

# ENDING INTERJECTIONS?

## The Impact of a Higher Proportion of Women in Canadian Legislatures

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### Introduction

A recent survey of Members of Parliament determined that 69 percent felt heckling was a problem (Samara Canada, 2016). Canadians feel no differently; recent public opinion research states that 56 percent of Canadians think less of the parliamentary process after tuning in to Question Period (Samara Canada, 2016). Is it possible that changing the composition of legislatures could have an effect on this troublesome aspect of Canada's political culture? This project examined whether or not a higher proportion of women in Canadian politics has an impact on the overall frequency of heckling. While women in politics may change political culture, they are simultaneously working in a system that is inherently patriarchal and where they remain underrepresented. Accordingly, this project also evaluated the extent to which women in particular are the targets of heckling and whether this, too, changes with better representation.

### Methodology

- Performed a quantitative analysis of Question Period transcripts, wherein heckles that are disruptive to speaking members or to the general decorum of parliament are recorded in parliamentary transcripts as an 'interjection.'
- Focused specifically on transcripts from British Columbia (BC), New Brunswick (NB) and the House of Commons (HOC). These jurisdictions were chosen based on the extent to which women were represented in both elected and appointed positions.

	Session Year(s) of Interest	Percentage of Women in the Legislature	Percentage of Women in Cabinet
BC	2018	39%	50%
NB	2015-2017	16%	19%
HOC	2018	26%	50%

- Each interjection was coded according to the jurisdiction in which it occurred, the date on which it occurred, the gender and party of the representative posing the question, the gender of the cabinet minister answering the question, whether the heckling is targeted at the question or the answer, whether the question posed to the minister relates to the personal conduct of the minister or policy matters, and, finally, the general topic of the question.
- As each transcript was reviewed, a tally was kept of how many questions were asked and answered by men, and how many questions were asked and answered by women.

### References

Childs, Sarah, and Mona Lena Krook. 2008. "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation." *Political Studies* 56 (3): 725-36.

Dahlerup, Drude. 1988. "From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 11 (4): 275-98.

Frisbie, W. Parker, and Lisa Neidert. 1977. "Inequality and the Relative Size of Minority Populations: A Comparative Analysis." *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (5): 1007.

### Theoretical Framework

Drawing on two opposing bodies of literature:

#### 1. Critical Mass Theory

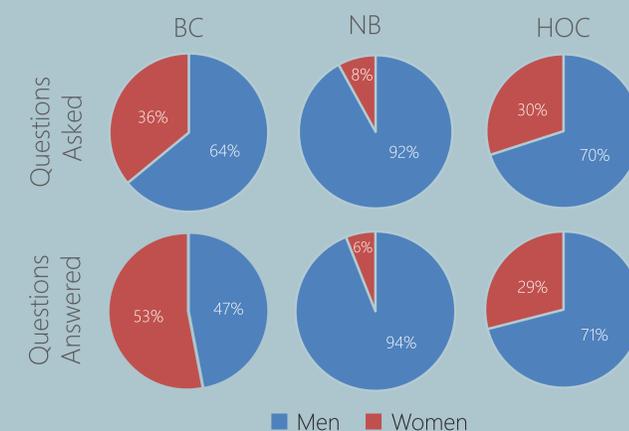
- Asserts that when women constitute a large enough minority (around 30 percent), they will have the ability to transform the political agenda and culture
- More recent iterations have shifted focus to 'critical acts' and 'critical actors' (Dahlerup, 1988; Childs and Krook, 2009)
- Generally used to refer to the body of literature that suggests increasing the number of women in politics has a tangible impact, that "numbers do count" (Dahlerup, 1988, p. 290).

#### 2. Backlash Theory

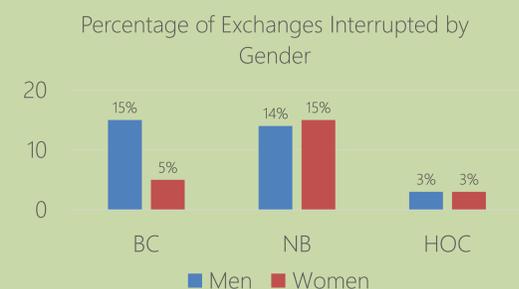
- Has its foundations in race relations literature.
- Asserts that increasing the size of a minority group will not result in widespread change but instead spur resistance from the dominant group (Frisbie and Neidart, 1977).
- Relevant because politics is a male-dominated sphere, and there may be resistance to the appointment of women to cabinet and the election of women more generally.

### Results & Discussion

#### Descriptive Statistics

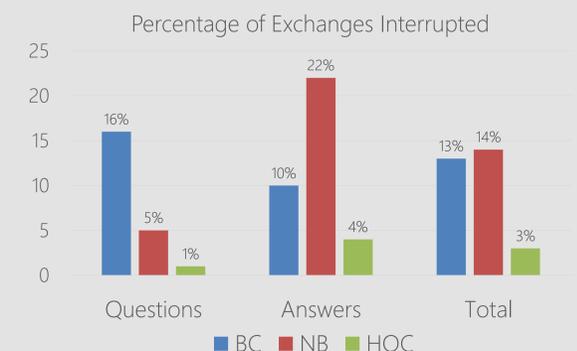


#### Micro-Level Findings: Do Women have a Unique Experience of Heckling?



- Previous qualitative and quantitative research suggests that women are more likely to be interrupted than their male colleagues.
- Though women were not interrupted more often than men in every jurisdiction, they were significantly more likely to be interrupted in legislatures with fewer women.
- The data seems to support critical mass theory, as the gap between the number of interruptions directed at men and the number of interruptions directed at women decreases as more women enter politics.
- Women in positions of power, women cabinet ministers, are especially more likely to be heckled when they are answering questions in legislatures with fewer women.

#### Macro-Level Findings: Does the Overall Quantity of Heckles Change as More Women are Elected?



- Critical mass theory suggests that incidents of interruption should be lowest in legislatures with more women. In other words, incidents of interruption should be lowest in BC and highest in NB
- Critical mass theory is partially borne out by macro-level data. While incidents of interruption are highest in NB, incidents of interruption are by no means lowest in BC.
- The high levels of heckling in BC may be a result of a unique political culture or the recent change in government.
- The low levels of heckling in the HOC may be a result of increased expectations for decorum at the federal level.

