

Closing Canada's Gender Gap

Year 2240 Here We Come!

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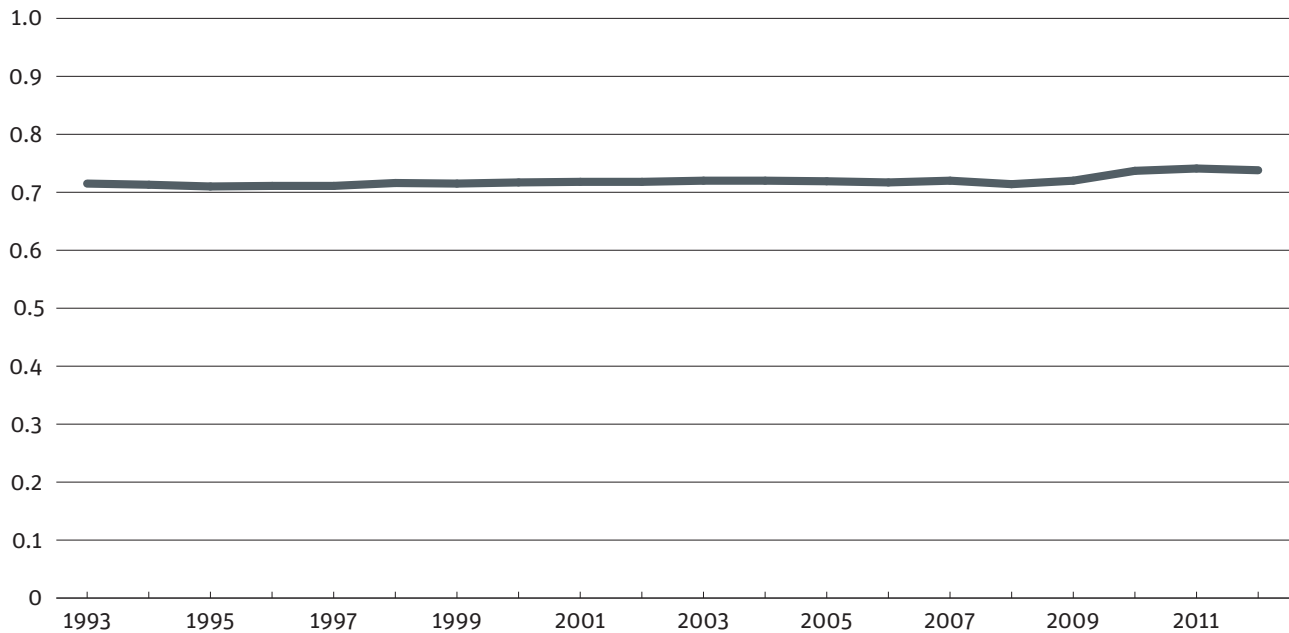
EVERY YEAR THE World Economic Forum measures the progress of the world's nations in closing the gap between the participation of men and women in four areas: education, health, the economy, and politics. The World Economic Forum measures provide an important insight into how the resources available in Canada are distributed and how we are (or are not) closing the gap on inequality. *The Gender Gap Report* calculates its scores based on broad indicators such as life expectancy and average income. As the name suggests, the report measures the gap between the access women and men have to the resources that are available (not the level of those resources). This is why a lower-middle income country, Mongolia, came in first in the rankings for economic opportunity in 2012, whereas Canada came in twelfth.¹ Although the average income for the population of Canada is higher than that in Mongolia, the gap between men's income and women's income is greater in Canada.

Although the World Economic Forum did not start measuring the gender gap until 2006, the gap has been calculated here for the past twenty years. This provides a better picture of the rate at which the gap is being closed in Canada.



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FIGURE 1 Canada's Gender Gap: 1993–2012



How Canada Measures Up

On the overall gender gap score, Canada doesn't fare too badly in comparison to other countries. Canada consistently scores around .7 out of 1.0 (with 1.0 representing no gap). In report card form, that is a solid 'B-'. More worrying is the rate of change over the past twenty years. Canada's gender gap score has climbed a mere 2.3% in two decades, (from .715 in 1993 to .738 in 2012). At this rate, *Canada will not close its gender gap for another 228 years.*

An examination of the different categories measured reveals uneven levels of progress in those different arenas. The good news: Canada has had a nearly perfect score in the areas of health and education over the past twenty years. The health score is based on life-expectancy and sex-ratios at birth. The education score is based on literacy and enrollment at the primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. In these two categories Canada has averaged .99 and .98 respectively over the past two decades.

Given the extent to which Canada and the global community have embraced education as a means to increasing gender equality this would suggest that progress on economic and political empowerment should follow such high levels of educational equality. However, this is not the case. Canada's score for economic participation and opportunity is well below its 'A+' for health and education. Between 1993 and 2012,

Canada's gender gap in this area has inched forward at less than .3% a year, from .728 to .788. At this rate, *it will take 71 years to close the economic gender gap in Canada.*

Economic participation and opportunity is calculated based on labour-force participation, income, and the ratio of women to men in professional, technical and management positions. The gap between men's and women's earnings is a significant factor in Canada's mediocre showing in this area. Although incomes for men and women overall have grown over the past twenty years, the gap between men's and women's shares of earned income has been nearly stagnant.²

However, the biggest drag on Canada's score in this arena is its poor performance in increasing the percentage of women who make up our country's legislators, senior officials, and managers. The ratio of women to men in these roles has remained nearly unchanged (from .522 in 1993 to .560 in 2012). This means men outnumber women in these professions at a rate of 2 to 1.

This gap cannot be ascribed simply to choice or to the impact of having children. Certainly there are women (and men) who are in an economic position to work less in order to spend more time with their families. But the truth is, most Canadian families don't earn enough to allow one or more family members to choose not to work. And whether by choice or necessity, 70% of all mothers with children under the age of six are working parents.³

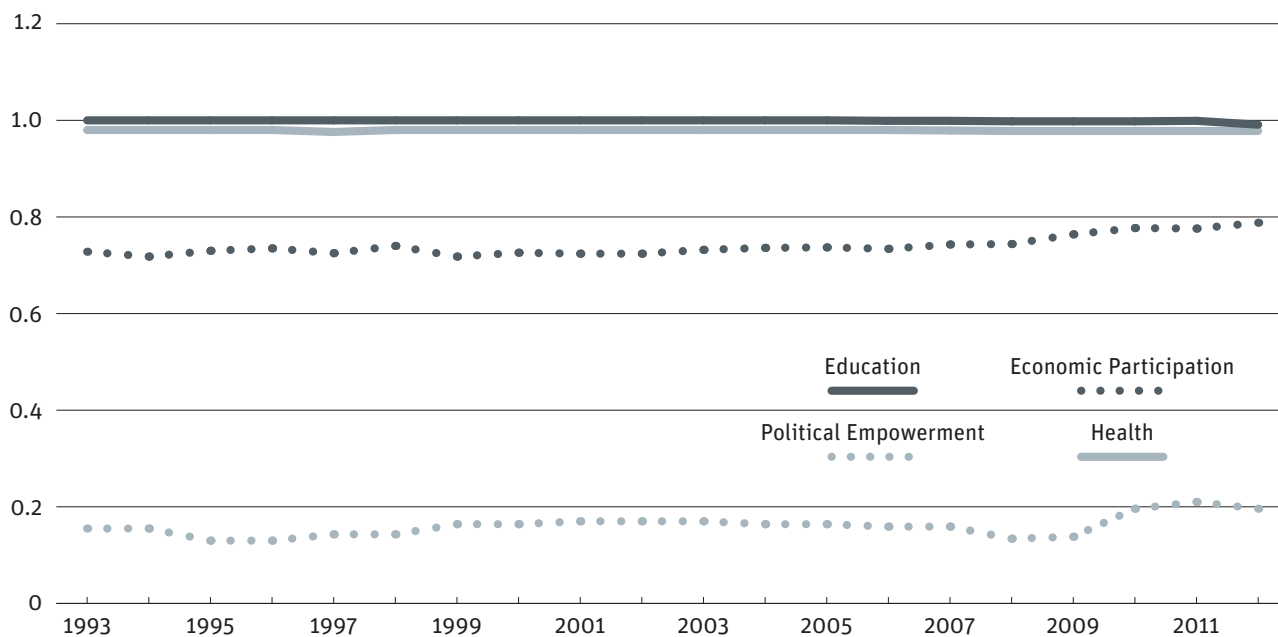
Nor does the gap derive from a lack of qualifications, evidenced not least by Canada's high levels of equality in access to education. In fact, the income gap is actually greater for women with university or college degrees than it is for those with high school diplomas.⁴ Having a university degree means a higher level of income overall, yes, but it also means facing a higher level of wage discrimination.

The same is true of income over time. Early in their careers, working men and women earn close the same incomes for the same work. As they reach mid-career, the gap widens significantly. The income gap between men and women increases rapidly in their 30s and women's earnings peak when they are in their early 50s and starts a rapid decline in the last decade of their working lives.⁵

What emerges from these indicators is this: the closer women get to the top, the greater the barriers to achieving equality. This trend is startlingly clear in the measures of the gap in political participation. Canada's gender gap in political empowerment was a failing .155 in 1993. With an average annual rate of progress of 0.2%, Canada inched up to the equally abysmal .196 in 2012 (fail again). At this rate, *Canada will close the gap on political participation in 392 years.* Canada will not achieve the equal representation of women in parliament, in cabinet, and as heads of state until the year 2404.

Political participation is the one area measured by the global gender gap in which rapid change is possible (all it takes is an election). Yet it is the area with the least

FIGURE 2 Canada's Gender Gap by Sub-Index: 1993–2012



progress and the slowest rate of change. Federally, women represent less than one quarter of our members of parliament.⁶ Even fewer members of government caucus are women (17%).⁷ At the provincial and territorial level much has been made of the fact that there are now six female premiers. However, provincial and territorial legislatures are just as lopsided as the federal legislature, with women making up 25% of members.⁸ Leadership in the private sector lags even farther behind: 14.5% of seats on corporate boards are occupied by women in Canada.⁹ Only one of Canada's top 100 CEOs is a woman.¹⁰

Lean In?

In the best-selling book *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, Sheryl Sandberg describes the problem of increasing women's participation in leadership roles as "the ultimate chicken-and-egg situation": "The chicken: Women will tear down the external barriers once we achieve leadership roles [...] The egg: We need to eliminate the external barriers to get women into those roles in the first place."¹¹

What are the specific barriers to closing the gap in women's leadership? Well, for one thing, the chickens are spending twice as much time taking care of the eggs.

Women's share of unpaid work, including childcare, remains nearly double that of men.¹² The chickens are also getting paid less, which means they have to work longer to make the same amount as the roosters. This doesn't leave the chickens with much time to commit to the demands of running for office.

And here's another unhappy truth. The henhouse isn't as safe as it ought to be. Over one million women in Canada each year experience harassment on the street, abuse in the home, and violence at the hands of people they know. This is why you will find recommendations for eliminating violence and harassment, along with the more usual discussion of quotas and mentorship, in the International Parliamentary Union's *Plan of Action for Gender-Sensitive Parliaments*.¹³ Personal security is also an important measure of equality that is notably absent in all of the current indices of gender equality conducted internationally.

Finally, that chicken does not necessarily lay that egg. There are plenty of examples of individual women in leadership positions who are either disinterested in or actively hostile to investments in gender-sensitive public policy (think Margaret Thatcher, who reportedly once said: "The feminists hate me, don't they? And I don't blame them. For I hate feminism. It is poison.")¹⁴ However, the alternative is not the absence of women from leadership.

A critical mass of women (not just a few prominent individuals) is a necessary ingredient in ensuring that decision-making bodies are more equitable and gender-sensitive. Necessary, but not sufficient. A thirty-year, multi-country study on public policy on violence against women demonstrated that it was not the presence of women in legislatures by itself that played the deciding factor in the effectiveness of public policy, it was the presence of equality-seeking civil society organizations.¹⁵ Similarly, an examination of the impact of women's representation in parliamentary systems on legislation, concludes that "the strength of women's movement mobilization in society at large and the linkages between women parliamentarians and women's movement organizations" are necessary factors in the successful passage of legislation that addresses issues of concern to women.¹⁶ Women in leadership positions cannot make their institutions more responsive on their own. It also requires robust civil society organizations working to the same end.

It Takes a Village

In order for Canada's legislative and policy-making institutions to adequately respond to the needs and experiences of women, there must be both an increase in women's representation in formal politics *and* an increase in investments in women's civil society organizations. Why? Because civil society organizations can bridge the

representation gap in a way that formal politics cannot. For example, each year, on average, 100,000 Canadians report experiencing spousal violence to the police.¹⁷ An estimated 70% of incidents of spousal violence are never reported.¹⁸ Eighty-three percent of victims of spousal violence are female.¹⁹ There is a significant segment of Canada's population experiencing a problem that falls squarely in the domain of government responsibility: public safety. A problem that costs the Canadian economy \$7.4 billion per year.²⁰

The reality of the lives of women experiencing abuse is that they will face not only physical and emotional trauma, but severe economic hardship as well. A recent study found that women who had left abusive domestic partners relied on food banks at nearly 20 times the rate of average Canadians, up to three years after leaving the abusive situation.²¹ Shelter organizations consistently report that the lack of affordable housing is a barrier for women attempting to move out of temporary shelters. In these circumstances, it is clear that running for office is unlikely to be the priority for the women who have direct experience of this public policy problem. So how do the needs of this segment of Canada's population get represented? How do we ensure that Canada's public policy and public funds are being directed to ensure that this public is secure?

Solutions

Service-providing organizations have important direct experiences of the barriers that stand in the way of women in Canada having their most basic needs met. However, those organizations are beset by inconsistent and inadequate levels of funding — leaving them without the human resources to invest in collecting and analyzing the policy implications of their experiences. The solution: adequate, consistent funding to civil society organizations that provide services such that these organizations can not only meet the immediate needs of the populations they are serving, but also provide analysis of the public policies that must be in place to better address those needs.

The organizations that used to fill the representation gap — providing opportunities for dialogue, analysis, and policy research — are largely absent in Canada today. In 2006, the federal government changed the mandate of Status of Women to specifically exclude funding for research and advocacy. National organizations providing a crucial public policy voice on legislation, human rights, and economic equality closed their doors or were reduced to operating on a volunteer basis.²² The impact of these changes is a growing gap in the representation of the needs of a significant segment of the Canadian population and an erosion of the capacity to develop sound,

gender-sensitive public policy. The solution: adequate, consistent funding to civil society organizations that conduct gender-sensitive research and analysis of the public policies that need to be in place to better address those needs of women in Canada.

Why is government support necessary? Civil society organizations in Canada do not have the same large base of private philanthropic organizations as do organizations in the United States. Those few foundations that do fund work that might contribute to closing the gender gap are precluded by the nature of charitable law in Canada from making significant contributions to public advocacy. Direct donations are one of the few remaining sources of funding for this work. However, a civil society supported solely by direct donations is not representative. Those with the most money to give will have the greatest impact on what kind of research and advocacy is conducted. Those with the greatest need, will be the least represented. Given the gap in women's economic security that currently exists, this means that women will be underrepresented.

Not Later, Not Never

Canada has one of the highest levels of well-being in the world. But the distribution of that well-being is not equal. Measures like the gender gap give us a picture of the difference that gender inequality makes for Canadians. Our greatest gap could be closed with an investment of political and financial resources into both the civil society organizations and the political institutions that represent the needs and interests of women in Canada. This is an investment that will pay huge dividends, not only the quality of life of Canadians but also in the economic stability of the country.²³ Public policy that closes the economic gap could increase Canada's GDP by as much as 10%.²⁴ An end to spousal violence and sexual assault will provide security for over a million Canadians each year and save the economy more than \$7 billion a year.²⁵ Canada cannot afford to wait 228 years to realize these benefits.

TABLE 1 Calculation of Global Gender Gap Score for Canada: 1993–2005

Measure	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Economic Participation and Opportunity Sub-Index													
Labour Force Participation ²⁶	0.809	0.810	0.817	0.819	0.823	0.832	0.836	0.843	0.848	0.855	0.865	0.868	0.867
Wage Equality Between Women and Men for Similar Work ²⁷	0.729	0.702	0.729	0.728	0.699	0.718	0.683	0.706	0.698	0.702	0.701	0.700	0.705
Average Earned Income ²⁸	0.642	0.620	0.643	0.636	0.617	0.627	0.626	0.617	0.623	0.628	0.628	0.633	0.640
Legislators, Senior Officials and Managers ²⁹	.522	.542	.525	.570	.582	.619	.543	.550	.537	.516	.556	.574	.560
Professional and Technical Workers ³⁰	1.050	1.062	1.079	1.154	1.389	1.362	1.374	1.348	1.358	1.478	1.451	1.468	1.447
<i>Sub-Index Score</i>	<i>0.728</i>	<i>0.718</i>	<i>0.730</i>	<i>0.735</i>	<i>0.725</i>	<i>0.740</i>	<i>0.718</i>	<i>0.726</i>	<i>0.724</i>	<i>0.724</i>	<i>0.732</i>	<i>0.736</i>	<i>0.737</i>
Educational Attainment Sub-index													
Literacy Rate ³¹	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.048	1.022	1.022	1.022
Net Primary Level Enrolment ³²	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Net Secondary Level Enrolment ³³	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	.99	.98
Gross Tertiary Level Enrolment ³⁴	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
<i>Sub-Index Score</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>0.999</i>	<i>0.996</i>
Health and Survival Sub-Index													
Healthy Life Expectancy ³⁵	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06	1.06
Sex Ratio at Birth ³⁶	.945	.946	.946	.953	.939	.954	.952	.947	.950	.947	.952	.947	.951
<i>Sub-Index Score</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.976</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>	<i>0.980</i>
Political Empowerment Sub-Index													
Seats in Parliament ³⁷	.219	.219	.219	.219	.259	.259	.259	.259	.259	.259	.259	.267	.267
Women at Ministerial Level ³⁸	0.333	0.333	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.235	0.321	0.321	0.345	0.345	0.345	0.310	0.310
Number of Years of a Female Head of State (Last 50 Years) Over Male Value ³⁹	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02	.02
<i>Sub-Index Score</i>	<i>0.155</i>	<i>0.155</i>	<i>0.130</i>	<i>0.130</i>	<i>0.143</i>	<i>0.143</i>	<i>0.164</i>	<i>0.164</i>	<i>0.170</i>	<i>0.170</i>	<i>0.170</i>	<i>0.164</i>	<i>0.164</i>
Overall Gender Gap Score	0.715	0.713	0.710	0.711	0.711	0.716	0.715	0.717	0.718	0.718	0.720	0.720	0.719

Notes

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- 5** CAN-SIM Table 202-0104: “Female-to-male earnings ratios, by selected characteristics, 2010 constant dollars. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
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- 21** Varcoe C. et al. (2011). “Attributing Selected Costs to Intimate Partner Violence in a Sample of Women Who Have Left Abusive Partners.” *Canadian Public Policy*, vol 37.3.
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- 39** Author’s own calculations.



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