

Gender Policies and Political Culture: An Examination of the Canadian Context

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Abstract : This paper is about gender-based analysis plus (GBA+), an intersectional gender policy used in Canada to assess the impact of policies and programs for men and women from different origins. It looks at Canada's political culture to explain the nature of its gender policies. GBA+ is defined as an analysis method that makes it possible to assess the eventual effects of policies, programs, services, and other initiatives on women and men of different backgrounds because it takes account of gender and other identity factors. The 'plus' in the name serves to emphasize that GBA+ goes beyond gender to include an examination of a wide range of other related identity factors, such as age, education, language, geography, culture, and income. The point of departure for GBA+ is that women and men are not homogeneous populations and gender is never the only factor in defining a person's identity; rather, it interacts with factors such as ethnic origin, age, disabilities, where the person lives, and other aspects of individual and social identity. GBA+ takes account of these factors and thus challenges notions of similarity or homogeneity within populations of women and men. Comparative analysis based on sex and gender may serve as a gateway to studying a given question, but women, men, girls, and boys do not form homogeneous populations. In the 1990s, intersectionality emerged as a new feminist framework. The popularity of the notion of intersectionality corresponds to a time when, in hindsight, the damage done to minoritized groups by state disengagement policies in concert with global intensification of neoliberalism, and vice versa, can be measured. Although GBA+ constitutes a form of intersectionalization of GBA, it must be understood that the two frameworks do not spring from a similar logic. Intersectionality first emerged as a dynamic analysis of differences between women that was oriented toward change and social justice, whereas GBA is a technique developed by state feminists in a context of analyzing governmental policies and aiming to promote equality between men and women. It can nevertheless be assumed that there might be interest in such a policy and program analysis grid that is decentred from gender and offers enough flexibility to take account of a group of inequalities. In terms of methodology, the research is supported by a qualitative analysis of governmental documents about GBA+ in Canada. Research findings identify links between Canadian gender policies and its political culture. In Canada, diversity has been taken into account as an element at the basis of gendered analysis of public policies since 1995. The GBA+ adopted by the government of Canada conveys an opening to intersectionality and a sensitivity to multiculturalism. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act, adopted 1988, proposes to recognize the fact that multiculturalism is a fundamental characteristic of the Canadian identity and heritage and constitutes an invaluable resource for the future of the country. In conclusion, Canada's distinct political culture can be associated with the specific nature of its gender policies.

Keywords : Canada, gender-based analysis, gender policies, political culture

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