

## A New Dataset on the Demographics of Canadian Federal Election Candidates

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**Abstract:** This research note reports on a new effort to track candidate diversity in Canadian elections. The dataset covers 4,516 candidates who ran in the 2008, 2011, 2015 and 2019 federal elections, and includes novel data on their race, Indigenous background and age, alongside information on gender, occupation, prior electoral experience and electoral outcome. We outline the process for collecting and systematizing these data, which relied on genealogical methods and the principle of triangulation. The data can be used to track diversity among electoral candidates over time or merged with other sources to answer district-level questions about representational diversity, electoral dynamics, vote choice and political communications. The method could also be replicated and applied to other levels of government.

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Scholars frequently use measures of representational diversity to assess the health of democracies and to understand the extent to which legislatures reflect the populations they govern (W. Cross, 2011). In Canada, the Library of Parliament provides information on federal election candidates' gender and occupation, and these data have recently been systematized for all elections since 1867 (Sevi, 2021).<sup>1</sup> We contribute to this effort by adding new data on candidates' race, Indigenous background and age, alongside data on their gender, occupation, prior electoral experience and electoral outcome. The dataset includes the 4,516 candidates who ran for the major federal parties in the 2008, 2011, 2015 and 2019 Canadian elections. This research note describes the main features of the dataset, explains the procedures for collecting and coding the information within it, and outlines some of the potential applications.

The dataset's most significant contribution is its inclusion of information on candidate race and Indigenous background, a focus of study where Canadian political science has typically lagged behind (Ladner, 2017; Thompson, 2008). Idle No More, Black Lives Matter and the rise of white supremacy all suggest we ignore matters of identity at our peril (Andrew, 2017). Political parties typically do not collect (or at least opt not to publicly share) individual-level data on candidate demographics, and this has left gaps in the knowledge base. This new dataset is therefore an important step forward, providing new information on the representation of identities in Canadian federal politics, which can be used to develop single-case studies as well as comparative benchmarking.

Other Canadian research tracks candidates' gender and racial background, but includes only aggregate numbers, such as the total number of women or racialized candidates, and this prevents researchers from linking these data to other variables (Black, 2017). Like others (Lucas et al., 2021; Sevi, 2021), we expand the possibilities by providing publicly accessible data at the district-level for all candidates,

and we add new data on racial and Indigenous backgrounds. These data can be tracked as dependent variables across multiple elections or included as independent variables to understand the relationship between candidate background and other political phenomena.

### **Data Collection and Variables**

Researchers have experimented with several methods for gathering data on candidate demographics, including surveys (Andrew et al., 2008; Black and Hicks, 2006), probability-based classifiers (Lucas et al., 2021; Sevi, 2021) and genealogical approaches based on publicly available biographical materials and surname and photographic analysis (Black, 2008), with many researchers combining two or more of these techniques. Surveys offer highly reliable information because they are based on self-identification, but often have considerable missing data given low response rates. Non-responses are of particular concern because they may be systematically linked to candidate demographics (Walgrave and Joly, 2018), and this is why we do not use a survey-based approach. Probability-based classifiers based on candidate name offer the advantage of automation and are most commonly applied to the study of gender using the R package *genderizeR* (Wais, 2016), but they require sample data to train the classifier and generate reliable inferences. In the United States, researchers have extrapolated candidates' racial identities using the Census Bureau's Surname List (Grumbach and Sahn, 2020), but this resource does not exist in Canada, so researchers must rely on other methods (Besco and Tolley, 2020). Given this, we developed a rigorous expert coding procedure based on genealogical methods, an approach that has been recognized as the "gold standard" in tracking candidate demographics (Shah and Davis, 2017).

Although researchers in a number of contexts rely on genealogical methods to infer or ascribe a candidate's background, there is the potential for error and bias. To guard against these limitations,

our coding procedure was based on the principle of triangulation: all demographic observations were cross-referenced across multiple sources. We required positive verification in at least two sources, such as a photograph and a non-European surname, prior to making a determination about a candidate's background. In cases where two positive verifications could not be obtained, the data are coded as missing.

We began by compiling candidate lists using official returns from Elections Canada. These also include election year, province, and the electoral district name and number; these are all included in the dataset. To this, we added variables on incumbency, gender, racial and Indigenous background, occupation, office-holding at other levels of government, age and electoral outcome. Data for variables not included in official returns were gathered from the Library of Parliament, Elections Canada, official party and candidate websites, social media and news media. Coders collected the data, which were then cleaned, verified and standardized by one of the authors. Coding took place in several rounds and at different timepoints, with the procedures adjusted and improved as new sources of candidate information were discovered. At least two separate coders examined each individual data point, and the approach to data generation was team-based and iterative. For this reason, we do not report conventional measures of intercoder reliability but instead provide a transparent account of the procedures and decision rules we used. We conservatively estimate the data collection and coding took more than 1,200 hours. The supplementary appendix includes additional details on the coding procedures and sources we consulted; in this research note, we highlight the main features of the substantive variables.

*Party.* From 2008 through 2015, the dataset includes candidates for the Bloc Québécois, Conservative, Liberal and New Democratic parties. In 2019, we added candidates for the Green Party.

*Incumbency.* Candidates who held a seat in the House of Commons immediately preceding the election were coded as incumbents; all others were coded as non-incumbents.

*Gender.* Candidates' gender identity or expression at the time of their candidacy was coded using biographical information, news reports, photographs, and first names. In 2008, 2011 and 2015, candidates were coded as either male/man or female/woman. In 2019, when nine candidates publicly identified as non-binary — meaning they identify as neither a man nor a woman — we added a third code to this variable.

*Racial or Indigenous background.* Candidates were classified as racialized, Indigenous or white. We based these constructs on the definitions of “visible minority” and “Aboriginal” that are included in Canada’s Census dictionary (Statistics Canada, 2017). While we retain the content of these definitions, the labels themselves have been criticized and are often not the ones used by the communities to which they refer (Hennig, 2019; United Nations, 2007; Vowel, 2016). The categorizing and labeling of demographic characteristics are not without contention, but consistent with best practices in the relevant scholarship, we use “racialized” and “Indigenous” rather than “visible minority” and “Aboriginal” (e.g., Gonzalez-Sobrino and Goss, 2019; Thompson, 2016; Vowel, 2016).

Racialized candidates are those who are not Indigenous and are “non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour” (Statistics Canada, 2017). This category includes those who are South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Arab, Southeast Asian, West Asian, Korean or Japanese and those who have mixed racialized backgrounds. Indigenous candidates are those who are First Nations (e.g., Status Indian, Cree, Ojibway), Métis or Inuit. Candidates who are neither racialized nor Indigenous

were coded as white. These classifications rely on both self-identification and ascription. Some candidates self-identify as racialized or Indigenous in their personal biographies or in media interviews, and we would code their background accordingly. In instances where existing sources provided no identification of a candidate's racial or Indigenous background, this variable was treated ascriptively and coded based on photographs, and surnames, using the principle of triangulation outlined above.<sup>2</sup> Although higher levels of disaggregation are desirable, this goal is impeded by a lack of data on sub-categories of candidate identification (for example, whether a candidate identified as Indigenous is Métis or First Nations), as well as the near impossibility of reliably inferring a candidate's specific racial background; to achieve this aim, expert coding using genealogical methods is generally not appropriate. Thus, with some reservations, we use macro-level categories ("racialized" and "Indigenous").

*Occupation.* We coded candidates' primary occupation prior to their entrance into politics. We relied extensively on the Library of Parliament's list of Elections and Candidates, which provides every federal candidate's occupation following each election. Elected representatives sometimes report "Parliamentarian" or "politician" as their primary occupation. To better reflect candidates' occupational background at the time they were first elected, we therefore also sought information from other sources, including candidate and party websites, interviews, and media reports. Occupational data are reported in nine broad categories: agriculture; business; education; government and politics; physicians and doctors; other health care; journalism; law; and other.

*Age.* We include a variable on candidate age, reported by year of birth. The Library of Parliament does not include age in its candidate database. Year of birth is available for elected members of parliament, as well as for some candidates who previously served in a provincial legislature, and some candidates

report their age in their official biographies or in media interviews. However, many do not disclose this information, and we are missing data on age for approximately one-third of the candidates in the database.

*Other Levels.* To capture electoral experience at other levels of government, we include a dichotomous variable indicating whether candidates previously held office at the provincial or municipal level, or if they have not.

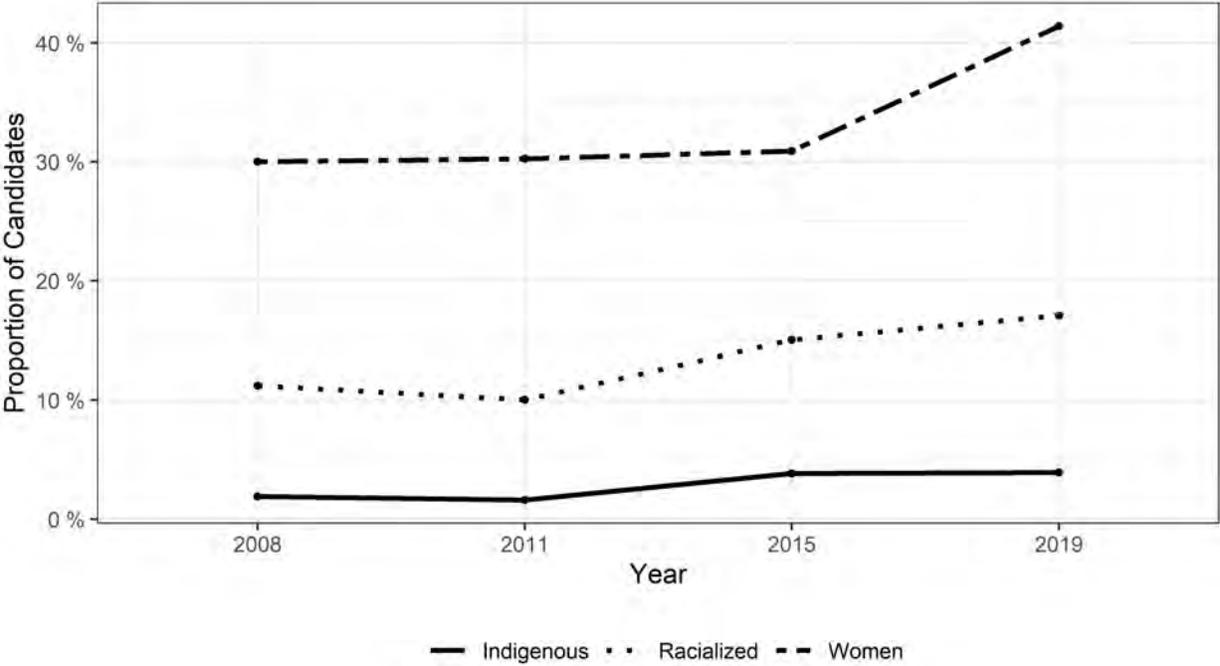
*Electoral Outcome and Competitiveness.* In each election, the candidate who won the district is coded as elected; all others are coded as having been defeated. We also include a measure of competitiveness, which is the difference between a candidate's percentage of the vote and that of the victor. The information for both variables was derived from Elections Canada's official electoral returns.<sup>3</sup>

## **Applications**

The dataset can be used, first, to understand and track diversity among electoral candidates. Figure 1 shows that since 2008, the proportion of candidates who are women, racialized or Indigenous has increased. The increase in women candidates between 2015 and 2019 is particularly notable and in contrast to the relative stagnation in this category in the preceding three election cycles. Other researchers can extend this analysis intersectionally to look, for example, at the presence of racialized women candidates in Canadian politics. Such an application would help to reveal whether racialized women are “doubly burdened” on account of their race and gender or, alternatively, whether they are “doubly advantaged,” with their race and gender providing party elites with an opportunity to tick two diversity boxes at once (Black and Erickson, 2006; Celis et al., 2014; Hughes, 2011). These questions have been posed in the comparative literature, but they have been less studied in Canada.

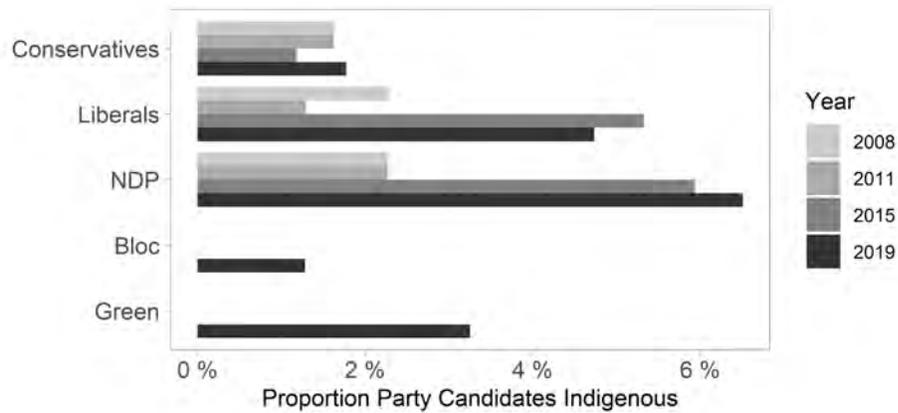
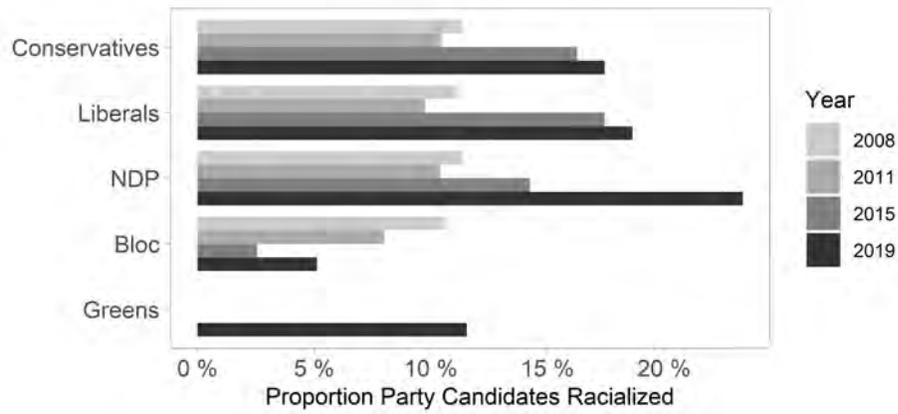
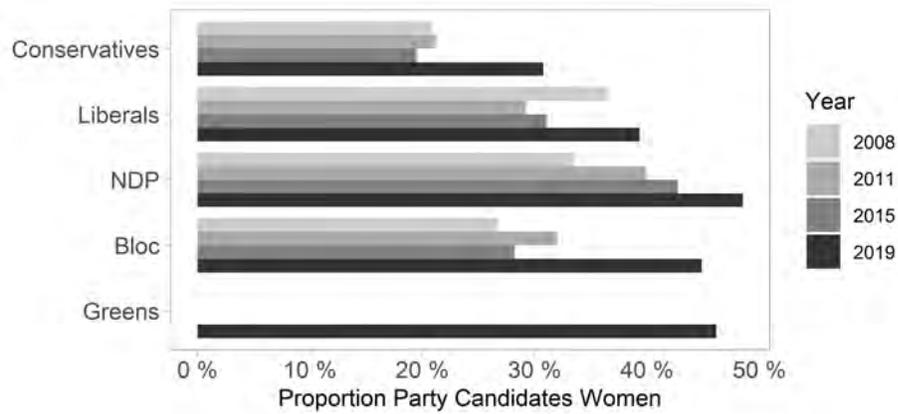
Given the centrality of political parties to candidate selection in Canada, the dataset also allows for comparisons across parties (W.P. Cross and Pruyzers, 2019; Thomas and Bodet, 2013; Tolley, 2019). Figure 2 compares candidate diversity across the federal parties, with panels for the proportion of women, racialized, and Indigenous candidates across the previous four federal elections. It shows the Bloc and Conservatives have consistently advanced the least racially diverse candidate slates, and that they have generally nominated fewer women than the other parties. The uptick in racialized and Indigenous candidates in the 2019 election appears to have been led by the Liberals and the NDP, with both parties making large gains here, and the NDP showing substantial increases on both measures. Future research could use these data to probe parties' strategies to recruit more diverse candidate slates and, in addition, advance new research on the competitive placement and outcome of these new recruits.

**Figure 1. Women, Racialized, and Indigenous Candidates in Canadian Election, 2008-2015**



*Note: For all elections, data captures information on candidates who ran for the Bloc Québécois, Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic parties, in addition to the Green Party in 2019.*

**Figure 2. Candidate Diversity by Party**



*Note: For all elections, data captures information on candidates who ran for the Bloc Québécois, Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic parties, in addition to the Green Party in 2019.*

In addition to these descriptive possibilities, the dataset offers significant analytical leverage on a range of questions related to electoral dynamics, political donations, vote choice and media coverage. For example, by merging the candidate-level data with voter-level data from the Canadian Election Study, researchers could answer new questions on the relationship between candidate demographics, attitudinal measures and vote intention. What voter or district features are correlated with the election of more diverse candidates? Are more urban districts or those with more progressively minded voters more open to candidates who break the demographic mould? Researchers could also merge our candidate-level data with Elections Canada's district-level data on voter turnout, financial contributions, and vote totals to understand the relationship between these dependent variables and candidate demographics. Is voter turnout higher in districts with more diverse candidate slates? Do candidates with historically under-represented backgrounds attract fewer donations? Candidate data could be merged with textual data, such as candidate mentions on Twitter or in election coverage to track candidates' portrayal and self-presentation, or with a new digital record of Hansard to track demographic patterns in parliamentary communication (Beelen et al., 2017).

Finally, the dataset offers possibilities for comparative analysis. It could be used alongside candidate data collected in other countries (e.g., Center for American Women and Politics, 2020) or with data on the gender of office-holders worldwide (e.g., Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2019) to understand how the relationship between representational diversity, political institutions, and public attitudes.

### **Contribution**

Candidates are at the centre of Canadian electoral politics. Despite diversity being a key feature of the country's composition, researchers to date have had limited access to data on candidate demographics, and the time required to gather such data may have deterred additional inferential analysis. This dataset

remedies the problem, providing a rigorous, reliable and comprehensive source of information on candidate race, Indigenous background and age alongside data on gender, occupation, electoral experience and outcomes. On their own, these data provide a benchmark for understanding representational diversity in Canada, but they also open up avenues for better understanding the political salience of identities on questions that are key to the study of electoral politics. Finally, by detailing the range of sources that were consulted, the coding procedures we used and the principles adopted to make decisions about contentious categories, this research note helps to “pull back the curtain” on the creation of new sources of data. The methods we describe here could be applied to the collection of other candidate data, including at the other levels of government. By documenting the data collection, this research note provides a basis for replication and, we hope, a move toward more institutionalized data collection on candidate diversity.

Supplementary data for this article are available at: [CJPS TO INSERT LINK]

The full dataset is available at:

<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/MI5XQ6>

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of writing, the Library of Parliament’s section on “Elections and Candidates” was available at [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/ElectionsRidings/Elections](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/ElectionsRidings/Elections), but we discovered the website is updated frequently, and the link is unstable.

<sup>2</sup> During the 2019 election, at least four candidates faced allegations that they were falsely claiming Indigenous identity (Berrera and Deer, 2019). Those candidates who recanted their claims of Indigenous identity were not coded as Indigenous.

<sup>3</sup> Peter Loewen, Daniel Rubenson, and Md Mujahedul Islam generously shared data related to the official results of the 2019 general election.

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## SUPPLEMENTARY APPENDIX

This appendix provides an overview of the coding procedures that were used to construct the Demographics of Canadian Federal Election Candidates dataset, created by Anna Johnson, Erin Tolley, Melanee Thomas, and Marc André Bodet. The dataset is available here: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi:10.7910/DVN/MI5XQ6>. Variables for election year, district name, district number, province, election outcome, and competitiveness were generated using Elections Canada data. Independent coders then collected data on the variables outlined below. The coders and authors met regularly to discuss anomalies, missing data, and ambiguous cases. The data were also cleaned, verified, and standardized by one of the authors.

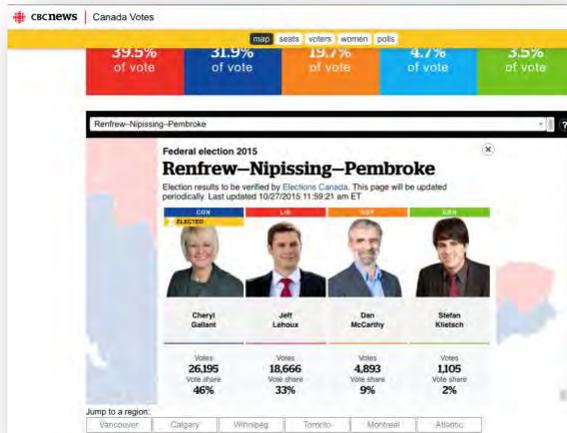
### CODING PROCEDURES

You will be assigned a series of districts to code from a specified federal election. You will use multiple sources, detailed below, to collect data on candidates. Even if you find all of the information in the first source you consult, work your way through the other sources to cross-reference and check your work. Generally speaking, and particularly for demographic variables, you should seek confirmatory evidence from at least two, and ideally three, sources. If the information contained in the sources conflicts (e.g., one source says that the candidate is a teacher and the other says the candidate is a minister, record both, but make a note of this and flag it for the PI).

#### Sources

1. Wikipedia
  - Look for the district name and determine if there are links to bios for the candidate
  - You can use these bios to find information on gender, age, and occupation.
2. Social media
  - Check Twitter, Facebook and Instagram using the candidate's name in the search function
  - Information that you might be able to glean from these sources include the candidate's age and clues about his or her gender or racialized / Indigenous status
3. Google
  - Google requires a multi-pronged search strategy, especially if the candidate's name is common
  - Terms to try: "candidate's name"; "candidate name" + district name, "candidate name" + party name. Enclosing the candidate's name in "" will improve the search results
  - Google might return social media profiles (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) that you didn't uncover in your search for social media). If they are the candidate's social media profile, then check these sources. This might happen if the candidate has a user name that isn't his or her "formal" name.
4. CBC Canada Votes 2015 results
  - <http://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/results-2015/>
  - Use the search bar to enter the district name (or click via the map). Double click on the district name, and you will be directed to a list of candidates

- There are photos of most of the candidates, which may be useful for inferring information about gender and racialized status, but these should be triangulated against other sources



5. PARLINFO (historical information compiled by the Library of Parliament)

- Use information compiled by the Library of Parliament to find information on candidates' occupations, women in Parliament, and incumbency.
- [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/ElectionsRidings/Elections](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/ElectionsRidings/Elections)

6. Canada's Who's Who

- This is a compilation of biographical information on notable Canadians. You can find it in the library

7. Media archives

- There are several of these you can search through the library, including Canadian Newsstream, Factiva, ProQuest. Paperofrecord has some smaller publications, so check there for local coverage.

**NOTE:** As you code, use a timer, and keep good notes as to how long you spend with each source. Note, too, the ease/difficulty with which you find coding each category in a separate document. We will use this information to assess the relevance / utility of each source and to hone our codebook or coding procedure if necessary.

Variable name	Description	Codes
Incumbent	Incumbency refers to whether or not the candidate held a seat in the previous Parliament. It is straightforward to code in elections where there was no redistricting of ridings (i.e., all ridings have the same boundaries and names as previous election) but slightly more complicated after elections where there was redistricting because riding names often change. So, the MP for Trinity-Spadina is running again, but now in a new riding called Spadina-Fort York. We thus have a slightly different coding procedure for the 2015 and 2004 elections (which occurred after redistricting) than for the elections between 2006-2011 (where all ridings remained the same). Use the Parliamentary website to determine if a candidate sat in the previous Parliament. Note we only refer to candidates as incumbents if they sat in the immediately preceding Parliament (i.e., they hold a seat at the time of the election), not if they have <i>at some time in the past</i> been an MP.	<p><i>Elections with redistricting (2015 &amp; 2004)</i></p> <p>1: candidate was member of previous Parliament 0: candidate was not member of previous Parliament</p> <p><i>Elections without redistricting (2006-2011)</i></p> <p>1: candidate held that seat in the previous Parliament 0: all other candidates</p>
Gender	Gender refers to one's identity or expression as a man, a woman, or as nonbinary (i.e., a gender expression that is neither man/male or woman/female). For transgender candidates (e.g., a candidate who was born biologically male but now identifies as woman/female), you would use the code that captures the gender with which they now identify. To infer a candidate's gender, you should use their names, photographs, biographies that include pronouns (e.g., he/she), and news reports (e.g., lists of women candidates).	0: Man 1: Woman 2: Nonbinary
Racial or Indigenous background	<p>This code captures whether a candidate is racialized, Indigenous, or neither (white).</p> <p>Indigenous peoples include those who are First Nations (e.g. Status Indian, Cree, Ojibway, etc.), Métis, or Inuit.</p> <p>Racialized individuals are those who meet Statistics Canada's definition of "visible minority."</p>	0: White 1: Racialized 2: Indigenous 3: Unclear

	<p>This includes individuals who are <i>not</i> Indigenous but are non-white or non-Caucasian in race or colour. A person is a visible minority if they are South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.); Chinese; Black; Filipino; Latin American (e.g., Argentinean, Chilean); Arab (e.g., Lebanese, Tunisian); Southeast Asian (e.g., Vietnamese, Cambodian, Malaysian, Laotian, etc.); West Asian (e.g., Iranian, Afghan, etc.); Korean; or Japanese.</p> <p>You will determine race and Indigenous background using biographical and other cues, including photographs, the candidates' surname, and (if available), their self-identification on their websites, in social media, or in interviews.</p> <p>Take notes of the sources and indicators that you used as the basis for your coding and note cases of ambiguity. These will be resolved in the verification stage.</p>	
Age	Code age based on birth year. If you have information about a candidate's age at the time of the election campaign, then you can use that to infer birth year. For example, if a media report indicates the candidate is 54 in 2004, then you can indicate their birth year is likely 1950	Enter birth year
Occupation	This is a descriptive column, which you will use to record the candidate's occupation. For incumbent candidates who list their occupation as "Parliamentarian" or "politician," please use instead their occupation when first elected. You will use PARLINFO and other sources to determine occupation.	Record the candidate's occupation. This will later be transformed into nine occupational categories.
Other Levels	Has the candidate previously held office at the provincial or municipal level? Provincial level includes those who have sat as an MLA, MNA, or MPP. Municipal level includes those who have been elected as a mayor or councilor. We will not include school boards in the municipal level. Here, we are only interested in whether the candidate has been <i>elected</i> at another level of government, not whether they have run and lost. Use their biographies, news reports, and information at other levels of government to code this variable.	1: has held office at the provincial or municipal level  0: has not held office at the provincial or municipal level

## OVERVIEW OF DATASET

The dataset includes 13 variables, and 4,516 observations.

	year	prov	ndistrict	ndistrictname	incumbent	gender	race	occupation	otherlevels	party	age	winner	trail
1	2008	10	10001	Avalon	Non-incumbent	Male	White	Other	Previously elected provincially/municipally	Liberal	1974	Elected	0
2	2008	10	10001	Avalon	Incumbent	Male	White	Other	No elected experience at other levels	Conservative	1964	Defeated	.1012
3	2008	10	10001	Avalon	Non-incumbent	Male	White	Business	No elected experience at other levels	NDP	.	Defeated	.279
4	2008	10	10002	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Incumbent	Male	White	Journalism	No elected experience at other levels	Liberal	1969	Elected	0
5	2008	10	10002	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Non-incumbent	Male	White	Law	No elected experience at other levels	Conservative	.	Defeated	.5504
6	2008	10	10002	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Non-incumbent	Male	White	Other	No elected experience at other levels	NDP	1978	Defeated	.5775999
7	2008	10	10003	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Incumbent	Male	White	Government & politics	Previously elected provincially/municipally	Liberal	1966	Elected	0
8	2008	10	10003	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Non-incumbent	Male	White	Business	No elected experience at other levels	Conservative	.	Defeated	.5759
9	2008	10	10003	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Non-incumbent	Male	White	Other	No elected experience at other levels	NDP	.	Defeated	.5073