The Origins of Gender-Targeted Public Finance Measures: The Case of New Brunswick, Canada

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Abstract: In recent years, there has been growing interest in policies that offer financial incentives to political parties to nominate women. Under what circumstances do political parties agree to adopt financial incentives for women’s representation? In this article, we conduct a feminist historical institutionalist case study of the adoption of gender-targeted public finance in the Canadian province of New Brunswick in 2017. We draw on a combination of: direct personal experience advocating for financial incentives for women candidates; interviews with party insiders, policymakers and actors within feminist organisations; and documentary evidence. The results have implications for understanding the potential for success of efforts to adopt financial incentives in other jurisdictions.

Keywords: gender-targeted public finance, women’s representation

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Over the past three decades, at least thirty countries have adopted financial incentives for political parties to increase women’s representation—or gender-targeted public funding (GTPF)—as part of their political finance policies (Ohman, 2018). However, we know relatively little about why governments adopt these policies (Borges et al., 2020; Childs, 2013; Feo and Piccio, 2020a; Muriaas et al., 2020). What explains the adoption of these measures?

In this article, we conduct a case study of the adoption of a GTPF policy in the Canadian province of New Brunswick. In 2017, New Brunswick passed a law that applied gender weights to a long-standing per-vote subsidy for political parties to promote the nomination of women as candidates. This policy is the first of its kind in Canada, but it has garnered considerable attention as a model for Canadian federal politics (Standing Committee on the Status of Women 2019: 46-48). Single-case research is particularly appropriate given the relatively limited research on the adoption of GTPF (Borges et al., 2020; Childs, 2013; Feo and Piccio, 2020a). We trace the adoption of GTPF in New Brunswick using a unique combination of sources that include participant-observation, interviews, and documentary evidence.

We develop a theoretical framework to analyse this case study that draws on historical institutionalism (Mahoney and Thelen, 2009; Pierson, 2004) and feminist institutionalism (Krook, 2009; Mackay et al., 2010). We argue that GTPF emerged in New Brunswick due to a combination of institutional legacies, perceived electoral incentives, and pressure from feminist actors. The existing institutional framework—particularly the single-member plurality electoral system and a per-vote subsidy for political parties—shaped party and public officials’ views of “reasonable options” for addressing women’s under-representation through public policy. Neither gender quotas, nor proportional representation were “viable” policy alternatives, but GTPF was a relatively minor tweak to the existing institutional framework. Feminist activists, who observed repeated failures of feminist electoral reform proposals, also shifted their efforts from changing the electoral system to the adoption of GTPF. After the New Brunswick Liberals’ victory in the 2014 provincial election, they faced pressure from feminist actors inside and outside the party to nominate more women and perceived electoral incentives to court progressive urban voters sympathetic to women’s representation. When the New Brunswick Liberals, in concert with their federal counterparts, decided to set up a commission to examine electoral reform in 2015, they started a sequence of events that led to the introduction of GTPF in 2017.

**Theoretical Framework**

Given the relatively limited research on the adoption of GTPF policies, we employ a feminist historical institutionalist framework to understand the adoption of GTPF. Historical institutionalism offers an account of how ideas, institutions, and interests shape political outcomes. Through this lens, we view the adoption of GTPF as a consequence of long-standing institutional legacies of past reforms to electoral and political finance laws, the development of “financial incentives” as a policy idea, and a contingent sequence of “small events” that began with the election of the New Brunswick Liberal Party in September 2014 (Pierson, 2004). There was no single “critical juncture” that led to the adoption of financial incentives (Capoccia and Keleman, 2007).

Feminist institutionalism explains what occurred in this sequence of small events. We take the adoption of GTPF as a somewhat analogous case to gender quotas, given the formal institutional recognition of gender difference and the gendered patterns of responses to remedies for gender inequalities. Krook (2009) identifies four pre-existing explanations for the adoption of gender
quotas: pressure from women’s movements, the strategic advantages of quotas for political elites, shifting norms of equality and representation, and diffusion through international organizations and transnational networks. She argues that no single factor explains all the cases of quota adoption. Instead, these four factors work in complex causal sequences within a particular case. While GTPF measures are less controversial than gender quotas, we nonetheless find that explanations of the adoption of gender quotas and other representation policies apply to the adoption of GTPF (as do Feo and Piccio, 2020a).

In this case, we focus on four main factors that explain the adoption of GTPF:

(1) the legacy of past institutional choices around electoral and political finance laws, particularly the adoption of a single-member plurality electoral system, the inclusion of a per-vote subsidy to political parties in the province’s political finance regime, and electoral administrators’ decision to collect data on candidate gender;
(2) the repeated failures of political parties to follow-through on changing the electoral system;
(3) pressure from a small network of feminist organizations and activists for a remedy for women’s representation; and
(4) the Liberals’ perceived electoral incentives to adopt GTPF to follow-through on their promise to pursue electoral reform and to court “progressive voters” sympathetic to women’s representation.

This analysis demonstrates that the timing of financial incentives on the agenda in 2017 played a major role in the success of this proposal. It was the first time that GTPF emerged as an issue when the party in power faced pressure from feminist actors and perceived electoral incentives to court progressive voters by campaigning on increasing women’s representation simultaneously.¹

Although these four factors explain the decision to adopt GTPF, they do not necessarily explain the design of GTPF. Although a small network of feminist activists and organizations were successful in getting GTPF on the agenda, they had limited resources to pressure policy-makers. As a result, elected officials and bureaucrats designed the policy without consulting them. The resulting policy was a tweak to the pre-existing per-vote subsidy to political parties that counted votes cast for women 1.5 times votes cast for men in calculating each party’s share of the public money set aside for political parties. As we show, this weighted per-vote subsidy has so far had only a limited impact on the share of public funding that goes to political parties. In this respect, the New Brunswick case resembles other cases where political elites designed GTPF policies that were relatively toothless and uncontroversial under limited external pressure, such as Cabo Verde (Borges et al., 2020) or Italy (Feo and Piccio, 2020a).

**Varieties of Gender-Targeted Public Funding**

Past work classifies GTPF policies along two main dimensions. The first is their funding mechanisms. Ohman (2018: 18-25) identifies three main funding mechanisms, including (1) restricting public funding to parties that nominate a certain number of women or promote women’s

¹ It can sometimes be difficult to adjudicate between sincere and strategic reasons for adopting policies. Several interviewees inside and outside the Liberal Party suggested that Premier Gallant, along with several staff members, had personal commitments to trying to increase women’s representation. However, we place more emphasis on the strategic explanations because they help explain the increased importance to the Gallant Liberals of demonstrating their commitment to women’s representation after the 2014 election as opposed to before the 2014 election.
representation in other ways; (2) allocating public funding to parties based on the degree to which they nominate women; and (3) earmarking public funding for parties’ efforts to promote gender equality. The second dimension focuses on their goals. Feo and Piccio (2019) identify three varieties of GTPF based on how they aim to influence the activities of political parties – promoting women’s participation in politics, women’s candidacies, or women’s election.

New Brunswick’s GTPF policy allocates public funding to parties based the votes cast for men and women candidates. That is, it is an “allocation policy” (Ohman, 2018). The policy takes an existing public subsidy to political parties that allocates funding to parties out of a fixed “pot of money” (about 700,000 CAD) based on the votes cast for each party’s candidate in the last election. Before the GTPF policy, each party received a share of the pot that corresponded to their vote share in the last election. Under the GTPF policy, electoral administrators calculate a weighted vote share for each party in which votes cast for women candidates count 1.5 times votes cast for men candidates. For each party, this weighted vote share is the total number of votes cast for men running for that party plus 1.5 times votes cast for women running for that party divided by the total number of votes cast for men running across all parties plus the total number of votes cast for women running across all parties.² New Brunswick’s approach differs from allocation policies in other countries that provide a flat rate of public funding per woman nominated (such as Ethiopia, Romania, or South Korea) or elected (such as Chile or Croatia) in linking the subsidy to votes cast for women (Ohman, 2018: 21). To our knowledge, apart from New Brunswick, only Papua New Guinea uses a GTPF policy that links public funding to votes cast for women candidates, and it does so by allotting additional funding to parties for each woman who receives at least 10 percent of the vote (Ohman, 2018: 21).

New Brunswick’s policy aims to influence both the nomination and the election of women. The policy aims to influence the nomination of women by weighting votes cast for women more than votes cast for men in the funding formula. In principle, the policy also provides incentives for parties to nominate women in competitive or even safe districts. If parties nominate women candidates in seats where they are likely to receive more votes, then they receive a larger share of the per-vote subsidy than if they nominate women candidates in seats where they are likely to receive few votes.

Case Selection
Relatively few jurisdictions around the world have adopted public financial incentives for women candidates. Many of these jurisdictions are in the developing world (Kayuni and Muriaas, 2014; Ohman, 2018; Muriaas et al., 2020). Only six EU countries have adopted gender-targeted public funding for women candidates, all since 1999 (Feo and Piccio, 2020b: 9). However, we have relatively little understanding of how these policies were adopted (Borges et al. 2020; Feo and Piccio, 2020a). In such situations, it is often appropriate to start with a theory-building case study of a particular jurisdiction (George and Bennett, 2005).

Historically, New Brunswick is an unlikely case for the adoption of GTPF given its low levels of women’s representation, its fiscal constraints, its lack of party system pressures from left parties,

² The binary conception of gender in the GTPF legislation does not provide guidance on how to count non-binary candidates for the per-vote subsidy and may actually incentivise non-binary candidates to identify as men or women to ensure that their parties receive the per-vote subsidy. Future GTPF policies should pay attention to this problem.
and its relatively small number of feminist movement organizations (Everitt, 2013). However, during the 2010s, left parties, such as the social democratic NDP and the Greens, gained in support, and after the 2014 New Brunswick election, a small network of women began to mobilise to demand increased representation. These new developments help explain the adoption of GTPF. However, they also help explain the limitations of the policy.

[Figure 1 about here]

Figure 1 displays the percentage of women elected in New Brunswick from the date the first woman was elected to the province’s Legislative Assembly in 1967 to 2020. Even though the percentage jumped sharply in the 2018 and 2020 elections, the province lags behind most Canadian provinces and territories in electing women. As a result, New Brunswick’s adoption of GTPF is clearly not a function of the presence of a “critical mass” of women pushing for change from within.

The adoption of GTPF in New Brunswick is also surprising given the province’s economic challenges including low levels of economic development and an aging population that puts pressure on public finances. It is consequently an unlikely case for the adoption of a new spending programme. However, while these factors played a role in shaping the form of the GTPF, they did not prevent its adoption. Given the province’s fiscal constraints, it was appealing to policymakers to adopt a form of GTPF that did not increase the total amount of money paid to political parties.

The past weakness of left parties in New Brunswick have made it difficult for them to push for improvements in women’s representation. New Brunswick uses a single-member plurality electoral system. The Liberal and Progressive-Conservative (PC) parties are the only parties to have formed the government. Until 2018, – the first election after the adoption of GTPF – no left party had won more than one seat in the Legislative Assembly. As a result, left parties have been unable to pressure the two major parties to increase women’s representation, let alone adopt policies to guarantee or incentivise women’s representation (Everitt, 2013). However, this changed in the 2014 election campaign. In the years leading up to the 2014 campaign, the NDP regularly polled over 20 percent of the vote, which would have been an unprecedented breakthrough. In the 2014 election, the social democratic New Democratic Party (NDP) won a historically large share (13 percent) of the vote and the Green Party managed to elect its leader in Fredericton South. This competition from left contributed to the Liberals’ decision to court progressive voters by demonstrating its commitment to women’s representation.

Finally, New Brunswick’s feminist movement organizations are few in number and have limited resources to push for policy change (Everitt, 2013: 110-111). This changed somewhat in 2016 when a group of women, well-connected in business and politics, became concerned with the women’s lack of voice in the province and formed a new organization, Women for 50%, which advocated for each party to nominate parity slates. One of the founders became concerned when she attended the swearing-in ceremony for Members of the Legislative Assembly in 2014 and saw only six women “in a sea of men in suits” (Interview 50, 4 January 2019). She then began to reach out to 11 other influential women in the province to mobilise on this issue. This low level of representation became even more troubling as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a gender parity cabinet in 2015 and as Hillary Clinton lost the 2016 U.S. presidential election. While Women for 50% did not
advocate for GTPF, their activities contributed to increased attention to women’s representation among journalists and party insiders. If the resources available to feminist activists played a major role in explaining the adoption of GTPF, then we would expect other provinces to have adopted GTPF before New Brunswick did.

**Research Design**

For insight into the development of the GTPF proposal within the feminist movement, we draw on one author’s direct personal experience advocating for financial incentives in New Brunswick over fifteen years. Originally, this involved providing governments, parties and women’s advocacy organizations with academically informed arguments about the possibilities and impact of options for increasing women’s political engagement, including changing the electoral system. However, as time passed, she concluded that major system overhauls were unlikely and focused her efforts on GTPF. This experience enables a form of reflective participant observation that provides insight into the factors and environment that led to the adoption of this policy.

We supplement the participant-observation with 93 elite interviews with 70 party insiders, candidates, feminist activists and policymakers conducted by the other author. The interviewees include former staffers at the Premier’s Office, bureaucrats, feminist activists, and electoral reform commissioners who played important roles in the adoption of GTPF. These interviews were originally confidential and conducted as part of a broader project on gatekeeping in candidate selection. However, for the purposes of this article two interviewees from the Premier’s Office agreed to identify themselves by name.

Finally, where available, we review documentary evidence relating to the adoption of the GTPF in law in 2017. This documentary evidence includes political finance legislation from 1978 to 2017, the reports of electoral reform commissions, and the submission of the New Brunswick Women’s Council to the 2016-2017 Electoral Reform Commissions. We triangulate evidence from these three methodological approaches to trace the adoption of GTPF. Together, these sources show how institutional legacies, the failure of electoral system change, perceived electoral incentives to court progressive urban voters, and organised demands for increases in women’s representation contribute to the decision to adopt GTPF in 2017.

**Institutional Legacies and the Design of the GTPF Policy**

The legacies of past institutional decisions played a major role in the development of GTPF in New Brunswick. The first was the electoral system. In 1973, New Brunswick moved from a multi-member plurality electoral system to a single-member plurality electoral system. The electoral system shaped party actors’ views of possible options for increasing women’s representation. They believed it was not possible to have gender quotas in single-member districts and gravitated to alternative options. The second institutional legacy lies in political finance laws. In 1978, New Brunswick adopted political finance reforms that included, among other things, public funding for political parties (Mellon, 1991). Public funding depended on a per-vote subsidy creating a ready-made, uncontroversial vehicle for GTPF. The third institutional legacy was Elections New Brunswick’s – the provincial electoral management agency – decision to start collecting self-
reported data on candidate gender in 1995 (Landry, 1996). These data gave Elections New Brunswick the capacity to implement the GTPF policy with information already available.3

These institutional legacies led to the quick adoption of a GTPF in 2017. The GTPF tweaked the pre-existing per-vote subsidy, which counted each vote equally in assigning funding, by weighting votes cast for women 1.5 times votes cast for men. It did not require substantial changes to electoral or political finance laws that customarily would require lengthy consultation with caucus, other political parties, bureaucrats or the public. This made it appealing to a government looking for a quick “win” on the electoral reform file with only a year to go before the next election. Katie Davey, Special Advisor for Policy and Stakeholder Engagement in the Gallant Premier’s Office and chief advisor to the Premier in his capacity as Minister of Women’s Equality (2016-2018), noted that the financial incentives policy “doesn't fundamentally change the way the system actually works. It doesn't change the way we vote. It doesn't change the way parties do their thing…It wasn't like we had to spend weeks with the act. It was a tweak. It wasn't that difficult to draft” (Personal interview).4

GTPF as a Policy Alternative to Electoral System Reform
Canadians have debated moving from a single-member plurality electoral system to ranked ballots and/or a more proportional electoral system for decades (Cairns, 1968; Irvine, 1979). Although several federal and provincial governments held commissions on electoral reform between 2000 and 2020, none has abandoned a single-member plurality electoral system. Feminist scholars and activists have participated in these debates often favouring more proportional systems based on evidence that they elect more women than single-member plurality electoral systems (Law Commission of Canada, 2004; Everitt and Pitre, 2007). Past failed efforts at electoral reform not only led to the emergence of GTPF as a recognizable policy alternative, but also produced the motivation for feminist actors to pursue GTPF over other remedies for women’s representation, particularly electoral system change.

The idea of GTPF, or “financial incentives”, first emerged in 1991 in a research report on women’s representation for the federal Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing, or Lortie Commission (Brodie, 1991: 50). The Lortie Commission recommended GTPF in its final report in 1992, but the government did not adopt the policy. Since then, feminist academics and activists have repeatedly advocated for the adoption of GTPF (Everitt and Pitre 2007; Standing Committee on the Status of Women, 2019; Tremblay 2001, 2010), but policy-makers rarely showed interest in the proposal. To our knowledge, GTPF has only been seriously considered as a policy for increasing women’s representation three times in other Canadian jurisdictions. The first time was in Quebec in 2004-5, during a broader discussion of electoral reform that included a proposal to move to a mixed-member proportional representation system (Tremblay, 2010). In 2016, NDP MP Kennedy Stewart introduced a private member’s bill that would have penalised parties by reducing their reimbursement if there was more than a 10% difference in the number of male and female candidates on the party’s list of candidates for a general election. The bill was defeated 68-209.

3 Elections New Brunswick allowed candidates to identify as non-binary for the first time in the 2020 election. No candidates selected this “other” option, even though there was an openly non-binary candidate in the 2020 New Brunswick election.
4 We do not include dates for these interviews so that other comments from these individuals can remain confidential in other published work.
The third was in consultations conducted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women in 2019.

New Brunswick first considered GTPF in the mid-2000s. In 2003 PC Premier Bernard Lord announced the establishment the New Brunswick Legislative Democracy Commission (NBLDC). This nine person royal commission had the mandate to examine the state of democracy in the province and ways to improve representation through legislative and electoral reform. Lord appointed David McLaughlin, his former chief of staff, as the new Deputy Minister for the Commission and set up a government department with staff to support its work. Between January and October 2004, the commissioners held over 85 meetings with groups, associations, experts, and governments. Dr. Joanna Everitt, a professor of Political Science at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John and the province’s leading scholar on women and politics recommended GTPF along with electoral reform ideas in a presentation during the public hearings for the NBLDC. She also recommended it at a forum hosted by the New Brunswick Advisory Council on the Status of Women’s (NBACSW) in September 2004, though the NBACSW did not include this recommendation in its submission to the NBLDC. Dr. Everitt and Sonia Pitre, a PhD candidate at Laval University, also submitted an official report on women’s representation to the Commission. They recommended the adoption of a mixed-member plurality electoral system to increase the representation of women and other under-represented groups. However, they also noted:

> Past history in the province provides little evidence that parties have made such efforts on their own and there is little to suggest that simply creating new electoral institutions will change the province’s political culture … an alternative option is for it to create financial incentives in the form of additional government funding that encourage parties to meet representational targets. (Everitt and Pitre, 2007, 117)

The NBLDC tabled its final report and recommendations in December 2004 (NBLDC 2004). It recommended a GTPF policy that “would include an increase of the annual allowance to political parties by $1 per valid vote to any party in which women comprise at least 35 percent of the candidates in the preceding provincial election. This incentive would be reviewed once the New Brunswick legislature reaches a minimum of 45 percent women” (New Brunswick Legislative Democracy Commission, 2004: 101). The Lord Government did not respond to the NBLDC report until June 2006 (Government of New Brunswick, 2006). Although it accepted many of the report’s recommendations, it did not adopt GTPF. Instead, it left it to parties “to do their part” (Government of New Brunswick 2006, 21).

The PCs narrowly lost the 2006 provincial election to the Liberals, which left the decision on whether to proceed with the Commission’s recommendations to the new government. Chris Baker, Deputy Minister of Policy and Priorities Committee consulted Dr. Everitt about ways to enhance women’s representation in New Brunswick without going so far as reforming the electoral system. At that time, she recommended several reforms including the adoption of GTPF. The government’s research and policy unit had also floated financial incentives as a means of improving women’s electoral success. The Liberal government indicated that they planned to adopt a form of incentive in their June 2007 response to the NBLDC report. The response read:
Local riding associations will be encouraged to nominate women candidates in provincial elections through an augmented election expenses rebate (55% instead of 50% after meeting a minimum threshold of voter support). This incentive could also be implemented at the provincial level, if a political party meets or exceeds a minimum number of female candidates (20 out of 55, for example) and meets a minimum province-wide vote threshold. This will be implemented in time for the 2010 general election. (Government of New Brunswick, 2007: 32)

While the Liberal focus was on election expenses rebates and not on subsidies based on candidate votes, this would still have had the effect of encouraging parties to seek out and nominate more female candidates. However, pushback from women within the Liberal caucus and members of the NB Women’s Liberal Commission who felt it was patronizing and that other means could be adopted to improve women’s representation meant that the policy was not pursued further.

Between the fall of 2008 and the election in September 2010 Everitt continued to conduct workshops, give talks, and write opinion pieces for the media (Everitt 2010) about the challenges facing women seeking election in New Brunswick. One was a full day workshop given to Elections NB, the Women’s Policy Branch and members of the Executive Council (October 2008) and others were sponsored by the Advisory Council on the Status of Women (Fredericton and Saint John, Feb 2010), the Saint John Board of Trade (March 2010), and the New Brunswick Federation of Labour (March 2010). In all cases, she identified the nomination process as the most significant barrier facing women and recommended GTFP to encourage party gatekeepers to seek out women as candidates in winnable ridings without requiring a major overhaul of the system or forcing penalties on those parties who did not wish to move in this direction. However, neither of the major parties discussed efforts electoral reform as part of their election platforms during the 2010 New Brunswick election.

**The Gallant Liberals’ Adoption of GTFP**

A Liberal government under Premier Brian Gallant unexpectedly introduced GTFP legislation in spring 2017. Its decision to adopt this policy was the result of a sequence of small events that began with its election in 2014. That year, the provincial Liberal platform promised to examine a change in the electoral system and eliminate “barriers to entering politics for under-represented groups” (New Brunswick Liberal Association 2014, 37). The Liberals made these proposals during a time period when they faced increased competition from the left. These proposals also deliberately mirrored the federal Liberals’ strategy going into the 2015 federal election. At the time, the federal Liberals were attempting to rebuild after a historically poor showing the 2011 federal election, where they fell behind the NDP. Interviews with staff in Gallant Premier’s Office indicate they viewed electoral reform in provincial politics as intertwined with the debate in federal politics.

In 2016, the Liberals created an independent five-person Commission on Electoral Reform (CER) with a mandate to consider ways to improve electoral democracy beyond merely changing from one electoral system to another. The consultation process overlapped with a federal commission on electoral reform that was also holding public hearings across the country in the fall of 2016. Unlike the federal commission, the provincial commission focused more on consulting with policy experts than with the general public.
During the electoral reform consultation, feminist organizations and activists began to agitate for increased women’s representation in New Brunswick. While some of these organizations, such as Women for 50%, focused on raising awareness of women’s under-representation or pressuring parties to nominate women, others focused their efforts on the consultation. In particular, Dr. Everitt and the New Brunswick Women’s Council pushed the CER to recommend that the government adopt a GTPF policy. Dr. Everitt advocated for financial incentives to both the federal and provincial electoral reform commissions. In October 2016, she participated in the federal consultations in Fredericton. She recommended GTPF as a means to improve women’s representation without electoral reform. The New Brunswick Women’s Council consulted Everitt in November 2016 as they developed their own recommendations for the CER. At this meeting, she again highlighted the potential for GTPF to improve women’s representation. The Women’s Council subsequently incorporated several of her ideas into their final report to the Commission including the use of the election rebate system to incentivise parties to nominate and run more women. Finally, Everitt presented a similar argument when the CER invited her to discuss women’s representation in January 2017. Thus, the CER repeatedly heard a common message. First, the government could adapt the existing political finance system to encourage parties to nominate more women in winnable districts. Second, this reform would not require significant overhauls to the political system, since it relied on existing tools governing the conduct of elections.

The provincial Liberals’ push for a change in the electoral system – likely to ranked ballots – ended when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the federal Liberals abandoned their promise to change the electoral system in February 2017. Since provincial Liberal insiders saw the provincial and federal electoral reform efforts as interconnected, they too backed away from considering a major change to the provincial electoral system. However, given their promise to pursue electoral reform, the Premier’s Office looked for relatively minor reforms as viable policy alternatives.

Surprisingly, the Commission’s final report focused on addressing women’s representation in the Legislative Assembly. It concluded that achieving gender equality in political representation required “more concrete and targeted measures rather than symbolic and aspirational speeches” (Passaris, 2018: 61). The Commission advocated using public funds as incentives to encourage parties to nominate more women (New Brunswick Commission on Electoral Reform, 2017: 27-29).

Although the final decision to recommend financial incentives was unanimous, Commissioner Constantine Passaris was the one driving the discussion and promoting the idea of incentives (Interview 59, 8 August 2019; Interview 67, 23 August 2019). Other commissioners expressed some initial scepticism over the proposal, believing that women ought to be able to get into the politics on their own steam. However, they ultimately concluded that the financial incentives might give political parties a push to nominate more women.

The Premier’s Office moved quickly to respond to the report. As Katie Davey said, “We definitely wanted to be seen as responding to the report and taking it seriously... It would have been an easy win, lots of stakeholder support, and it fit in with lots of other things we were trying to do” (Personal Interview). According to both Jordan O’Brien, Chief of Staff to the Premier, and Davey, this was the time when the Premier’s Office became aware of the
idea of GTPF. Davey said, “Honestly, I don't think the financial incentive was on our radar at all before the report [of the Electoral Reform Commission]” (Personal interview).

Nineteen days after the Electoral Commission tabled its report, Premier Brian Gallant announced that his government was prepared to adopt the Commission’s recommendation of a financial incentive (Poitras, 2017b). Three days later the government introduced Bill 56, which included the GTPF policy. According to Davey, the Premier’s Office wanted to demonstrate action on the Commission’s recommendations. However, it did not want to do a complete overhaul of the province’s electoral institutions, especially given that the next provincial election had to take place sometime in the next eighteen months. Davey said, “From the perspective of Premier’s Office senior staff, it was far enough from an election that it could be implemented and still have an impact” (Personal Interview).

Given the timeframe for the adoption of the policy, the Premier’s Office did not undertake extensive consultations with feminist organizations or outside experts over details of the incentive policy. While feminists had advocated for a financial incentive for parties to nominate women candidates to the CER, they were not involved in the actual policy design. Indeed, one interviewee from a feminist organization indicated that they did not find out that the Gallant Government was planning on introducing a financial incentive until shortly before it became public (Interview 66, August 20, 2019). Instead, political staff and bureaucrats developed the policy in closed-door meetings (Interview 58, 25 July 2019; Interview 68, 23 August 2019).

The form of the GTPF was largely by accident. The Premier’s Office was aware that some countries, particularly developing countries, had adopted GTPF. However, neither political staffers nor bureaucrats knew exactly how to make GTPF work in a Canadian context. According to O’Brien, “I was in a meeting with a bunch of bureaucrats, and they couldn’t come up with an incentive. I said, ‘why don’t we weight the votes of women 1.5 times that of men?’ That was not a formula. It was an exasperated, ‘think creatively’” (Personal interview). In a public interview, O’Brien also said, “One point five was literally just a number picked out of the air. There was no science behind it” (Davey, 2019).

Liberal strategists viewed GTPF as electorally beneficial. First, GTPF was a way to gain a financial edge over their PC opponents. As O’Brien, put it, “parties did not realise how much money they were going to get. They just thought they were going to get more money.” He also said, “Everybody thought it was a big cash cow. We thought it would be $100,000…It was useful to say to the old boy’s club, or for the leader to say to the old boy’s club [that a woman would give us more money].” Second, GTPF was a means to court progressive urban voters. After the Liberals’ narrow victory in 2014, party strategists conducted a review of the reasons why their victory was not more decisive. They concluded that one of the main reasons was the increase in support for left parties, including the Greens and the social-democratic NDP (Interview 29, Session 2, May 14, 2018; Interview 58, July 25, 2019). These parties did particularly well in urban districts in 2014. Liberal strategists decided that they needed to court progressive urban voters—particularly women—who might otherwise vote Green or NDP and were generally sympathetic to women’s representation. These perceived electoral incentives did not exist before the 2014 election.5 When

5 The NDP actually polled over 20 percent until six months before the election. However, the Liberals had a sizeable lead in the polls until the very end of the campaign.
the Liberal strategists met in 2016 to plan candidate recruitment for the next provincial election, they prioritized recruiting women candidates to court this group of voters (Interview 29, Session 5, 8 August 2019).

Strategists were also responding to feminist actors inside and outside the party who had mobilised to increase women’s representation (Interview 20, Session 1, 5 February 2018; Interview 40, 28 June 2018, Interview 42, 6 July 2018; Interview 50, 4 January 2019; Interview 57, 23 January 2019). In December 2016, a group of high-profile women formed a new organization, Women for 50%, to advocate for parity in candidate nominations across all parties. This organization held several public events in the winter of 2017 to promote women’s representation, and it received considerable news coverage and attention from the Liberal Premier’s Office (Interview 29, Session 2, 14 May 2018; Interview 50, 4 January 2019; Interview 57, 23 January 2019). Women for 50% did not advocate for GTPF, but it raised the salience of women’s representation in public debates.

This pressure contributed to the Liberals’ desire to demonstrate publicly their commitment to increasing women’s representation. Ultimately, both the perceived electoral incentives and pressure from feminist actors led the Gallant Liberals to announce publicly in September 2017 that the party’s goal was to nominate women in fifty percent of the seats not held by Liberal incumbents (Poitras, 2017a).

An Early Assessment of the Effects of GTPF in New Brunswick

Although GTPF has only been in place a short time, we can make a preliminary assessment of its impact in New Brunswick based on the 2018 and 2020 elections. The GTPF policy did not substantially change the allocation of the per-vote subsidy to political parties after the 2018, but it had a more substantial effect on party finances after the 2020 provincial elections. Table 1 displays the change in the annual allowances paid to political parties in New Brunswick due to the GTPF as opposed to the pre-2017 policy for the 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 fiscal years (the first fiscal years after the 2018 and 2020 elections). We display the impact both as a percentage of the total subsidy paid to that political party in that fiscal year and as a raw dollar amount. We also include the percentage of women on each party’s slate in 2018 and 2020 and each party’s share of the votes in 2018 and 2020.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>2019-2020 Allowances</th>
<th>2021-2022 Allowances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberals</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCs</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Alliance</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greens</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the 2018 provincial election, the Liberals’ subsidy hardly changed, the PCs and People’s Alliance lost over 2 percent of their annual allowances, and the NDP and the Greens gained enough additional funding to make up over 6 percent of their annual allowances. No party gained or lost more than $5,450, which is a relatively small fraction of parties’ total annual budgets. Many Liberal and PC insiders noted that their parties’ candidate recruitment drives had already begun by the time that the financial incentives took effect. Furthermore, several PC insiders were unaware of the financial incentives during interviews conducted before the 2018 election. For this reason, it is unsurprising that the GTPF did not greatly affect the 2018 election.

This relative non-impact surprised individuals from the Premier’s Office. However, in retrospect they attributed it to the fact that many parties nominated more women in 2018. They reasoned that, if no one party did substantially better than the others at nominating women, especially in winnable seats, the financial incentives would not meaningfully change parties’ annual allowances. Davey
said, “It didn’t have much impact in hindsight because the pot of money available to parties for the per-vote subsidy didn’t change, it is about $700,000, and everyone did a little bit better.” O’Brien and Davey concluded after the 2018 election that the GTPF needed to provide a stronger incentive to be truly effective (Personal Interviews; see also Davey, 2019). O’Brien proposed increasing the weight applied to votes cast for women in constructing the subsidy, while Davey suggested creating a separate “pot of money” for the GTPF rather than using the existing per-vote subsidy. However, with the Liberals now out of government neither could take steps to see these changes enacted.

In 2020, the GTPF policy had a more substantial impact on party finances. After the 2018 election, PC leader Blaine Higgs formed a minority government. The PCs called an early election in August 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, which took the other parties—particularly the Liberals—off-guard. By contrast, the PCs had nominated many of their candidates before the election call. The PCs ran an unprecedented number of women candidates. The Liberals, under a new leader, nominated half as many women candidates as they had in 2018. This combination of few women candidates and a poor electoral performance meant that the GTPF policy penalised the Liberals by five percent of their annual allowance. The PCs’ better performance resulted in a slight increase of 0.7%. The NDP, who typically run a larger number of women candidates, received one of the largest percentage increases (7.8%). However, since they won such a small share of the vote (just over three percent), the GTPF only increased the party’s annual subsidy by $887. The main beneficiary of the GTPF policy was the Greens, who nominated a parity slate and increased their vote share to over 15 percent province-wide. Their annual subsidy was almost 10 percent larger (over $10,000) than they would otherwise have had. Finally, the right-wing populist People’s Alliance continued to face a relatively small reduction in its annual subsidy compared to the pre-2017 rules.

It is unclear how much difference the GTPF policy will make going forward. It may take time for parties to adjust to its presence. If the policy works as intended, all parties will converge on a strategy of nominating more women, particularly in winnable seats where they are likely to gain additional votes. If this happens, the weighted subsidy will not look much different from the unweighted subsidy.

However, it debatable whether the current policy provides enough of an incentive to shift parties’ candidate recruitment and selection practices in ways that will increase women’s chances of being nominated or elected. Without adequate public funding, parties may have little incentive to nominate women, particularly in winnable districts. As a result, this policy may be more symbolic than effective.

Conclusions
We argue that New Brunswick adopted GTPF due to a combination of factors. Past institutional choices, including the single-member plurality electoral system, political finance laws, and data-gathering on candidate gender, made the GTPF policy an easy “tweak” to the existing institutional landscape. As feminist actors observed that federal and provincial governments did not follow through on reforming the electoral system, they shifted their focus to GTPF as an alternative option to improve women’s political representation. When the New Brunswick Liberals set up a commission to examine electoral reform, feminist actors pushed for GTPF. Once the commission recommended GTPF, the Liberal government adopted the policy to appeal to progressive urban voters and manage pressure to nominate more women from inside and outside the party. This case
study parallels cases of the adoption of gender quotas in which strategic politicians and feminist actors both play important roles in shaping policy outcomes (Krook, 2009).

This case offers lessons for feminist actors in other jurisdictions, in Canada and elsewhere. The first is that it is easier to tweak the system than to overhaul it completely. The second is that actors and ideas are important, but that they often require the right sequence of events to produce change. Finally, governments will be most easy to persuade to adopt feminist policies when it is in their strategic interests. This suggests that to achieve similar successes feminist actors in other jurisdictions might best focus on building support for minor reforms in feminist policy communities first and then take advantage of windows of opportunity for policy adoption. Without any of these historical developments, New Brunswick may not have adopted GTPF.

Ultimately, it remains unclear whether New Brunswick’s GTPF policy will be effective in increasing women’s representation or will merely serve as a symbolic policy. The evidence so far suggests that the policy has had a relatively small impact on parties’ finances. It is possible that the weights need to be larger or that the incentive needs its own pot of money. If so, feminist activists should develop their own proposals for the design of GTPF and push policy-makers to involve them in the design of GTPF policies. However, it may take time for parties to adapt. We leave this question for future work.
References


Table 1: Change in Public Subsidies to Qualifying Political Parties in New Brunswick Due to the Adoption of Financial Incentives, 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 Fiscal Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Financial Impact of GTPF After 2018 New Brunswick Election (2019-2020 Fiscal Year), As a Percentage of the Total Annual Subsidy Paid to Each Party (and in Canadian dollars)</th>
<th>Financial Impact of GTPF After 2020 New Brunswick Election (2021-2022 Fiscal Year), As a Percentage of the Total Annual Subsidy Paid to Each Party (and in Canadian dollars)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>+0.1% (+$488)</td>
<td>-5.0% (-$10,249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>-2.7% (-$5,450)</td>
<td>+0.7% (+$1,702)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NDP</td>
<td>+6.5% (+$2,528)</td>
<td>+7.8% (+$887)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>+6.4% (+$5,195)</td>
<td>+9.6% (+$10,257)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People’s Alliance</td>
<td>-2.3% (-$1,831)</td>
<td>-3.5% (-$1,966)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 – Percentage of Women Elected in New Brunswick (1967-2020)