



# Women Suffrage and Beyond

confronting the democratic deficit



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## From the Front Lines: A Young Woman in Politics

[11 Dec 2012](#) | [No Comments](#) | posted by Erin Rennie | in [On the Frontline](#)

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BC Legislature via Flickr user mohit\_k.

I feel very lucky to be a woman in Canadian politics in 2012. I've studied my history and I know how hard women have worked for decades to achieve the political equality I enjoy today. Personhood, the right to vote, the right to attend university, the social acceptance of my choice to have a career, the guarantee of equal pay, and the freedom to speak freely at the boardroom table or at the kitchen table – these are things I am able to take for granted because of the women who fought relentlessly to guarantee them for girls of my generation.

But I don't take these rights for granted. I take my political rights very seriously. And I think rights always

come with accompanying responsibilities. I've chosen a career in politics not just out of a love for the thrill of the political world, but also out of a sense of duty. Politics are how I serve my community. Since Grade 8 student government, the political realm has been where my talents and my passions have fused. Unlike women of the past and women in other parts of the world I am able to exercise not only my rights, but my calling as well.

Which isn't to say it's all perfect. With just 24.7% of Parliamentary seats held by female MPs, Canada ranks 27th in the world when it comes to female representation in national parliaments, right above Sudan. As a political aide for the past four years, I have had many more male colleagues than female colleagues. And it wasn't much better at university: in the UBC Debate Society I was often one of a handful of girls at a tournament full of guys. In 2008 I was the only female candidate out of five to run for President of the student body. My experiences often leave me wondering what was holding the other girls back. My generation has been raised with every right, opportunity, and encouragement that our male counterparts have had. Women are out-performing their male classmates in universities across the country. So why are we still seeing a gender gap at the top?

I think that there are many complicated reasons. Women face different challenges than men when it comes to entering the political world. Women continue to shoulder the bulk of the household chores and child-rearing responsibilities. Female politicians are portrayed more negatively by the media. Female politicians are even "heard" differently by voters who have been conditioned to expect their political leaders to be white, male, middle-aged, and WASPY. The political waters are still fraught with sexist sharks.

But I think women themselves also have something to do with the gender gap. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, says that there is an "ambition gap" at the bottom contributing to the gender gap at the top. Women, she argues, plan a way out of the "corporate ladder" long before they need to. Young women are more likely to choose a flexible, middle management career path in preparation for the children they may not even have yet. They "check out before they check out." Effectively, women are self-sabotaging.

I think confidence is key to helping fill this ambition gap. It isn't enough for girls to have the right to be walking through the halls of power, girls need to want it and believe they can have it.

As a political aide strategic communications are my bread and butter. I am constantly listening and analysing what people say and write and what I've noticed is that men are far better at articulating what they want. And unsurprisingly, they are better at getting what they want. The women in my life are the opposite. They hum and haw over decisions. They don't express their preferences. They defer decisions to others. They think this is what it means to be likeable and feminine. Heck, I'm guilty of this too.

I believe that until women stop communicating this way we will never see equality in our political chambers. I challenge the women of Canada to stop self-sabotaging and lying to themselves about what they really want. Express your preferences. Tell us that you WANT to lead and why. Make the decisions you now have the right to make. Be as ambitious and demanding as you can be. Like everything else, if men can do it, we can too.



**This article was written by: Erin Rennie**

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## Who We Are

We are based at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Our team consists of [Dr. Veronica Strong-Boag](#), Canadian historian in Women's and Gender Studies and Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, Grace Lore, PhD candidate in Political Science, Lindsey Massar, MA candidate in Asia Pacific Policy Studies at the Institute of Asian Research, Kelsey Wrightson, PhD candidate in Political Science, and [Kelly Christensen](#), MA candidate in Asia Pacific Policy Studies at the Institute of Asian Research.

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12 Dec

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