there have been no campaigns for legal quotas in Canada and the United States, it is largely due to the lack of mobilization for quotas on the part of women's organizations. The cooptation of the field of women and politics by liberal feminists in Canada and the U.S. may explain the absence of a more radical approach to overcoming the problem of low numbers of women elected in politics.

⁴⁴From a feminist perspective, training programs for women who want to run for office are grounded in problematic assumptions. They understand the fundamental issue as one of women's individual characteristics (confidence, campaign experience, networking skills, and exposure) rather than identifying and attacking the political structures that might generate exclusion. They constitute a status quo approach to political structures in a historical moment when broad questions are being asked about representative democracy. They also reflect dated political science postulates on women's incompetence relative to men for political recruitment. Despite these shortcomings, training programs are immensely popular and fill quickly, year after year, thus supporting such projects and validating their utility, though one may question their real impact on improving numbers of elected women in office. In both Canada and the United States, such programs have existed for more than a decade and some for more than twenty years. Within the same period, the statistics on the election of women to office have made little substantial progress. It may not be possible to measure the impact of such approaches by looking at the variation in percentages of elected women. Nevertheless, the absence of visible results could bring women's groups who intervene in the field of women and politics to move in the direction of quotas, particularly when looking at the success of the international movement for legal quotas. If one considers the existence of affirmative action programs for employment and education in both countries, resistance to the idea of legal quotas for women in politics on the part of Canadian and American women's movements is inconsistent with other struggles for representational equality. That women's organizations defined as feminist insist on initiatives that assume women's lack of skills for politics is ironic, and even more so when these organizations operate in national contexts where young women have outstripped their male counterparts in academic excellence.

 NOTES

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- iii. "Global Database of Quotas for Women," *Quota Project*, accessed 3 June 2014, <http://www.quotaproject.org/>.
- iv. Sylvia Bashevkin, *Women, Power, Politics. The Hidden Story of Canada's Unfinished Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.
- v. The author acknowledges the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) for this research project. For this study I conducted phone or in-person semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of autonomous Canadian and American women's organizations dedicated to the promotion of women in politics. Questions dealt with approaches used by groups to promote the presence of women in politics, networking with other groups, the impact of group's work on numbers of women elected, and the perception of strategies used in other contexts to increase numbers of elected women. I started with purposive sampling, in which I selected a small number of groups according to preselected criteria relevant for this research: they had to be autonomous women's organizations with national visibility and the primary or secondary objective of promoting women in politics. A first list was made based on these criteria. Then I used snowball sampling: during interviews I asked the first groups to identify other groups that were considered key players in the field.
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- xxii. *Ibid.*, 9.
- xxiii. Studlar, "Feminist Society, Paternalistic Politics," 55-65.
- xxiv. Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics*, 45.
- xxv. Dahlerup and Freidenvall, "Quotas in Politics," 52.
- xxvi. For the United States, the organizations whose representatives I interviewed include: The National Organization for Women, Running Start, Annie's List, Ready to Run at the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, The Women's Campaign School at Yale University, and the From Harvard Square to the Oval Office Program at Harvard University.
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- xxviii. "About Us," *Running Start*, accessed 27 May 2014, <http://runningstartonline.org/about-us/historymission>.
- xxix. "Political Action Site," *National Organization for Women*, accessed 21 November 2013, <http://www.nowpacs.org/about.html>.
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- xxxi. Krook, *Quotas for Women in Politics*, 20; Dahlerup and Freidenvall, "Quotas in Politics," 52.
- xxxii. Bashevkin, *Women, Power, Politics*, 5-6.
- xxxiii. Lisa Young, "Slow to Change. Women in the House of Commons," in *Stalled. The Representation of Women in Canadian Governments*, eds. Linda Trimble, Jane Arscott, and Manon Tremblay (Toronto: UBC Press, 2013), 287.
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- xxxix.** Bashevkin, *Women, Power, Politics*, 151.
- xl.** Young, "Slow to Change," 269.
- xli.** "Employment Equity Act, 1995," *Government of Canada*.
- xlii.** Manon Tremblay, "Women's Representation in the House of Commons in Canada: The Art of Making Balance" (presentation, Political Studies Association Conference, Bristol, 2005).
- xliii.** Young, "Slow to Change," 263.
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- xlvii.** Jill Vickers, "Toward a Feminist Understanding of Representation," in *In the Presence of Women: Representation in Canadian Governments*, eds. Jane Arscott and Linda Trimble (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1997), 36.
- xlviii.** "Mission," *Equal Voice*.
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- i.** "EV Explores New Avenues to Elect More Women," *Equal Voice*, accessed 22 November 2013, http://www.equalvoice.ca/speaks_article.cfm?id=481.
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ABSTRACTS

While many countries have adopted quota laws to regulate the election of women to political office, the United States and Canada seem unaffected by this trend. In this article, I seek an explanation for this and examine the role of women's movements and some of the initiatives launched over the last 25 years to counter the problem of low numbers of elected women in Canadian and American parliaments. I examine features common to the approaches of American and Canadian women's movements, both of which are characterized by a strong emphasis on training for political office and an absence of mobilization in favor of legal quotas. Women's groups involved in the promotion of women in politics in the U.S. and Canada do not support the strategy of legal quota implementation; rather, one type of intervention is favored over all others: training programs. I conclude that the absence of campaigns for legal quotas in Canada and the United States can be linked to the lack of mobilization for quotas on the part of women's organizations. However, from a feminist perspective, training programs for women who want to run for office are grounded in problematic assumptions.

INDEX

Keywords: Canada, elections, feminism, first-past-the-post electoral system, legal quotas, national parliament, politics, training programs, United States., women, women's groups

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