

# Whitewashed world: Why has it taken so long to add colour to our leadership? <sup>[1]</sup>

Opinion

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Read online <sup>[2]</sup>

## EXCERPTS

It's hard to know what to think sometimes when I watch the news, especially when it comes to politics. Despite the more flagrant ridiculousness (elbowgate, anyone?), what surprises me most is how we've gotten all the way to 2016 with so little variety in the faces that show up on our television screens. So many middle-aged, upper-class white men, so little variety in perspective. Even in non-Caucasian countries, the movers and shakers seem mostly to be males of a certain age and socio-economic background.

Take a look at the G7, comprising the seven wealthiest developed countries on earth: If you made a vanilla sundae with marshmallow sauce, white chocolate flakes and coconut sprinkles, you couldn't get much whiter. Until recently, our Parliament wasn't any great shakes, either. The majority on the Hill were white as the driven snow and able to write their names in it, too.

In fact, until Stephen Harper's Conservatives lost the last election, the median age of Canadian MPs was 57, when the median age of Canadians is 40. Women made up only 27 per cent of parliamentarians in this great land, despite the number of females nationally being closer to 50 per cent. Minorities? Please. The only thing less visible in Ottawa before King Justin swept to power was a comprehensive national daycare strategy. Or Stephen Harper's empathy for Syrian refugees.

## Time dulls edges

Which brings me to my question: How does a group of politicians who are so like each other and so unlike the general population expect to serve the needs of a populace to whom they are only passingly similar? If the majority still consists of well-off, middle-aged white men, how will that influence their policy-making?

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that the concerns of an older man nearing retirement whose kids are grown and gone are going to be significantly different from someone who is in the thick of carpooling, PTA meetings and wacky things like braces and mortgage payments.

You might say that these people likely remember their days of parenting young children and make policy accordingly. You might say that, but I think you'd be wrong. Time has a way of dulling the edges of our experience. The memories of sleepless nights, vomiting children and empty bank accounts tend to get pushed to the very back of our mind. It's a human coping mechanism, and it's perfectly understandable to want to put tough times behind us in order to focus on our present situations. We remember things as we want to remember them. But that doesn't bode well for empathizing with folks who are in those tough times right now.

I have a hard time believing, for instance, that a man who has more than likely never had to give up a job in order to stay home to raise children is going to be as voluble/forceful an advocate for an affordable national daycare strategy as would a woman who has been in that position.

How about people who've been gainfully employed their entire working lives? I'm not suggesting that only people who've been on EI or received welfare cheques are qualified to decide how to run those portfolios. But isn't it logical that someone who's been intimately involved with those life challenges should play a part in the policy-making process?

Just to be clear: I'm not here to bash older white men. I'm really not. My dad fell into that category, and I know darned well that I benefitted greatly from his life experience and resultant wisdom. My issue is with the lack of diversity in politics, here in Canada and around the world.

Trust me: I would be saying the same thing if another homogenous group was in power over most of this planet. If, for example, we woke up tomorrow and the major decisions of our lives were being made by teenage female Tibetan yak herders, I would be just as annoyed (and a little confused).

I recently read an online excerpt from a report by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Apparently, the gender gap in Canadian politics is likely to last until 2404, if the current rate of change (read: minimal) is sustained. That's more than 300 years. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it?

The only way we're going to make these changes happen faster is to put women in a better position to run for political office. In practical terms, this means making shorter parliamentary sessions so politicians who are mothers are not forced to stay away from their families for extended periods of time. It also means there needs to be quality reliable child care available for families, as well as more staff support for members of Parliament.

In the U.S., Hilary Clinton is finally in the running to be the most powerful politician in the Free World. My only question: What took so long?

-reprinted from CBC News

**Region:** Canada <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** equality <sup>[4]</sup>

women <sup>[5]</sup>

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