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DiversityLeads: Women in Politics

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### Background

In spite of strides made in representation of women among political candidates and elected officials at all levels of government, barriers remain. Our research project – DiversityLeads – tracked the representation of women at the municipal, provincial and federal level of government and provided an in-depth analysis of the factors shaping their participation and success at the micro (individual) meso (organizational) and macro (societal level). Our data indicates that in the elected sector, 20% of the municipalities analyzed had more than 40% women in their city councils, and all had at least 20% women. Women are more likely to be elected as school trustees (59%) than federally (37%) or provincially (32.4%). More than 40% of the trustees in all of the school boards analyzed were women, with 83% of the school boards having a majority of women trustees.

Women remain significantly underrepresented in politics worldwide, and Canada has made less progress than many countries, ranking 63rd out of 193 in terms of women represented in national parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017). There has been notable efforts to advance female parity in cabinet office – such as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s appointment of women among 15 cabinet posts, rationalizing gender parity “Because it’s 2015” (Ditchburn, 2015). However, diverse women are still under-represented in the political spaces. For example in the City of Toronto, where 50% of the population is racialized, there is only one racialized woman on city council.

### Stereotypes

The broader literature on women in leadership reveals many ongoing challenges. Women are socialized away from leadership positions through deep-rooted systemic barriers and practices, resulting in a confidence gap between men and women that is evident from an early age (Hall, 2012; Cukier et al., forthcoming). Leadership images are highly gendered (Schein’s, 1996) and people generally “think-manager, think-male,” and that men tend to encourage an all-boys club (Gartzia, Ryan, Balluerka & Artizeta, 2012). Performance appraisals for women are more likely to use words like bossy, abrasive, strident, and aggressive when they lead; words like emotional and irrational describe their behaviors when they object (Snyder, 2014).

### The Pipeline and Institutional Challenges

Previous research has helped us understand the political pipeline for women in politics in Canada and the structural factors influencing the proportion of women who run for office, are elected to office, and who occupy leadership roles as cabinet ministers or leaders of parties. Researchers say it is not unusual to see more women in tough races, with these contests sometimes described as “lost-cause ridings” (Bashevkin, 2009). Thomas’ 2013 study analyzed data from federal elections between 2004 and

2011 and found that women were more likely than men to run in ridings with little prospect of success, or to be “sacrificial lambs” in Canadian elections.

### Barriers and Need for Greater Support Systems

There has been much written about factors affecting women’s individual choices and the challenges political office represents both in terms of entering and staying. Recent events have emboldened to talk openly about the barriers that they experienced, from everyday sexism and micro-aggressions to harassment and even violence they experienced. Research has focused on institutional barriers that exist in, for example, nomination processes, financing of candidates, mentoring and support.

### Media

Media is also a factor on women’s success within political systems as media both shapes and reflects culture, attitudes, and values, which in turn influence behavior. There is considerable evidence of the prevalence of gendered news media coverage in North America generally, and in Canada more specifically (Bashevkin, 2009; Goodyear-Grant, 2013; Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). Gendered news media coverage can create barriers to women seeking and maintaining political office and impact their willingness to run in the first place. Once she has decided to run, news coverage can undesirably influence a woman’s chance of winning and maintaining elected office (Goodyear-Grant, 2013, p. 7).

### Recommendations

We believe the following recommendations will assist in making even greater strides in terms of representation of women among political candidates and elected officials at all levels of government:

- Build the pipeline particularly targeting diverse women in politics (racialized and indigenous women for example) with programs aimed at engaging them at an early age in electoral politics. Political party’s need to be engaged within this process as their coordinated efforts are instrumental in achieving greater representation of women in the political process. The current variation of results can be attributed to the lack of concrete mechanisms in place.
- Establish targets for the proportion of diverse female candidates and ensure that they are well represented in winnable ridings. In the past women have been appointed in ridings that are not competitive for the Party, or where they are placed as “sacrificial lambs”.
- Provide institutional women in politics providing same consideration for family supports as in other sectors (child care, eldercare, etc.). With changing demographics of parliamentarians, it is important to pursue parental leave programs that support political service.
- Strengthen support for women’s caucus and women’s voices at committees on significant policy issues.
- Strengthen real gender plus analysis of all budgets and policies including health, justice, innovation, foreign policy and trade rather than traditional portfolios (status of women).
- Provide more profile and “stories” of women’s pathways to political success.

Appendix: Background on the Diversity Institute



**ABOUT RYERSON UNIVERSITY'S  
DIVERSITY INSTITUTE**

We undertake research on diversity in the workplace to improve practices in organizations. We work with organizations to develop customized strategies, programming, and resources to promote new, interdisciplinary knowledge and practice about diversity with respect to gender, race/ethnicity, Indigeneity, ability, and sexual orientation.

We collaborate with industry, government, not-for-profits and academics to:

- Research existing practices and evaluate programs;
- Explore barriers to full participation in the workplace;
- Develop policies and programs to help organizations attract, promote and retain underrepresented groups; and
- Provide customized training to support the development of diversity strategies.

Using an ecological model of change, the Diversity Institute is driving social innovation across sectors. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results.

**THE BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY**

Promoting diversity in the workplace has numerous social and economic advantages for organizations. Effectively managing diversity enables organizations to:

- Overcome the skills shortage;
- Respond to increasingly diverse markets;
- Increase innovation and creativity;
- Increase employee satisfaction and reduce turnover; and
- Mitigate legal and reputational costs.

**CURRENT PROJECTS**

**Social Innovation in Human Rights, Equity and Diversity, Complex System and Discourses of Change:** This four-year project, funded by a SSHRC Insight Grant, builds on previous research in social innovation and social movements to examine discourses used by social actors in advancing Human Rights, Equity and Diversity (HRED) in the Canadian context. The study will provide new knowledge on processes that achieve social innovation, and alternatively, impede it, by examining prevailing discursive practices and strategies among different organizations and other actors in this domain.

**Bridging the Technology Skills Gap: New Evidence-Based Approaches to Leveraging Diversity and Inclusion:** In this three-year, Ontario Research Fund: Research Excellence project led by Dr. Wendy Cukier, scholars, industry and community partners will examine the discourses and data related to the skills gap and challenges that women, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous people face in the Information and Communications Technology sector. This project seeks to develop policies, practices, and technologies to expand the talent pool and advance inclusion.

**Ensuring Equitable Access to Work Integrated Learning in Ontario:** This three-year, Ontario Human Capital Research and Innovation Fund project is evaluating and researching the barriers to work-integrated learning (WIL) for post-secondary students in Ontario through a series of interviews with institutional and employer stakeholders, analysis of national student surveys, and surveys of student participation in WIL.



**Social Mobility of Immigrants to Peel Region Across the Life Course** is a two-year project designed to expand current understanding of the immigrant experience and to inform policy and services in Peel Region. Working alongside the Region of Peel and community-based partners, this multi-stakeholder project uses interviews, surveys and workshops to explore factors affecting the social mobility of immigrants.

**Advancing Diverse Leadership** is a partnership with the Canadian Women's Foundation and builds on previous Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) - funded research to analyze cross-sector leadership in the Greater Toronto and Montreal Areas. It will examine trends over time and share findings to promote diversity and inclusion among senior leadership.

**TD-DiverseCity onBoards** is a partnership with TD Bank to do a nation-wide survey of diversity on public, not-for-profit, and corporate boards. By analyzing publicly-available data and interviews, this project enhances understanding of the factors involved in increasing board diversity.

**Newcomer Entrepreneurship Hub:** In partnership with Scadding Court Community Centre (SCCC), NEH provides entrepreneurship, settlement and wrap-around services that prepare participants to run a business in Canada. The Diversity Institute will assess the impact of the program on the economic integration of vulnerable newcomers.

**We-Hub Toronto:** In partnership with SCCC, the Women Entrepreneurship Hub will test a model that provides access to business testing, training, a wide network of partners and supportive services for a community of newcomer and racialized women.

**Recess Project Canada:** Founded by Ashoka Fellow Dr. Lauren McNamara, the Recess Project simultaneously studies and actively addresses social barriers that children face on school playgrounds. The project has worked with over 2,000 children by coordinating activities that create opportunities for all to feel included.

**Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT)** is an action-research project funded by the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth which aims to bridge the employment gap for recent graduates, including youth from diverse groups and social science and humanities graduates. ADaPT examines the effectiveness of hands-on workshops in digital literacy, communications, business financials, career skills, and more, along with an opportunity to compete for paid internships.

**Magnet Export Business Portal** provides a platform for registered businesses to receive free customized updates and information about export-related services, funding, resources and opportunities. The Diversity Institute has partnered with Magnet to offer project coordination and research support. <https://magnet.today/export-business-portal/>

**Summer Company:** is an entrepreneurship program supported by the Ministry of Economic Development and Growth. As one of the hosts, Ryerson gives youth between ages 15 and 29 who are returning to school in the fall the opportunity to develop a business plan and launch their own business with the support of experienced mentors. The program assesses the viability of entrepreneurship as a pathway for youth financial literacy and empowerment.

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### Appendix: Backgrounder

For over 15 years the Ted Rogers School of Management's Diversity Institute (DI) at Ryerson University has been an authoritative voice and thought leader in interdisciplinary knowledge and practice of diversity with respect to gender, ethnicity, abilities, and sexual orientation with a focus on evidence based strategies.

### Wendy Cukier, MA, MBA, PhD, DU (Hon) LLD (Hon) M.S.C.

#### Professor, Entrepreneurship and Strategy at Ted Rogers School of Management Director, Diversity Institute

Wendy is the founder of DI is coauthor of the best-seller Innovation Nation is an internationally recognized expert on innovation processes. She has received many awards for her leadership - a YWCA Woman of Distinction, one of the top 25 Women of Influence, one of 100 Alumni who shaped the Century (at the University of Toronto), recipient of the City of Toronto's Bob Marley award and most recently, winner of the Black Business Professional Association's Harry Jerome Award for Diversity. The Diversity Institute team includes representation from across Diversity groups and a commitment to inclusive research approaches – “nothing about us, without us” and a focus on the assets diversity offers.

### Ruby Latif, BAH, MA, DocSci Candidate (abd)

Ruby is pursuing a Doctorate of Social Science at Royal Roads University and has experience working in all three levels of government (federal, provincial and municipal). She has also worked on numerous political campaigns. Her work at the Diversity Institute, her work focuses on breaking down barriers to underrepresented groups in leadership positions, media representations of women and visible minorities, and creating partnerships to advance diversity & inclusion initiatives. Ruby is a former Young Women of Distinction recipient, a Zonta Young Women in Public Affairs Award recipient and has been named one of the most influential South Asian Canadians by South Asian Generations Next magazine.