

## Abstract

The Legislative Assembly of Ontario, like many other Westminster-style systems of parliamentary democracy, is heavily reliant on its parties in its functioning. For this reason, as well as for the reason that there have historically been few, Independent Members are seldom examined. Two types of Independent Members exist: those who run for office without partisan affiliation, and those who run with a party that fails to meet the threshold for recognized party status, come election night. This paper examines the transitional experiences of the latter of these Members.

The research concludes that Ontario's law makes it both more common and more costly to be an Independent Member than the experience would be at other provincial legislatures. Independent Members in Ontario's House are not resourced enough in order to serve in their capacities (i) as opposition Members, due to a dearth of research resources, and (ii) for their constituents, as their offices in the ridings tend to be staffed less in order to support the Members' legislative offices, given the lack of caucus resources to do so.

## Methodology

This survey collected qualitative, narrative data.

Two cohorts of Members were surveyed:

(i) Cohort X: Those in Premier Bob Rae's Cabinet and government of 1990-95 who were re-elected with the New Democratic Party under the leadership of Howard Hampton in 2003, when they lost official party status by one seat.

(ii) Cohort Y: Those in Premier Kathleen Wynne's Cabinet and government of 2014-18, who were re-elected with the Liberal party in 2018 when they lost official party status, also by one seat.

# Seven's a Crowd, Eight's a Party

## The Transition from Government to Independent Member

Nish Chankar

Honours Bachelor of Arts, Economics and International Relations - Trinity College, University of Toronto 2018  
Conference of the *Canadian Political Science Association*, June 5 2019 - University of British Columbia  
Ontario Legislature Internship Programme

## Research Question

Independent Members - and certainly, 'caucuses' of ideologically-aligned Independent Members - are relatively new phenomena within the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. This research examines the perceptions, experiences, and transitions of Members who have each served, at different times over the course of their tenure in the House, as first Cabinet Ministers and/or Parliamentary Assistants, and then eventually as Independent Members.

## Findings

Independent Members within the Legislative Assembly of Ontario are unfairly disadvantaged with regards to their ability to accomplish their constituency work and legislative tasks to the extent that they were elected to. This is in part due to:

- (i) Ontario's punitively high threshold for parties to be officially recognized.
- (ii) Financial restrictions imposed by their lack of caucus funding, which results in a lack of central caucus staff
- (iii) Restrictions imposed by the conventions held by their colleagues belonging to recognized parties.

The constant balancing act between spending global budget resources on constituency support, versus accomplishing legislative business without the assistance of central caucus staff, consistently forces a choice upon Independent Members that prevents them from accomplishing tasks to their full capacity - a capacity that their constituents deserve to be represented with.

## Moving Forward

The research encouraged the following policy reform suggestions. The policies of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario should be amended to:

(i) Provide a stipend for Independent Members that is earmarked directly for research, in order for them to have the tools they need to operate effectively with regards to legislative business in their role as Members of the (albeit unofficial) opposition, and with regards to serving their constituents.

(ii) Strike a committee to build upon the 1993 *Report on the Role of the Independent Member*, so that the often-exclusionary conventions used by their colleagues in the House against Independent Members can be assessed, and perhaps mitigated by the Speaker and other non-partisan staff of the Legislature, as they see fit.

## Selected References

Raney, T., Tregobov, S., & Inwood, G. J. (2013). Democratizing the Ontario Legislature: Change, but Change Enough?. *Canadian Study of Parliament Group*.

L'Heureux, S. (2013, winter). The library of parliament's research service: adding value for parliamentarians. *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, 36, 4, 17-19.

Seat thresholds for Recognized Party Status

