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Searching for Persons with Disabilities in Canadian Provincial Office

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Abstract: This exploratory study examines the electoral experience of persons with disabilities with a particular focus on those that have sought provincial political office in Canada for the last three provincial elections in every province. It also gauges the accessibility of the environment into which they were entering when deciding to seek political office: political parties (recruitment efforts, campaign finance provisions, disability specific language in party constitutions) and the provincial electoral management bodies (campaign financing laws). If the incremental nature of disability policy changes has long been "not good enough" with minimal gains won through long drawn out processes (Levesque and Graefe, 2014), what then is to be made of the gains made to date? For persons with disabilities, this is important given their late enfranchisement (Davidson and Lapp, 2004). In its wake, a small but growing literature has emerged that examines accessibility issues related to the voting experience (Prince, 2004, 2012) while an even smaller literature exists that examines persons with disabilities seeking political office in Canada (e.g., D'Aubin and Stienstra, 2004). The work thus far largely focuses on barriers to inclusion and on federal electoral participation. Missing in this literature is a provincial assessment of persons with disabilities that have sought elected office, as well as the mechanisms used by political parties to encourage potential candidates with disabilities to seek office. The story that emerges is one of largely non-participation which underscores the work needed to attract candidates with disabilities to seek political office to aid in the construction and reconstruction of the Canadian nation.

Keywords

Political participation; Persons with Disabilities; Canada; Disability politics

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Introduction

Persons with disabilities are the largest minority group in North America, yet little is known about the political participation of this important group (Prince, 2012). What we do know is that persons with disabilities report lower education and employment rates, lower income levels, and face higher costs of living to meet their daily needs (Levesque, 2012). We also know that disability policy is not on the mainstream political agenda with only small incremental changes in Canadian disability policy occurring in the last three decades. If the incremental nature of disability policy changes has long been “not good enough” with minimal gains won through long drawn out processes (Levesque and Graefe, 2014), what then is to be made of the gains made to date or “citizenship by installments” as Prince has previously characterized the situation of marginal gains in federal policy related to social, economic, political and democratic affairs (Prince, 2001)? For persons with disabilities, this is important given their late enfranchisement (Valentine and Vickers, 1996; Davidson and Lapp, 2004). Since gaining the franchise, a small but growing literature has emerged that examines the physical barriers persons with disabilities face when attempting to vote, which has led to recent accessibility changes from Elections Canada (Prince, 2004, 2012). An even smaller literature exists that examines persons with disabilities seeking political office in Canada (e.g., D’Aubin and Stienstra, 2004). The work thus far largely focuses on barriers to inclusion and on federal electoral participation. Missing in this literature is a provincial focus, an assessment of persons with disabilities that have sought elected

office, as well as the mechanisms used by political parties to encourage potential candidates with disabilities to seek office.

This exploratory study takes stock of persons with disabilities that have sought provincial political office in Canada for the last three provincial elections in every province. The article proceeds in five parts. First, the literature on the voting experience of persons with disabilities is examined and found to be "thin," revealing slow progress in obtaining the right to vote and in ensuring accessibility of the voting experience. The second section focuses narrowly on persons with disabilities as candidates and the challenges and opportunities that they have faced in seeking political office. Significant challenges remain with few persons with disabilities seeking political office as the results from a survey conducted for this study reveal. Drawing on the same survey, the inclusivity of political parties in regards to recruitment and campaign financing provisions for persons with disabilities is examined in section three. This investigation is broadened to examine disability-specific language in provincial party constitutions. Combined, political parties are found to be not as inclusive as they could be. Lastly, the accessibility of the electoral experience is assessed externally through provincial electoral management bodies such as Elections Ontario and Elections New Brunswick which reveals some promising practices to help negate campaign challenges if they were adopted across the provinces. The story that emerges and is emphasized in the conclusion is largely one of non-participation of persons with disabilities in Canadian provincial political life underscoring the work needed by political parties and elections offices to address issues of accessibility in order to attract candidates with disabilities to political office to aid in the construction and reconstruction of the Canadian nation.

1. Persons with disabilities and voting

The Canadian political participation literature focusing on persons with disabilities is thin, with only a handful of studies in the academic literature, which largely focus on accessibility issues and voter turnout (D'Aubin and Stienstra, 2004; Prince, 2004, 2007, 2012; McColl, 2006).

Outside Canada, a small but growing literature on the political participation of persons with disabilities exists. Overall, persons with disabilities have a lower level of political participation ranging from 10-21% lower (but see Schriener et al., 1998). As Guldvik et al. (2013) summarize, political participation is lower among women than men, among older than younger people, among those with severe disabilities, among those with lower education, among those unemployed and among those who are isolated when compared to non-disabled individuals (see Schur, 1998, 2003). Voting rates also vary by the type of disability with individuals with mobility and cognitive disabilities having the lowest probability of voting (Matsubayashi and Ueda, 2014). Being employed and/or belonging to a faith based organization also raises voter turnout given the increase in income and socialization (Schur and Kruse, 2000).

Poor voter turnout can also be blamed on low voter registration rates. Overall, the registration rate is 16% lower for persons with disabilities when compared to non-disabled people (Dickson, 2002). Men with disabilities are also less likely to register to vote than women with disabilities (Schriener et al., 1998). It is for this reason that voter registration reforms have long been urged and made in many jurisdictions such as the United States to ensure that people who have the right to vote can and do vote. However, as the US situation reveals, implementation of legislative changes can be slow and underscores the importance of disability organizations in mobilization efforts to ensure commitments are adhered to (Schriener, 2001).

The slow pace of change is a consistent theme throughout the disability literature. One example is the evolution of voting rights for persons with disabilities. It was not until 1993 that all Canadians including those with intellectual disabilities gained the right to vote (Davidson and Lapp, 2004).¹ Yet, Canadian advances are not necessarily the norm around the world. In the US, for example, even though the *Americans with Disabilities Act* was passed in 1990, significant problems with accessibility persist (United States General Accounting Office, 2001). For example, voting rights for persons with disabilities and especially those with intellectual disabilities are often suppressed. A similar situation exists in the European Union (EU) given the majority of EU countries suppress the right to vote by persons with mental health problems and persons with intellectual disabilities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2010). This is despite the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which enshrines political participation rights for persons with disabilities and efforts to change EU laws (Inclusion Europe, 2014). It is also despite the vast literature on human rights and law rejecting the withholding of the right to vote for persons with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems (e.g., Schriener et al., 1997; Beckman, 2014; Karlan, 2007).

It has also been a long process to improve the accessibility of polling stations and the training provided to staff at those stations (see Prince, 2004 for an overview). Problems still exist on this front as the last two Québec elections (2014, 2012) demonstrate where at least 30 polling stations were inaccessible while dozens of others were minimally accessible in 2014. Staff preparedness for how to handle accommodations was also lacking. The fact that disabled

¹ Some provinces such as Québec withhold the right to vote for individuals including persons with disabilities under legal guardianship (see *Québec Election Act, Revised Statutes of Québec* 2015 c. E. 3.3) while others such as New Brunswick eliminated such provisions in light of the 2002 *Sauvé* case (*Richard Sauvé v. Canada (Chief Electoral Officer)*, 2002 SCC 68) which struck down provisions that disenfranchised prisoners and, by extension, had potentially important ramifications for individuals under legal guardianship (Chief Electoral Officer of New Brunswick, e-mail message to author, May 04, 2015).

voters in Québec can vote at other polling stations that are accessible is of little comfort given the need to learn which polling stations are accessible and the associated added costs of transportation to go to the accessible polling station (La Presse Canadienne, 2014). Other Canadian provinces such as Nova Scotia are experimenting with continuous polling where voters can vote any day except Sundays and up to five days before election day using write-in ballots which are dropped off at local returning offices. This allows all people, including persons with disabilities, the opportunity to plan their time accordingly to when it is most convenient, thus eliminating the need for special trips out to polling stations on election day, and allowing people to plan around inclement weather (Turnbull, 2013). Similarly, Nova Scotia, through the Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities, the Disabled Persons Commission and the Human Rights Commission, is working to create a “voter’s toolkit” for persons with disabilities, a campaign school for persons with disabilities, education and training materials for polling station workers and other strategies to enhance the political participation of persons with disabilities (Bruce and MacKinnon, 2010; as an example, see Forum29 at <http://disability.novascotia.ca/content/forum-29-enabling-persons-disabilities-participate-public-and-political-life>). An MLA/MP guide may also prove useful as the United Kingdom situation demonstrates (see RADAR, 2010). Yet, much more is needed to ensure stated commitments are met as disability groups and others continue to advocate (e.g., Monsebraaten, 2014). Underpinning these challenges are one’s system of social support, societal attitudes and additional barriers that need to be overcome.

The importance of social supports, attitudes and barriers

Social supports are important to the political participation of persons with disabilities.

Examining one’s social support system entails moving beyond a focus on key individuals and organizations such as caregivers, family members, friends and disability organizations to a focus

on the quality or quantity of a person's social ties with an emphasis on distinguishing between important intimate ties and distant contacts (Smith and Christakis, 2008). Such support facilitates discussing politics and learning about the electoral process (education) to campaign work, aid in accessing polling stations and for voting (Kjellberg and Hemmingsson, 2013). In this process, trusted individuals and groups need to remember their position (i.e., agents) and are best to not advocate autonomously. Rather, it is an interdependent relationship that needs to be fostered and allowed to grow in order for persons with disabilities, especially those with severe disabilities, to fully participate in political life (Clifford, 2012). Individuals and disability groups may be limited in what they can do depending on the degree and type of institutional support authorities provide, thus limiting their options, which is also affected by local values. For example, whether or not jurisdictions have a civil rights or charity outlook to disability groups and persons with disabilities more generally will affect the support and access they may have (Imrie, 1999). It appears that the situation facing persons with disabilities themselves – given their lack of representation and resources – is replicated in regards to disability groups. This is unfortunate given the importance and role of trusted individuals and disability groups in facilitating political participation including overcoming barriers such as isolation. For example, we know that persons with disabilities are more likely to live alone and are less involved in the broader community including groups and social activities. This is significant in that it is through community activities and social interaction that political participation is fostered (Anderson, 2009). Enhancing systems of social support is imperative (Barnes, 1991)² as is addressing societal attitudes.

² Others argue that it is not a panacea (see Monsebraaten, 2014).

Attitudes remain a significant barrier to the political participation of candidates with disabilities. Daruwalla (1999) has shown the dichotomy that exists in attitudes with the public verbalizing favourable attitudes towards persons with disabilities while harbouring deeper feelings which are frequently negative and rarely communicated. Such deep seeded attitudes are challenging to address. Indeed, societal attitudes are much easier to change through education, training and disability awareness programs while personal attitudes only superficially change with such programs. Rather, direct contact with persons with disabilities is required to change personal attitudes (Daruwalla and Darcy, 2004) thus underscoring the need for the political participation of persons with disabilities in political life either directly as candidates or in various organizations and employment.

2. Persons with disabilities as candidates

Consideration needs to be given to the heterogeneity of the attitudes of persons with disabilities. Schur and Adya (2013) found that few differences existed in general political attitudes and party affiliations between people with and without disabilities. However, they did find that persons with disabilities tended to be concerned more so with health care and the economy while having more negative views of government performance in regards to fighting unemployment. They also trusted the government less so than persons without disabilities and found the government to be more unresponsive. The lower unresponsiveness rating seems to be linked to persons with disabilities who are unemployed (Schur et al., 2003). Lower levels of political efficacy are also expressed by persons with disabilities which is related to their employment, income, educational and group participation which are lower when compared to non-disabled people (Schur et al., 2003). Such factors may be related to their perceived reception in general society, broadly speaking, and in employment situations more specifically. For example, Boyle (1997) found that

a negative social image built on stereotypes of persons with disabilities as "damaged goods" or "second-class citizens" increased the isolation sought by persons with disabilities. Moreover, their lack of control over career options and an inability to adjust job completion methodologies when employed undermined their efforts to fully participate in society. These were reinforced with the tokenism expressed by employers who were found to be more interested in minimizing what they needed to do to accommodate persons with disabilities yet were quite interested in maximizing a positive inclusive corporate image leaving persons with disabilities feeling undervalued. Such tokenism extends to the political arena where persons with disabilities are marginalized in the policy process further eroding their will to participate in politics (Barnartt et al., 2001).

Marginalization in political life is related to attitudes surrounding stigma and discrimination that surround disability. It is this stigma that often prevents the political participation of persons with disabilities (Hahn, 1988). Yet, stigma has different effects and is moderated by time. For example, political participation is decreased by isolation, diminished resources, the desire to distance oneself from others with disabilities and efforts to "normalize". However, as time passes and one learns to accept their abilities, they tend to join more groups and learn about issues and seek involvement thus carving out a prime role for disability organizations to facilitate political participation (Schur, 1998). Yet political participation is nebulous and is affected by various factors. For example, Schur (2003) found gender to be a significant factor. Women with disabilities tended to have lower political participation rates than non-disabled men and women largely due to their lower employment levels and social isolation. Similarly, they were less likely than men with disabilities to be politically active but were more likely to take action on issues and to participate in protests. Other factors such as race also

crosscut gender. For example, African American women are more likely to register and vote while Caucasian women (and men) with disabilities have the lowest registration and voting rates (Schriner et al., 1998).

Yet the value of political participation is great, especially with young people with disabilities. Roker et al. (1998), in examining volunteering and campaigning activities of young people with disabilities, found several benefits including increased self-confidence, a growing sense of agency, enhanced personal and social skills, an increased social network and sense of structure coupled with the development of practical and work skills. It is such direct involvement of persons with disabilities working in regular contact with others, disabled and non-disabled, that can change societal and personal attitudes to disability (see Brill, 1994) and which directly speaks to Daruwalla and Darcy (2004; see above) emphasizing the direct and regular contact required. The question arises of how such fact is translated into persons with disabilities seeking political office, specifically, the opportunities and challenges that are encountered.

In the Canadian context, we find challenges related to public attitudes, inadequate access to disability supports, a lack of role models and inaccessible places and spaces (D'Aubin and Stienstra, 2004). Attitudes remain a significant blockage for candidates with disabilities. Voters readily discriminate against them, fearing they will not adequately represent the views of non-disabled candidates, fearing that they will be unable to do a "proper job," or fearing the additional costs associated with accommodating persons with disabilities if they were to be elected. Some fear the different appearance of candidates with disabilities such as a blind person continually wearing sunglasses (see also Eadie, 2000 on these points). This is unfortunate given that legislatures and councils could benefit from the experiences of "being a disabled person"

who often bring their own solutions to their disability (Moss, 2013). This also ignores the fact that persons with disabilities successfully participate in all phases of the electoral process including as candidates (Lord et al., 2012). Community leaders do not help the situation when they themselves question the suitability of candidates with disabilities. In other cases, community leaders are outright discriminatory against persons with disabilities, thus fueling such stereotypes. One example is the recent case with Toronto Councillor Doug Ford, who expressed his preference for institutionalization in stating that an Etobicoke home for teens with autism has “ruined the community” (Ballingall, 2014; Jones, 2014). Thus the motivation to seek political office is related to the degree to which candidates with disabilities gain recognition and respect as elected representatives (Phillips, 1995) something which stereotypes and discrimination erode (Lord and Stein, 2013).

Missing from the above discussion is the positive effect role models can have on those considering whether to seek political office (D’Aubin and Stienstra, 2004). To an extent, having political representatives with disabilities, both elected (e.g., MPs, MLAs) and appointed (e.g., Former Lieutenant Governor of Ontario David Onley) may be a powerful motivator, symbolically and substantively, for those considering elected office. For example, current British Columbia MLA Stephanie Cadieux (Surrey Cloverdale) noted being motivated by seeing Sam Sullivan as Mayor of Vancouver (2005-2008). As Cadieux stated, “well if he can do that I can do this [seek provincial office]”.³

To summarize, persons with disabilities are significantly less politically active than persons without disabilities. The literature attributes this to various factors such as societal

³ Stephanie Cadieux, Interviewed by Brynne Langford. Vancouver, BC, June 09, 2014. It is unclear as to why Ms. Cadieux looked to the municipal situation for motivation instead of to the provincial level where she may have found Kent Hehr (L – Calgary-Buffalo) in Alberta or Jennifer Howard (NDP – Fort Rouge) in Manitoba or to the federal level and Steven Fletcher (C - Charleswood — St. James — Assiniboia). Perhaps this was due to proximity issues or to the profile of Mr. Sullivan’s mayoralty. Note that Mr. Sullivan has since become a BC MLA.

attitudes, stigma, discrimination, isolation, and issues related to funding and a lack of role models more generally. This hampers our understanding of whether or not a critical mass of persons with disabilities in elected office is required for substantive disability policy changes to occur. Put differently, does it make a difference if we elect persons with disabilities policy wise? But to answer this question, we need an understanding of persons with disabilities who have sought political office, a task to which we now turn.

Surveying Persons with Disabilities in Provincial Office

Documentary research and a survey were used to gauge the number of persons with disabilities who have sought political office in the last three provincial elections for each province, as well as any related recruitment and financing mechanisms. A provincial focus was undertaken given the plethora of literature available on representation at the federal level (e.g., women, visible minorities and, related to disability, accessibility issues broadly) that is missing at the provincial level. Documentary research consisted of journal database searches and was combined with grey literature combed from internet searches. The grey literature in particular revealed a number of persons with disabilities who had sought political office and whether or not they had been elected in the provinces.

A paper survey was mailed via regular mail to each of the party presidents of the main provincial political parties in Canada: Liberal, Progressive Conservative (Conservatives in British Columbia), New Democratic Party and the Green Party.⁴ Other provincial political parties were also forwarded a paper survey if they were provincially significant: The Wildrose Alliance in Alberta, the Saskatchewan Party in Saskatchewan and, in Québec, the Parti

⁴ There is no provincial Progressive Conservative / Conservatives or New Democratic Party in Québec.

Québécois, Coalition Avenir and Québec Solidaire parties. The paper survey was followed up with an e-mail soliciting their participation to complete the attached survey four weeks later for those that had not responded. It is emphasized that this was a voluntary survey, that is, political parties had the option to *not* respond to the survey or to *not* identify candidates with disabilities. In total, 42 surveys were mailed out with twelve completed surveys returned for a response rate of 28.6%. Another three political parties responded by stating that they will be completing the survey but that they needed extra time to do so while seven political parties responded stating that they "will look into it" or "bring it to the attention of the appropriate people". Of the 42 surveys, responses were received from 22 provincial political parties (52.3% response rate), which includes the 12 completed surveys noted above.

Lastly, documentary research was completed to examine political party constitutions to gauge their inclusiveness in regards to persons with disabilities and to examine provincial campaign finance laws to determine how additional disability related costs due to campaigning are addressed. For this research, disability is defined as someone who has a physical, visual, hearing, mental health, intellectual or learning disability.

The results of the documentary research and the survey are shown in Table 1 and are meant to be illustrative only. Firm conclusions should not be made given there are likely many more candidates that have sought provincial office yet have chosen to not self-identify as being disabled, potentially fearing discrimination and stigma. For example, of those that self-identified, most asked to have their identity remain confidential, fearing their upward mobility within the party would be stunted and societal discrimination. In addition, several political parties admitted that they did not track whether a candidate had a disability or not. Thus, their

ability to identify disabled candidates often relied on the memory of office personnel, which was sketchy at best given their high turnover.

The results indicate that the greatest number of persons with disabilities in the three most recent provincial elections has been in Nova Scotia where seven candidates have sought provincial political office. British Columbia has had the second greatest number of candidates with a disability with five. Most of the other provinces have had at least one candidate with a disability seek provincial office. Information is limited for some provinces given survey responses and while Newfoundland and Labrador has never elected a person with a disability (see Marland, 2009), it is unclear the number, if any, that have sought provincial office given individuals may not be self-identifying. The results are tentative and suggest that over the three most recent provincial elections, persons with disabilities have increasingly sought provincial political office in Canada, especially in Nova Scotia and British Columbia.

Table 1
Persons with Disabilities as Candidates for Provincial Office,
Last Three Provincial Elections^{1, 2, 3}

Province (no. of seats)	Candidates (bold indicates elected)
British Columbia (2013: 85, 2009: 85; 2005: 79)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberal Party: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2013 Stephanie Cadieux (Surrey Cloverdale) 2013 Michelle Stilwell (Parksville-Qualicum) 2013 Sam Sullivan (Vancouver-False Creek) 2013 Ken Kramer (Burnaby-Lougheed) 2009 Stephanie Cadieux (Surrey-Panorama)
Alberta (2015: 87; 2012: 87; 2008: 83; 2004: 83)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberal Party: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2012 Kent Hehr (Calgary-Buffalo) 2008 Kent Hehr (Calgary-Buffalo)
Saskatchewan (2011: 58; 2007: 58; 2003: 58)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saskatchewan Party: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2011 1 individual (identity confidential)
Manitoba (2011: 57; 2007: 57; 2003: 57)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Democratic Party: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2011 Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge) 2007 Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge)
Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberal Party:

(2014: 107; 2011: 107; 2007: 107; 2003: 103)	<p>2014 Andrew Olivier (Sudbury)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressive Conservative Party: 2011 - 1 individual (identity confidential)
Québec (2014: 125; 2012: 125; 2008: 125)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coalition Avenir: 2014 - 1 individual (identity confidential) 2012 - 1 individual (identity confidential) 2012 (by-election) - 1 individual; (identity confidential) Note: Same individual ran in the three elections. Québec Solidaire: Pascal Minville (Louis-Hébert)
New Brunswick (2014: 49; 2010: 55; 2006: 55; 2003: 55)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberal Party: 2014 – Ed Doherty (Saint John Harbour) 2010 – Ed Doherty (Saint John Harbour) 2006 – Ed Doherty (Saint John Harbour) 2005 – Ed Doherty (Saint John Harbour)
Nova Scotia (2013: 51; 2009: 52; 2006: 52)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liberal Party: 2013 Kevin Murphy (Eastern Shore) 2013 1 individual (identity confidential) Progressive Conservative Party: 2013 - 1 individual (identity confidential) New Democratic Party: 2013 Steve Estey (Dartmouth North) Green Party: 2013 - 3 individuals (identities confidential)
Prince Edward Island (2015: 27; 2011: 27; 2007: 27; 2003: 27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Democratic Party: 2015 - Jennifer Coughlin (District 16 - Cornwall - Meadowbank)
Newfoundland & Labrador (2011: 48; 2007: 48; 2003: 48)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No information available.

¹ Candidates are listed as having self-identified as having a disability or can be visibly identified as having a disability. Documentary research has revealed the names of some of the candidates with political parties having provided the names of additional candidates. The identity of some of these candidates has not been revealed as requested by the political party or by the candidate.

² The survey was conducted prior to the 2014 Ontario and New Brunswick elections and the 2015 PEI and AB elections. However, once the elections were completed, the survey was also forwarded to the parties for completion and their results included in Table 2.

³ In addition, no candidates sought political office across the elections for the following political parties: Green Party of Alberta (including the 2015 election), New Brunswick New Democratic Party, PEI Liberal Party, PEI NDP Party (2003, 2007, 2011 only), PEI Green Party.

Persons with disabilities are increasingly succeeding in getting elected and re-elected. This can be seen in British Columbia where in 2013, three candidates with disabilities were elected. We also see that getting elected can be challenging with at least one candidate (in Québec) having sought political office on three occasions without being elected. However, once elected, persons with disabilities seem to have no trouble in getting re-elected. Note the second mandate given to Jennifer Howard in Manitoba, Kent Hehr in Alberta and Stephanie Cadieux in British Columbia. Overall, thirteen of 25 disabled candidates were elected over the three provincial elections, a success rate of 52%.⁵ This success rate may provide an opportunity to renew focus on disability issues especially in provinces where a number have been elected thus forming a critical mass such as in British Columbia, though this is far from certain (see Lamb, 2013). The results also suggest that much more work is required to recruit persons with disabilities to seek political office. For example, over the last three provincial elections for each province, only 25 disabled candidates of a possible 2,084 sought political office. This is a rate of 1.2%⁶ which is extremely low given Canadians with disabilities make up 15-21% of the population depending on the jurisdiction in question (Levesque, 2012). Caution is urged with this interpretation though, given that persons with disabilities vying for political office have likely been underreported, as previously discussed.

3. Accessibility of political parties: Recruitment, campaign financing, party constitutions

Results in the previous section paint a mixed picture for persons with disabilities who seek provincial office. Those that seek office have a reasonable chance of getting elected and in

⁵ Note that the survey was conducted before the 2014 Ontario and New Brunswick elections and the 2015 PEI and Alberta elections. However, once these elections were completed, the survey was also forwarded to the parties for completion. Including these results yields 14 of 28 candidates elected for a success rate of 50%.

⁶ 28 of a possible 2,354 candidates, for a success rate of 1.2%, if the 2014 New Brunswick and Ontario and 2015 Alberta and PEI elections are included.

getting re-elected, yet few actually become candidates, which calls into question the environment into which persons with disabilities are entering, that is, political parties discussed in the next few paragraphs and provincial electoral management bodies discussed in the next section (see Clifford, 2012; Moss, 2013).

In terms of recruitment, the survey asked all political parties whether or not their party specifically sought out persons with disabilities for political office. Of the responses, only two parties (New Brunswick New Democratic Party, Nova Scotia New Democratic Party) stated that they specifically reached out to underrepresented groups while another two parties (Coalition Avenir du Québec, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario) stated that they were only sought out because of someone having a personal connection to them and considered them to be strong candidates. This point was repeated in the other responses. That is, all responding parties noted that they looked for the best candidate that they thought could win the riding for them. The fact the candidate had a disability was not a factor in their selection and was considered a "bonus". In other words, the quality of the candidate was prioritized. No political party reported using any special recruitment initiatives. This does not mean that they did not exist. For example, the Ontario and Nova Scotia New Democratic parties have affirmative action guidelines for nomination and candidacy (such provisions were absent from those parties reporting, but see below). They defined "target ridings" for application of a "further Affirmative Action formula" as follows,

- i) 75% of the non-incumbent "targeted" seats should have candidates from Affirmative Action target groups: women, visible minorities, youth, **people living with disabilities**, aboriginal people, gays,

lesbians, bisexual and transgender individuals and francophones
(emphasis added; New Democratic Party of Ontario, 2013: 1)⁷

Such provisions were absent from those parties reporting (but see below) as were formal measures to address higher costs to campaigning such as for transportation or for the use of interpreters for persons with disabilities. How these added costs are to be paid for loom large for candidates with disabilities (Eadie, 2000). Hiring guides or drivers to assist in campaigning is costly, as are technological supports (Rose, 2004). D'Aubin and Stienstra (2004) call for a national disability supports plan for persons with disabilities to help in meeting these costs, yet such a plan remains elusive. In this regard, Canada can learn from the recent United Kingdom experience which examined access to elected office for disabled people in 2011. They found issues related to public attitudes, training, development and support for candidates with disabilities and accessibility, including funding, needed to be addressed to ensure the full participation of persons with disabilities in political life. Their 2011 consultation resulted in the *Access to Elected Office for Disabled People Strategy* in 2012 which included a £2.6 million fund to help candidates with disabilities overcome barriers in their bid to get elected as MPs, councillors, police and crime commissioners. Candidates with disabilities could apply for individual grants ranging from £250 to £40,000 to offset additional disability related costs in seeking political office (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, 2012).

But how do Canadian provincial parties address additional campaign costs? The survey asked provincial political parties to list mechanisms such as funding, transportation or access to special assistants they provided to help offset those costs. One party, the BC Liberals, stated they used such mechanisms but did not provide specifics. A second party, the Green Party of

⁷ This Affirmative Action formula is found in the Ontario NDP *Affirmative Action Guidelines for Nomination and Candidacy*, which was available online until shortly after the 2014 Ontario provincial election.

Nova Scotia, stated that they had no mechanisms per se but worked to gain consideration for disabled candidates at all-candidate forums. Such consideration could include positioning to be in direct sight line of the moderator (not blind side), to have someone provide visual clues for questions or to ask for all electronic devices to be turned off. Other parties responded that while they had no provisions per se, they worked to obtain whatever the candidate required for their needs through direct purchase, volunteers or donations. As one respondent noted, they did "whatever it took to make it work".

Yet, more formal measures of accessibility and inclusion may be needed even with the above on the ground approach to "making it work". For example, one approach to measuring the inclusivity of provincial political parties is to examine their constitutions. It is here where the broad parameters of the party are outlined, including their orientations and broad ideas. How a minority group is referenced in a party's founding document may be important for symbolic if not substantive reasons (Edelman, 1964), thus potentially facilitating interest and "buy-in" to the state. That is, if candidates, such as persons with disabilities, "see themselves" in the party, they may then be more inclined to consider seeking political office.

To this end, a review of the provincial party constitutions (available online and by request) is revealing (see Table 2). The majority of the political parties, 29 in total, have no disability specific language in their constitutions. Another four party constitutions were unavailable. Four political parties (AB Liberals, SK Liberals, MB Liberals, QC Liberals) reference disability in relation to anti-discrimination for party membership. The fact the parties are all Liberal parties is telling, especially since it was in 2004 when the federal Liberal party stopped asking potential candidates about their experiences with mental illness (D'Aubin and Stienstra, 2004). One party, Québec Solidaire, espouses feminist ideals and notes that women

who are disabled face a double discrimination in society. Lastly, the Ontario NDP is the only political party that enshrines a Disability Rights Committee in their constitution. Other parties such as the Saskatchewan NDP and the Manitoba Liberals embed other subgroups into their constitution such as a Rainbow Pride Committee, Aboriginal Committee, Senior’s Association and Multicultural Associations (though not a disability subgroup) as shown in Table 2.

Collectively, if one were looking to parties as a beacon of hope, that hope is surely dimmed by these findings. It is possible that disability-specific language and policies are outlined in other documents, as is the case with the Ontario NDP and their Affirmative Action Guidelines for Nomination and Candidacy, yet such documents are largely non-existent online (the NDP Affirmative Action Guidelines were the only ones found online). This suggests that more is needed from political parties to attract persons with disabilities into political party life.

Table 2
Disability Specific Language in Provincial Party Constitutions^{1, 2}

Province	Disability Specific Language in Party Constitutions
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberals s. 3.1 Every member of the Liberal Party of Canada ordinarily resident in Alberta is a member of the Party. Any person who has attained the age of 14 years and who desires to support the Party and who wishes to be known as a Liberal shall be eligible for membership in the Party without discrimination based on race, nationality or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, or mental or physical disability. (emphasis added)
Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDP No specific disability language/provisions but have specific subgroups as follows: (a. 14) Saskatchewan New Democratic Women; (a. 15) Aboriginal New Democrats of Saskatchewan; (a. 16) Rainbow Pride Committee of Saskatchewan; and, (a. 17) • Liberals s. 3.1 The Party shall be open to all who desire to support the Saskatchewan Liberal Party and who wish

	to be known as Liberals. All individuals aged fourteen (14) and over shall be eligible for membership in the Party without discrimination based on race, nationality or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age or mental or physical disability (emphasis added)
Manitoba	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberals 2.1. Eligibility (iii) All individuals aged 14 and over shall be eligible to apply for membership in the MLP without discrimination based on age, colour, mental or physical disability, nationality or ethnic origin, race, religion, or sex ...(emphasis added) note subgroups: Manitoba Young Liberals; Manitoba Women’s Liberal Associations; Manitoba Liberal Aboriginal Association; Manitoba Senior’s Liberal Association; Manitoba Liberals Multiculturalism Association
Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NDP (a. 11, s. 5.3) Disability Rights Committee
Québec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Québec Solidaire <i>Nous sommes féministes</i> Bien des femmes vivent par ailleurs une double discrimination parce qu’elles sont pauvres, autochtones, lesbiennes, immigrantes ou handicapées. Leur marche vers l’égalité est d’autant plus ardue. Les inégalités vécues par les femmes sont le résultat d’un système d’oppression.... (emphasis added) • Liberals (a. 1) ...la philosophie repose sur les éléments suivants : b) l’égalité de droit de toutes les personnes, sans distinction, exclusion ou préférence fondée notamment sur la race, la couleur, le sexe, la grossesse, l’orientation sexuelle, l’état civil, l’âge sauf dans la mesure prévue par la présente Constitution, la religion, la langue, l’origine ethnique ou nationale, la condition sociale, le handicap ou l’utilisation d’un moyen pour pallier ce handicap (emphasis added)

¹Disability specific provisions do not exist for the following provincial parties (provinces): Liberals (BC, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI and Newfoundland & Labrador); Conservatives / Progressive Conservatives (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, Newfoundland & Labrador); the NDP (BC, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, PEI, Newfoundland & Labrador); the Green Party (BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia); the Wildrose Alliance

(Alberta); the Saskatchewan Party (Saskatchewan); and the Coalition Avenir and the Parti Québécois (Québec).

²Provincial party constitutions were unavailable online or by request for the following parties: NDP (Alberta); Green Party (Saskatchewan, Québec, PEI).

Provincial political parties remain important actors in the electoral process for persons with disabilities, yet as this investigation has found, negligible recruitment efforts, the lack of formal campaign financing measures to address additional costs encountered, and the lack of disability specific language in party constitutions paint a picture of political parties as less than accessible vehicles for persons with disabilities. Much more is needed from Canadian provincial political parties, including work for which some aspects such as campaign financing provisions may be addressed in conjunction with provincial electoral management bodies.

4. Persons with disabilities and provincial electoral management bodies

Political parties do not exist in a vacuum. Rather they act within a broader structure, the electoral process, to gain power. Provincial electoral management bodies such as Elections Ontario and Elections New Brunswick are tasked with managing elections and associated laws and regulations such as elections and campaign financing laws. As an external entity, electoral management bodies have a role in determining the accessibility of the electoral experience for all candidates. How do they, as provided by their provincial laws, account for costs related to one's disability in the campaign? Attending meetings and campaigning door-to-door may pose serious challenges for candidates with disabilities. Uneven sidewalks, gates and steps may make physical access to individual front doors challenging while ensuring buildings are accessible for meetings and that technological aides are readily available for candidates may add significant costs to one's campaign (Rose, 2004). How these costs are accounted for is important. For example, specialised transportation for a candidate with mobility challenges is much more

expensive than transportation afforded non-disabled candidates. If the cost over and above what a non-disabled candidate would experience counts against one's campaign expenses, a candidate with disabilities would quickly be at a disadvantage, thus providing a disincentive for persons with disabilities to seek political office (D'Aubin and Stienstra, 2004).

To explore this question, each province's elections and election financing laws were reviewed for disability specific finance provisions as shown in Table 3. Half of the provinces (5) (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Québec, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador) have no specific disability provisions. Four provinces are explicit in excluding disability as a campaign expense. British Columbia considers such expenses personal expenses if they are *reasonable* though reasonable is not defined. As Elections BC stated, "[s]ituations are assessed on a case by case basis, with consideration to the functions of seeking election and any needs that result from disability of candidate" (E-mail message to M. Gouchie, May 06, 2014). Manitoba also excludes *reasonable* disability expenses from election expenses but goes further to explicitly define what is reasonable as that which "are over and above expenses the candidate normally incurs for the disability". Manitoba is also the only province that reimburses the candidate's reasonable disability expenses if the candidate receives at least 10% of the valid votes cast. Ontario and Nova Scotia also exclude disability related expenses but no reference to reasonableness is to be found in their election financing laws. Lastly, Prince Edward Island election financing law is a hybrid. While it is silent on disability specific provisions, it allows for the Chief Electoral Officer to issue guidelines for administration of the Elections Act. Such guidelines state that expenses to support disability are not considered an election expense (see Table 3).

What to make of these election financing provisions? If one compares the provisions with the electoral results above, it suggests that campaign finance reforms may be needed. For

example, Nova Scotia and British Columbia have had the most candidates with disabilities seek provincial political office - and in British Columbia’s case, get elected - while Manitoba, with the most elaborate provisions, has had one candidate get elected twice in the last three provincial elections. This suggests that campaign finance provisions may matter. However, it does not explain why Alberta, which has no disability specific campaign finance provisions, has had one candidate elected twice while Ontario which excludes disability expenses from campaign expenses has had none elected during the three elections studied. Given these facts, it suggests that campaign finance provisions are only one part of the equation as to whether or not candidates with disabilities seek political office. Other considerations are at play.

Table 3
Disability Specific Candidate Campaign Finance Provisions

Province & Legislation	Disability Specific Finance Provisions
British Columbia <i>Election Act</i> (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s. 183(4)(e): “election expenses incurred as a result of any disability of the candidate, including the cost of any individual required to assist the candidate in performing the functions necessary for seeking election” if <i>reasonable</i> are personal election expenses and (s. 203(1) not counted towards election expense limits • similar provision for leadership contestants (s. 184) • “reasonable” not defined in <i>Election Act</i>. Situations assessed on a case by case basis, with consideration to the functions of seeking election and any needs that result from disability of candidate.
Alberta <i>Election Act</i> (2000) <i>Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act</i> (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific disability provisions but all candidates to be reimbursed from their campaign account for personal expenses exceeding \$2000 (EFCDA, s. 39.1)
Saskatchewan <i>Election Act</i> (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific provisions
Manitoba <i>Election Financing Act</i> (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s. 50(3): “Reasonable disability expenses incurred by a disabled candidate to campaign in an election period” are not election expenses.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s. 63.(1)(1.c) Must report reasonable disability expenses as part of audited financial statements. • s. 74(1) & (2) full reimbursement of reasonable disability expenses if receive 10% valid votes cast. • s. 115 “reasonable”, in relation to personal expenses incurred by a candidate, or the expenses that a candidate incurs for child care or because of a disability of the candidate, means expenses that are over and above expenses the candidate normally incurs for those reasons. (« raisonnable »)
Ontario <i>Election Act (1990)</i> <i>Election Finances Act (1990)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the Election Finances Act, s. 1(1) “campaign expense” excludes (b.1) “expenses that are incurred by a candidate with disabilities and that are directly related to the candidate’s disabilities” and therefore not subject to spending limits • disability-related expenses must be reported as part of audited statements
Québec <i>Election Act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific provisions
New Brunswick <i>Election Act</i> <i>Political Process Financing Act (1978)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific provisions
Nova Scotia <i>Election Act (2011)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • s. 166 (i) (vii) “election expenses” does not include expenses that are incurred by a candidate with a disability and that are directly related to the candidate’s disability
Prince Edward Island <i>Election Act (as amended)</i> <i>Election Expenses Act</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific provisions but under 3.1(h) of EEA, Chief Electoral Officer can issue guidelines for proper administration of the <i>Act</i>; expenses to support disability not considered an election expense
Newfoundland & Labrador <i>Elections Act (1991)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no specific provisions

Conclusion

This exploratory study examined the electoral experience of persons with disabilities with a particular focus on those that have sought provincial political office in Canada for the last three provincial elections in every province. It also gauged the accessibility of the environment into

which they were entering when deciding to seek political office: political parties (recruitment efforts, campaign finance provisions, disability specific language in party constitutions) and the provincial electoral management bodies (campaign financing laws). As voters, persons with disabilities are largely non-participants in elections, given few vote when compared to people without disabilities. This is linked to their late enfranchisement (restrictions which continue in some cases), issues of polling station accessibility, their system of social support, and societal attitudes and barriers. As candidates, persons with disabilities have a reasonable chance of getting elected and re-elected yet few become candidates as the survey found 1.2% of candidates in the last three provincial elections for each province had a disability. Nova Scotia and British Columbia have attracted the most candidates with disabilities seeking political office while such candidates have had the most success in British Columbia. This questions, among other things, the accessibility of political parties and provincial electoral management bodies. For parties, much work is needed to attract candidates with disabilities to seek political office to aid in the construction and reconstruction of the Canadian nation. The low political participation rates of persons with disabilities may be related to several factors. First, political parties are not necessarily the most welcoming entities. None surveyed have any specific recruitment or formal campaign financing provisions for persons with disabilities. Furthermore, few have disability specific language provisions in their party constitutions thus contributing to the lack of "buy in" to political parties (see Edelman, 1964). In turn provincial electoral management bodies do not fare much better given provincial campaign finance laws need to be improved to ensure additional costs candidates with disabilities face due to their disability do not place them at a disadvantaged position in the campaign process. It is not good enough to have significant disability related campaign costs not count in electoral campaigns given candidates with

disabilities are still disadvantaged with having to raise those funds to begin with! Underpinning these forces is the need to address societal attitudes to disability to eliminate stigma and discrimination. Turning low participation rates into robust political participation rates where many candidates with disabilities seek political office will take time, but will offer rich rewards. After all, as one candidate noted, persons with disabilities "are problem solvers who often bring their own solutions to their disability" (Moss, 2013). Canadian society has much to learn from such insights.

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