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‘Cheryl N. Collier and Jonathan Malloy (Editors), The Politics of Ontario, Second Edition’

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Cheryl N. Collier and Jonathan Malloy (Editors), *The Politics of Ontario*, Second Edition (University of Toronto Press, 2024), 374pp. Paperback. C\$54.95. ISBN: 978-1-4875-5649-5.

The first thing to know about this book is that this is not merely a revision of a first edition. It's an entirely different volume and I find it greatly unfortunate that it was not at least sub-titled to ensure that distinction in the public eye. The first edition, published in 2016, was an excellent collection on a vitally important topic that is dramatically undernourished.

The second thing to know is that this new volume follows the same path. The new version is also a treasure trove, offering new perspectives on another spectrum of issues. Cheryl Collier returns with a new examination of women and party politics in Ontario and Mark Winfield reappears with a new chapter on environmental policy. Martin Horak takes a new look at Toronto and the GTA, Anna Lennox Esselment comes back with a broader look at the political parties, and Julie Simmons also resurfaces with a new assessment of intergovernmental affairs.

Ontario, by far Canada's largest province in terms of population, has a distinctively elusive political culture. For most of its history, its party and government leaders have been as earnest as they have been colourless. Over the past thirty years, two of its premiers had not attended university and one did not have a full-time occupation until elected to the legislature. This is hard to imagine in any other province. No matter the party, their speeches are consistently bland and uninspiring, eschewing any sense of time or place. There is no urgency or heroes in Ontario politics, and the villains are mostly imagined exaggerations. The issues discussed rarely go beyond the meat-and-potato issues of ensuring economic growth. Ontarians expect little from their government, it seems, and their governments seem content to shape policy by practically unnoticeable increments.

The politics of the province feature very few political cues and Ontarians almost take pride in being low-information voters. Turnout is low. In the last election, held in February 2025, only 45.4 percent of eligible voters took the time to cast a vote. The average now hovers around sixty percent since 1867, though it was still above seventy percent in the early 1970s.

It is ironic that Ontario's politics should be so dull because its affairs should cause alarm. Ontario bears a massive debt (the largest sub-national debt in the developed world), barely provides the minimum of health care to its citizens (up to two million citizens do not have a family doctor and a disproportionate number of elderly died in its poorly regulated homes for the aged during the Covid-19 pandemic), pays more in debt service than it does for post-secondary education, barely manages a dysfunctional justice system, and pursues an energy policy that is unsustainable. It has no housing policy to respond to a crisis where the cost of an average home is among the highest in the world. The list could go on, but it is also undeniable that Ontario boasts important centres of technological innovation and the economy of Southern Ontario is among the most vibrant in the world.

In the second edition of *The Politics of Ontario*, the topic of political economy is sharpened. "How did Ontario get So Rich? And Why Are There So Many Poor Ontarians?" asks Peter Graefe. Entirely new topics are opened up. Rebecca Major

sheds light on the topic of relations between the province and its Indigenous communities. Tamara Small examines government-media relations during the Covid-19 pandemic and stimulating new topics also include 'Race and Ontario Politics' by Asif Ahmed and an examination of the challenges experienced by Black teenagers in the province. Zachary Spicer examines the broad topic of local government and Andrea Migone sheds new light on the government's executive offices. Every chapter opens a new venue and they are a delight to read without exception.

The Politics of Ontario (Second Edition) commends itself as a textbook for courses entirely dedicated to the study of Ontario politics but it will be extremely useful as well for all scholars of Canadian politics. It now takes its place on my bookshelf right next to its predecessor and Greg Albo and Bryan Evan's edited collection, *Divided Province: Ontario Politics in the Age of Neoliberalism* (2019). I look forward to the third edition (suitably subtitled), hoping that the wait will not take eight years and that it will again show off an equally fresh set of perspectives.

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