

HOW CANADA BUDGETED MORE SPACE FOR WOMEN: A GLIMPSE INTO THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT'S CULTURAL VALUE OF EMPLOYABLE WOMEN

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ABSTRACT This paper analyzes the Canadian federal budget speeches from 1965, 1987 and 2018, and their reflection on their time's social and political climate. A feminist lens is used to examine how the government's prioritization of women's participation in the labour force has changed over time, and a point of interest is how these social changes have affected the economy, culture, and political climate of Canada. Political rights and opportunities for women to join the workforce existed in all the periods being discussed, but societal and political culture impacted the employment rates of women in the Canadian workforce. Reflecting on the language and statistics used in the budget speeches allows insight into how societal norms have impacted the political culture and thus the government's priorities surrounding women's rights and the role of a woman in Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Canada has changed in the last fifty-five years; our country's demographic, policymaking, and culture have all undergone massive social upheavals since 1965. Viewing federal budget speeches as a reflection of the past and a guiding force for our future, these changes become clear. Canada's political culture has been influenced by the dominant waves of feminism experienced within their time. This paper seeks to understand the connections between Canadian culture and the federal government's political plans. Through examining three federal budget speeches in the context of the dominant feminist movements of the time, I analyze how the government's economic and political priorities are influenced by citizens' cultural and social

movements. Through a review of the 1965, 1987, and 2018 budget speeches, I connect different waves of feminist movements in Canadian society to the federal government's policymaking for women in the workforce. The years being discussed reflect different waves of feminist movements that shaped Canadian citizens' understanding of women and gender equality. In 1965, the Liberal government was influenced by second-wave feminism movements. In 1987, the Progressive Conservative government's priorities were shaped by the lull in late second-wave feminism. In 2018, the Liberal government addressed concerns raised by intersectional feminism movements. The budget speeches delivered by the federal governments reflect

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the wider cultural role of women in Canadian workforces and the public spheres, such as politics and the economy.

CANADIAN WAVES OF FEMINISM

Second-wave feminism in the 1960s-late 1980s and the fourth-wave feminism in the late 2010s contributed to a different sociopolitical environment in Canada. Second-wave feminism is exemplified by the Women's Liberation movements and focused on criticisms of the existence of patriarchy that existed in Canadian society to benefit men and oppress women. The patriarchy influenced social norms and expectations to normalize women's roles as homemakers, housewives, and mothers. Second-wave feminists protested policies that disadvantaged women in workplaces and society (Rutherford 2015). The prominent proponents of second-wave feminism were white, middle or blue-collar class, heterosexual, cisgender women (Sangster 2015). The Women's Liberation Movement in Canada made incredible efforts for Canadian women's education and employment prospects (Strong-Boag 2016). Progressing beyond the late 1980s to the 2010's fourth wave, Canada's political culture has become increasingly influenced by the theory of intersectionality, which has transformed policymaking approaches.

The fourth-wave feminist movement is invested in the intersections of gender, the role and norms surrounding women in society, and the use of the internet and social movements to pressure corporations and governments to empower women (Phillips and Cree 2014, 14). Intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to provide a framework for unique experiences of oppression that African American women face in society and policy (Coaston 2019). In the context of this paper, intersectionality will refer to how race, class,

gender, and other characteristics can interlock and compound to create uniquely personal experiences of oppression. Leaders of this fourth-wave movement are socially conscious governments who focus on policies that care about empowering women and emphasizing gender equality.

Feminist movements in Canada are linked directly to societal expectations and norms, changes in political culture and policy approaches, and the government's commitment to addressing employment issues involving women. How women are discussed in federal budget speeches provides comprehensive examples of how Canadian policy-making and Canadian society are linked together to form periods of political culture. The fight for gender equality remains ongoing in Canada and the world in 2022. Canada has allowed women prioritized by second-wave feminism (white, middle-class, educated) to vote since 1940; however, the feminist movement and fight for equality did not end when suffrage for this limited group was achieved (Strong-Boag 2016). People are still prevented from engaging meaningfully with their government system due to discrimination based upon intersecting elements of their class, race, and sexuality among other things. Awareness of the continuous fight for equality influenced perceptions of the presence of women in the budget speeches from 1965, 1987, and 2018.

METHODS

A content discourse analysis of keywords regarding women can begin a focused approach to societal expectations and pressures that influenced the Canadian Budget Speech in 1965, 1987, and 2018. In the 1965 budget speech, the word "women" was used a total of eight times in a one hundred and ninety-one-page document, while "wife" was used

once, with the context primarily being the unemployment rates for women compared to men. The 1987 budget speech does not mention “women”, “wife”, or “female” once throughout the twenty-nine-page document. However, the 2018 budget speech uses the word “woman” a total of thirty-seven times throughout a fourteen-page document. These results point to a change in political culture and Canadian identity even before one begins to dissect the roles of women within the Canadian budget speeches.

1965 BUDGET SPEECH AND SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

The 1965 budget speech was delivered by the Minister of Finance, Honorable Walter L. Gordon. This speech, like all budget speeches, outlined the ongoing goals of the government to encourage prosperity in Canada, and the successes of the Canadian economy under their legislature period (Canada 1965). Gordon outlined the very first economic objective of that government to be the desire to achieve “a high level of employment for Canadians and the reduction of unemployment” (Canada 1965, 4). While this budget speech may paint a picture of a successful government, the success neglects to account for women’s struggles in Canadian society at the time. A sociopolitical understanding of the typical Canadian citizen that the 1965 budget wished to resolve unemployment was exemplified by “programs children and adults see on television and at the cinema or hear on the radio, the games they play and watch, the comics, books, magazines they read, the towns and architecture which surrounds them” (Meisel 1974, 5). Often, this content would be focused on the white cisgender men who “continue to seek work if they become unemployed” (Canada 1965, 80). At the time this speech was delivered, second-wave feminists began to realize how patriarchal

expectations of women were embedded in workplaces, their homes, and government priorities (Rutherford 2015).

Gordon congratulated his government on their reduction of unemployment by 3.9% (Canada 1965, 4), but the question remains; who did this government wish to employ? When viewing the “Labor Force Graph 1957-1964” within the 1965 budget speech, it can be concluded that women were not the targets of the labour initiatives. The categories were defined as such: civilian labour force, total employment, male employment, and unemployment as % of the labour force. To further reinforce how uninterested the government was in women acting as employable Canadians, this graph was followed by an analysis of youth unemployment and possible employment opportunities, rather than the statistics of women in the workforce (Canada 1965). These statistics were not just the fault of the government: gendered roles and expectations remained very prevalent in 1965. The government was not excluding “female employment” statistics to purposefully ignore women in the workforce. Rather, the social expectations of women’s place in the private sphere rather than the public sphere influenced economic policies and expectations of female labour (Brodie and Bakker 2008). Males and youth were predominantly the people who were working in the labour force. Women typically worked in the domestic sphere of the household and family (Sangster 2015). The government’s priorities focused on enhancing the economy rather than encouraging gender equality in Canadian society or economy. Political culture and the priorities reflected in Canadian budget speeches are directly related to a society’s vocal concerns and priorities.

It is important to understand that the attitudes of the government and MP Gordon were a reflection of the attitudes towards women in the

period. People and society pressure the government into representing their goals and desires through electoral processes and acting within social norms. The employment rate of women was viewed as wonderful progress by feminist scholars in the 1960s (Sangster 2015, 384-385). Women's typical roles in Canadian society have changed drastically since 1965. Participation of women in the labour forces was at 30.6% in 1964 (Canada 1965, 80), while it was at 60.4% in 2019 (Catalyst 2020). Second-stage feminism focused on dismantling patriarchal ideals of a "women's place". For gender equality movements, women entering the labour force into the public sector of work was a sign of progress. Women's increased ability to work for a living challenged the cultural and political dominance of white men in Canadian society. The increase in labour participation of women was a huge improvement, which bodes well for women and the fight for gender equality in Canada's future political culture.

1987 BUDGET SPEECH AND LATE-STAGE SECOND-WAVE FEMINISM

groundwork for gender equality fights and women's participation in the labour force, the 1987 budget speech has no comment on how Canada has progressed on these fronts. While the views and norms of the 1960s are reflected in Gordon's budget speech, Honorable Michael H. Wilson's speech in 1987 seems to be unconcerned with matters outside of the government. The '87 budget is much more concise than the '65 with a little diversion from economic matters in Canada. It is hard to find any direct or indirect comment on the fight for gender equality in the 1987 budget speech. There seems to be an almost purposeful distance from women, minority groups, and the Canadian people in general from this speech. Instead, the focus lies plainly in the

government's desire to restore the economy (Canada 1987).

The societal focus on white middle-class women's issues did not reflect in the budget speech, however second-wave feminism in Canada during the 1970-1980s was focused on this demographic (Sangster 2015, 2). Between 1989 and 1990, the second wave of feminism's focus on education, equitable opportunities, violence against women, and a multitude of other patriarchal issues would come to falter. The budget speech's lack of reference to women may reflect this change, as a "lull" in feminist movements allowed for the government to assume society was less interested in prioritizing women's rights and place in the workplace. The second wave of feminism lost traction following the gains in Women's Liberation rights during the 1970s (Rutherford 2015). One reason for this lull may be that there was not an incentivizing rallying incident for Canadian women and citizens as there was in the early stages of second-wave feminism. A rallying incident for second-wave feminism occurred at the end of the World Wars as women were encouraged to leave their jobs so men could work, and women could take care of families and the household (Rutherford 2015; Sangster 2015, 397). In the late 1980s, women were in the workplace.

An economy remains functioning due to the cooperation of society, and a thriving economy is reliant on a working society with the ability to spend money and participate in the system of governance and economics (Brodie and Bakker 2008). Canadian culture and society are not left behind in this speech—especially the parts of our culture that appeal to our differentiation from the United States of America—yet there is no acknowledgement of women and minority groups in the 1987 budget speech. A possible justification for not directly addressing these groups could be that it

instead nods towards “disadvantaged Canadians” and the desire to “increase to those in need” (Canada 1987, 8). However, it is unlikely that white middle-class women would hurry to classify themselves with these identifiers.

2018 BUDGET SPEECH AND FOURTH-WAVE FEMINISM

obvious, as Honourable Bill Morneau’s 2018 budget speech reflects a modern version of governance. In a budget that “plan [s to] put people first” (Canada 2018, 2); women are fully included in this category of “Canadian people”. Entire sections are dedicated to government-enforced childcare benefits and glowing reports of young women who are working and learning. A more modern Canadian political culture is displayed through this speech; the center of the opening statement is around Morneau’s previous conversations with diverse elementary school students in downtown Toronto who are open-minded and excited about the future of their country (Canada 2018). The 1965 budget speech spoke of women’s employment, yet women were excluded from employment graphs and depicted as placeholders who work jobs until men could. In contrast, 2018 speaks of “Canada’s talented, ambitious, and hard-working women” (Canada 2018, 4) who are integral to the labour force and doing well. Women are seen as valuable members of the home and the workforce, which contradicts the views seen in the earlier budget speeches and Canadian political culture. A large part of this transition is due to the feminist movements in the 2000s and the 2010s globally and nationally (see Phillips and Cree 2014; Catalyst 2020).

Not only are women addressed as valuable Canadians in this speech, but this speech also clearly addresses the gender equality battle; it

recognizes that social changes affect economic matters. The gender wage gap is addressed as a serious issue that women in Canada face, and an issue that is actively harming the Canadian economy. Using statistics from the RBC economics, MP Morneau draws attention to the “[estimated] increase...of the economy by 4 percent last year” (Canada 2018, 6) to highlight the correlation between fourth-wave feminism in Canada, such as the fight for equal pay between the genders, and policy within the Canadian government and economy. The gender wage gap is not the only thing that impacts women’s participation in the labour force, and the speech addresses this by promising more money for childcare resources and support, which lowers the amount of unpaid labour that women have been doing for centuries (Catalyst 2020; Sangster 2015). In the aftermath of feminist movements such as #TimesUp and #metoo, the political climate around gender equality which demands accountability from men are vastly different from that of 1965 (Phillips and Cree 2014, 17). The 2018 budget speech reflects the movement’s awareness of Canadian society’s concern surrounding women in the workplace, and the Canadian government seems to be taking steps toward reconciliation of errors Canadian governance has made in progressing the gender equality fight and feminist movements.

There is no room for “out of sight, out of mind” rationale in government in this new globalized digital age. Fourth-wave feminism in Canada is rapidly rising and drawing attention to backward and outdated policies (Phillips and Cree 2014). While the patriarchy still exists, women are beginning to fill positions in power—whether that is in government, corporations, or law. This representation opens more doors for women to step through, and behind them, more minority groups. Case in

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point: the 2018 budget speech is the first of the three analyzed speeches to address Indigenous people living in Canada, reinforcing the linkage between the sociopolitical fourth-wave feminism movements and political culture and government priorities. This could be accredited to the 2018 speech being the most socially involved of the budget speeches. Canada's political culture appears to have shifted towards one of supposed reconciliation for groups who have been disenfranchised in the past speeches to align with the dominant sociopolitical movements.

While there have been considerable gains in the fight for gender equality and the roles of women in Canadian political culture, work remains to be done as society changes to become more accepting and more likely to offer opportunities to women. There are still steps to take toward acknowledging the intersectional factors that oppress Canadian women in the workplace and in society. However, through a review of the 1965, 1987, and 2018 budget speeches, we can see how different waves of

feminist movements have occurred in Canadian society to pressure governments into better policy making for women to interact fully with their country. In 2018 the budget speech reflected a government that was incensed with society and enacted policies that show this. The mentions of #metoo and #TimesUp show how fourth-wave feminists utilize media campaigns to pressure Canadian society and government directly. The agenda-setting of the government has a cause-and-effect relationship with society and the media (Soroka 2002, 20). In this relationship, Canadian political culture is formed, and this culture has allowed for women to be viewed as valuable members of the labour force in the progressions of budget speeches being analyzed. Examining future budget speeches with this framework after the COVID-19 pandemic, widespread Black Lives Matter social movements, and other issues of Canadian unrest could identify further connections between social movements and government policies.

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