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Impacts of Online Incivility Towards Female Elected Officials

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Winter 2024

POLSCI 4AA6A:Contemporary Politics

Dr. Karen Bird

March 22, 2024

## Introduction

Social media platforms have become essential forums for political discourse in the current digital era, impacting democratic processes and public opinion. Although these platforms present never-before-seen chances for citizens to interact with elected officials and participate in political discourse, they also have a negative side typified by incivility. These behaviors frequently include insults, personal attacks, and animosity. Within the context of incivility, one particularly concerning phenomenon is gendered incivility, in which people, women in particular, are singled out for insults and attacks because of their gender. In addition to undermining the professionalism and dignity of elected officials, gender incivility also feeds damaging prejudices and stereotypes that impede the advancement of gender equality in politics.

The central focus of this study is a pivotal research question: *‘Is there a difference in the amount and severity of incivility on social media towards female elected officials in Canada in comparison to men in the same position?’* This question is timely and crucial in understanding the dynamics of gendered incivility and its potential impact on political discourse and gender equality in politics.

This study intends to illuminate the particular difficulties faced by women in leadership roles in politics and the consequences of gendered incivility for democratic discourse by examining interactions on social media platforms. Recognizing the role of social media in shaping public perceptions and influencing electoral outcomes, understanding the dynamics of gendered incivility is a crucial step toward addressing systemic barriers to women's participation in politics and promoting a more equitable and democratic society. This study aims to uncover patterns, trends, and underlying biases that contribute to gendered incivility on social media by conducting a comprehensive analysis of tweets directed at both male and female elected officials.

### Topic Outline:

***Topic: Is there a difference in the amount and severity of incivility on social media towards female elected officials in Ontario in comparison to men in the same position?***

- I. Introduction
- II. Literature Review
- III. Research Design
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### Introduction

There is growing concern about the impact of online political discourse in the modern era, especially among young people due to the rise in incivility. This study aims to investigate the following research question: *‘Is there a difference in the amount and severity of incivility on social media towards female elected officials in Ontario in comparison to men in the same*

*position?* Our research project will aim to bridge gaps, particularly in the areas of literature that concern lower-level politics (particularly mayoral positions) and gendered incivility.

The research is framed by two key concepts: incivility, which encompasses a range of disrespectful and hostile behaviors in political communication, and gender. Discussions in the literature center on the possible decline in trust among democratic institutions, the impact of critical discourse on political effectiveness, the role of gender in politics, the role of gender in politics and incivility, and the long-term ramifications for cultivating an informed and involved citizenry.

Although this study acknowledges the broader issue of incivility in political discourse, it purposefully narrows its focus to gendered incivility, specifically: potential differences in the amount of incivility female vs male political figures are subjected to. By focusing more narrowly, the study hopes to identify whether such a difference exists. From an answer to this question, future research into associated questions concerning why and how such incivility propagates, as well as where it comes from, can be undertaken, and solutions discovered. The need for a focused investigation that addresses the unique dynamics of sexism in relation to incivility targeting elected officials motivates the decision to forgo a more comprehensive analysis of incivility in various political contexts. This research study will also shed light on “lower” levels of politics, particularly mayoral positions, and the relationship between gendered incivility and the individuals who occupy that office in sizable Canadian cities. By examining cases of incivility directed towards individuals in these areas of democratic politics on social media, this study aims to uncover if incivility targets the female gender more than it does the male gender, specifically at the mayoral level.

### **Literature Review**

Incivility held in online political discussions can ultimately leave an underlying effect on voter participation. This is evident through incivility shown for women in online discussions that cause them to feel less inclined to participate in political events. This lack of civility creates a hostile environment for women that leaves them feeling shamed in the political environment. Extensive research indicates an ongoing and consequently sexist bias against women who actively participate in politics. Female political activists experience unpleasant reactions to publicly revealing their political views online (c, 2018; Vochocová, 2018). Female politicians (Rheault et al., 2019; Southern & Harmer, 2021) and journalists (Gardiner, 2018) are more frequently the subject of online incivility than their male counterparts (Reich and Bach 2023). However, upon further investigation on the study, it was concluded that the sexist online comments within political discussions did not impede women’s political participation. This can also be understood within the Canadian context.

Gender based incivility within politics is an ever-present issue within the political world. Women in politics face a drastically greater amount of gender based political incivility, where they are subjected to sexist and sexualizing comments over social media and in person (Rheault et al., 2019; Carson et al., 2023). It is evident that women in politics continue to face the effects

of patriarchy and sexism within the Canadian political system, which is demonstrated through gender based incivility within Canadian politics (Rheault et al., 2019). The effects of gender based incivility greatly impact women's motivation to enter politics, as well as the strength of their political platform(s) (Carson et al., 2023). The unequal treatment that women receive within the political sphere can be of great significance when examining the limited number of political leadership roles that are occupied by women. Gendered incivility is an important area of focus when investigating political engagement trends, especially within local politics since this area of politics receives less attention than provincial and federal politics. Our research project will shed further light on gender incivility in local politics, particularly at the mayoral level, with the goal of increasing the knowledge and breadth of the body of literature in this specific area.

The effect of incivility amongst and towards elected officials on electoral participation as a whole has been measured in a number of different contexts over the past decade. Particularly within the North American context, there is evidence of a wide variety of circumstances that facilitate the propagation of incivility, and there are also numerous examples of incivility in action at the regional and national level. Causation can be easily chalked up to abstract concepts such as human nature and greed, but ties can also be made to structural circumstances. One such structural circumstance is, as Donovan et al. (2016) argue, the type of electoral system in use and the impact that said system has on voter confidence and turnout. Indeed, The National Youth Survey (2015) commissioned by Elections Canada provides valuable data on youth perception of the electoral system, as well as responses to a wide variety of questions that inform upon the importance of character in politicians, and the way in which sources of information/advertising play a role in influencing young voters. Fridkin and Kenney (2011) delve further into the role that advertising and the media play at the local level, where they found that incivility amongst politicians in their political advertisements had a pronounced effect on voter perception towards those running for office, and towards politics as a whole. Also of note, particularly when considering impacts of incivility, Slattery (2019) examines the ways in which incivility towards elected officials can affect their willingness and motivation to continue their work of service towards the general population. These four sources provide ample information and data with which significant progress can be made on the goals of this research project. Specifically, they demonstrate concrete examples of sources of incivility, which our project will be building upon through its analysis of incivility on social media.

Feinberg and Frimer's (2022) research aligns with a body of literature that studies the broader effects of incivility on political behaviour, such as voting behaviour, political participation, and public trust in political institutions. According to their research, political engagement and interest in political messaging are significantly impacted by incivility. This realization is essential to comprehending the possible consequences of careless political discourse. Furthermore, understanding causal relationships is aided by Van't Riet and Van Stekelenburg's (2021) meta-analysis, which is a part of a larger body of work focusing on experiments on political incivility. Based on a meta-analysis of published research on the

effects of political incivility on ordinary citizens, these authors have concluded that incivility tends to reduce political trust, however effects on political participation are more inconsistent. This is because, in some cases, incivility and negativity generates greater attention which in turn leads more people to turn out to vote (Van't Riet et al., 2021).

The vast majority of the literature described above concerns itself with only a handful of areas. In particular, these are youth participation in politics, incivility, and the circumstances and factors that play into both of them. Below is an analysis of our topic in the context of the literature that has been explained in the above literature review.

The literature reviewed surrounding gendered incivility offers useful information that could tie into the research question within this study. The literature investigates gendered political incivility in both an analytical and academic light. Although, there are some gaps within the existing literature. The literature does not solely focus on the country of study within this paper (Canada), rather the literature also examines gendered incivility in the United States of America and Australia. Though the literature can be useful and offer insight on the types of political incivility and its effects, there is evidence that the literature does not directly solve the empirical puzzle being examined within this study. Moreover, the literature does not examine the effects of gendered incivility in local politics and government. Though local politics in Canada are argued to be favourable to women, the literature within this review suggests against this notion through the examination of gendered incivility at *all* levels of government. Although the literature does not focus on Canadian politics, the findings within the article offers integral information surrounding the general harms of gendered incivility, which will be of use in framing our research that will be focusing on comparing the prevalence of gendered incivility in discourse aimed at male vs female political figures.

The investigations conducted by Van't Riet and Van Stekelenburg (2021) and Feinberg and Frimer (2022) significantly advance our knowledge of how political behaviour is influenced by incivility. Feinberg and Frimer expand on the impact of rudeness by discussing voting behaviour and public trust. Their findings provide important insights into the effects of thoughtless political discourse by highlighting the significant detrimental effects of rudeness on political engagement and messaging interest. Conversely, Van't Riet and Van Stekelenburg's meta-analysis addresses endogeneity and alternative explanations while establishing causal relationships through a rigorous methodology. While each study offers insightful information, combining the experimental focus of Van't Riet and Van Stekelenburg with the broader implications of Feinberg and Frimer could result in a more thorough framework for understanding the effect of rudeness on political engagement. Both studies contribute substantially to our understanding of the complex nature of political incivility.

The literature discussed in this review provides a number of answers and causes for exploration in relation to our research question, which is: ***“Is there a difference in the amount and severity of incivility on social media towards female elected officials in Ontario in comparison to men in the same position?”***. Of key importance to answering our question are the sources that conduct an in-depth examination of the various avenues for incivility, such as

local news outlets, debates, advertisements, and particularly social media. Also of importance are sources that measure the prevalence of gender as a factor in incivility, and the impact of gendered incivility as a whole. Moreover, the literature reviewed provides areas of significance when examining the lack of female actors that have secured political leadership roles. We will use these preliminary findings to examine further the extent to which incivility is propagated differently when gender comes into play, and the role that gender plays in mitigating how much incivility and gendered incivility a political figure may be subjected to.

## **Research Design**

### **Cases for Study**

This research project will be studying whether the gender of political figures/officials plays a role in the amount and type of incivility they are subjected to, with a particular focus on social media.

The cases being examined in this project are the prior and current mayors of six cities in the province of Ontario: Mississauga (Bonnie Crombie and Patrick Brown), Hamilton (Fred Eisenberger and Andrea Horwath), Toronto (John Tory and Olivia Chow), Cambridge (Jan Liggett), and St. Catharines (Mat Siscoe).

These cases are being examined primarily because of the structure of the research project: we aim to compare the online incivility of both a male and female political figure in order to gauge whether there is a difference in the amount of incivility they receive, and how much of that incivility is gendered. All of the figures that will be examined will be current and prior mayors, in order to keep the level of political involvement consistent (municipal). The position of mayor was chosen in order to be able to examine an individual with a political career that is visible and subject to enough scrutiny. An initial attempt to use city councilors as cases failed due to the relative obscurity of the individuals chosen, and the lack of engagement with them on social media.

As stated above, each of the four cities chosen will see the current mayor be compared to a prior mayor. It was decided to select cities where the current mayor was female in order to maximize the amount of engagement that can be analyzed, as the focus of this project is on gendered incivility and sexism aimed towards women in politics. To make the comparison, a male mayor of the city was also chosen, with the condition that they had held office within the past three years. This was done to ensure that there would be enough recent engagement with the individual in question in order for the analysis to be conducted. For the city of Hamilton, Andrea Horwath (mayor from 2022-present) and Fred Eisenberger (mayor 2014-2022) were chosen, while for the city of Toronto, Olivia Chow (mayor from 2023-present) and John Tory (mayor from 2014-2023) were chosen. However, for the other two female cases (the cities of Cambridge and Mississauga), there were no male officials who had served as mayor within the past three years, and so to compare against Bonnie Crombie of Mississauga (mayor from 2014-2024) we have chosen Patrick Brown of Brampton (mayor from 2018-present). Similarly, To compare against Jan Liggett of Cambridge (mayor from 2022-present), we selected Mat

Siscoe of St. Catharines (mayor from 2022-present). We ensured that we were consistent with cities when mayors from two different ones were chosen for comparison: both cities had to have a population with an approximate similarity in size.

### Key Concepts:

Incivility: speech or behavior that is rude, unsociable, or offensive.

Gendered Incivility: Takes all of the above, but also includes attacks and rude statements that target gender.

Crucial to our study is how we define incivility. For the purposes of this project, we will be defining incivility as any statement that includes vulgar or brash language, and is rude or offensive in nature. Any statement containing swear words is uncivil based on this definition.

As a result of this, gendered incivility will be used to define any statement that incorporates all of the above, but also attaches a gendered aspect to the statement. The usage of slurs or derogatory comments aimed towards specific genders, charged comments referring to gender stereotypes or biases, or attribution of a negative trait or action to a specific gender will be categorized as gendered incivility.

A further elaboration on incivility: comments that are negative in their nature or language are not necessarily uncivil, and will not be counted as uncivil unless they adhere to the definition provided above.

To determine how we would categorize, define, and code our definitions of incivility and gendered incivility, each of our group members came up with a defining series of traits in a comment or post that they would categorize as being uncivil. These definitions included the usage of vulgar language, the usage of slurs, disparaging language, and more. From these definitions, we narrowed down, and by comparing definitions to examples of tweets that we had found, we settled upon the above definitions for how we would categorize incivility and gendered incivility.

A note on categorizing the gender of posters: we will be categorizing and classifying the genders of tweet posters by using profile names, profile pronouns, and profile pictures. Due to the highly subjective nature of attempting to classify gender, this aspect of the study will not be a major focus of our research project. If there is any doubt or uncertainty in regards to any of the three sources of information for determining gender in a specific case, that individual will be classified as “unspecified”, “unknown”, or “unidentified”. As will be discussed in the conclusion, the relationship between social media incivility and the gender of those engaging in the incivility is an area of research that warrants its own separate and dedicated investigation.

### Sources of Information for Analysis

The information being used for analysis in this research project will come from social media posts and engagements with the political figures listed in the “cases for study” section of the research design. The bulk of this analysis will focus on tweets: statements made and posted

on to twitter. These statements must refer to actions or statements made by the figure in question that is being analyzed, or must include their name or twitter tag in the tweet.

### Methodology:

The methodology for the gathering of data will be as follows:

For every figure to be analyzed, we will be searching their full name in the “search” tab on twitter, and viewing the latest results. These latest results must cover the period in which the individual was mayor. So, for mayors that are not currently in office, the most current tweets from when they were in office will be counted and examined. This was the case for all cases except for John Tory, where we were unable to find tweets dating back to his time in office. Due to the importance of the City of Toronto as an important social and political hub in Ontario, we elected to keep Tory in the study, but examine the latest tweets that we could find, even if he was not in office when they were posted. The first, or most recent, 50 tweets were recorded and categorized based upon the definitions of incivility described in the “key terms” section, and a count will be maintained that will take into account the number of uncivil tweets, the number of uncivil tweets that are gendered in nature/content, and (if possible) the gender of the individuals making the tweet. The latest tweets are being analyzed in order to ensure consistency across the board, and to focus on the most recent engagements made with the politicians being examined. Sorting by “top”, for example, would lead to tweets appearing out of order, potentially tweeted when the figure being analyzed was not even in office. Once the data has been compiled, the following statistics will be calculated: the percentage of tweets that were uncivil in relation to the total number of tweets that were analyzed, the percentage of uncivil tweets that were gendered in nature, the number/percentage of tweets (in some cases) that were negative as a whole, and (if possible) the gender of those posting the tweets. Other data of note that will be recorded will be exemplary cases/examples of incivility, potential connections drawn in tweets between the two political figures of the region being analyzed. Once the statistics have been calculated, comparisons will be made, and conclusions drawn based upon the findings of the research. Based upon our hypothesis, we will be determining whether there is a difference in the amount of incivility and gendered incivility that mayors in Ontario receive based on their gender. In the conclusion, suggestions will be made for future research, and tentative answers will be provided for any discrepancies that may appear in the research.

### Research Findings: Bonnie Crombie and Patrick Brown

Social media's rise has changed the way people talk about politics. It has made it easier to communicate with legislators, but it has also given rise to hate speech and incivility toward them. We will examine Tweets from Twitter between Bonnie Crombie, Mayor of Mississauga and Patrick Brown, Mayor of Brampton. The lack of current information on male mayors in Mississauga notably impacts the selection of Crombie and Brown. This study aims to shed light on the nature and prevalence of incivility in online discourse regarding gendered perceptions of



political leadership through a thorough analysis of tweets addressed to both officials. Both cities have roughly similar populations, whereas Mississauga has a population of 804,872, and Brampton's population is 826,998.

Patrick Brown has experienced both wins and setbacks. His early leadership qualities were demonstrated when he was elected president of the Ontario PC Youth Association in 1998, marking the beginning of his journey (Global News, 2022). He moved up the political ladder over time, first holding the position of member of parliament for Barrie and then as a city councillor in Barrie, Ontario (Global News, 2022). He accomplished a noteworthy accomplishment in 2015 when he was chosen to lead the Ontario Progressive Conservatives. Brown entered politics with runs for Peel Region regional chair and, in the end, became the mayor of Brampton, where he has remained ever since (Global News, 2022).

Bonnie Crombie's advocacy and public service dedication have defined her political path. She started her career in federal politics in 2008 when she ran as a Liberal Party candidate and won the Mississauga—Streetsville riding (Parliament of Canada, 2024). Crombie persevered after losing the 2011 federal election and moved into local politics, where she won a 2011 by-election for Mississauga City Council (Parliament of Canada, 2024). She won the 2014 mayoral election with the support of longtime mayor Hazel McCallion (Parliament of Canada, 2024).

Analyzing all 50 tweets addressed to Bonnie Crombie indicates an alarming degree of incivility. Thirty of these tweets were discovered to be impolite, suggesting a sizable percentage of unfavourable interactions on social media. Of the nasty tweets, 34% were mainly directed at Crombie and displayed gendered incivility. These assaults included everything from derogatory comments about her appearance to allegations that her gender renders her unfit for political leadership. For example, comments that call her "a blonde version of Doug Ford" or imply that she "sleeps with developers" aim to weaken her authority and skill as a female leader in addition to criticizing her political position. These attacks based on gender are a reflection of more considerable prejudices and misconceptions in society about powerful women. Similarly, there is much incivility in the 50 tweets analyzed about Patrick Brown. 94% of these tweets were considered uncivil, which is shocking given the widespread negative sentiment on Brown on social media. Brown's actions, demeanour, and perceived shortcomings as a political figure were the main points of criticism; his gender was barely mentioned. Attacks like calling him a "clown" or a "scumbag" may be derogatory, but they primarily focus on his behaviour rather than his gender.

Contextualizing the societal dynamics contributing to the disparities between Bonnie Crombie and Patrick Brown is essential when exploring the comparison between the two individuals' acts of incivility. The pervasiveness of gendered incivility directed at Crombie is indicative of deeply rooted prejudices and misconceptions about powerful women. Crombie's experience is representative of the more significant structural obstacles that women in politics face, as their capacity to lead is questioned, and disparaging remarks and sexist remarks frequently overshadow their achievements. Moreover, the gendered assaults against Crombie go

beyond simple criticism of her choices or policies; they also attack her identity as a woman. In addition to undermining Crombie's credibility, the use of sexist and derogatory language reinforces the stereotype that women in positions of authority are intrinsically less competent or deserving of respect, which discourages prospective female leaders. Majority of the tweets that were directed towards Crombie were male.

Patrick Brown, on the other hand, receives a lot of hate mail on social media, but most of it is directed at his behavior and actions rather than his gender. This highlights the differences in the online evaluations of male and female politicians, with male politicians frequently being assessed more based on their policies and actions than their gender identity. Although this might appear to be a good thing, it also represents the tendency in society for women to be held to lower standards and to be under more scrutiny simply because of their gender. The study's conclusions demonstrate how critical it is to address gender-based incivility in online political discourse and foster an atmosphere that is more welcoming and considerate of all elected officials. In order to truly address systemic gender biases and advance gender equality in political leadership, efforts to combat misogyny and sexism in politics must go beyond isolated social media interactions. Moreover, developing a strong and dynamic democracy where all voices are heard and respected requires encouraging positive discourse and mutual respect, regardless of gender. The tweets that were displayed were a mixture of both male and female users.

#### Research Findings: Jan Liggett and Mat Siscoe

Jan Liggett was elected to her first term on Cambridge City Council in 2014, representing Ward 4. She serves on the Economic Development Advisory, Cambridge Arts Theatre, and Core Areas Revitalization Advisory Committees, as well as the Water Billing Appeals Committee and the Post Office Steering Committee. Jan Liggett was elected Mayor for the 2022-2026 term after serving as Ward 4 Councilor for the previous eight years (Mayor Liggett's biography). From this research through the public's tweets about Jan Liggett, it is evidentially clear that the mayor of Cambridge receives a numerous number of uncivil comments.

Of the 50 most recent tweets regarding mayor Liggett, 34% (17) of them were addressed in an uncivil manner. However, of those 34% uncivil comments, only 3 of them were targeted towards her gender. The demographics of the 50 tweeters reveal the reality behind where incivility is rooted. From the 50 tweets, 28 of them were from males, 14 were female, and 8 were unidentified. From the 28 male tweets, 9 of them were uncivil and 2 of them were addressed towards her gender. From the 14 female tweets, 7 of them were uncivil and 1 of them were addressed towards her gender. Finally, from the unidentified tweets, 1 of them were uncivil and it was not targeted towards her gender.

Much of the uncivil backlash that mayor Liggett faced online came from her comments and actions made during a Waterloo Region Council meeting. During this meeting, the board of councilors dealt with local complaints about concerns raised about gender neutral bathrooms at a local Waterloo recreation center. However, the issue that were raised about this change room was the notion that women, men and children would be changing together with proposed glass walls throughout the change room. A local woman voiced her concerns towards the council, and in response mayor Liggett, a member of the Waterloo Regional Council, proceeded to turn off the woman's microphone and kick her out of the meeting. Citizens were outraged by the response that mayor Liggett took, and this is the basis for most of the incivility voiced online. However, their critiques were more focused on her character rather than her gender. Whilst it may be true that there were some posts that targeted her gender in their outrage, it was not a major theme that occurred in the incivility. However, with the nature of the events, with it involving silencing another woman, comments made towards her gender show that her gender can be used against her in the form of incivility. For this scenario, it would not make much sense to use her gender as a form for uncivil comments, but alas it still occurred. This shows that no matter what the situation at hand is, the targeted gender comments can still take place.

To get an understanding of the targeted gender incivility, we conducted another research process towards a male mayor. However, since the last male mayor of Cambridge ended their tenure in 2018, there was difficulty finding recent tweets about them. To account for that, we chose to research a currently serving male mayor that served a municipality that is similar in population to the female. Therefore, the male mayor that will be compared to mayor Liggett is Mat Siscoe. Mayor Siscoe is currently the mayor of St. Catherines, also elected to office in 2022.

The research showed that of the 50 most recent tweets involving mayor Siscoe, only 14% (7) of them were uncivil, and 0% of them were targeted towards his gender. These research results show drastic differences amongst the mayors. The demographics of the tweets show that 34 of the tweeters were male with 5 of those tweets being uncivil according to our framework of understanding incivility. Furthermore, 10 of the tweets were female, with 2 of them being uncivil, and finally 6 were unidentified, with none of them being uncivil. The results from this show that regardless of the gender of the mayor, the male demographic is more prone to being uncivil in nature, likewise what is seen in the research on Jan Liggett.

However, an argument can be made that the results may have less to do with gender, but rather with the character of the mayor in question. Mayor Liggett received much hate due to her actions at the Waterloo Councillor meeting, whilst the 50 most recent tweets regarding mayor Siscoe were regarding his response to a library protest. The protest occurred when "Drag Queen Storytime" was being hosted to do a library reading for children over the march break. The rioters protested the event's nature, arguing that it was inappropriate for such an event to take

place. It was Siscoe's response to this situation that inevitably led to the lack of current online hate towards him. Siscoe released a statement in which he said, "he supports the community in any way he knows how but he does not like to amplify the people involved in these types of protests". This statement was more appealing towards the citizens of St. Catherines, and from further research it can be understood that the citizens have a good relationship with him. However, this may be due to his gender. Robin McPherson, a ward 4 councilor for St. Catherines, was in attendance that day and advocated support towards the drag queen and the people of the library as well. However, upon further review, it is noticeable that councilor McPherson has received more uncivil comments on the subject in comparison to mayor Siscoe. This occurs more than just outside the events at the library, as it is seemingly so that McPherson in general has received more incivility compared to Siscoe. This finding can amplify the notion that being gendered in politics can warrant more incivility.

#### Research Findings: Olivia Chow and John Tory

Olivia Chow was elected as mayor for the city of Toronto in 2023 who currently serves as the 66th mayor of Toronto (City of Toronto, 2023). Olivia Chow has a lengthy history of working in public service and government positions, such as her previous position as a Member of Parliament. Due to this research surrounding topics of gender and incivility, it is important to note that Olivia Chow is the first female mayor of Toronto since 1998 (City of Toronto, 2023). Olivia Chow's gender and mayoral position opens a door for political and gendered incivility to flow in her direction. Through the examination and analysis of viewing the most recent 50 public tweets through social media platform 'X', Olivia Chow received limited uncivil comments. Of the 50 reviewed tweets regarding Olivia Chow, 20% of them ranked as uncivil in nature. Comments towards Olivia Chow were more critical towards her performance as mayor, rather than being rude or offensive. Among this 20%, 10% of uncivil comments came from unspecified genders, 3% came from the female gender, and 4% came from the male gender. The highest amount of uncivil comments were noticed amongst groups who did not specify their gender. Between the specified genders of male and female, males tended to spew more uncivil comments regarding Olivia Chow. In addition, of the 50 reviewed comments regarding Olivia Chow, 0% of the ranked comments targeted her gender. Although none of the comments regarding Olivia Chow were ranked as uncivil towards her gender, two comments were gendered in nature. The first comment referred to Olivia Chow as a "sweetheart", which is a term typically used to describe a woman's gentle and feminine nature due to gender biases. The second comment stated that the commenter had a "crush" on Olivia Chow, which is a term typically used to refer to a person that another person has a deep personal liking to, which usually stems from a physical attraction towards the person in question. According to the definition of incivility within this research, the comments that had gendered roots do not showcase political or gendered incivility. The uncivil comments regarding Olivia Chow surrounded conversations and views of incompetency, "uselessness", and the inclusion of a few

curse words. The research conducted on public tweets towards Olivia Chow showcase that she did not experience gendered incivility, rather she experienced low rates of general political incivility. A possible explanation for the lack of recorded incivility could be due to the fact that Olivia Chow has not been mayor for a longtime. At the time of writing, Olivia Chow has only been mayor for 9 months. All comments examined, and included within this report, regarding Olivia Chow's mayoral position were comments published during her time in office.

John Tory was the 65th elected mayor for the city of Toronto in 2014 and continued his mayoral duties up until 2023. John Tory has a lengthy history of working in the legal and political field, such as his career as a lawyer and serving as principal secretary to Bill Davis (former Ontario Premier) (Lorinc, 2015). To examine if political incivility is significantly gendered towards women, it is important to examine public comments towards male mayors. Through the examination and analysis of viewing the most recent 50 public tweets through social media platform 'X', John Tory received a moderate amount of uncivil comments. Of the 50 tweets regarding John Tory, 32% of them ranked as uncivil in nature. Comments toward John Tory were rude, greatly offensive, and included many insults, ill wishes (such wishing severe sickness, sexual harm, and physical harm), and curse words. Among this 32%, 12% of uncivil comments came from unspecified genders, 8% came from the female gender, and 12% came from the male gender. Unspecified gender groups and the male gender expressed the most uncivil commentary towards John Tory. In addition, of the 50 reviewed comments regarding John Tory, 8% of the ranked comments were gendered in nature. The comments that ranked as uncivil towards John Tory's gender included slander against his sexual preferences (many comments referred to John Tory's sexual relations with a younger female), sexual history (one comment implied that John Tory could not "keep it in his pants), and performance as a "man" (one comment referred to John Tory as a "weak man"). According to the definition of incivility within this research, the comments that had gendered roots did showcase political and gendered incivility. The research conducted on public tweets towards John Tory showcase that he experienced moderate rates of incivility, and lower rates of gendered incivility. A possible explanation for the prevalence of incivility toward John Tory could be due to the conditions surrounding his abrupt resignation in 2023. In addition, John Tory was elected twice as mayor of Toronto which allowed for citizens to develop opinions and preferences toward his performance as mayor. All comments examined, and included within this report, regarding John Tory's mayoral position have mixed publication timeframes. The larger amount of comments examined were comments published after John Tory's time in office. The smaller amount of comments examined were comments published during John Tory's time in office. Approximately 10% of all examined and included comments were published during John Tory's time in office. However, this percentage is an estimation due to the occurrence of technical difficulties at the time of re-examining the dates of all included published comments.

Research Findings: Andrea Horwath and Fred Eisenberger

This section of the analysis will discuss two political figures of importance to the city of Hamilton: Andrea Horwath (the current mayor of Hamilton since 2022) and Fred Eisenberger (mayor of Hamilton from 2014-2022).

Beginning first with a brief background on Horwath's career. Horwath was first elected to office in 1997, when she was elected to a Hamilton City Council Seat. Serving as MPP for the provincial electoral district of Hamilton Centre from 2004-2022, Horwath was also the leader of the Ontario NDP from 2009-2022. Horwath's career is of high significance for the subject of this paper: she is a very well-known female politician with a long-term career in upper-level politics. She was the first woman to lead the Ontario NDP, and only the third woman to serve as the leader of a party in Ontario with official party status. After the 2022 election, Horwath resigned as leader of the NDP, and just one month later announced her intention to run for mayor of Hamilton. Horwath was elected mayor in late 2022, and has remained in the position since then.

The mayor of Hamilton directly before Horwath was Fred Eisenberger. A veteran municipal politician, Eisenberger served as mayor of Hamilton from 2006-2010, and then again from 2014-2022. Unlike Horwath, Eisenberger's political career is limited almost exclusively to municipal politics: he ran for a federal seat in 2004, but was unsuccessful, and prior to the election of 2006 he served as the chair of the Hamilton Port Authority.

The statistics yielded from the surveying of tweets addressed towards or directly concerning Andrea Horwath demonstrated a sizable amount of incivility directed towards her. 32% of the tweets examined (16/50) were uncivil in their language, and of these uncivil tweets 12.5% (2/16) of them were gendered in their incivility. Prominent examples include a reference to Horwath as "Andrea Whorewath", and a poster addressing her as "toots", which can be interpreted as a derogatory means of referring to a woman ("toots" is defined as meaning "baby", or "honey"). In addition to the above, the vast majority of the tweets aimed or addressed towards Horwath were negative in nature: 70% (35/50) of the tweets voiced dissatisfaction with Horwath's policies, capabilities, or political stances.

The statistics yielded from the tweets addressed towards or directly concerning Fred Eisenberger, on the other hand, yielded markedly different results. Just 12% of tweets (6/50) could be defined as uncivil, using inflammatory or offensive language, and 0% of them utilized gendered language or attacks aimed at Eisenberger. Like the tweets aimed at Horwath, the majority of the pens aimed towards Eisenberger were "negative", voicing dissatisfaction with his policies, capabilities, or political stances. However, the percentage is lower: 60% (30/50) of the tweets aimed at Eisenberger were negative in nature, compared to 70% aimed at Horwath.

Some of the tweets aimed towards Eisenberger were disparaging towards Horwath: one referred to her as "Angrea", and lamented the fact that Eisenberger was no longer mayor. There were virtually no tweets praising Horwath, although this could potentially be attributed to her short amount of time in office. Eisenberger received messages of support and praise for his long career in public service, with Horwath receiving no similar messages despite her similarly long career in politics.

In regards to the posters of the tweets themselves, there are some statistics of note. 25% of the uncivil tweets directed at Horwath came from male posters, while 33% of uncivil tweets directed at Eisenberger came from male posters. However, the overall number of uncivil tweets that Horwath received was much higher, and as a result the number of male uncivil posters tweeting at her was double that of Eisenberger (4 versus 2). Due to the challenges of categorizing the gender of a twitter poster, and confirming their gender, the vast majority of posters of uncivil tweets were categorized as “unspecified”: 69% for Horwath and 66% for Eisenberger. A more detailed study focusing solely on the gender of posters would be necessary to get the full benefit and accuracy out of statistics examining the gender of twitter posters in relation to their tweets and language.

What are the implications of these statistics? Examining them purely from the surface, it would appear that gendered incivility is much more prominently aimed at female officials than it is at male ones. Two individuals who occupied the same position, and one receives a sizable amount of gendered incivility (13% of incivility targeted at Horwath was gendered, accounting for 4% of the total twitter engagement examined) while the other receives none at all. There is an argument to be made that the statistics represent two points in relation to gender and incivility: that male political figures receive less gendered incivility as a whole due to the normalization of the association of men with politics (and the fact that sexism towards men is less frequent and harder to conceptualize), but also the fact that Eisenberger receiving less incivility as a whole is indicative of the fact that incivility towards female political figures is much more prevalent than it is towards male figures, a finding which is highly relevant towards gender and incivility in politics. The incivility aimed at both figures does not necessarily need to be gendered in its content to prove that there is a divide in gendered incivility: the fact that a male politician, who had very recently occupied the exact same position that a female politician is occupying in the present, receives significantly less incivility aimed at them online is demonstrative of the impact of gender in politics and online discourse. Future research can and should aim to consider how incivility and negative behavior aimed towards political figures manifests online, and who it comes from, and whether or not regular incivility is rooted in misogyny or gendered biases. These are more difficult questions to answer, and would require a much wider scope of research than that which was feasible for this project, but the findings of this survey of tweets lays groundwork for the exploration of these questions.

One area worthy of further examination is how partisan politics impacts incivility. A number of the uncivil tweets aimed at Horwath made references to her involvement with the Ontario NDP, and made mention of certain political and economic ideologies as well. A research study aimed at examining how past political affiliations can impact mayoral candidates in their electoral campaigns, and during their tenures, could help to expand the understanding in this area.

## Conclusion

The results of our study reviewing tweets addressed to Canadian elected leaders provide insight into the widespread problem of incivility in political discourse on social media, especially when it comes to gendered incivility. It is clear from the range of male and female mayors this study looked at that online conversations frequently turn into nasty and insulting language, which undermines the integrity and professionalism of elected leaders. Particularly concerning is gendered incivility, where female officials are subjected to a disproportionate number of attacks because of their gender identity.

The overall results of our research study reinforce the notion that was presented in our hypothesis, stating that gendered incivility has a larger affect towards female mayors. The results showed that of the 400 tweets reviewed, 35% were uncivil and 65% were civil, with 5% of the total tweets classified as gendered incivility. Furthermore, it confirmed the notion that female mayors receive more incivility as 36.5% of the uncivil tweets were addressed to the female mayors, and 20.5% of those tweets were targeted towards their gender, in comparison to the male mayors with 33% of their tweets being uncivil and only 6% of those tweets targeting their gender.

Our research findings are beneficial towards trends that can be found within municipal politics. The multitude of incivility that female mayors face online can give perspective towards why there are fewer female mayors in office compared to men, this incivility can be negative towards future females feeling comfortable to run in the future. For future research, there can be several implications that can be considered. Such as if the political riding of the mayor in question has anything to do with the incivility they face, as well as potentially expanding the number of tweets researched to see if a larger scope would impact the results. One policy move/implication that can be explored and potentially enforced based on the results found is that future elected mayors can remove all forms of personal social media, and only have the party account to post from. This implication may not stop online gendered incivility, but it may reduce the amount that is posted as there will be no direct personal source or “online identity” to attack for tweeters/posters. Further research could also look to survey prospective female political candidates at the municipal level (council and mayoral positions), and determine if experiences with incivility on social media (whether directed at them or at other female politicians or candidates) have impacted their decisions to engage with politics and involve themselves. Further research could also look more closely at party affiliation and prior political history, and track how said history can impact the type, severity, and amount of incivility a political figure receives.

In regards to limitations of our study: our study focused exclusively on mayors in one province, Ontario. As such, regional factors that might impact the incivility that a mayor may face (regional markets/economies, regional cultural differences, etc.) may not have been fully taken into account in regards to the bigger picture nationwide. Another limitation is our examination of the gender of the posters on Twitter/X. Difficulties in classifying posters based on gender made it difficult to draw confident and conclusive results, but initial examinations



demonstrate some notable statistics, mainly that in most cases the majority of uncivil tweets came from male posters. Further research with its focus on the relationship between the genders of posters and the amount of incivility politicians are subjected to may yield useful results in furthering our understanding of how gender and incivility interact on social media.

In our research, certain factors were discovered that we found potentially altered our research findings. Factors such as tenure in office and the location's geography may play a role in these alterations. For example, the case of Olivia Chow was the only outlier in our research, this may be because she has only served 9 months as the Toronto mayor, whereas John Tory had served from 2014-2023, giving more time for uncivil remarks to be made. Factors such as these can play a significant role in shaping the way online gendered incivility can occur.

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