



## Political opportunity structures and the representation of women and visible minorities in municipal elections



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received 4 April 2016

Received in revised form

21 November 2016

Accepted 12 January 2017

Available online 17 January 2017

### ABSTRACT

Are women and visible minorities more likely to contest and win municipal elections under different institutional and contextual circumstances? We examine this question using data collected on 934 individual candidates who sought election in twenty-two large and mid-sized cities during the 2014 municipal election cycle in Ontario, Canada. The influence of three types of political opportunity structure on the 'decision to run' for female and minority candidates is examined, as well as the ability of these candidates to win when they do stand for election. While we uncover no evidence that such structures affect candidacy, our results do indicate district magnitude is negatively correlated with the likelihood of female and minority victory. This finding conflicts with the existing literature on the topic and has implications for debates on electoral reform and the representation of women and minorities.

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The health and legitimacy of any representative democracy depend heavily on the range and quality of the candidates that run for and win political office. Two groups that are systematically underrepresented at the local level are women and racial minorities (Siemiatycki, 2011; Goodyear-Grant, 2013; Siemiatycki and Saloojee, 2002). According to the most recent available Canadian data, for instance, a mere 26% of municipal councilors and just 18% of mayors across the country are women. Visible minorities are also dramatically under-represented at city hall: as of 2015, fewer than 7% of council seats across Canada's largest 50 cities were held by visible minorities, and only one, Calgary, has ever elected a mayor with a visible minority background (Equal Voice, 2016; FCM, 2013). At best, governments that lack diversity invite questions of legitimacy, and at worst, the policies they implement may fail to reflect or benefit from the full range of opinions and experiences within the electorate (Lenard and Simeon, 2012).

To what extent do structural factors help account for the representational deficits from which many democracies suffer? Recent research on legislative races in the United States has found that the characteristics of the candidates and the political opportunity structures (e.g. institutional and other contextual factors) that they face are crucial for explaining their "decision to run" and the outcomes they experience (Black, 1972; Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2010; Caselli and Morelli, 2004; Fox and Lawless, 2005: 644; Mattozzi and Merlo, 2008; Brodie, 1985; Gavan-Koop and Smith 2008; Swers 2002). Our paper investigates whether some of these factors are relevant to the underrepresentation of women and ethnic minorities at the local level in Canada. If so, then attitudinal explanations, such as racism or sexism on the part of voters,<sup>1</sup> may not fully explain the paucity of representation within municipal governments from which these groups suffer.

In this paper, we focus on whether three structural factors,

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<sup>1</sup> The literature on voter affinity, which is the idea that voters will support candidates of the same gender/race as themselves, is mixed with respect to women and visible minority candidates in Canada. Some studies have found evidence of strong effects (Besco, 2015; Bird, 2016; Tolley and Goodyear-Grant, 2014) while others have uncovered weak effects, if any at all (Black and Erickson, 2006; Cutler and Matthews, 2005). More recently, Bird et al. (2016) found that gender affinity effects were moderated by ethnicity in the 2014 Toronto mayoral election. Some explanation for this lies in the research design of these studies, some of which are experimental, while others are observational.

commonly seen as disadvantaging women and visible minorities, account for their scarcity in municipal politics: district magnitude, incumbency and salary.<sup>2</sup> Our goal is not to imply that both groups face the same disadvantages. Instead we hope to shed light on the types of obstacles that women and visible minority candidates encounter, with the recognition that the scale of such effects may be unevenly distributed between both groups.<sup>3</sup>

As demands for more robust and fair democratic processes grow louder (Lenard and Simeon, 2012), so too do proposals for addressing the barriers facing women and visible minority candidates. Some of the more popular proposals focus on a number of rules and situations associated with the electoral system (e.g. district magnitude and incumbency) and the attributes of the elected positions themselves (e.g. salary levels) (Atkinson and Rogers, 2012). Accordingly, we hope to shed some light on whether these proposals are likely to succeed.

Much of the existing literature has tended to focus on federal and provincial/state level races where political parties predominate, thus making it difficult to tease out the effects of other aspects of political opportunity structure. Local elections in Canada, however, are generally free from formal political parties (Lightbody, 1999). In most places, the absence of parties is the result of long-standing norms that have developed and become path dependent (Lightbody, 1999). In other jurisdictions, like Ontario, Canada, it is the result of provincial legislation prohibiting local candidates from fundraising via a party structure.<sup>4</sup>

In the absence of parties, voters and candidates in these races may exhibit substantially different behavior and face different structures, incentives and barriers as compared to jurisdictions with long-standing party systems (Anderson et al., 2011; McDermott, 1998, 1997; Matson and Fine, 2006). In partisan settings, partisanship has been shown to be a crucial heuristic cue that can override other relevant information about candidates (Rahn, 1993). Without this informational shortcut, however, voters may fall back on other cues, such as gender or race (McDermott, 1998; Matson and Fine, 2006). The mechanical effects of structural factors might also be stronger in the absence of such a powerful attitudinal cue. A non-partisan setting, therefore, presents an ideal context to study these effects.

By analyzing council races in 22 municipalities in Ontario,<sup>5</sup> Canada, we test the impact of three POS factors - incumbency or the presence of an open seat, salary, and district magnitude - on the rates at which visible minorities and women contest and win office. We chose to focus on local elections in Ontario because the province provides a great deal of institutional variation, thus allowing us

to observe the effects of these institutional differences upon candidacy and representation. Solving the puzzle of female and minority representation is also particularly important at the municipal level because many politicians begin their political careers in municipal politics before migrating to other levels of government (Deckman, 2007; Sanbonmatsu et al., 2009).

## 1. Women, minority candidates and municipal elections

Councils are the formal decision-making bodies of local governments, combining both executive and legislative functions. While municipalities themselves vary in shape and size, the roles and responsibilities of Ontario municipal councillors do not. The powers of council are spelled out in the (provincial) *Municipal Act, 2001* (see s.224–225). While there is technically no variation in the responsibilities of councillors across the province, the amount of work required and the level of compensation received, vary.

Much of the existing literature examining how “citizens become candidates” focuses on the manifestation of political ambition. The leading research on this topic (Lawless, 2012; Fox and Lawless, 2005) argues the decision to run for office can be divided into two stages: nascent ambition, where candidates display an inclination to run, and expressive ambition, which is the actual act of seeking elected office (see also Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2010: 16–18). Once nascent ambition is activated, candidates engage in a cost/benefit analysis regarding whether to run, balancing the costs of fundraising and running a campaign against the benefits of salary, enhanced job opportunities and notoriety (Black, 1972; Diermeier et al., 2005; Keane and Merlo, 2010; Moncrief et al., 2001).

Once a candidate enters a race, the outcome of their campaign depends heavily on a variety of factors. At the federal and provincial/state levels, for instance, partisanship plays a significant role in mediating the effects of local campaigns, as do multilevel institutional (e.g. electoral systems; federalism, etc.) factors and environments (economic voting; news national and regional media coverage). Other influential factors include local campaigns and issues, contextual factors like riding demographics and the characteristics of individual candidates (Carty and Eagles, 1999; Gidengil et al., 2012; Kanji et al., 2012; Roy and Alcantara, 2015).

## 2. Expectations

In this paper, we focus on three factors that have been shown elsewhere to affect the number women and visible minority candidates that run and win municipal elections: district magnitude,<sup>6</sup> incumbency, and salary. Research has shown women may be more likely to run in multi-member districts (Karnig and Walter, 1976; Kirkpatrick, 1974; Welch and Studlar, 1990). On balance, the literature also suggests that district magnitude is positively correlated with the election of women and visible minorities, and it is well established that multi-member district electoral systems tend to have higher numbers of female and visible minority legislators than single-member districts (Castles, 1981; Matland and Studler, 1996; Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran, 1996). In partisan settings, district magnitude has multiple effects. First, district magnitude influences the extent of electoral competition and the strength of

<sup>2</sup> There exists a strain of literature that suggests that women, in particular, may enjoy a “municipal advantage” in local elections, making them more likely to be elected municipally than federally or provincially. There are two arguments put forward to support this claim. First, most municipal elections in Canada are non-partisan, meaning that if political parties are at all reluctant to run female candidates, the absence of parties should remove a structural barrier to female participation. Second, it has been argued that women have a greater affinity for “politics where we live,” and engaging in policy issues that more directly affect themselves and their families (see Trimble, 1995; Graham et al., 1998). Recent scholarship, however, has shown that this “municipal advantage” is no longer present, if it ever really existed (see Andrew et al., 2008; Tolley, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Our analysis does not take into account the quality of the candidates. We take account of the number of women and visible minority candidates, not their personal attributes or unique circumstances that may make them more viable to the electorate.

<sup>4</sup> Some Canadian cities – notably Montreal and Vancouver – have party systems in place, but these are by far the minority.

<sup>5</sup> The 22 municipalities are: Ajax, Barrie, Brampton, Brantford, Burlington, Chatham-Kent, Guelph, Hamilton, Kingston, Kitchener, London, Markham, Mississauga, Ottawa, Oakville, Oshawa, Peterborough, Thunder Bay, Sudbury, Vaughan, Waterloo and Windsor.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth differentiating between elections that use at-large districts, which effectively consist of one ward that covers the entire city, vs. multi-member districts, where cities are divided into wards that each elect two or more officials. Most cities in Canada employ multi-member districts. Of the six cities considered here with multi-member districts, only one (Oshawa) employs an at-large system. Theoretically, we see no reason to expect voters to respond similarly in the two similar types of systems, as compared to cities with single member districts.

minority parties, who are more likely to nominate women and minority candidates for election (Rule, 1987; Jones, 1993; Mainwaring and Shugart, 1997). Second, multi-member districts are often associated with “ticket balancing,” where parties will nominate both female and male candidates to appeal to a broader portion of the electorate (Matland and Studler, 1996). It has also been argued that parties are more likely to nominate women and visible minorities in multi-member districts because they are more inclined to “risk” the nomination of women and visible minorities within these districts rather than single-member districts (Rule, 1987; Matland and Brown, 1992).

While most literature has found women candidates achieve better results in multi-member districts, there is evidence that suggests this relationship is imperfect. While examining elections to the Irish Dail, Engstrom (1987) found women candidates did better in four-member versus three-member districts, but not better in five-member versus four-member districts. The reason for this discrepancy is unclear. In another example, Welch and Studler (1990) found no relationship between district magnitude and women's electoral success in their large study of multi-member elections in the United States, England and Wales. They did find single-member districts tended to disadvantage women slightly, but their analysis was uncontrolled and they did not explain this finding.

The impact of district magnitude is even less clear at the local level, where literature on this topic is relatively sparse. Studler and Welch (1991) studied local candidates in London, England, finding that, for the most part, women candidates won about as often as males, once the impact of race and incumbency were considered. They also found the most important predictor of winning in these elections was incumbency. Overall, their results ran counter to earlier research (Engstrom, 1987; Clark et al., 1984) leaving them to conclude the benefits of district magnitude were not universal. More recent research on gender and local elections in London has uncovered that district magnitude, at the very least, does not operate as a detriment to women candidates (Borisyuk et al., 2007).

Similar results have been found for visible minority candidates. Bloemraad (2013) uncovered limited evidence that multimember systems increase the electoral prospects of racial minorities in national parliamentary elections in some western European countries. Dancygier (2014) explored Muslim representation in local London elections, finding electoral rules and district magnitude had less of an effect on the chances of Muslim candidates versus demographic variables, such as the size of the local Muslim population and its spatial concentration.

Important in these results is that they are based overwhelmingly upon partisan settings. In local elections in England, candidates run under party labels, which, as we have seen, generally help women candidates win in multi-member districts. Studler and Welch (1991) also remind us that the dynamics of British politics affect these local contests, whereby it is generally accepted that local results constitute a referendum on the current popular standing of the parliamentary parties (Dancygier, 2014). Therefore, it is very possible the effects of district magnitude are mediated through party systems (see Norris, 1998; Lovenduski and Norris, 1993), leaving outstanding questions about what occurs in non-partisan environments.

Past research has shown that although a linear relationship between district magnitude and success of women and visible minority candidates has not been established, district magnitude has promise in producing more equitable outcomes than single-member districts (Studler and Welch, 1991). We expect similar results in our study. Our first hypothesis has two components, which are stated as follows:

*H1A:* Females and visible minorities will be more likely to run in wards with a district magnitude of greater than one.

*H1B:* Female and visible minority candidates will be more likely to win in wards with a district magnitude of greater than one.

Incumbency in local elections is another factor that has been identified as a hindrance to the entrance of women and visible minorities in local politics. Research has shown incumbency can be one of the strongest predictors of success in local elections (Krebs, 1998; Schaffner et al., 2001; Hanjal et al., 2002). Past research has found incumbents have an extremely high re-election rate in municipal politics (Desposato and Petrocik, 2003; Hajnal et al., 2002). Although incumbents have control over a number of advantages, such as name recognition and office resources, it has been found that the incumbency advantage in municipal politics is largely the result of voters using incumbency as a heuristic in the absence of political parties (Krebs, 1998; Schaffner et al., 2001; Trounstone, 2011).

Incumbency has been shown to have a ‘dampening effect’ on the decision of women to enter politics (Palmer and Simon, 2001). The presence of an incumbent can dissuade women to seek office, pushing them to instead opt for another opening in the political system (e.g. re-districting, retirement, etc). Male candidates face no such concerns. Similar dynamics come into play when racial minorities consider running for office (Andrew et al., 2008). Given these considerations, we expect:

*H2A:* Females and visible minorities will be more likely to run in wards without an incumbent.

*H2B:* Female and visible minority candidates will be more likely to win in wards without an incumbent.

High salaries for politicians should increase the likelihood of women running for office because, while salary levels for politicians are the same regardless of the office holder's gender, the same cannot be said for salary levels in the private sector. Thus women may face stronger financial incentives to run for political office compared to male candidates, given the gendered differentials in salary between public and private sector jobs. Kotakorpi and Poutvaara (2011: 877) uncovered some empirical support for this assumption, finding that a 35% salary increase for members of parliament in Finland in 2000 “increased the fraction of candidates with higher education among female candidates” by 5%, whereas such an increase had no effect on their male counterparts.

We expect a similar dynamic among racial minorities, with high salaries drawing more minority candidates to run for office. Additionally, recall the literature above that emphasizes the importance of the cost-benefit calculus in which potential candidates engage (Caselli and Morelli, 2004; Kotakorpi and Poutvaara, 2011: 878; Black, 1972; Keane and Merlo, 2010; Moncrief et al., 2001). Given that, on average, racial minority salaries in the private sector tend to be lower than non-minorities, the likelihood of racial minority citizens running for office should increase as the payoff (e.g. salary differential) for winning an election increases. Finally, if education is positively correlated with candidate quality, we also expect more women and minorities to be elected in places with high salaries for public officials. Here, we assume that voters, in general, want to elect higher quality candidates, all else being equal (Roy and Alcantara, 2015). Formally, we expect:

*H3A:* Females and visible minorities will be more likely to run when councillor salary is high.

*H3B:* Female and visible minorities candidates will be more likely to win when councillor salary is high.

### 3. Data and methodology

In order to evaluate the relationship between POSs and the candidacy and election of women and visible minorities, we collected data from a number of sources. Official municipality websites were used to gather information on the names of candidates, including the winner(s) in each ward. Depending upon the city, some official municipal websites included additional information about, or pictures of candidates. Research assistants then scoured the internet for information on the gender and race of the candidates themselves. Sources for this information include official candidate websites, newspaper articles and candidate social media accounts. Based upon the information collected we coded each candidate's gender and visible minority status.<sup>7</sup>

While we were able to collect this information for the vast majority of candidates, it was not possible to find information on all of them. 950 candidates contested the council races in the 22 municipalities considered here. Given our hesitance to code candidates for race or gender in the absence of absolute certainty, there were a number of candidates for whom we did not assign values for one or more of these characteristics. In total, we were able to categorize 97.5% (or 927) and 92.2% (or 876) candidates on the basis of gender and visible minority status respectively, and it is these individuals who form the basis of our analysis below. Importantly, we were able to code all winning candidates on the basis of both gender and race.

Information on POSs was gathered through official municipality websites, and all information was collected at the ward level. Our theoretical variables have been coded as dummies for ease of analysis and to compare the magnitude of the effects of the different factors upon gender and visible minority candidacy and victories. The multimember district variable compares those wards with a district magnitude of one to those with a magnitude of greater than one. 155 of 184 wards had a district magnitude of one, while the remaining 29 were categorized as multimember districts.<sup>8</sup> Aside from having a district magnitude greater than 1, there are no systematic differences between the municipalities in question. In Ontario, the structure of the election process and the institutional context of municipal government are largely dictated by the provincial government through the *Municipal Elections Act* (1996) and the *Municipal Act* (2001), meaning there are few major institutional differences between our cases beyond the three POS factors on which we focus.

The open seat/incumbent variable has a value of 1 if the number of members elected in a district is higher than the number of incumbent candidates. For instance, a ward with a magnitude of two but only one incumbent is considered an open-ward. Of our 184 wards, 62 (or 33.7%) had at least one open seat. The 'pay' variable categorizes municipalities into two groups: those above or below the median compensation level.<sup>9</sup> The income variable was converted to a dummy for ease of interpretation in our analysis

<sup>7</sup> We recognize that this approach to categorizing candidate gender and race does not take the self-identification of candidates themselves into consideration. That said, our approach does resemble the process which voters themselves would most likely use to determine gender and race – using names and information readily found on the internet. We define visible minorities as persons who are non-Caucasian in race.

<sup>8</sup> The cities with a district magnitude (DM) greater than 1 include Brampton (DM = 2), Brantford (DM = 2), Chatham-Kent (DM = 2, 3, or 6), Guelph (DM = 2), Oshawa (DM = 3) and Peterborough (DM = 2). Note that our conclusions remain unchanged if this variable is coded as interval-level, rather than as a dummy.

<sup>9</sup> Pay ranges from \$24,496/year in Oshawa to \$92,999/year in Ottawa, with a mean value of \$52,671 and a median of \$36,262. This variable has been converted from an interval-level variable into a dummy. Note that the substantive conclusions of our study remain unchanged if an interval level variable is used instead.

below and to make it comparable to the open seat and multimember district variables. Note that Appendix 1 contains descriptive statistics for all variables included in the analysis below.

As noted above, this study has two goals: to determine if there is a relationship between three POSs and (1) female and visible minority candidacy and (2) female and visible minority victories.<sup>10</sup> To these ends, our analysis consists of three stages. First, we provide a descriptive analysis of the relationships between our three POSs and gender and visible minority candidacy and victory. This uncontrolled analysis provides a baseline of the relationship between our factors of interest.

The second component of our analysis is a logistic regression model, where the goal is to identify the correlates of female and minority candidacy. In this analysis our POSs and several important controls are considered simultaneously in a series of models where the outcome variables are gender and visible minority status. Controls include a measure of education (the share of the population with a university degree) as well as an indicator of the average household income of residents in each city (in thousands). These factors serve as crude, yet nevertheless theoretically important proxies for social and economic conservatism, respectively. Existing literature suggests that female and minority candidates are often seen as being more left-leaning (Huddy and Terkildsen, 1993; Gidengil and Everitt, 2003; McDermott, 1998); the inclusion of these variables allows us to account for the possibility that conservatives (either social or economic) may be less likely to support female and/or minority candidates. An additional control, the share of population comprised of visible minorities, is included when we consider minority candidacy, under the simple assumption that, *ceteris paribus*, the more minorities live in a city, the more minorities will contest office (such a variable is not necessary in the gender analysis, since gender breakdowns are similar across all cities).

The third and final segment of our analysis is similar to the second, except that the goal is to determine the correlates of female and minority victories.<sup>11</sup> In these models the dependent variable becomes whether a candidate is victorious or not, and the right-side variables are the POSs and controls. For this analysis we include two additional controls that are presumably related to candidate victory. The first is an indicator of each candidate's 'chances' of winning the election, as calculated by dividing the number of seats in a ward by the number of candidates contesting that race. For example, if 5 candidates are contesting a race in a ward with a district magnitude of 2, the 'chances' variable has a value of 0.4, while if the ward is a single member district this value would be 0.2. We also include a variable to account for the advantages of incumbency; candidates are coded as incumbents or not.

### 4. Results

Prior to testing our theoretical expectations, it is worth presenting some brief descriptive information on the relative prominence of female and visible minority candidates. Both groups were significantly underrepresented as candidates and elected representatives. In our sample, roughly 22.1% of candidates were female and 17.8% were visible minorities. The proportion of women who

<sup>10</sup> Gender and minority status are considered separately in all analyses. Only 2 of the 213 winning candidates were minority women, which is not enough to analyze the interaction of these factors (including such an interaction term in any of our models causes some of the explanatory variables to drop out).

<sup>11</sup> Note that we exclude from all of our analysis the small number of races where the winner is acclaimed.



won, however, was higher than those who ran – 27.4% of winning candidates were women. The pattern for visible minorities is quite different. A mere 11.5% of victorious candidates belonged to this category, a figure much lower than the group's candidate share.

Regardless of the reasons for such a pattern, our goal is to evaluate the effect of selected POSs upon the success rates of women and visible minorities. We begin this analysis with Table 1, which presents a series of cross-tabulations of gender/visible minority status and POSs. The first two columns show the share of female and visible minority candidates by POS, while the third and fourth show the share of victorious candidates by POS. For each, we also show the difference between our groups of interest, and indicate statistical significance (based upon a series of t-tests).

Of the six comparisons in the candidacy columns, only one difference is statistically significant. Visible minorities are much more likely to be candidates in cities where compensation is relatively high. The openness of a seat and district magnitude do not display a relationship with candidate race. Women are no more or less likely to be candidates than men on the basis of whether a seat is open, the level of pay, or district magnitude.

In terms of victorious candidates, three of the six comparisons are significant. Whether or not a seat is open does not affect whether women or minorities will win, and there is no relationship between council pay and the success rate of women. However, visible minorities are more likely to win in cities where pay is high, and both women and minorities are much less likely to win in multimember districts than in wards where only a single member is elected. This effect is particularly large for minority candidates, who are less than 20% as likely to win in multi-member districts versus single member districts. The comparable value for women is roughly 50%.

While suggestive, the results in Table 1 are uncontrolled, and thus insufficient to establish a causal relationship. Accordingly, we employ multivariate analyses to control for a series of other factors. We begin by considering the correlates of candidacy for women and visible minorities, and then shift to the correlates of candidate success.

Table 2, which considers the correlates of candidacy, displays the results of four logistic regression models. For models 2A and 2B, the dependent variable is candidate gender, and positive and significant coefficients for explanatory variables would indicate that these factors positively affect the rate of female candidacy. Models 2C and 2D are similar, with visible minority status as the outcome variable. For both gender and race we run two models. Recall our expectation is that women and minorities will be more likely to run when a seat is open, when pay is high and in multi-member districts. The first model in each instance includes only POS variables, while controls are added in the second (to isolate the effect of POSs from other system level factors that might conceivably affect

**Table 1**  
Candidacy and winning candidates by gender/visible minority status and POS.

	Candidacy		Victorious Candidates	
	Female	Visible Minority	Female	Visible Minority
Multimember District	18.5%	16.2%	15.8%	1.8%
Single Member District	23.1%	18.2%	30.1%	10.9%
<i>Difference</i>	-4.6%	-2.0%	-14.3%*	-9.1%*
Open Seat	21.0%	18.0%	24.1%	9.0%
Closed Seat	23.1%	17.6%	27.8%	8.3%
<i>Difference</i>	-2.1%	0.4%	-3.7%	0.7%
High Pay	24.0%	29.1%	28.4%	13.6%
Low Pay	20.2%	7.3%	24.8%	4.9%
<i>Difference</i>	3.8%	21.8%*	3.6%	8.7%*
N	927	876	213	211

\*: Difference significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

candidacy). Results are clustered by city to account for municipality-specific circumstances.

In short, Table 2 provides no compelling evidence that any of our POSs of interest have a causal influence on either female or minority candidacy, and thus we find no support for any of our three hypotheses. In neither of the gender models are any of the theoretical or control variables statistically significant. The pay variable is positive and significant in Model 2C, indicating that minorities are more likely to seek office in cities with high remuneration levels (such a finding is congruent with the uncontrolled results in Table 1). However, the effect of pay washes out in Model 2D, once we take into account the share of the population comprised of visible minorities (the latter variable is highly significant). Such a finding is unsurprising given that minorities are concentrated in larger cities, and councillors tend to be paid more in such settings. Thus while Table 1 suggests a relationship between pay, district magnitude and the candidacy of women and visible minorities, this relationship disappears in a controlled analysis. In fact, we find support for none of our candidacy hypotheses (*H1A*, *H2A* and *H3A*). These null findings are nevertheless significant in that they suggest making institutional changes to our POSs will not necessarily attract greater numbers of women and minority candidates.

Even though POSs do not appear to have an impact upon the candidacy rates of women and minorities, might it be the case that such candidates perform better under certain circumstances? We turn now to whether women and minorities are advantaged or disadvantaged by our three POS factors. To this end, Table 3 includes a series of six logistic regression models, where the dependent variable is the same in all instances: winning/losing a council seat. In contrast to Table 2, therefore, gender and visible minority status are independent variables here. Models 3A to 3C examine the influence of gender in candidate success, while 3D to 3F consider visible minority status. Models 3A and 3D include our POS factors and gender/visible minority status only, while 3B and 3E introduce controls. Model 3C and 3F include interactions between gender/visible minority status and the POSs to determine if these political opportunity structures affect women (visible minorities) differently than men (whites). Note that Models 3E and 3F include one additional control: the percentage visible minority variable that was included in Table 2.

The focus of Table 3 is the gender and visible minority status variables, as well as the interaction terms. It is these results which tell us whether women and minority candidates are systematically (dis)advantaged, and whether our POSs contribute to such a pattern. While several of the constituent POS and control variables are significant,<sup>12</sup> it is the variables in the shaded portion of Table 3 that reveal how POSs affect the electoral prospects of women and visible minorities.

In this vein, Table 3 reveals several findings of note. First, while the female term in Model 3A is significant (and perhaps surprisingly positive), the inclusion of controls in Model 3B causes the effect of this variable to disappear. In contrast, the visible minority variable is negative and significant in both Models 3D and 3E. Thus, by itself, gender does not negatively affect a candidate's chances of winning. However, visible minorities do appear to be systematically disadvantaged, even after taking into account a variety of controls. Such a finding suggests that the barriers faced by female and minority candidates are qualitatively different.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, two of the controls (the 'chances' and 'incumbent') variables are highly significant. Models 3B and 3E also reveal that the chances of any candidate winning are higher when there is an open seat and in single member districts. While the second pattern, in particular, is interesting, an extensive discussion of this finding is beyond the purview of this article.

**Table 2**  
Gender and visible minority status and candidacy – logistic regression.

	Gender		Visible Minority status	
	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 2C	Model 2D
Multi-member district	–0.18 (0.20)	–0.20 (0.25)	0.52 (0.72)	–0.20 (0.41)
Open seat	–0.68 (0.13)	–0.01 (0.13)	–0.01 (0.23)	0.12 (0.23)
High pay	0.17 (0.20)	–0.06 (0.32)	1.79 (0.57)**	0.31 (0.29)
% University Educated		–1.23 (2.76)		2.72 (3.45)
Average Income		0.01 (0.01)		–0.01 (0.01)
% population minority				5.22 (0.64)**
Constant	–1.28 (0.19)	–1.96 (0.82)	–2.73 (0.51)**	–3.81 (0.77)**
Pseudo R2	0.0031	0.0054	0.0958	0.2060
N	927	876		

Entries report coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).

\*:  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ .

# of clusters = 22.

**Table 3**  
Gender and visible minority status and victory – logistic regression.

	Gender			Visible Minority status		
	Model 3A	Model 3B	Model 3C	Model 3D	Model 3E	Model 3F
Open seat	–0.65 (0.11)**	1.00 (0.23)**	0.88 (0.28)**	–0.63 (0.11)**	1.03 (0.24)**	1.02 (0.25)**
High pay	–0.33 (0.13)*	–0.14 (0.09)	–0.09 (0.13)	–0.08 (0.09)	–0.07 (0.06)	–0.04 (0.07)
Multi-member district	0.48 (0.17)**	–0.29 (0.12)*	–0.09 (0.17)	0.50 (0.13)**	–0.36 (0.11)**	–0.23 (0.11)
Female	0.34 (0.16)*	0.21 (0.16)	0.25 (0.35)			
Multi-member district X female			–0.86 (0.42)**			
Open seat X female			0.49 (0.52)			
High pay X female			–0.24 (0.36)			
Visible Minority				–0.98 (0.31)**	–0.74 (0.35)*	–0.73 (0.44)
Multi-member district X visible minority						–2.60 (0.44)**
Open seat X visible minority						0.64 (0.46)
High pay X visible minority						–0.11 (0.46)
% University Educated		1.72 (0.81)*	1.78 (0.92)		0.50 (0.59)	–0.02 (0.63)
Average Income		–0.01 (0.00)	–0.01 (0.00)		0.090 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Chances of victory		3.27 (0.39)**	3.29 (0.37)**		3.12 (0.40)**	3.28 (0.46)**
Incumbent		3.66 (0.48)**	3.67 (0.48)**		3.62 (0.48)**	3.62 (0.48)**
% population minority					0.27 (0.26)	0.57 (0.30)
Constant	–0.98 (0.12)**	–3.44 (0.24)**	–3.48 (0.27)**	–0.82 (0.10)**	–3.21 (0.20)**	–3.18 (0.27)**
Pseudo R2	0.0256	0.3148	0.3173	0.0359	0.3172	0.3226
N	927			876		

Entries report coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).

\*:  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*:  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ .

# of clusters = 22.

The second set of noteworthy findings relates to the interaction terms, which reveal the extent to which POSs combine with gender and visible minority status to affect candidate success. The ‘open seat’ and ‘high pay’ variables are insignificant in both models 3C and 3F, suggesting that women and minorities are not (dis) advantaged compared to male and white candidates, respectively. We thus have no support for *H2B* and *H3B*. Pay and incumbency do not help to explain the chronic underrepresentation of females and minorities on city councils. We also find no evidence that making changes to pay or incumbency (such as the enactment of term limits) affects the representation of women and minorities.

In contrast to these null findings, the district magnitude variable is negative and significant for both women and minorities (in models 3C and 3F). These results suggest that when district magnitude is greater than one, women and visible minorities have less of a chance of winning than men and white candidates. Such a finding conflicts with *H1B* and is inconsistent with a sizable body of existing literature that suggests increases in district magnitude lead to more diverse legislatures (Castles, 1981; Matland and Studler, 1996; Cameron, Epstein and O'Halloran, 1996).

Fig. 1 reveals the predicted probability of female and minority candidates winning election in single and multi-member districts,

holding all other variables constant (estimates are based upon post-estimation following Models 3C and 3F respectively). It allows us to visualize and compare the extent of the disadvantage seemingly faced by female and minority candidates in multi-member districts.

Fig. 1 reveals several findings of note. First, in single member districts, female candidates perform no worse than men (in fact, although the difference is statistically insignificant, the female coefficient in model 3C suggests that women may, in fact, outperform men in single member districts). However, male candidates have a much higher chance of winning in multi-member districts than female candidates. The probability of a male candidate winning in such a race is 0.21, as compared to 0.16 for females.

For their part, minorities suffer more from an increase in district magnitude than women. The predicted probability of a minority candidate winning in a single member ward is 0.19, while this number drops to a mere 0.03 in multimember wards. This decline is more than three times the magnitude of the decrease experienced by female candidates. Such a pattern is compounded by the fact that minority candidates are disadvantaged as compared to their white counterparts in single-member districts as well. White candidates have a 0.26 probability of winning such contests, as compared to 0.19 for minorities. Thus while district magnitude

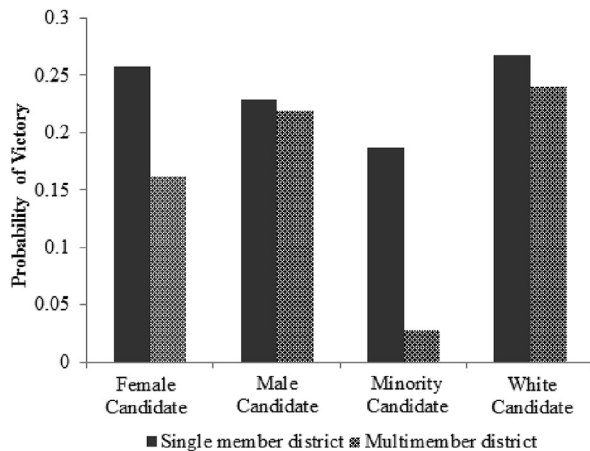


Fig. 1. Gender, Race and District Magnitude.

negatively affects both female and minority candidates, the latter group appears to suffer much more.

## 5. Conclusion

In an ideal world, voters would be blind to gender, race and any other factor that might form the basis for discrimination. In reality, however, we know that this is not the case. Both women and minorities are systematically underrepresented at all levels of government in Canada, and this paper sheds some light on the correlates of this phenomena. The first finding of note is that we find no evidence that our three POSs affect rates of candidacy among women and visible minorities. While past research has shown a ‘dampening effect’ upon candidacy stemming from the particulars of the electoral system (Palmer and Simon, 2001), we find no such pattern here. Women and visible minorities are no less inclined to run for office than the rest of the population in our study. Normatively speaking, this is a positive result for Canadian democracy; our null results on this front are therefore encouraging.

In terms of the impact of POSs and the success rates of women and minorities, we find two more null results. Neither councillor pay nor the presence of an incumbent affects the electoral prospects of the two types of candidates under consideration here.<sup>13</sup> As noted above, such findings suggest institutional change may not be a miracle cure for the underrepresentation of women and minorities.

However, we do find one POS that affects the success rate of women and visible minorities: district magnitude is negatively associated with the success of female and minority candidates. This finding runs contrary to our expectations and the findings in the literature (Castles, 1981; Matland and Studler, 1996; Cameron et al., 1996). While perhaps surprising, these results are also strong; the Z-scores for the relevant female and racial minority interaction terms are 2.05 and 5.91 respectively. Additionally, as we are conscious of the fact that only 6 of the 22 cities included in our study have multi-member districts, we conducted a sensitivity analysis to ensure the significant results for the interaction terms in

Models 3C and 3F were not due to the inclusion of a single ‘outlier’ city. We re-ran these models several times, excluding one of the multi-member cities in each iteration. At no point did either of the interaction terms lose statistical significance.<sup>14</sup> Our finding that district magnitude is negatively associated with female and minority success, therefore, cannot be dismissed as a mere fluke.<sup>15</sup>

While these results are strong, we are nevertheless hesitant to make grand conclusions about the generalizability of our findings. Though our study covers a substantial number of cities and elections, we have focused on a single province. Relatedly, our sample includes only six municipalities with multi-member districts. Replicating this study in other settings is required to fully evaluate our conclusions. That being said, our research has uncovered a unique phenomenon that runs counter to the long-standing expectations in the literature, thus proving that the work of existing scholars does not apply to all settings. In short, our findings present a new puzzle to be explained.

So why might it be the case that female and minority candidates find it difficult to win in multi-member districts? Why do our results conflict so strongly with existing findings? We think the likeliest explanation is that much of the existing work on this topic focuses on systems that include active political parties. In these systems, parties feel pressure to put forward representatives of different types in an effort to ‘balance’ their slate of candidates and appeal to a wide range of voters (Studler and Welch, 1991; Dancygier, 2014). In municipal elections in Ontario, however, formal parties do not contest elections. As such, there is no coordinating mechanism to promote such balance. Our findings demonstrate that multi-member districts may not be beneficial to women and minorities in the absence of an established party system. In fact, such a system may serve to systematically disadvantage these groups.

Although we suggest that the absence of formal party structures explains why minorities and women do not do better than white and male candidates, it does not explain why they *do worse*. On this matter, we can think of no convincing explanation and therefore suggest future researchers attempt to uncover the causal mechanisms underlying this pattern. We can, however, rule out some potentially plausible explanations for this finding. First, it may conceivably be the case that our 6 multi-member and 14 single-member cities differ from one another in important ways that may somehow affect the general success rates of female and minority candidates. However, we compared these groups of cities with respect to population, population density, geographic size and even voter turnout, and did not find any statistically significant differences between the groups.<sup>16</sup>

Secondly, we recognize that, as is the case in other settings,

<sup>14</sup> This is despite the fact that such a reduction in sample size had a sizable impact upon standard errors, and thus *p*-values. The interaction was significant at  $p < 0.01$  for all ethnicity models, and never went above  $p < 0.10$  for any of the gender models.

<sup>15</sup> Unsurprisingly, visible minority candidates are not distributed equally among the wards and cities considered here. In fact, minorities are more likely to face off against one another in multi-member races. This difference does not, however, account for our finding that minorities perform particularly poorly in multi-member contests. If we focus only upon those wards where at least one minority candidate is present, minorities make up 35.8% of candidates in wards with a district magnitude of 1 and 47.7% of candidates where magnitude was greater than 1. However, these figures do not take into account the number of available spots in each contest, or the ratio of minority candidates to available seats. There were 35.8 minority candidates per 100 council spots in single member districts, while the comparable value for multi-member districts was only 23.8. It is not the case, therefore, that minorities performed poorly in multi-member contests because they were disproportionately concentrated in such races, thus defeating one another.

<sup>16</sup> Results not shown but are available from the authors.

<sup>13</sup> Some might wonder whether increases in salary levels across time and within jurisdictions could affect candidacy and success rates. In this paper, we draw on data from one election cycle and so we cannot comment directly on this issue. What our data do tell us is that there were no significant differences in outcomes across municipalities with higher salary levels versus lower salary levels. Future research might tackle this question directly by replicating our approach across multiple election cycles.

spending is central to success in municipal politics. As such, we conducted an analysis to determine whether spending patterns may account for the relatively poor success rates of women and minorities in multi-member settings. To test this possibility, we collected spending data from all winning candidates in the 22 cities considered here.<sup>17</sup> If these data were to reveal that (a) minorities and/or female candidates have to pay more than white and/or male candidates to win, and (b) if spending limits tend to be higher in multi-member districts, then such patterns could help explain why minorities and women are particularly disadvantaged in multi-member wards. If women and minorities need to spend more to be successful and if spending limits are high, this could present a significant hurdle for them.

The data do not meet these criteria. Although we did find a difference between the spending levels of victorious minority and white candidates, we did not find any noteworthy difference between women and men. Winning female candidates ( $N = 56$ ) spent an average of \$12,317.96, while men ( $N = 157$ ) spent \$12,133.40 ( $\Delta = \$184.56$ ). Winning minority candidates ( $N = 18$ ) did significantly outspend their white counterparts ( $N = 194$ ) at \$17,369.40 versus \$11,726.27 ( $\Delta = \$5643.13$ ). This pattern holds when values are normalized to take spending limits (which vary by city, and sometimes ward) into consideration. Victorious white candidates spent an average of 49.9% of the available spending limit, while minority candidates spent 71.4% – a sizable difference. However, men and women spent almost exactly the same amount when normalized – both spent 51.7% of the available limit. It is not the case, therefore, that women spend more than do men to win, although minorities do appear to need to outspend their white counterparts to be elected.

Such a pattern only helps to explain our finding that minorities are disadvantaged in multi-member districts. However, if spending levels and limits are higher in such settings than in single-member wards, the impact of any potential spending disadvantage should theoretically increase as average spending levels and limits (and thus any potential differences between types of candidates) increase. The data provide no evidence of such a pattern. Spending limits are, in fact, slightly higher in multi-member districts (averages are \$23,373.44 versus \$22,218.40,  $\Delta = \$1,155.04$ ). However, average spending levels in multi-member districts are actually *lower* in than in single-district races: the average is \$6,527.57 versus \$14,247.93 ( $\Delta = -\$7,720.36$ ). Thus, while candidates are allowed to spend slightly more in multi-member districts, winning candidates actually tend to spend less money in such districts, as compared to single-member races. We are therefore able to rule out spending patterns of victorious candidates as an explanation for our finding that women and minorities perform poorly in multi-member contests.

Future work is required to explain this puzzle. Individual-level data may be particularly valuable on this front. Another question that should be investigated further is why minorities are seemingly punished more than women in multi-member wards. Finally, our contention that the absence of parties may help to explain our finding should be evaluated empirically. There is some variation amongst Canadian cities in terms of the degree of partisanization of contests. Vancouver, for example, has well established parties, while many municipalities in the province of Quebec have slates of candidates who run together under the banner of mayoral candidates (though these slates are relatively temporary). Such variation

may help to determine if the non-partisan nature of Ontario municipal elections contributes to our results.

Beyond the academy, our findings will be of interest to those involved in ongoing debates about democratic reform. There has been considerable discussion in Canada, and in Ontario in particular, regarding the structure of local processes; institutional change has been discussed as a potential way for improving the representation of traditionally marginalized groups. One suggestion has been to adopt more multi-member districts in the hopes of improving the representation of women and visible minorities; the implementation of term limits has also been considered.<sup>18</sup> Our results demonstrate that these structural reforms may not have the desired effect and, in the case of district magnitude, may in fact produce the opposite effect.

## Appendix I

**Table 1**  
1: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	N
Female	0.22	0.41	0	1	929
Visible minority	0.18	0.38	0	1	878
Open seat	0.47	0.5	0	1	934
High pay	0.49	0.5	0	1	934
Multi-member district	0.22	0.41	0	1	934
Education	0.36	0.05	0.26	0.44	934
Income (thousands)	83.55	14.17	62.18	113.99	934
Chances of victory	0.23	0.11	0.07	0.5	934
Incumbent candidate	0.17	0.37	0	1	934
% population visible minority	0.22	0.19	0.03	0.72	934

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<sup>17</sup> Ideally, we would wish to conduct an analysis of the spending data of all candidates, rather than just winners. However, many candidates do not file expense reports (in most instances, the only penalty for failing to do so is a ban on running in future elections).

<sup>18</sup> The Province of Ontario introduced legislation that enables municipalities to switch to ranked ballots beginning in 2015. See <http://www.mah.gov.on.ca/Page11120.aspx>.



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