



5-Minute Opening Statement by Lindsay Brumwell
Appearance Before House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC): Study on Civic Resilience in Canada

Good morning, Mr. Chair, Vice-Chairs, and members of the committee.

Thank you for the invitation to appear today on behalf of the Equal Voice Foundation.

We are Canada's only national, multi-partisan organization dedicated to strengthening women's participation and leadership in political life. We work across party lines, the country and at all levels of government to help build a more representative, inclusive, and resilient democracy.

Today's study on civic resilience is both timely and important.

At its core, civic resilience is about whether Canadians continue to believe that our democratic institutions are open, responsive, and worth participating in. It is about trust, belonging, and confidence that individuals can contribute meaningfully to public life.

One of the clearest ways to strengthen that trust is to ensure Canadians can see themselves reflected in leadership and the decisions they make.

According to our national research, Canadians in general do not think politics is very accessible. Less than half believe there are opportunities for Canadians to run or even get involved in politics, 8 out of 10 say politics is not very welcoming to those who are new to the sector.

When people believe politics is only for a narrow group of insiders, participation declines.

That is why representation matters. Not only as a question of fairness, but as a matter of democratic strength.

At Equal Voice, we often see barriers arise long before someone considers becoming a candidate. Many talented women are interested in serving their communities, but hesitate because politics can appear inaccessible, adversarial, financially difficult, or incompatible with caregiving and professional responsibilities.

Others face harassment, online abuse, or simply a lack of encouragement and pathways into public life.

As a result, many capable people self-select out before they ever reach the starting line.

That is a loss not only for those individuals, but for Canada as whole.

A resilient democracy depends on drawing leaders from the broadest and strongest possible talent pool. And women are 50% of that talent pool.

We are also increasingly focused on research and evidence. Strong institutions and good training programs, need to be evidence based on real and evolving information.

If Canada wants to improve participation, we already know where the barriers exist, and who is being left out. But we also know solutions and actions that are effective in addressing many of these barriers.

At Equal Voice we focus on tackling these barriers in the quiet time between elections when the work needs to happen. And this is where Equal Voice shows up.

We also know our multi-partisan model matters, and the support for this approach is only growing. We heard this over ~18 months of consultations that went into our new Strategic plan: Lead. Connect. Compete. Govern.

At a time when many democracies are experiencing polarization, Equal Voice brings women together across political affiliations to build relationships, share experiences, and support one another in public life.

That kind of bridge-building is valuable. It reminds us that participation and democratic renewal can rise above partisan divides.

There are also areas of hope from our experience and research. There is a great deal of untapped interest in getting involved in politics in a volunteer capacity. 58% of women are interested in getting into politics at the municipal level. And young women would be more likely to get involved or run if they knew more about the opportunities and process for involvement.

As the committee considers recommendations, we would respectfully offer three areas for consideration.

First, continue supporting public life leadership development initiatives that prepare more Canadians for public life with both civics and political literacy.

Second, recognize harassment and intimidation, particularly online, as real barriers to democratic participation.

Third, continue improving research and data collection on representation, participation trends, and pathways to leadership so future policy is evidence-based.

Canada's democracy is strong, but strong democracies require regular reflection.

Equal Voice is proud to contribute to that work.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.