

COMMITTEE ON CITIZEN RELATIONS

SELF-INITIATED ORDER ON WOMEN'S PLACE IN POLITICS

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

OCTOBER 2017



GENERAL DIRECTORATE FOR PARLIAMENTARY AFFAIRS



ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE

QUÉBEC

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INTRODUCTION

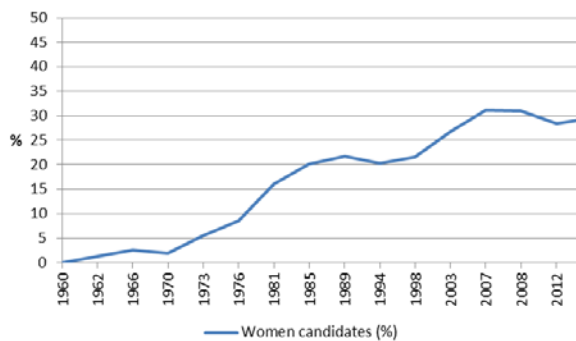
On March 22, 2016, the Committee on Citizen Relations unanimously adopted a self-initiated order on women's place in politics. Members decided to focus their work on women's representation in the National Assembly. Specifically, they want to find out what would persuade and help women to run in provincial elections.

THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMENS IN QUEBEC'S NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

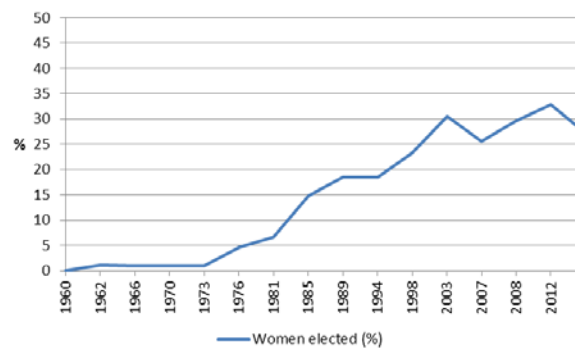
Women in Québec won the right to vote in 1940. Seven years later, Mae Leehy O'Connor was the first woman in Québec to run for office. In 1961, Marie Claire Kirkland became the first woman elected to the National Assembly. The number of female candidates and members increased over the decades that followed. However, women remain in the minority, both on the ballot and in Québec's National Assembly.

The graphs below show the change in the number of women candidates and members of the National Assembly since 1960.

Proportion of women candidates in general elections
in Québec, 1960–2014



Proportion of women members elected in general
elections
in Québec, 1960–2014



Over the past 15 years or so, the proportion of women candidates in Québec's general elections has stagnated at around 30%. The proportion of women elected to the National Assembly is similar. The proportion even decreased twice, in 2007 and 2014¹.

In 2014, 241 women candidates ran for office. This number represents 29.6% of all 814 candidates. A total of 34 women won one of the National Assembly's 125 seats, a proportion of 27.2% of all members. As the graphs above illustrate, the proportion of women elected corresponds to the proportion of women who run for office. Many studies have concluded that an increase in the number of women running for office would translate into an increase in the number of women elected.

CHALLENGES

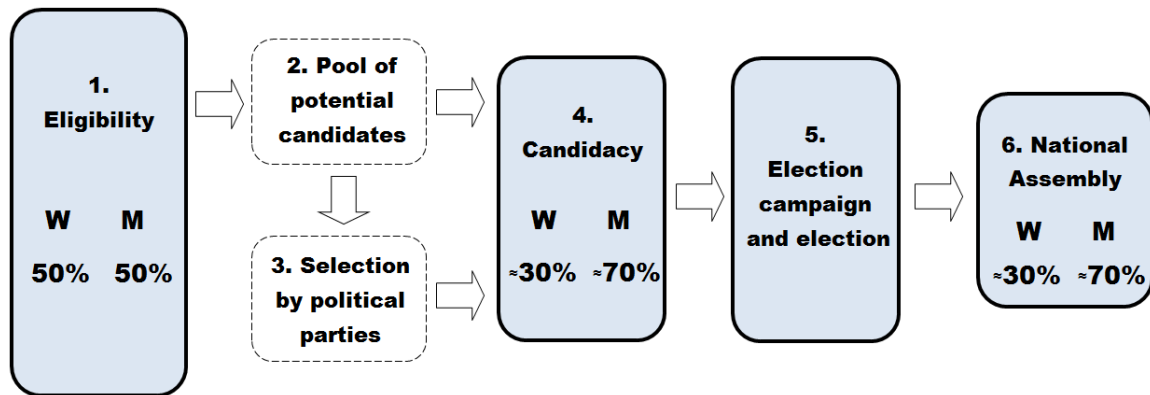
There are several challenges in the road to becoming a parliamentarian. The members of the Committee on Citizen Relations want to better understand the stumbling blocks that women encounter in provincial politics in Québec. They wish to identify the causes of women's potential disinterest in this type of involvement and the obstacles facing those who hesitate to make the leap. The Committee also wants to understand the difficulties encountered by women already active in politics. Finally, members want to identify measures that would encourage and help women in Québec enter provincial politics.

GETTING INTO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Everyone who wants to hold a seat in the National Assembly must complete three steps. They must meet the legal eligibility criteria, run for office in an election and be elected. The reality of aspiring candidates' journeys is a bit more complex. There are other challenges.

¹ For a more detailed look at the historical evolution, including by-elections and resignations, visit the National Assembly website. [Online] <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/patrimoine/femmes1.html>

This diagram illustrates the steps involved in getting into Québec's National Assembly.



1. ELIGIBILITY

To become a member, candidates must be legally eligible to run for office. The eligibility criteria are specified in the Election Act². Over six million Quebecers are legally eligible to run for office. Women account for 50% of eligible candidates.

2. THE POOL OF POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

Political engagement presupposes developing an interest in active political participation and having the practical ability to get involved. The pool of potential candidates includes all individuals who could, to varying degrees, run for office in an election. Personal interest, motivation, skills and abilities, as well as a person's situation and the general context can affect the likelihood that a person will enter politics.

The larger the pool of potential candidates, the more people likely to take the leap. Because the pool is both hypothetical and informal, it is very difficult to determine the number of men and women it includes.

² [Online] <http://legisquebec.gouv.qc.ca/en/ShowDoc/cs/E-3.3>

3. SELECTION BY POLITICAL PARTY

Individuals who launch an independent candidacy can enter an election directly. But those who wish to run for a political party face an additional step. Their candidacy must be officially approved by the party leader.

Each political party is responsible for establishing its own regulations and selection procedures for its candidates. Some parties hold nomination meetings in each electoral division. Candidates can also be nominated directly by the party leader or the provincial party apparatus.

Selection by political parties is a crucial step in the process of entering the National Assembly. Parties have become key actors in Québec's political system. The last time an independent candidate was elected was in 1966. Since then, all parliamentarians have been elected under a party banner. In 2014, 11 people ran as independents, including one woman. The other 803 candidates, 240 of whom were women, were divided between the 18 authorized parties.

The available literature concludes that political parties in Québec do not limit their female candidates to ridings where there is no chance of victory. Once they are chosen as candidates, women and men have an equal chance of being elected.

4. NOMINATION OF CANDIDATES

All candidates, whether they are independent or running for a party, must be authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer. To this end, the Election Act requires candidates to file nomination papers. Candidates are also required to gather the signatures and addresses of at least 100 electors who are registered on the list of electors in the electoral division where they are seeking nomination.

5. THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND VOTING

An election campaign has its challenges, especially when it comes to promoting ideas, media relations, logistics, campaign financing and grassroots support.

At the end of the campaign comes the election's deciding moment. Québec has a first-past-the-post voting system. Electors in each of Québec's 125 electoral divisions must choose one candidate from the names on the ballot. The candidate who receives the most votes wins.

It is important to remember that studies conclude women are not at a disadvantage during elections in Québec. The population of Québec does not favour women or men in its voting preferences.

6. PARLIAMENTARY WORK AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

The 125 individuals who are elected become members of the National Assembly for a four-year term. Parliamentarians are likely to deal with a range of difficulties during their terms. These issues may be related to the way Parliament operates, political dynamics, the organization of work and workload, relations with the media or the public, or the balance between work, family and personal life.

At this step, as with the others that lead to Parliament, it is important to examine the obstacles encountered by women and the measures that could encourage or help them to become members.

AVENUES FOR THOUGHT AND ACTION

The issue of women in politics has spawned a wealth of literature. The members of the Committee on Citizen Relations are aware of the latest studies and of best practices in place in other parliaments. They are familiar with the current situation of women in municipal and provincial politics in Québec. They also know that steps have been taken to encourage Québec women to get involved in politics.

Parliamentarians, however, have observed that there is little recent empirical research about women in provincial politics in Québec. Many studies are based on reviews of the literature from other parts of the world. Field surveys are usually based on a limited number of respondents.

The committee members place special importance on Quebecers' actual experiences. More specifically, they are asking themselves the following questions:

- Do Québec women encounter different barriers than Québec men in seeking to enter the Québec National Assembly? If so, what are these particular barriers?
- In concrete terms, what would encourage and help Québec women make the leap into provincial politics?

- Should we implement measures to reduce the difficulties encountered by women? If so, which measures would be the most useful?
- Are the measures that are currently in place appropriate? Are they sufficient? Should they be modified or enhanced?
- Should measures be implemented to encourage women with diverse profiles (Aboriginal women, ethnocultural minorities, sexual minorities, young people, people with disabilities, etc.) to get involved in provincial politics in Québec?

CONCLUSION

The Committee on Citizen Relations is counting on Quebecers to help it complete its work. At the end of the mandate, the committee will make recommendations. It hopes that the consultations will help it in its reflections on the representation of women in provincial politics in Québec.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN THE COMMITTEE'S MANDATE

Quebecers are invited to participate in the committee's work. Online consultations, special consultations, and the briefs and comments received during the mandate will contribute to parliamentarians' reflections.

ONLINE CONSULTATIONS

The population of Québec is invited to participate in an online consultation by December 31, 2017. The questionnaire is for both men and women, regardless of their degree of interest or involvement in politics.

You can participate in the online consultation at the following web address:

www.assnat.qc.ca/femmesenpolitique.

SPECIAL CONSULTATIONS

During fall 2017, parliamentarians will hear from groups and individuals as part of the parliamentary committee's special consultations. These hearings are public.

To follow the Committee's work:

<http://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commissions/crc/mandats/Mandat-34995/index.html>

ONLINE BRIEFS AND COMMENTS

All groups and citizens are welcome to submit briefs or comments relating to the mandate.

To submit a comment online:

<https://www.assnat.qc.ca/en/travaux-parlementaires/commentaire.html?type=Mandat&id=34995>

To submit a paper (letter format) or electronic (PDF format, unlocked and as a single file, including appendices) copy of a brief:

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