

## Research Question

This paper will investigate how analyzing politics through a theatrical framework informs our understanding of a politician's role and the policy making process.

## Thesis

This paper will argue that to be strategic politicians, successful policy creators and trusted elected servants for Ontario, Members must also be strategic performing artists.

## Methodology

Data for this research paper was collected from semi-structured face to face interviews and peer reviewed sources. A convenient (stratified) non-random sample totalling five Members of Provincial Parliament from the Progressive Conservative, New Democrat, Liberal and Green party as well as two interviews with Ontario political journalists and one with a theatre creator were selected to participate in a 45 minute interview.

## 1. The Influence of Space and Design in the Legislative Chamber



Ontario Legislative Assembly (2019). What is Parliament. [Online image]. Retrieved from <https://www.ola.org/en/visit-learn/about-ontario-parliament/what-parliament>

The Chamber is a motivator of political action. As the set for Ontario's political theatre, the space can evoke emotions based on the context in which they exist. Members can reference a mural or carving to colour the tone of the message with the historical context of the space, similarly to an actor who uses elements of their stage. Staging tactics in conjunction with the increased scripted nature of Chamber proceedings suggests that politics is becoming less about oral debate and more about unspoken communication tactics that are influenced by the built environment.

## 2. How Staging Tactics in the Legislature Reinforce Public Policy Positions

Partisan tensions in the House are elevated by strategic directorial staging choices made by the house leaders, whip, and staff of the parties such as the hierarchical Chamber seating arrangement which indicates the status of the member based on their proximity to the Speaker and/or the party leader or the dramatic ejection of the NDP during the Toronto City Council debates. Staging tactics such as these and the increased scripted nature of Chamber proceedings suggests that politics is becoming less about spoken debate and, importantly, more about what someone does not say.

## Abstract

Politics and theatre are intertwined in subject matter, discourse, and engagement. The difference between the two being that politics aims to maintain a stable society and theatre aims to reflect and comment on it. Although it is mutually agreed upon that theatre as an art form is inherently political, rarely are politics assumed to be inherently artistic. This paper will investigate how analyzing politics through a theatrical framework informs our understanding of a politician's role and the policy making process. By using theatre as the context to analyze Ontario's Provincial Legislature, we can develop a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between our elected provincial performers and the public's role as Queen's Park's audience. This paper argues that to be strategic politicians, successful policy creators, and trusted elected servants for Ontario, Members must also be performing artists.

This research and subsequent findings are based primarily on a literature review and supplemented by interviews with five seasoned Members, two journalists, and one theatre creator. Overall, one Progressive Conservative, one New Democrat, two Liberal and one Green party member were interviewed. The conclusions and recommendations challenge current elected officials to balance their role as performing artists within their duties as parliamentarians.

# ENTER STAGE LEFT, RIGHT, AND CENTRE

An analysis of Queen's Park through  
a theatrical framework  
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## Conclusions

If MPPs and political parties truly want to be successful political actors then they must equally balance their political aspirations with the responsibilities that come with being a performing artist including learning the importance of finding truth and accurately reflecting the needs and struggles of the public. In a similar way that actors have a cannon of work that they perform to emphasize their creative versatility, political actors should also embody a similar enthusiasm for diverse cross political pollination with Members from all factions of their political cast. The Legislative Assembly offers versatile theatrical characteristics that set the stage for elected political actors to perform our current story as Ontarians and allow the public to be reflected in the future.

## 3. Member Costuming to Reflect Status, Standing, and Role

Traditional costumes reinforce the values of the legislative institution and ensures that essential players are perceived to be apolitical. In the Legislature, the Speaker and presiding officers, clerks, ushers, pages and Sergeant at Arms are all dressed communally in black and white robes or uniforms. The formality of their attire and stark contrast from the contemporary suits of the Members afford authority and wisdom. Members leverage their clothes to earn respect from parliamentarians, stakeholders, and the public. Using costumes to communicate a party direction or reinforce political partisanship emphasizes the strict unwillingness for cross party colour mixing.

## 4. How the Use of Technology Influences Political Theatre



Applied Electronics Limited. (2019). Legislative Assembly of Ontario [Online image]. Retrieved from <https://www.appliedelectronics.com/ontario-legislative-assembly>

Technology shifts the context of the performance from performance for truth to performance for gain. Furthermore, it adds a new extension of artificially created self to the public policy making process by disingenuously limiting the information that the audience and public have to make informed decisions about government policy.

## Select References

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