POLITICAL ELITES IN CANADA

Power and Influence in Instantaneous Times

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Gender, Tone, and Content of Premiers’ News Coverage: A Matched Comparison

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The news media are crucial to our understanding of elites in Canada. We know that most citizens receive their information about politics and elites from the news media (Zaller 1996); we also know that the media themselves have changed considerably with the advent of the internet and social media (Tewksbury and Rittenburg 2012). Certainly, with the rise of social media, there are more opportunities for citizens to access information from political elites directly, and there are fewer opportunities for editors and mainstream news media outlets to frame, order, or restrict what citizens might learn about politics or politicians than was the case in the past (Tewksbury and Rittenburg 2012). That said, research shows that very few explicitly use social media for political purposes (Small et al. 2014). Thus, many, if not most, Canadians rely on the media to gather their information about elites, and citizens, elites, and the media alike are actively engaging with and changing their practices to accommodate the digital media environment. These reactions are all the more important because voters’ evaluations of some political elites – such as party leaders, prime ministers, or provincial premiers – are vital for vote choices. Evaluations of leaders are about as important as partisanship and more important than issues for the vote (Bittner 2010; see also Johnston 2002).

Perhaps most important for our purposes, media presentations of political elites vary systematically based on who those leaders are (Goodyear-Grant 2013), and these variations have been preserved or even amplified in the digital media environment (Burke and Mazzarella 2008; Conroy et al. 2015). The media are embedded in broader society, so they reflect the norms and barriers present in society. Society remains a gendered place, and politics is a social context that remains deeply gendered. For example, women continue to be dramatically underrepresented in Canada relative to their demographic weight; after the 2015 federal election, women still comprise a mere
26 percent of all elected members of Parliament (Interparliamentary Union 2016). They comprise between 9 percent and 37 percent of provincial and territorial Legislative Assemblies (calculated from Parliament of Canada 2016). And, until recently, the most powerful elite political offices in Canada—of prime minister and premier—appeared to be closed to women.

Kim Campbell remains Canada’s only woman prime minister, and she failed to secure election in 1993. To date, no woman has been selected as prime minister through a general election. And, prior to 2010, the same could have been said about premiers. The first woman premier was Rita Johnston, appointed premier in British Columbia in 1991. Of the eight women who have served as premiers in Canada as of 2016, six have been selected since 2010. In comparison, fifty-seven men have served as premiers since 1991, making men seven times more likely than women to hold this position. And, despite the pithy “because it’s 2015” rationale that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau offered for why he appointed a parity cabinet, the idea that gender is an appropriate, let alone meritorious, category for political representation in Canada remains controversial (Franceschet, Beckwith, and Annesley 2015).

Research shows that media coverage of political elites is gendered. Politics is stereotyped as a masculine field, and this is (re)created and (re)enforced in how the media present politics and politicians to the public (Gidengil and Everitt 2003a, 2003b). Earlier studies showed that the media “symbolically annihilated” women by omitting them from coverage or by trivializing and/or condemning them when they were covered (Tuchman 1978). This suggests that media coverage of political elites who are women can vary from that of political elites who are men in three ways: volume, content, and tone. As discussed below, research consistently shows that women in elite positions can receive less coverage, less serious coverage in terms of subject and content, and more negative coverage than men in elite positions. Although this has changed considerably since Tuchman’s early studies, there is still evidence to suggest that media coverage of Canada’s political elites is gendered in the following three ways.

First, the volume of coverage that women elites in politics receive has changed significantly over time. As recently as the 2000 Republican primary in the United States, the second-place candidate and first serious woman contender for a party’s presidential nomination in the United States, Elizabeth Dole, was simply not covered as such. She withdrew, in part because the volume of coverage that she received was far lower than expected for a candidate in second place in the polls (Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005). That said, by 2008, Hillary Clinton received significantly more coverage than any of her competitors (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). In Canada, women who compete for the leadership of some federal parties do not appear to receive less media attention than their competitive positions warrant (Trimble 2007). Since the 2000 federal election, few gender differences in visibility can be found in television or print coverage of party leaders and candidates (Goodyear-Grant 2013). That said, during this period, very few of these political elites were contending for the top job of premier or prime minister.

Second, because politics is a masculine-stereotyped field in which women remain grossly underrepresented, the process to bring the public news about politicians uses “ostensibly gender-neutral news frames that are, in fact, masculine in nature” (Goodyear-Grant 2013, 5). For example, it is common to use metaphors that relate to sports or battles to describe political debates or events, and these metaphors are at odds with how society sees women and their acceptable roles. Thus, though it is no longer socially acceptable to show explicit gender bias in media toward politicians, the content generated about women in politics remains different from that presented about men in politics. A seemingly neutral frame for a politician who is a man can cue that politics is unnatural, or an odd fit, for his peer who is a woman.

Coverage of women party leaders at the federal level in Canada is disproportionately focused on “soft” issues such as health care and education. Furthermore, women leaders are rarely associated with images of power, whereas their male peers are more likely to be presented with symbols of power such as Parliament or the flag (Goodyear-Grant 2013). These differences are attributable, in part, to the lower levels of electoral viability of women-led parties at the federal level as well as strategic decisions that these parties make in their press releases. Still, coverage of women candidates in Canada and elsewhere focuses far more on their appearance, personal relationships and marital status, and parental status than does that of their male peers (Goodyear-Grant 2013; see also Heldman, Carroll, and Olson 2005; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010; Trimble 2007; and Trimble et al. 2013). This coverage leads women in politics to make strategic decisions about how to present themselves that vary considerably from those of men. Men can often present their families as strategic or branding cues (see Thomas and Lambert 2017 for an overview); although women elites sometimes choose to
cue their parental or marital status, the strategies and results are typically very different from those seen among their male peers. This reality leads many women political elites to be discreet, if not entirely closed, about their private lives in public (Everitt and Camp 2009; Goodyear-Grant 2013; Thomas and Lambert 2017; van Zoonen 1998, 2006).

Third, women political elites receive considerably more negative press than do their male peers. For example, Hillary Clinton did not receive the same kind of treatment from the media as Barack Obama. Research shows that Clinton only received positive media coverage, comparable to that of Obama, when she was polling ahead of him by about ten points in any given media market (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). Furthermore, the majority of negative coverage that Clinton received was directed at her character, whereas the majority of negative coverage that Obama received questioned his credentials (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). Similarly, after Canadian federal leaders’ debates, women leaders have been presented in media coverage as more aggressive and adversarial than their male peers, even though objective analyses effectively debunk this presentation. In fact, it is not uncommon for women party leaders in Canadian debates to be the least aggressive and adversarial, yet coverage presents them as behaving in a more hostile manner than their male peers (Gidengil and Everitt 2003a, 2003b; Goodyear-Grant 2013). This is reflected even for parliamentary candidates; although the majority of coverage of all candidates is neutral, women are still more likely than men to receive negative coverage (Goodyear-Grant 2013).

The media’s gendered approach to tone matters for a number of reasons. Media reports are not neutral in that they mediate and frame how the audience is to interpret or understand the subject of a story. Thus, when women in politics receive more negative coverage than men, or coverage that suggests they are more hostile, aggressive, or cold, the frame suggests that the audience should think of these political elites in the same way. This framing can have effects on vote choice, and research shows that voters’ assessments of political elites’ character matter significantly more for their vote choices than do their assessments of their competence (Bittner 2010; Johnston 2002).

Our study builds on this research by investigating how the media cover political elites in office. As noted above, very few women have served as prime minister or premier in Canada; thus, much of what we know about how the media cover women political elites is based on party leadership candidates or leaders of electorally uncompetitive political parties. Therefore, the sudden increase of women in the premier’s office since 2010 provides us with an opportunity to study how political elites are gendered in the media in two unique ways: by examining them while they are in office and by examining them at the provincial rather than federal level. Doing so fills a major gap in the literature since this marks the first chance to study how the media gender women who lead governments in Canada.

Using the framework set out above, we investigate how media coverage varies for women in the premier’s office compared with that for men in the premier’s office in terms of volume, content and tone. Our case study is based on three hypotheses:

1. Women premiers will be less prominently covered than their peers who are men (volume).
2. The coverage of women premiers will vary systematically from that of premiers who are men by subject and policy area, with women tied more often to “soft” issues (content).
3. The tone of coverage of women premiers will be more negative than the tone of coverage about premiers who are men (tone).

In each case, the null hypothesis – that there is no relationship between the gender of the premier and the media coverage – is compelling. Although evidence shows that women political elites used to receive less coverage than men, more recent studies show that this is often no longer the case (Goodyear-Grant 2013; Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010). Notably, there is no plausible reason to believe that this would be the case for sitting premiers outside of, perhaps, their gender. Furthermore, the provinces are constitutionally responsible for most “soft” policy areas that Canadians care deeply about, such as health care and education. Thus, though evidence shows that women’s political coverage focuses more on these soft issues than does men’s, it would be difficult for media coverage of men in the premier’s office to avoid these subjects. And it might be surprising to find systematic gender differences in the tone of the coverage that premiers receive, in part because research shows that most political news stories are neutral in tone (Goodyear-Grant 2013) and in part because government popularity can change considerably over time. Thus, premiers could have a substantial number of both positive and negative stories published about them. Given these things,
evidence confirming the three hypotheses outlined above speaks powerfully to the continued gendered nature of political news. Conversely, their rejection would also tell us something about gender and political elites, and more specifically political leaders, in a country where women in leadership positions have become more common.3

Case Study
Our case studies investigated all of the online media coverage of the first year of government for two premiers in each of three of Canada’s largest provinces: Progressive Conservative Jim Prentice and New Democrat Rachel Notley in Alberta; Liberals Dalton McGuinty and Kathleen Wynne in Ontario; and Liberals Gordon Campbell and Christy Clark in British Columbia. The selection of these six cases follows a matched comparison strategy. In each of the three provinces under study, we selected one premier who was a woman and one premier who was a man during a relatively short time period from 2010 to 2016. This time period is important since women were almost entirely excluded from executive office at the provincial level between the early 1990s and 2010. Doing so allowed us to compare the three women leaders to their male counterparts with a measure of control for differences across provinces as well as differences among the major news sources that we chose in each one. These pairs allowed us to assess if the first year of coverage for a premier varied by their selection mechanism. Notley is the only woman premier selected to that office first by a general election; every other woman premier was first selected through an intraparty process while her party held the government. In contrast, most men were selected as premier via a general election; Prentice was one of the few in a powerful province who was not.4 Notably, both Notley and Clark are the second women premiers in their respective provinces. Approximately twenty years passed between the selection of the first and second women premiers in British Columbia, but a much shorter time lag existed between the first woman premier in Alberta and Notley’s selection (approximately fourteen months).

Method
The first step in our analysis was to gather all of the potentially relevant news articles. Using Canadian Newsstand Complete, we gathered every news story that contained each premier’s name during the first twelve months in office, starting from the day that each was sworn into office, published online in the Globe and Mail, the National Post, and the newspaper with the largest daily circulation in that premier’s province.5 We selected this time period deliberately since we expected that variations in the context faced by each premier should moderate over the course of a year in office, increasing the generalizability of the findings across provincial contexts. Importantly, each of these papers also has considerable online reach: each of the largest dailies not only has the largest conventional circulation but also the most followers on Facebook or Twitter compared with other print-based publications and television outlets such as CTV, CBC, and Global. In addition, evidence suggests that each publication reflects the hybrid media environment since the online coverage of these premiers includes, at least at times, reports about how they or their actions have been viewed on social media (see Gerson 2015).6 In Alberta, the largest daily is the Calgary Herald; in Ontario, the largest daily is the Toronto Star; and in British Columbia, the largest daily is the Vancouver Sun (see Newspapers Canada 2014).7 Our search yielded a total of 11,579 news articles, all from the digital media environment.8 Articles were coded for date of publication, outlet, and first, second, and third mention of a person. Along with the number of overall articles, we used the first-mention variable to assess the prominence of each premier in articles.

We then used a quantitative dictionary-based content analysis tool, Lexiconcoder 3.0 (Daku, Soroka, and Young 2015) with two separate dictionaries for tone (Young and Soroka 2012) and topic (Albaugh, Sevenans, and Soroka 2013). Net tone is a composite score that captures the proportion of positive words less the proportion of negative words. This gives us an index that runs from −1 (all negative words) to 1 (all positive words) and should be interpreted as the ratio of positive to negative words.9 Scores closer to zero reflect coverage neutral in tone. Topic is a count of words related to nineteen policy domains, such as health, education, environment, and social welfare, inspired by the Policy Agendas Project (http://www.comparativeagendas.net/).

Findings
Our first hypothesis focuses on the prominence of coverage of provincial political elites as measured by the quantity of coverage of premiers. Table 5.1 presents the average number of news articles that premiers received during their first year in office. Prentice received, on average, the most coverage online, followed by McGuinty, then by Notley.10 If we consider our matched pairs, then we can see that in each province the men premiers received
significantly more articles on average than the women premiers ($p < .001$). Notley received the most coverage among the women, though it was less than that of fellow Alberta premier Prentice.

In terms of overall levels, then, there is some evidence that women premiers receive less digital coverage, though only when we consider it within a provincial context. These differences are largely reproduced across sources of publication. In each provincial newspaper, the woman premier consistently received fewer daily articles online than her male counterpart. The same was true in one of the national papers, the National Post. The only exception was the Globe and Mail, in which the two women premiers received average daily counts of digital coverage not statistically distinguishable from those of their male provincial counterparts. Only Wynne received significantly less than McGuinty in the Globe and Mail, reproducing her overall low level of online coverage in contrast to that of McGuinty across news sources. This is noteworthy since Wynne is the first out sexual minority selected as a premier in Canada. This gap was by far the largest of any pair: Wynne’s coverage varied from 3.4 to 6.3 fewer average articles a day compared with McGuinty’s coverage. Gaps for the other two pairs were smaller in their local papers and the National Post, ranging from 1.3 to 3.0 articles per day.

Prominence can be measured by more than simply the quantity of articles published online. We can also look at the amount of coverage that leaders received over time during the first year of their mandate. As might be expected, there are peaks and declines in coverage corresponding to events that bring a premier into online news. The two most dramatic spikes were for Notley and Prentice, each of whom received a large amount of online coverage at the beginning and end of the first year in office. The spike for Notley at the beginning of her mandate can also be observed, though to a lesser extent, for Campbell and McGuinty. Prentice’s late spike corresponded to Notley’s win and his announcement of his resignation as party leader and reflected the large media interest in the change of power in Alberta after more than forty years of Progressive Conservative governance.

We can further test prominence with two other indicators: article length and placement of the leader’s name in the article (e.g., whether the premier is mentioned first). Table 5.1 provides this information. When we considered word count, no clear gender pattern emerged. Overall word count was similar between the men and women premiers, and differences between the matched pairs were not in a consistent direction. Consistent with our expectations, Wynne was covered in significantly fewer words than McGuinty despite her having inherited several difficult files from his government; Notley was covered in significantly more words than Prentice, consistent with expectations grounded in her electoral victory. In terms of first mentions, women premiers seem to have had a slight advantage since they received 81 percent of first mentions compared with 76 percent among male premiers. However, this difference broke down among the matched pairs. The Ontario pair largely drove the difference: McGuinty received the fewest first mentions (71 percent), and Wynne received the most (85 percent) of all premiers. This pattern was largely reproduced if we consider the pairs by news source.

**Table 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prominence and tone of news coverage by premier and gender</th>
<th>Average N of stories daily</th>
<th>Average word count</th>
<th>% first mention</th>
<th>Net tone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men premiers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell (BC)</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>Clark (BC)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice (AB)</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Notley (AB)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGuinty (ON)</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Wynne (ON)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Women premiers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell (BC)</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>708</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice (AB)</td>
<td>774</td>
<td>745</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGuinty (ON)</td>
<td>653</td>
<td>771</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>% first mention</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell (BC)</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice (AB)</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGuinty (ON)</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Net tone</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campbell (BC)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prentice (AB)</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGuinty (ON)</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All pairs of premiers are statistically significant from each other at the 99.9 percent level unless indicated with +.
Overall, then, it appears that men premiers received more articles in the digital media environment but were not necessarily covered in more depth or placed more prominently within articles than women premiers. Furthermore, men's advantage in terms of numbers of articles held only within a provincial context. This means that the conventional expectation that women in politics receive less attention or coverage than men does not hold for women in executive office in Canada, at least with respect to the content that these media outlets were publishing online. Instead, when women are heads of governments, they are covered as such, at least in terms of volume. This mirrors results found in other contexts, notably coverage of Hillary Clinton's front-running candidacy in the 2008 Democratic primary (Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010).

If men received somewhat more digital coverage, then it is useful to consider whether this coverage was also more positive. Table 5.1 also provides the net tone for each premier in our study. Overall, this online coverage tended to be relatively neutral (i.e., close to zero), though it appears that women's overall coverage was almost twice as positive. Men's coverage, on average, contained about 6 percent more positive words than negative words, whereas women's coverage was almost 10 percent more positive than negative ($p < .001$). If we consider the matched comparisons, then this also holds for two of the three cases. Prentice received about 6 percent more positive words, whereas Notley received over 12 percent. The difference in British Columbia was even greater, with Campbell just shy of 6 percent and Clark at almost 16 percent.

The case that does not hold is Ontario, where McGuinty (.051) received online coverage almost twice as positive as that of Wynne (.028). She presents an interesting case for our analysis as the first openly lesbian premier in Canada. Our argument about the potential "normalization" of women in politics should be less likely to hold for Wynne given her "first" status as well as how leaders' gender can intersect with their sexual orientation. In the previous subsection, we noted that in this digital media environment Wynne was the least-covered woman premier and the fifth least covered overall. Although she was the most likely to be mentioned first in the article, she tended to receive considerably fewer words and fewer articles. Her difference from the other two women premiers, as well as from the men premiers, was even more obvious with respect to tone, for she received the most neutral coverage by far. A number of factors might explain this beyond Wynne's sexual orientation, including the length of time that the Liberal government had been in office; arguably, though, many of these factors should also have applied to Clark. More research (and more LGBTQ politicians) are required before we can fully assess how sexual orientation affects the coverage that women and men in politics receive.

The relatively positive coverage of the two heterosexual women premiers runs counter to the general hypothesis in the literature. This coverage might have been driven initially by highlighting the novelty or importance of the premiers' gender early in their mandates. Figure 5.1 provides the net tone over the first year in office of each premier.

For four of the six premiers, their online news coverage became more negative over the course of their first year in office. Recall that the literature predicts that women premiers should be covered more negatively. Our findings do not clearly support this prediction. Only one premier, Wynne, fits this prediction: she received the most negative coverage of all the premiers, and this trend of negative coverage was steady over time. Four of the other premiers—two women and two men—saw their coverage become steadily more negative over time, though on average their coverage remained positive or neutral at the end of their first year in office. McGuinty was the only premier who saw his online news coverage become more positive over time.

Tone, then, fails to conform to our hypothesis for two of the three women premiers. Interestingly, the hypothesis does conform for Wynne; although we cannot confirm this with these data, it is noteworthy that she is the only woman premier who is also a sexual minority.

Our final analysis considers the policy domains most often linked to each premier. As indicated, past gender and politics research suggests that women candidates are most often linked to so-called soft issues such as health care and education. The extent to which this holds for women in elected offices in general, and in executive positions in particular, is less clear. When we further consider the provinces, largely responsible for such issues (and without jurisdiction over many "hard" issues such as foreign policy), we can expect coverage of every premier to be skewed toward soft issues regardless of gender.

Table 5.2 provides the average policy mentions per digital article for each premier, organized by province to facilitate our matched comparisons. Not surprisingly, local and provincial politics topped the list as the policy area most often mentioned in each article, with macroeconomics following at a close second. Articles about women premiers were also more likely to focus on these two topics than was the news coverage of their male peers. Larger
gender differences appeared for policy domains most often associated with women in politics, education, and health care. Contrary to expectations, these topics were much less likely to be mentioned in online news in association with women premiers. The difference was particularly stark for health care, with articles on average containing one mention for women and over three mentions for men. In contrast, masculine domains such as energy, and to a lesser extent labour and transportation, were more often associated with women premiers. The only other notable difference was with the environment, about twice as many mentions for women premiers (especially for Notley) than for men.

What do these differences tell us? They suggest that women in the highest positions of power do not conform to expectations that they are more often covered in terms of social or “soft” policy areas. This might be partly because premiers are responsible for a host of policy areas, and candidates can either choose or be selected to specialize in certain policy domains that reflect their gender. Yet the differences that do emerge in coverage also suggest that women in power might be more hesitant to put traditionally women-centred policy domains – such as health care – on the media agenda. Or women premiers might not get the credit for policy innovations in more stereotypically feminine policy domains precisely because they are expected to be more competent with these policies than their male peers. Another explanation rests with governance decisions that women in executive offices make that their male peers do not. Alberta is a good example. Prentice might have been covered more in terms of health care and education precisely because his government proposed cuts to these social programs to deal with a budgetary deficit. Notley’s government, in contrast, chose not to cut these programs, and that decision might have led the media to deem these topics less newsworthy. That said, whether these differences result from choices by the leader about what to focus on or choices by the media about what to cover (or both) cannot be assessed without our data. Future research could probe all of these potential explanations to determine which one has the most support.

Political Elites in Canada in the Digital Age
What has this chapter told us about the coverage of women premiers in Canada, and what can we learn about gender and the digital media environment from these results? After all, most of what we know about media and women candidates and party leaders focuses on the federal level in the 1990s and early 2000s, predating both the digital media environment and the increase in women political elites at the provincial level. Our chapter thus provides a test of this literature at the provincial level in a time period when women in political leadership roles have become more common, though still far from equal with men.

We find that men in the premier’s office receive more coverage than their women peers, but this is the case only when we draw intraprovincial comparisons. That said, there does not appear to be a national trend showing that, across the three large provinces discussed here, men are systematically covered more frequently than women. Similarly, there is no evidence to show that women premiers are disadvantaged in terms of length or prominence of coverage. Thus, our results run contrary to some observations but confirm others generated from women who seek executive offices elsewhere (see Miller, Peake, and Boulton 2010).

Contrary to expectations, women premiers are covered more positively by the media during their first year in office than are men. It is not clear why, though perhaps the three women premiers in question here have garnered advantageous coverage because of their novelty. After all, though Clark and Notley were both the second women to head governments in their respective provinces, Clark was the first to do so in British Columbia in decades, and Notley’s government was the first to defeat a long-standing political dynasty in Alberta. However, Wynne’s coverage does not fit this narrative. Wynne certainly fits the “first” frame that dominates much of the coverage of women in political media, for she is both the first woman and the first sexual minority to lead the government in Ontario. Yet her coverage is less positive than that of any of her peers. This study is limited; although we can identify this pattern, it remains unclear why it exists. Perhaps Wynne’s more negative coverage reflects her party’s long tenure in government, for the Liberals have governed in Ontario since 2003. If that is the case, then it raises the question of why Clark’s online coverage did not show a comparable pattern, for the Liberals have governed in British Columbia since 2001.

Gender differences, or the lack thereof, in the topics associated with men and women in the premier’s office also run contrary to expectations. Women are no more likely than men to be associated with “soft” issues such as health care and education. This is not surprising perhaps given the constitutional roles that provincial governments play in Canada. That said, our results suggest that a government leader’s agency adds a dimension to the literature on gender and media political coverage that might not have been considered much before. Because women in Canada are so rarely premiers or prime
ministers, research to date has not needed to address how their governance choices have affected their media coverage. Perhaps one reason why women premiers are less likely than their male peers to be mentioned in reports about health care or education is that women are less likely to cut these programs when they lead these governments. This analysis does not permit us to explicitly test this assertion, and this is an avenue for future research.

This study is limited in a number of other ways. Not all news stories published online are created equal, and the measures and methods used here are blunt. Certainly, gender bias would have to be strong to show up so consistently in the volume, tone, and topics covered in news reports about premiers in their first year of office. Indeed, as noted above, each of the three null hypotheses is arguably as compelling as the research hypotheses posed above. Because these measures are so blunt, they are likely to miss more subtle forms of gendered coverage that we know persist for women in politics in Canada and elsewhere. A comparable quantitative analysis of ostensibly gender-neutral concepts such as competence, cooperation, and competition might find gender differences that our analysis does not, and a more nuanced analysis is required to elucidate how each provincial context shapes the coverage of women and men in the premier’s office.

Similarly, it is not surprising that blatant sexism is not obviously included in online news reports, for social forces in society and journalism alike have already rendered that unacceptable (Goodyear-Grant 2013). This suggests that more established news norms – specifically, the norm established in The Canadian Press Stylebook that journalists review content to ensure that the words and frames used to describe women are the same as those used to describe men – have been integrated into online news (see Chadwick 2013). It remains unclear, though, how much of the difference in this news coverage of women premiers now is a result of the changing media environment rather than changes in society, particularly with respect to women in the political executive, since Canada had so few women in these positions prior to 2010. And we cannot know from this study how sexism in online news percolates through reader comments posted with the article online or on social media or if negative coverage that women in politics or the premier’s office receive is structured, at least in part, by potential hostility from new areas such as social media. We cannot know from these data how women political elites use social media to strategically disseminate information, especially photos and videos of events, nor can we know how the media choose to use this information, especially if they are constrained in terms of time and resources. Similarly, we cannot know how voters integrate this unfiltered information from elites into evaluations of leaders crucial to voting in elections.

We also cannot know from this analysis how women political elites deal with gender bias and sexism that occur in social media or comments on online news stories. Anecdotally, it is known that social media are more hostile for women elites than for male elites. Notley had to take to Facebook to ask that people stop using pornographic language in their posts on her page. It is plausible that women political elites spend considerable resources and staff hours moderating their social media pages, not unlike how the Guardian (Gardiner et al. 2016) reports having had to moderate its comments section. The implication is twofold. First, it means that women political elites need to dedicate resources to moderating online spaces that their male peers can use on other things, such as constituency service, campaigns, or outreach. Second, if political elites have to moderate their online spaces, then they might be deleting comments that contain, or blocking users who engage in, profanity, violence, sexism, or other personal attacks. Does this constitute censorship, or do political elites have the right to moderate their own online spaces?

Clearly, more research is required. Yet we can conclude, based on these results, that as political leaders women premiers are not symbolically annihilated now as women in politics were in the past. Instead, they face new challenges in the digital media environment, the full extent of which is not yet known.

NOTES
1 When we refer to “the media” in this chapter, we typically mean “mainstream news media outlets” unless otherwise noted.
2 In contrast, typical “hard” issues include the economy and taxes, though some of this difference is arguably the result of the issues that leaders choose to emphasize in their campaigns (Goodyear-Grant 2013).
3 Little in the existing literature leads us to predict that the digital media environment would create differently gendered patterns in media coverage. Given that, and the fact that analyses of women in the premier’s office are new because of the small number of women premiers, we hold with hypotheses derived from the literature on more conventional media coverage.
4 These factors justify the inclusion of Prentice in the study even though he did not serve a full year in office as premier of Alberta (September 2014 to May 2015).
5 Canadian Newsstand Complete provides full-text articles published by the newspapers that we use here. For more information, see https://library.ucalgary.ca/404?destination=search-collections/newspapers/canadian-newspapers.
6 A more detailed analysis of how online news coverage approaches social media representations of premiers is beyond the scope of this study. However, we argue that our exclusive use of all online articles from these newspapers should provide a good lens through which to view how premiers are presented in a hybrid media environment (see Chadwick 2013).

7 To do this, we created a program that would download (in a .txt file) every article found for each premier during the first year in office for each publication from Canadian Newsstand Complete. We would like to thank Dylan Dobbyn for his assistance with the program code.

8 Note that a small number of articles not clearly related to politics were eliminated from the total sample (e.g., condolences in an obituary).

9 This is the same formula used by Soroka (http://www.sansoroka.com/observatory -methodology.html).

10 This is remarkable given that Prentice did not serve a full year in office (see note 4).

11 For an exception, see Goodyear-Grant’s (2013) discussion of party press releases.

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From Elitism to Idealization: The Representation of Premiers in Social Media Videos

J.P. Lewis and Stéphanie Yates

Provincial premiers are powerful actors; their position allows them to dominate cabinet and caucus. Indeed, though premiers have a constitutional standing within their jurisdiction similar to that of prime ministers, the scale of the politics related to their position presents even more opportunity to centralize power (Dunn 1995; White 2005; Young and Morley 1983). Still, the threat of the autocratic premier is often overshadowed by the attention paid to centralizing forces at the federal level in the Prime Minister’s Office (Ancoin 2012; Savoie 1999; Smith 1970). Regardless of where the academic and media attention has settled, the power of a premier is indisputable. Although this power gives premiers the ability to implement their policy agendas, the optics can be politically damaging. One way to combat perceptions of autocratic tendencies is through public image management, a function that has grown in importance since the advent of television (Delacourt 2013; Marland 2016). Through branding, premiers can try to convey an image of openness with and proximity to their constituents. Twenty-first-century technology allows them to do so in ways unimaginable only a few decades ago. A technological advance that stands out is video, which can be done at low cost and easily shared through social media. It gives premiers a direct route to influencing public opinion on policies and programs.

The use of social media videos by premiers began in about 2007 with one of the first premier videos posted on social media: a speech from Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach. At the time, a member of Stelmach’s staff observed that it was a mechanism for communicating directly with people (Johnsude 2007). Five years later Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall’s staff uploaded a video of humorous outtakes from his election campaign commercials. The clip quickly went viral, reaching 7,000 views in an afternoon. Wall’s staff presented that initiative as a way to provide a window to a politician’s personality (Couture 2012). The release of videos by Canadian politicians on
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