

Keeping the Lights On: The New Federal Government and GIC Appointments

Contemporary Issues Facing the Canadian Public Service

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A test facing a new government is whether it can keep the lights on while implementing new policy directions. The Liberals promised to reform the current appointment process to be more transparent, fair and merit-driven. However, by the end of 2017, CBC reported that the Trudeau government set a record at 594 vacancies for governor-in-council (GIC) appointments after their second year in office. This led to accusations it was failing in its basic duties.

We hypothesize that the inadequate appointment of appropriate individuals is attributed to a federal process that regards all GICs as a homogenous group rather than as specialized communities of appointments requiring heterogeneous approaches. We use the following questions and indicators to test our proposition:

- Are there possible process problems to appointments? Tested by the composition of selection committees, coordination issues, weight of political versus bureaucratic rules;
- Are there are challenges/faulty assumptions in the selection criteria being used? Tested by comparing the current “merit-based” approach with the previous approach used by the Harper government; and,
- Are there problems related to an adequate supply of candidates? Tested by the recruitment processes employed.

The paper samples agent of Parliament appointments between the Harper and Trudeau governments. It is a discrete sample, and it will be possible to determine whether a homogenous or heterogeneous process has been used, and for what reasons.

Data collection will be a combination of statistical information regarding the agents, and qualitative evidence drawing on current and former agent's experience with the appointment process under Harper and Trudeau. The paper begins with a general description of the appointment processes for all GICs and how these map onto the appointment of agents in particular, an understanding of merit that underlies these processes, followed by an assessment of the processes according to the three tests provided.