

PLEASE GET EMOTIONAL: CONSERVATIVE CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND THE POWER OF EMOTION IN THE 1995 ONTARIO ELECTION

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For the province of Ontario the early 1990s were a period of economic instability and uncertainty. Equally as unpredictable were a number of election results during the 1990s. From the Bob Rae led NDP to the Mike Harris led Conservatives the pendulum of Ontario public opinion swayed from the left to the right of the political spectrum, avoiding its traditional location at the centre. Perhaps most surprising to many Ontarians was the general election victory of the Mike Harris Conservatives in 1995. While many welcomed the man who led the *Common Sense Revolution*, others looked upon his arrival with utter disdain. Notwithstanding opinions of the Conservative party itself, how did the Tories return to power in 1995? What brought them back from relative obscurity to overcome a twenty-point deficit in the polls to form government with a sizeable majority?

While these questions have received a great deal of analysis from scholars, there are some aspects of the 1995 campaign, which have not. On the surface it would seem that the return of the Progressive Conservative party to power in 1995 was nothing more than a restoration of the status quo. After all, the Tory Big Blue Machine had ruled over the province for forty-two years until Frank Miller lost power to an Liberal/NDP accord in 1985. However, to describe the Mike Harris led Conservative party victory of 1995 as a reversion back to the ‘status-quo’ misses a number of important points. First and foremost, the Mike Harris Conservative party bared little ideological resemblance to the Bill Davis governments that preceded him. Harris was notably more right-wing in his agenda and his 1995 policy platform, the *Common Sense Revolution*, reflected that. Secondly, many of the Red-Tory stalwarts that characterized the Bill Davis years in government had either moved on to Federal politics or were no longer involved with the party. Instead, a team of young ideological committed Tories who had progressed up the party ranks ran the election with incredible success. Finally, the return of the Conservatives to government was anything but a foregone conclusion for the Harris led team in 1995. Ranking second in the polls going in the election, the Tories had to overcome a twenty-five point deficit to the Lynn Macleod led Liberal party to secure victory. This significant deficit in the polls continued until the second half of the election when voter support began to swing significantly towards the Harris led Conservatives.

The swing in voter support can be explained by a number of factors. From a disorganized, poorly led Liberal party and a “non factor”¹ NDP, to a well designed and articulated Conservative policy platform, the 1995 election was, in hindsight, the Tory’s for the winning.² Although election tangibles like policy platforms, leaders debates and political strategy have received a great deal of analysis from academy, how the mood of the Ontario electorate in 1995 effected the election outcome has not.

While people have been shown to vote for a variety of reasons, some scholars argue that emotion can be an important component in election strategy. This paper will focus on the Conservative campaign strategy, which targeted a disillusioned and distrustful electorate whose faith in government had plummeted under the leadership of Premier Bob Rae and the NDP. Whatever the methods of the Conservative party were, we know that polling done after the election had concluded indicated that seventy six percent of the electorate could identify the Conservatives key issues in the campaign.³ As

¹ Phone Interview with Tom Long, 1995 Conservative election campaign co-chair, co-designer of *Common Sense Revolution*, March 26, 2008.

² Personal interview with Leslie Noble, 1995 Conservative campaign co-chair, co-designer of the *Common Sense Revolution*, May 24, 2008.

³ Ibid.

such, we know that the Conservative communication with voters was effective enough that voters were able to distinguish the major themes of their platform even if they had been discussed at the beginning of the campaign.⁴ Herewith, this paper will argue that the ability to target the disillusioned and distrustful electorate through campaign advertising that first, targeted issues that evoked emotions of anger and anxiety in voters and second, established Harris as a trustworthy candidate, is a substantial reason the Conservatives were able to swing voter support in the second half of the 1995 election. The following paper will elaborate on this assertion, focusing on the use of campaign television advertisements to evoke particular emotions in the electorate. It will also show how the Conservative policy platform found in the *Common Sense Revolution (CSR)* was viable to voters and that Mike Harris was a trustworthy candidate.

Theoretical Framework: Jerit's Justification on Advertising and Emotion

The exploitation of anger and anxiety in elections has been the subject of a reasonable amount of analysis by academy. Some maintain that anxiety or fear has an indirect effect on political learning, such that the effect of the electorate's anxiety depends on people's hope of success regarding the issue at hand.⁵ Based on this idea one could argue that in 1995 the majority of the Ontario electorate regarded the chances of success, specifically economic success, to be most advantageous with the well thought out and detailed Conservative election platform, rather than the confused policy platforms of the other parties. Yet, this perspective only begins to acknowledge the ways that strategists approach the evocation of emotion in an election campaign.

There is little doubt that candidates have an incentive to evoke emotion in election campaigns. Such a strategy, "allows candidates to emphasize consensual values, which makes it easier to mobilize their party's base while simultaneously attracting the support of the uncommitted."⁶ This premise reflects the outcome of the 1995 Ontario election very well. Partly through the use of campaign advertising that exploited voter anxiety and anger that accumulated under the previous NDP provincial government, the Harris Conservatives were able to make broad appeals to the core supporters with issues like tax cuts and welfare reform, while appealing to the 'soft centre' or uncommitted group of voters who were upset with the current direction of the province. Issues like taxes and welfare reform also evoked strong emotions in an Ontario electorate that was overtaxed and fearful of their economic future, thus giving these issues particular sustainability throughout the campaign.

If this paper is to continue to maintain that the evocation of emotion by election strategists creates a degree of issue sustainability, it must establish some theoretical support. Helping us to frame the use of emotion as a campaign tool is Jennifer Jerit. Jerit maintains that election candidates have "strong incentives to evoke emotions such as anger and fear, and anxiety; thus, appeals that are high in emotional content will survive longer than other types of arguments."⁷ Building off the works of Riker and Johnston,

⁴ Interview with Long.

⁵ Nadeau, Richard and Richard G. Niemi and Timothy Amato, "Emotions and Issue Importance," *Political Learning of Political Science*, Vol. 39, 3, (Aug. 1995). pp. 558-574

⁶ Jerit, Jennifer, "Survival of the Fittest: Rhetoric during the Course of an Election Campaign," *Political Psychology*, Vol. 25, 4, (Aug. 2004). pp. 565.

⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 564

who argued that negative arguments in election campaigns appeared to be the most enduring,⁸ Jerit simplifies these arguments contending that:

[A]lthough anger and fear belong to the family of negative emotions, they have dramatically different effects on decision making. Fearful people perceive greater risk across new situations, leading them to be risk-averse. Angry people, by contrast, are characterized by a sense of certainty and individual control that leads them to make risk-seeking choices.⁹

Choices like electing a right-wing golf pro from North Bay? Perhaps, but the disillusioned anger that led many Ontarians to support a ‘risky’ candidate will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper.

Jerit supports her thesis by presenting three reasons why candidates have an incentive to appeal to emotions such as fear and anger. Beyond the fact that emotional makes three main assertions. First, she reasons that citizens routinely rely on their feelings when evaluating election campaigns. As such, she contends that, “political elites who speak the language of emotion have a better chance of connecting with the electorate than those who do not.”¹⁰ Second, as was previous mentioned, candidates who evoke emotional appeals can emphasize widely shared values and goals because they project images that are universally valued. This allows candidates to cross partisan boundaries and appeal to a broad spectrum of voters. Similarly, it allows candidates to solidify the support from their base all bleeding the opposing party’s of their ‘soft’ supporters. This is achieved by signaling that, “the stakes of the election are high, thereby rousing citizens from inattention.” Noble supports Jerit’s assertion when she reflects on the Conservative’s campaign strategy of 1995. “People have to care about an issue. It has to mean enough to break people out of their comfortable lives.”¹¹ Lastly, Jerit maintains that the use of emotional appeals is consistent with the media’s desire for drama and excitement in news reporting. This follows many modern day newspapers desire to report controversy simply because it helps to sell more newspapers.

In addition to her three reasons, Jerit maintains that candidates must avoid relying on an emotional electorate exclusively. In order for candidates to be credible, “campaigners must convince the electorate that they are worth of its support by drawing attention to favorable personal characteristics or the expected benefits of their policy positions.”¹² This highlights an important theme discussed earlier in this paper. The evocation of emotion by Conservative campaign advertisements helped them motivate the electorate to give them their support. However, all of this could not have been accomplished had it not been for ability of the Conservative campaign to convince the electorate of the trustworthiness of Mike Harris and the viability of their election platform.

The succeeding sections of this paper will discuss the use of Conservative television advertisements and other campaign strategies using Jerits’ assertions on emotion and the importance of policy viability and personal characteristics of a candidate as its background. All of this will work to establish that by exploiting strong emotions

⁸ Ibid. pp. 545

⁹ Ibid. pp. 566

¹⁰ Ibid. pp. 566.

¹¹ Leslie Noble interview.

¹² Jerit. pp. 568

that gave the Conservative key issues sustainability in the election, Mike Harris was able to turn the tide of the campaign in the second half of the election. Before we can launch in to a more focused discussion of Conservative advertising and strategy it is important to establish the lead up to the 1995 as it relates to politics in the province of Ontario. Doing so will establish that five years of NDP government had primed the electorate for Conservative appeals to lower taxes, welfare reform and repealing job quota legislation.

'Thanks Bob!': NDP Government and Setting the Stage for Common Sense

In *Heartland to Region State*, Courchene and Telmer argue that had Mike Harris won the 1990 election he could not have used the *CSR* in 1995.¹³ Conversely, one could also argue that given the political setting of 1990, with the state of the economy relatively good (although it would get much worse in the years ahead) the *CSR* could not have been used with such great success anyway. The setting for a policy platform of that type would have not been ripe given the 1990 political landscape under Peterson. Instead the 1990 election surprised many in Ontario by bringing Bob Rae and the NDP a majority government while relegating the Harris led Conservatives to third place. Although 1990 was a setback, the following four and a half years of NDP government would provide the necessary factors that would make Harris and his principles in the *CSR* the desirable choice for a plurality of the electorate.

If you want to pin point a time, as Courchene and Telmer have, it was the 1991 NDP budget that set the stage for the *CSR*.¹⁴ As part of the 1991 budget the NDP negotiated a generous wage settlement with the Ontario Public Service Union (OPSEU) in December of 1990. While also serving as a benchmark for collective bargaining in the public sector for other organizations like hospitals, universities and school boards, the government's total increase for public sector salaries amounted to 10% more than it had been in 1990.¹⁵ As treasury officials began preparing for the 1991-1992 budget it was discovered that in the face of an increasingly worsening recession, government revenues had fallen to a point that the NDP would run a \$10 billion deficit in the upcoming fiscal year.¹⁶ Instead of cutting government spending, the NDP cabinet decided to stay the course and "fight the recession" with increased spending in text book Keynesian anti-recession style.¹⁷ As a result spending increased again in 1991-1992 to 13% higher than it had been in the previous fiscal year. Unfortunately, not a great deal would change over the course of the next two and a half years in the province of Ontario. By 1993 the government was borrowing more than \$1 billion a month and spending more on interest costs than on public schools, with the projected deficit for 1993-1994 being an astounding \$17 billion.¹⁸ Although Ontario had become the largest non-sovereign borrower in the world, the effects of these fiscal strategies were to push it extremely close to an out of control debt trap where borrowing costs become so out of control that the

¹³ Courchene, Thomas and Colin Telmer, *From Heartland to North American Region State: the social, fiscal, and federal evolution of Ontario: an interpretive essay*, Toronto, University of Toronto, 1998. pp. 29

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ White, Randall, *Ontario Since 1985*, Toronto: Eastendbooks Publishing, 1998. pp. 225.

¹⁶ Ibid. pp. 226

¹⁷ White. pp. 225

¹⁸ Laughren, Floyd, *1993 Budget*, Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. pp. 15.

ability to manage the economy is nearly impossible.¹⁹ Thus, the out of control spending, particularly on social services set out in the first NDP budget in 1991 and inability to address the increasing economic uncertainty that faced many Ontarians would in part set the stage for the Conservatives to exploit these issues in the electorate in the 1995 election.

Also in the 1991 budget was significant increases in the levels of Ontario's social assistance. These increases gave Ontario the highest welfare benefits in Canada at just under \$19,000 for a couple with two children.²⁰ As the recession began in the 1990s welfare cases rose to new heights, with 623,000 people in 1993. Even more distressing however, was that when the recession ended in 1994 the welfare case load continued to rise to 669,000 people with 1.3 million Ontarians overall on social assistance. But what about public opinion on the issue of welfare benefits and the increasing number of people on the welfare in the province? Commenting on what became known as the Hulgaard affair Ibbiston notes:

When government officials reported that Hulgaard would, in fact, suffer a significant drop in income from going on welfare, Harris's ploy backfired. But the letters of outrage to editors suggested taxpayers were more angry at the generosity of welfare benefits than at the Tories for pulling a shoddy stunt.²¹

As the many Ontarians struggled with rising taxes and increasing economic uncertainty the frustration inside many segments of the electorate was obvious. They felt simply that welfare was too generous in the province. This frustration would be exploited by Conservative advertisements throughout the campaign that would evoke the emotions that galvanized support for Harris and his party during the 1995 election.

In order to finance the expansion of welfare and other social programs the NDP implemented a number of tax increases. Rising tax rates under the Bob Rae NDP governments would also form a key issue for the Conservatives to evoke emotion out the electorate in the 1995 election. Although the NDP had run on a policy platform that made a pledge for "fair taxes," the reality for many Ontarians that had anticipated tax relief was, "a feeling of betrayal by the NDP."²² But to understand why the situation many Ontarians faced in the early to mid 1990's one need only look at the numbers. Rae increased provincial tax rate from 53 to 58 percent, resulting in one of the highest income tax rates in the country.²³ As such, "the bottom line for average working people in Ontario was that under the NDP their wages continued to decline and their taxes had continued to go up. Their frustration contributed substantially to the popular appeal of the Conservative's pledge in the *Common Sense Revolution* to reduce taxes."²⁴

¹⁹ Rachlis, Chuck and David Wolfe, "An Insiders' View of the NDP Government of Ontario: The Politics of Permanent Opposition Meets the Economics of Permanent Recession," in, *The Government and Politics of Ontario*, Graham White (ed), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. pp. 352.

²⁰ Monahan, Patrick, *Storming the Pink Palace: The NDP in Power a Cautionary Tale*, Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1995. pp. 47

²¹ Ibbiston, John, *Promised Land: Inside the Mike Harris Revolution*, Toronto: Prentice Hall, 1997. pp. 70.

²² Rachlis and Wolfe. pp. 353.

²³ Ibbiston. pp. 65.

²⁴ Rachlis and Wolfe. pp. 353.

Amidst sky rocketing deficits and rising taxes the NDP implemented a number of other measures that contributed to the unpopularity and ultimately set the stage for the Harris led campaign of 1995. For example, the NDP introduced its controversial “employment equity” legislation September of 1994. Known as Bill 79, it was designed to eliminate workplace discrimination against for groups: women, persons with disabilities, racial minorities and aboriginals. Under the legislation every public sector employer with more then 10 employees and every private sector with more then 50 employees had to design and implement a plan that would eliminate barriers to the hiring and promotion of individuals from the designated groups.²⁵ Although the legislation was aimed at achieving greater equality for groups who in many respects were economically disenfranchised, it became very controversial. Opposition parties criticized the legislation commenting that even though the legislation does not state, “job quotas are required... there is no other imaginable way that the objectives of the legislation could be achieved.”²⁶ Klassen and Cosgrave agree with this assessment and add that, “the *Employment Equity Act* received extensive media attention during the provincial election campaign of the spring of 1995 as the legislation became the focus of much of the debate during the campaign.”²⁷ From editorials in the *Globe and Mail* in particular, a large portion of this debate was negative. One editorial affirmed that, “the quota-based affirmative-action program introduced by the NDP ...effectively requires discrimination against white males in hiring, needs to be rescinded.”²⁸ It is these feeling of anger and disillusionment with a government that was regarded as increasingly out of touch with the people, that the Conservatives were able target in their campaign advertising. These ads that evoked strong emotions on job quota legislation and other issues that would prove crucial to the success of the Harris led campaign in the second half of the election.

As the economy continued to fall into recession the public’s trust in government began to erode. As NDP support plummeted to below 23% of those surveyed many concluded that an, “electorate taxed to what it regarded as the breaking point viewed with implacable hostility not only the government that had brought it to pass, but governments in general.”²⁹ Leslie Noble also acknowledged that public opinion of government was low reiterating that the ballot question for the 1995 question became, “who can you trust the most?” Convincing the electorate that they could be trusted to implement their campaign promises became central to the Tory election strategy in 1995.

Conservative Television Advertisements: Stark and Effective

The Conservative television add campaign formed the backbone of their election strategy. With 68% of their entire campaign budget spent on advertising and \$800,000 just on four television ads, the Conservatives concentrated on using “stark ads to reinforce stark messages.”³⁰ Strategists from all parties agreed after the election that the Conservative television campaign, “managed to not only pick the issues that were most disturbing to the electorate, but also to sell the solutions that were credible and that the

²⁵ White. pp. 243.

²⁶ Monahan. pp. 221.

²⁷ Klassen, Thomas and Jim Cosgrave, *Ideology and Inequality: Newspaper Coverage of the Employment Equity Legislation in Canada*, Toronto: York University Press, 2001. pp. 11.

²⁸ “Ontario’s passive Premier,” editorial: *Globe and Mail*, May 20, 1995.p. D6.

²⁹ Ibbiston. pp. 61.

³⁰ MacDonald, Robert “TV Advertising in the 1995 Ontario Election,” in *Revolution at Queen’s Park: Essays on Governing Ontario*, Sid Noel (ed.) Toronto: James Loriner and Company Publishing, 1997. pp. 86.

Tories could be trusted to carry them out.”³¹ Campaign co-chair Tom Long emphasized the importance of the television ads saying that they, “galvanized people and spoke to their frustration and disillusionment.”³² Focusing on issues like welfare, taxes and work quotas the Conservatives worked to exploit the built up frustration and anger they had from five years of economic mismanagement and uncertainty under the Bob Rae led NDP. As Ibbitson explains:

The Tory T-bar ads went for the jugular, accusing Mcleod of being soft on welfare recipients and supporting employment equity... Though other parties shied away from such controversial topics, Long and company believed, in 1994, that these were the topics that tapped middle class anger and could swing the election their way.³³

The ability to tap into that middle class anger and frustration was crucial to the Conservative comeback of 1995. Following Jerits reasoning, it assisted in giving sustainability to issues that were central to the Tory campaign platform. This sustainability resulted in a second half turnaround of the Conservative’s election fortunes.

After closer examination of the television ads themselves, we can see how Conservative strategy to focus on issues that evoked electorate emotion was put to work. After watching welfare recipients in the province swell to 1.3 million people, the provincial tax rate grow to 58%, many Ontarians felt that the burdens placed on them by the previous NDP governments were too much. The existence of the underlying frustration and anger was crucial for the Conservative television strategy. While the incumbent NDP were regarded as a non-factor because of their poor performance³⁴, the Conservative ads targeted the Lynn Mcleod and the Liberal’s position on taxes, welfare and work quotas. Two ads in particular labeled, “Welfare/Quotas” and “Taxes” were stark compare and contrast ads made-up exclusively of stills and narration. In these ads, the Harris CSR policies were contrasted with the Mcleod party policies, emphasizing three particular issues: putting welfare recipients to work, cutting taxes produces jobs and removing NDP job quota legislation.³⁵ For example in the ‘Welfare/Quotas’ ad, the narrative read, “Mike Harris will require welfare recipients to work for benefits. Lyn McLeod opposes work for welfare. You will not hear Lyn McLeod talking about mandatory workfare.” Using the seditious issue of welfare, the Conservatives were able to show that their position of ‘workfare’ was in direct contrast to the Liberal’s position. As such, while they creation of contrast was important, the initial focus on the issue of welfare was more important as it was identified, early on, as an issue evoked emotion in the electorate.

Contrary to the use of emotion as a key reason for the success of the Conservative election campaign, is the assertion that the amount of times the ads were aired in addition to their placement on superior time-slots was far more important to the Conservative media strategy. This premise works with the adage that ‘repetition creates emphasis,’ and the more often people saw the ads the more likely they were to remember the issues in them. Although the Conservative campaign team bought substantially more airtime then

³¹MacDonald. pp. 86.

³² Interview with Tom Long.

³³ Ibbitson. pp. 89.

³⁴ Interview with Tom Long.

³⁵ MacDonald. pp. 100.

the NDP and Liberals with much better placement,³⁶ this alone does not explain the success of their television ad strategy. Instead the substance of the ads and how the Conservatives focused on issues that evoked emotions in the electorate is far more important. This view is supported by MacDonald when he says:

While those in the advertising business and especially those selling media space like to cite the credo that “advertising is like manure – the more you spread it, the better it is,” there is little hard evidence on the effectiveness of repeating ads... Of course, in the case of real-world advertising, this assumption is obviously false since many products fail regardless of the frequency of their advertising message.³⁷

If Conservative campaign ads had focused on less galvanizing subjects like electoral reform for example, the saturation of ads would have made very little difference in determining the success or sustainability of Conservative election issues. By ensuring that the issues in each television ad evoked anger and frustration in segments of the electorate the Conservatives were to give survivability to the issues, ensuring that they were successful in the second half of the campaign.

Although the evocation of emotion is important to election strategy, “campaigners must convince the electorate that they are worthy of its support by drawing attention to favorable characteristics or the expected benefits of their policy positions.” Given the developments in Ontario politics under the NDP and the overall erosion of trust in government that has been discussed earlier in this paper, the Conservative campaign also had to make it clear to the electorate that their policies were plausible and that the Tories could be trusted to implement their promises. In terms of the plausibility of the *Common Sense Revolution* the platform designers like Noble and Long, worked extensively to ensure that the policies found inside were achievable once the Conservatives got to government. In her book *Right Turn: How the Tories Took Ontario*, Toronto Sun columnist Christine Blizzard acknowledges that the electorate could not be fooled by a flashy policy platform and that tax cuts had to be balanced by reductions in spending that communicated a clear alternative to the years of turmoil under the NDP and the position less Liberal party.³⁸ According to Long, the tax cuts and cuts to spending programs were worked through by economists hired by the party, to ensure that they were mathematically viable. As such, the Tories were confident that because they had invested so much being specific where cuts to taxes and spending would take place they had added credibility to their plan by reinforcing convictions in the electorate that these policies would not drive Ontario further economic instability.³⁹ Therefore, the viability of the Tory election platform was key in their efforts to build support for their campaign. The electorate had already shown that were in favor of many of Tory policies before the election took place. All they needed was emotional appeals to their beliefs and the reassurance that they Tory policies were viable.

Equally as important to advantages to the Tory policy positions, as Jerit asserts, were the personable characteristics of Mike Harris. In particular, the ability of Mike Harris to communicate to the electorate that he was the most trustworthy candidate of the

³⁶ 3.3 times as much as the NDP and 1.7 times as much as the Liberal party. MacDonald. pp. 82

³⁷ Ibid. 80.

³⁸ Blizzard, Christine, *Right Turn: How the Tories Took Ontario*, Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995. pp. 57.

³⁹ Ibbitson. pp. 71.

three, was essential to the success of the Conservatives in the 1995. Going into the election, Harris was far and away the greatest advantage of the Tory campaign. Polls taken just after the 1995 writ was dropped showed that a plurality of the electorate thought that Harris was the best person to be premier when compared to Rae and McLeod.⁴⁰ However, those early stages showed the challenges that faced all party leaders in the 1995 election. During one campaign stop, Harris was confronted by a voter who articulated the erosion of trust that had occurred under the NDP government. Peter Judd explain to Harris as he walked a west-end Toronto street that, “Your plan sounds wonderful and I want to vote for you. Bu I’m afraid that, when you get in there, you’ll just say the same things as all the rest. You’ll say there isn’t enough to do what you had planned.”⁴¹ Contrasted against a ‘flip-flopping’ Lynn McLeod and Bob Rae who refused to promise anything, “[a] cynical electorate chose Mike Harris because he was consistent, because what he said had a ring of truth to it.”⁴² Noble and Long describe it as a the ‘Hell of a Guy’ (HOAG) effect that many people would describe say after meeting the Conservative leader, for his down to earth and in touch with the middle class appeal. Others maintained that Harris and the Conservative strategy had the ability to show that they “were really committed to their proposals and were not just interested in winning the election.”⁴³ Nevertheless Harris himself showed himself to be utterly committed to gaining the electorate’s trust when he campaigned. He even went so far as to promise in a speech given to the Toronto Rotary Club two weeks prior to the 1995 election that he would resign if he failed to deliver on his commitments as premier. No other candidate was willing to make that promise and it undoubtedly contributed to Harris and the Conservative party’s success in the 1995 election. By advertising to the electorate, targeting issues that generated emotional responses, the Conservatives were able to grab a significant amount of disillusioned voters that dotted the political landscape of Ontario in 1995. Just as important, however, Harris and the Conservatives were able to convince the same electorate that their policies were viable and that Harris himself was steadfastly committed to implementing them.

Conclusion

When asked why her party was so successful in the 1995 election, Leslie Noble concluded that “that there was no substitute for planning during that election, we had a detailed playbook and it paid off.”⁴⁴ For the Conservatives this planning extended to a broad evaluation of the issues that had become glaringly important to the voters of Ontario during the Bob Rae years in government. The challenge during the planning stages of the build up to the 1995 election was how to connect with voters in a way that would “draw them out of their comfort zone” and motivate them to vote. For support in this area we turn to Jerit and her thesis that states, “candidates have strong incentives to evoke emotions such as anger and fear, and anxiety; thus, appeals that are high in emotional content will survive longer than other types of arguments.” For the Conservative’s this meant using their main campaign tool of television advertising to target issues that the Ontario electorate felt very strongly on. Specifically, the Conservative television advertisements focused on taxes, welfare and job quotas, targeted issues that voters had shown themselves to be very poignant about over the course of the

⁴⁰Woolstencroft, Peter, “Reclaiming the Pink Palace,” in *The Government and Politics of Ontario*, Graham White (ed), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. pp. 381.

⁴¹ “Harris hit hard by core of distrust,” *Toronto Star*, April 30, 1995. p. A6.

⁴² Blizzard. pp. 23.

⁴³ Woolstencroft. pp. 379.

⁴⁴ Interview with Leslie Noble.

last NDP government. Similarly, according to Jerits hypothesis, the evocation of emotion gives issues sustainability. This helps explain why Harris and his party's popularity recovered from a twenty-point deficit after the third week of the campaign to eventually take the lead and win a majority government. It also explains why the majority of those voters surveyed after the election could identify the majority of the issues the Tory's ran on.

It is important to note that the evocation of emotion is not the sole reason for the Conservative success. In fact, success in the 1995 election is thanks in part to a number of factors ranging from an inept Liberal party, to a nearly flawless Conservative campaign. While the appeals to emotion alone do not account completely for the Conservative victory in 1995 they are important. They tapped directly into a sea of discontent and disillusionment that had come to characterize the Ontario electorate over the course of the Bob Rae government. They motivated an electorate who, at the beginning of the campaign, supported Lynn McLeod and the Liberal party. By focusing on the controversial, emotion engineering issues like taxes, welfare and job quotas, all the while maintaining the viability of their election platform and the trustworthiness of Mike Harris, the Conservative party succeeded in gaining a monumental majority in the Ontario legislature for the first time in over a decade.

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