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In Canada, the women’s electoral outcomes at the provincial level in Ontario between the 1970s and 1990s has had some successes and failures. As this paper shall act as a critical analysis of political science literature in regards to the representation of women in the politics of Ontario, this paper shall first define what is meant by successes and failures for women at the provincial level. In addition, it shall examine which party gives the most opportunities for women numerically in policy making. These successes and failures can be attributed to the recruitment and nomination agendas of the three main Ontario parties. The agendas of the Ontario parties include the type of party system, structure, motivation, level of competitiveness and the availability and number of seats for women. Finally, this paper shall also take into the consideration of external barriers for women outside of the realm of politics as well.

Results have shown that although female legislators find better electoral success at lower levels of government, the proportion of women has barely exceeded 25 percent at all levels of government in Canada (Tolley 2011: 575). Numerical representation can be best defined as the characteristics of elected officials and how those characteristics reflect those of the party, it is commonly referred to as either mirror or descriptive representation (Tolley 2011: 580-581). Tolley’s work provides an explanation on why women succeed easily at the lower levels of
government compared to higher levels of government. The data she supplies shows that women “do better” (Tolley 2011: 582) at municipal levels of government due to the lack of barriers and chances for failure given to them at home. In order to understand a party’s processes and policies towards women, one must look into the “internal party structures” (Tremblay 1998: 174).

1. Defining and Measuring Women’s Successes and Failures Provincialy

The movement of women as a success in politics can be best defined as the number of women being elected as a reflection of the number of women candidates running for office (Trimble et al. 2013: 118). On the other hand, the failure of representation in regards to women in politics at the provincial level of Ontario can be best characterized as the inability of political parties to not meet goals or quotas for female candidates running for office (Trimble et al 2013: 229). Women’s movement success can be measured as policy responses which include these two characteristics: (1) the strength of the movements and (2) the openness of governments to movement lobbying which would include political advertisement and retention effort for potential female candidates (Collier 2005: "Do Strong Women's Movements Get Results? Measuring the Impact of the Child Care and Anti-Violence Movements in Ontario 1970-2000." 3-4).

It can also be noted that movement strength is present if the following characteristics are identified: (1) a sense of unity, (2) if it is challenging social norms, and if it is (3) more flexible for advertisement initiatives such as through television or recruitment campaigns (Collier 2005: "Do Strong Women's Movements Get Results? Measuring the Impact of the Child Care and Anti-Violence Movements in Ontario 1970-2000" 3).
In addition to this, a sign of the degree of which the government is open includes if they share the same ideas, along with if that particular movement can help them gain potential voters, whether or not the movement is close to election period and if the government has the finances to fund and help support the operation (Collier 2005: "Do Strong Women's Movements Get Results? Measuring the Impact of the Child Care and Anti-Violence Movements in Ontario 1970-2000." 4). In essence, failure can be defined as the inability to increase the number of seats and the number of women in cabinet. One can define and measure success through movement activism such as putting more women into positions of power. Putting more women into positions of power would this mean placing gender issues onto state policy agendas where they have been absent in the past. If there is no social advocacy for women inside of politics, there will be minimal development for future opportunities to come.

2. The Type of Party

Collier looks at the important determinants that are vital to the succession of women when it comes to the provincial government in the 1970s through the 1990s. Collier comes to the conclusion that women are given more promotional opportunities and are more successful under the main left-leaning parties in Ontario as opposed to the right-leaning parties ("Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 269). The success of women elected in office can be attributed to how each of the three main parties’ approaches women-centred politics as well as feminist policies as apart of their state agendas (Collier 1997: "Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 269). Various research done by Collier suggests that feminist women thrive when they are involved with a social-democratic government when either elected or appointed to office, as the
aim of their preferred policies seem to be in their favour (Collier 1997: "Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 270).

As a matter of fact, Collier reveals that women have better numeric and promotional opportunities when they are also under left-leaning governments, like the New Democratic Party and the Liberals ("Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 276). As the New Democratic Party implemented the employment-equity legislation for women in 1987, the Liberals also improved this when they came to power (Collier 1997: "Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 276). The employment equity legislation in this case created a larger selection of experienced politicians that were women. Collier also points out that merit based trends can also help explain the increase of numbers when it came to women in agencies, boards, and commissions in the province of Ontario (Collier 1997: "Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 278). In contrast, as with a neo-conservative government is in power, this is when the women are absent, along with their implemented policies being part of the state’s agenda (Collier 1997: "Judging Women's Success in the 1990s." 270).

3. Party Structure and the Nomination/Recruitment of Women

According to research, the main reasons why women representation in political parties lack is due to the political representation initiatives set up by the political parties in the first place (Traney 2013: 160). Key determinants such as the examination of the organizational structure and the nomination processes of the three main political parties in Ontario show the different levels of commitment towards increasing women’s representation in the long run (Traney 2013: 162). Considering this, parties each have their own different nomination processes towards women as well (Traney 2013: 163).
For instance, the New Democratic Party is in fact the most open to nominating women and visible minorities as candidates. Such examples of this include the 1982 affirmative action plan. The 1982 affirmative action plan states that 50 percent of all ridings should have candidates drawn from their affirmative action targeted groups (Traney 2013: 162). These targeted groups included: youth, people who have disabilities, francophones, aboriginal people, gays, lesbians, and other visible minorities (Traney 2013: 162). This reveals that the New Democratic Party is capable of achieving their targets by providing funds in particular for female candidates in order to relieve burdens such as childcare throughout the campaign process (Traney 2013: 162).

Studar and Matland’s research shows that the New Democratic Party has constantly pushed for women’s support even past equal representation with employment equity and even reproductive policies too (1996: 282). This opportunity has shown that the third party has a better chance of attracting new voters from the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives through their political platform (Studar and Matland 1996: 281). This positive notion gave push to the New Democratic Party’s ideology of incorporating women in order to fulfill numerical targets within their agenda. This evidently led the party to attracting many leftist feminists who wanted greater representation in political parties and in government (Studar and Matland 1996: 280). However it can be noted that the affirmative action plan has been more successful in implementing women’s representation in the executive as opposed to the provincial council (Tremblay 1998: 178).

As opposed to the New Democratic Party, the Liberals work with the local levels to find the most appropriate people for the candidate position. Instead of having firm targets like the New Democratic Party, the Liberals send out a Central Candidate Search Committee in which they facilitate and pay attention to specifically the recruitment of women in the ridings where the
party views as “winnable” (Traney 2013: 162). The strongest authority made to the party is the five appointments of candidates made by the leader, this reveals the amount of power party leaders and first ministers use to recruit and appoint women to higher positions of political power (Traney 2013: 163). This method is used by the Liberal Party in Ontario and connects to the point where women are considered to be more successful in less competitive situations when it comes to provincial politics. Traney notes that financial assistance for the Liberal Party includes giving up to one thousand dollars to women who have not won a seat and a total of three hundred dollars towards holding office officials (2013: 163).

On the other hand, the Progressive Conservatives are known to be the most decentralized in the nomination process for women candidates as they do not establish any sort of targets (Traney 2013: 163). However, in 1987, the party had sent up an initiative called the Women in Nomination Program. The main goal of this program was to help organize training sessions, campaign teams, and funding for women to get involved in provincial politics (Traney 2013: 163). One can conclude that the lack of strict penalties of external forces to influence along with the lack of formal party rules relating to women provides the explanation as to why women representation is so low in Ontario during the time period of the 1970s to the 1990s.

The campaign participation of women in Ontario has shown that gender socialization, a minimal amount of financial resources and time given to appropriate female candidates, and the discrimination of political parties in gender activity, has resulted in a more generalized view of politics in the public and thus has attributed this kind of work to that of masculine qualities and characteristics with politics in the job market (Bashevkin 2008: 50). Recent findings by Bashevkin has shown that women’s representation could improve numerically in the future
provincially if campaign management would be exposed to female managers who are successful 
(Bashevkin 2008: 51). With this being said, it is important to also note how valuable campaign 
management by women would contribute to the parties’ mobility (Bashevkin 2008: 51).

4. The Motivation and Competitiveness Behind the Party

Brodie examines the motivations behind the main political parties in Ontario into two 
categories. One as being “instrumental” (Brodie 1975: 88) and the other being “exploitative” 
(Brodie 1975: 88). Other political scientists have offered another perspective to which incentives 
are given to individuals to participate in the political party which can be considered as gain either 
monetary or materially (Brodie 1975: 89). Brodie also draws that social, political, and cultural 
practices of women can be linked to professional systems of incentives and thus can be 
associated as “amateur”(Brodie 1975: 92) with political parties.

Between the time period of the 1980s to the 1990s, the outcome has been positive in 
terms of numeric representation for women in Ontario from varying degrees. Statistics show that 
since 1981, the New Democratic Party has had the highest percentage of female candidates, 
leaving the Liberals behind in second and the Progressive Conservatives last (Traney 2013: 157). 
Traney describes political parties as “gatekeepers” (2013: 162). Using this term, Traney shows 
the differences between each political party and how the electoral outcomes for women vary 
between each and how the number of female candidates in the legislatures are determined by the 
parties (2013: 160). Consequently, Traney comes to the conclusion that more powerful positions 
in the political hierarchy still belonged to men (2013: 159).

Another factor that plays into the failure of women’s representation in Ontario between 
the 1970s and 1990s is the competitiveness of the party system in Ontario (Studar and Matland
Studar and Matland’s work looks at the trends of women’s representation in Ontario legislatures between 1974 and 1994. Studar and Matland point out that the lack of resources and research completed on women and their electoral successes and failures in provincial government showed four neglected areas (1996:271). Notable areas they came across included the difference of gender representation across political parties, revealing that women are disproportionately chosen as candidates in such situations compared to men (Studar and Matland 1996: 270).

Studar and Matland use the term “sacrificial lambs” (1996: 28) for women involved with provincial politics. Studar and Matland’s reviews of the political parties in Canada showed that not surprisingly, the New Democratic Party has used sources of affirmative action in promoting and sponsoring women at the provincial level compared to the Liberal and Conservative parties (1996: 275). It is evident that party composition in the legislature is a key factor in the representation of women at the provincial level in Ontario. The competitiveness of the seats at the provincial level do affect the number of women and their chances of being elected. In the case when women do receive nomination, they are likely to be looked at as “sacrificial lambs” (Studar and Matland 1996: 276) as women are often placed in a riding with minimal chances of winning.

Traney draws the distinction of when the Progressive Conservative leader fell in 1985 in Ontario, the electorate became extremely competitive particularly in the 1990s between the New Democratic Party and the Progressive Conservatives. It was towards the 1990s that it was evident that women representation has not improved since the change of government going back and forth in Ontario (Traney 2013: 163). Research has also indicated that these instances of
Ontario’s competitive party system has had significant impact on the representation of female candidates. When the Ontario electorate has a majority mandate, this means that the party must be committed towards gender equality, whereas with minority mandates, gender equality in provincial government is an issue of the latter (Traney 2013: 164).

5. The Availability and the Number of Seats

The final determinant for the failure of the representation of women in the 1970s until the 1990s is the availability of the types of seats. Various researchers suggest that incumbency is a struggle for women to enter into politics because of the likelihood of women winning a seat before men is extremely low (Traney 2013: 65). Advantages to incumbents may include political socialization, this would include networks within the political community and the establishment of their experience in preparation for political activities (Newman and White 2012: 97). With this being said, incumbency may lead females to be more susceptible to losing a campaign. Such barriers to women candidates may include sex stereotyping, the concept of formal politics being masculine, and how women are not socialized or encouraged to take an interest in politics or in leadership-like positions (Newman and White 2012: 104).

Overall the success and failures for women at the provincial level of government in Ontario is caused by the recruitment and nomination processes to the three main political parties of Ontario. As this paper acted as a critical evaluation of political science literature for women representation in Ontario, it looked at the main political parties of Ontario such as the New Democratic Party, the Liberal Party, and the Progressive Conservative Party. Also, other factors such as the type of party system, structure, level of competitiveness, motivation, the availability and number of seats, along with the external barriers for women outside the realm of politics has
also influenced the electoral successes and failures for women in Ontario. As this paper first identified the definitions of the successes and failures for women at the provincial level of Ontario, it shows that although women have achieved a moderate degree of numeric representation between the 1970s and 1990s, it is still not satisfactory. Satisfactory representation of women in provincial politics of Ontario would reflect proportionality between the number of women running for office and the number of women being elected to hold a seat. As numeric representation may also vary on the previous factors stated that influence political parties in giving women an electoral chance.
Works Cited


