

Time for another federal leaders' debate on women's issues^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Friday marks the 30th anniversary of the first - and only - leaders' debate on women's issues in a Canadian federal election campaign.

On Aug. 15, 1984, Brian Mulroney, Ed Broadbent and John Turner sat down together at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto to tell Canadians how their policies would impact women's lives. As the chair of the political science department of the University of Ottawa at the time, I was invited to moderate the debate.

Looking back, I am proud to have been part of that important moment in Canadian history. I have seen a lot change for women over the last 30 years, but remarkably many of the issues the leaders debated then - including child care, pay equity, violence against women, and women's role in global peace and security - continue to be just as pressing today as they were back in 1984.

While more women than ever before are graduating from university, entering new professions, and running for public office in Canada, women continue to form the majority of people living in poverty. Young women graduating today will still earn 20% less than their male peers for the same full-time work, will be promoted less often to senior management positions, and will spend twice as much time doing unpaid work at home.

Intimate partner and sexual violence continue to directly impact women from every walk of life - driving more than 8,000 women and children in Canada to seek protection from a shelter or transition home on any given day. Levels of violence against Aboriginal women and girls are completely unacceptable.

And around the world, the struggle to ensure equal rights for women and girls is far from won. Just think of Malala Yousafzai, who was brutally shot for standing up for girls' right to education in Pakistan. Or of the 14 million girls who, every year, are married off before they turn 18. Or of the fact that women still only account for nine per cent of the police, 20 per cent of parliamentarians and 27 per cent of all judges worldwide.

So much remains to be done to promote women's rights at home and abroad. So why isn't gender equality higher up on the agenda when it comes time to elect our federal government?

Without a leaders' debate on women's issues, the chances of having a good public debate on childcare, or income inequality, or Canada's global leadership on women's rights are pretty slim.

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read online at the Ottawa Citizen^[2]

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