



PATHWAYS TO THE PREMIERSHIP

What is the P2P project all about?

The Pathways to the Premiership Project (P2P) is designed to answer a crucial question: **how do women succeed in political leadership roles?** To answer it, researchers need a sizeable number of comparable success stories. They can be found in Canada and Australia, where 15 women have served as premier of a provincial or state government. Examining these women's career paths will tell us:

- What motivates women to seek government leadership?
- How do they get to the top?
- What sorts of obstacles and opportunities do they encounter? Is media coverage a barrier?
- Are women's pathways to office different from those of men?
- Do women and men experience different levels of success and longevity in the role?
- Do female premiers boost the political representation of women?

Why is this research important?

Women continue to be under-represented at all levels of government around the globe. The [World Economic Forum](#) predicts that, at the current rate of progress, it will take 108 years to achieve gender equality in political office worldwide.

The presence of women in party and government leadership is key to speeding up the process of electing more women. Studies show that the most effective way to help people see women as competent leaders is to expose them to more women in high-profile leadership positions. Women are also inspired to run for political office when they have more female role models.

By examining the conditions under which women have succeeded in high-prestige leadership positions, the P2P presents a blueprint for future research and a roadmap for change. Practical observations and strategies from the study will benefit political parties, governments, and community organizations whose aim is to promote gender equality in political life. The research is intended to better equip women to enter politics and attain leadership roles, ensuring our democracies become more equitable over time.

Why Canada and Australia?

Canadians and Australians can easily picture women as political leaders because they have seen quite a few women in charge. To date, 8 women have led Canadian provincial governments and 7 have governed at the state level in Australia. Four of them are the second woman to lead their state or province.

Over the past decade, there has been at least one woman and often several more in the premier's office at any time in both countries. For almost a year, women led Canada's four largest and economically powerful provinces. Check out this 2013 photo of Canada's provincial and territorial premiers: almost half were women.



The Canadian Press/Aaron Lynett

Canadians are now so accustomed to women in political leadership roles that, when the number of women premiers shrank from 6 in 2013 to 0 in 2019, people asked why. Women's absence from the upper echelons of power "should be a national wake-up call," said journalist [Anne Kingston](#).

Australians have also witnessed a steady stream of women premiers over the past 12 years. Women presently lead two of the country's six state governments. Annastacia Palaszczuk is in her second term as premier of Queensland and Gladys Berejiklian governs the country's most populous state, New South Wales. The image below shows the two women – with Palaszczuk on the far right – at a meeting of first ministers in June 2017.



Council of Australian Governments

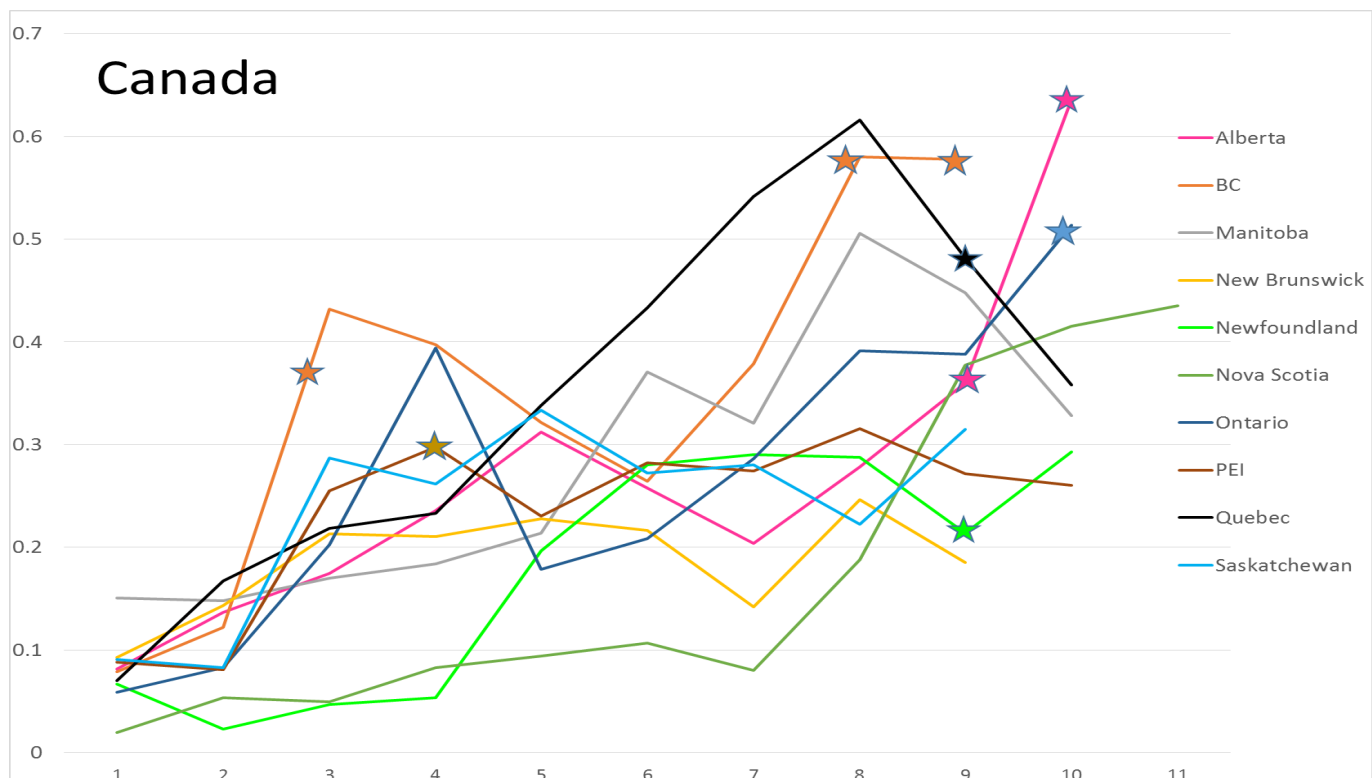
What have we found?

The Importance of Women's Legislative Representation

To date, 15 women have become premier of a Canadian province or Australian state. All but 4 of them rose to power in the past decade. What has changed? More women have been elected, improving the **gendered representative context (GRC)** within which women compete for leadership roles.

The P2P team mapped women's representation at each election in each jurisdiction since 1980. To develop a robust measure of representativeness – which we call the GRC indicator score – the ratios of women to men as elected legislators, members of the governing party caucus, and cabinet ministers were calculated, then averaged. The closer the number is to 1, the closer women are to equal representation. The chart, below, gives a snapshot of changes in the gendered representative context over the past 11 election cycles in Canada, to 2018. The emergence of a woman premier is indicated by a star.

GRC score



What do these data reveal? Women's presence in Canada's provincial legislatures has been growing. Unfortunately, no jurisdiction has reached gender parity – women equally represented in key legislative positions. In most provinces, women hold less than half of the seats, and they remain under-represented in crucial leadership and decision-making roles. While there is a clear link between jumps in women's political representation and the emergence of women premiers, four provinces still have not seen a woman at the helm of their government. Right now, all of Canada's national and subnational government leaders are men.

Is Media Coverage a Barrier to Women's Success?

The P2P examines newspaper reporting about the 11 most recently elected women premiers and the men who preceded them in office. We focus on stories published in the first week after each premier was selected because these introductions offer powerful first impressions of who they are as people – and as leaders. If news coverage suggests women lack suitability for and credibility in leadership roles, women face a legitimacy gap.

Emphasizing gendered identities, bodies, intimate relationships, and family lives is a phenomenon known as **media personalization**. It draws attention to the ways in which women are different from the men who usually hold power. A focus on women's parental roles and marital situations reinforces the presumption that women should take care of families while men take charge of politics.

Leftist Lara Giddings still looking for Mr Right



—The Australian—

Not surprisingly, our study finds women premiers are more likely than men to be personalized. As an example, former Tasmanian premier Lara Giddings was asked why she had “failed, so far, to find a life partner” and have children. By saying Giddings was still “looking for Mr. Right,” journalists suggested her life was incomplete without a partner.

Novel women, like Giddings, who were first to become premier of their state or province, experienced higher levels of personalized

coverage than men premiers. But news stories gave less attention to the personal attributes and family lives of women who were the second in their jurisdiction to gain the premiership. When a woman leader is no longer seen as unusual, journalists rely less heavily on gender stereotypes to tell the story of her rise to office.

However, women who are divorced, single, in same-sex partnerships, or who do not have children, are more likely than those with conventional families to have their parental roles evaluated by the media. When she took power in British Columbia, Christy Clark – shown in the photo on the right – was referred to as “Premier Single Mom” and asked how she would balance politics with parenting. An expectation that political leaders should have traditional nuclear families continues to inform media evaluations of women premiers.



—The Canadian Press—

What about media depictions of **leadership abilities**? Historically, the qualities most directly linked to 'good' leadership – strength, experience and capability – are associated with men and the performance of masculinity. Our study found that journalists prioritize these leadership qualities when introducing new premiers to the public for the first time. The attributes most emphasized in reporting about the 22 Australian and Canadian premiers are experience, strength, and competence. Least emphasized were likeability, honesty, and compassion.

Here's the good news: journalists evaluate all premiers according to the same standards of effective leadership. Female premiers are as likely as male premiers to be depicted as capable, strong, intelligent, and experienced.



— The Canadian Press/Frank Gunn —

On the other hand, key leadership qualities commonly associated with women are downplayed. The capacity to build collaborations, sustain relationships, and govern with transparency and kindness is essential to good governance in the contemporary era. By overlooking these relational elements of leadership in favour of emphasizing hard, authoritative approaches, the media suggest women are not as well suited as men for governing.

Palaszczyk poised for historic Qld victory

Jim Morton | AAP

Friday, 24 November 2017 12:29AM



— Australian Associated Press —

What do these findings tell us?

Unfortunately, sexist attitudes and stereotypical assumptions about the gendered division of labour continue to shape how society evaluates premiers. Highlighting women's personal lives positions their relationships and caregiving roles as

integral to their performances as leaders. On the other hand, women are not being held to different leadership standards than men, and there is considerably less personalization of women who are not "firsts." The symbolic impact of women's increased representation may be shaping how news organizations talk about women leaders.

What's next?

The P2P team is currently gathering comprehensive information on the biographical, systemic and institutional variables shaping the career paths of women and men premiers. Comparing pathways to office and outcomes for female and male premiers will isolate important gender differences and identify explanations for these differences. What are the factors associated with women's success and longevity in office? What are the most intransigent barriers?

Over the coming year, we will conduct in-depth personal interviews with women premiers. The goal is to find out what sorts of factors help them succeed. We'll ask about the importance of upbringing, role models, mentors, and other opportunities that supported their political advancement.

Finally, the project will determine the extent to which women premiers boost women's representation in politics by promoting their candidacies for office and advancing women to senior positions within government.

Who are we?



We are an international team of researchers led by Professors Linda Trimble from the University of Alberta and Jennifer Curtin from the University of Auckland. The research is inspired and supported by Post-Doctoral

Fellow Dr. Angelia Wagner and Graduate Research Assistants Meagan Auer, Victoria Woodman, and Rissa Reist. Our research collaborators include political scientists Matthew Kerby (Australian National University) and Amanda Bittner (Memorial University of Newfoundland).



Find out more about the research team, the premiers, our findings and outreach activities on our website, www.pathway2premier.com, or by contacting Linda Trimble (ltrimble@ualberta.ca) or Jennifer Curtin (j.curtin@auckland.ac.nz).

Funding for the project is provided by a Partnership Development Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and contributions from our partners: The University of Alberta, the University of Auckland, and the Government of Alberta's Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism, and Status of Women, formerly the Status of Women Ministry.



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