

# WHY SO FEW WOMEN AND MINORITIES IN LOCAL POLITICS?: INCUMBENCY AND AFFINITY VOTING IN LOW INFORMATION ELECTIONS

**R. Michael McGregor, Aaron Moore, Samantha Jackson, Karen Bird and Laura B. Stephenson**

*Previous research has examined the effects of incumbency or affinity voting on the political representation of women and minorities. No study has considered the interaction of these two factors, even though there are good reasons to suspect that both may play a key role in voter choice. This study examines the joint effects of incumbency and gender and racial affinity voting in non-partisan and generally low information ward elections in the City of Toronto. Results reveal the absence of gender affinity effects, regardless of the presence of an incumbent, but that racial affinity is a factor in wards without incumbents.*

## Introduction

If one measure of democratic equity is 'mirror' representation, then municipal governments in Canada tend to perform quite poorly on this score. According to the most recent available national data, women comprise 26% of municipal councillors and just 18% of mayors across the country (Equal Voice 2014; see also FCM 2013). And while immigration has changed the face of Canadian cities, visible minorities are dramatically underrepresented at city hall. As of 2016, fewer than 7% of council seats across Canada's largest 50 cities were held by visible minorities, a share that is about one-fifth of the diversity across that urban population. Of these major municipalities, only one (Calgary) has ever elected a mayor with a visible minority background. These figures for women and, especially, visible minorities pale in comparison to descriptive representation in Canada's federal and provincial parliaments (Siemiatycki 2011a; Tolley 2015).

What accounts for the lack of diverse representation in Canada's large, cosmopolitan cities? We have few, if any, conclusive answers to this question, owing largely to the scarcity of research on municipal elections in Canada. One line of discussion has focused on structural barriers, including municipal amalgamation and an overall reduction in the number of council seats in several large cities that has shut out challenges by female and minority candidates (Andrew et al. 2008; Bashevkin 2006; Hicks 2006). Other research has looked at the role of institutions, especially the absence of formal parties in most municipal elections. Parties in Canada and elsewhere tend to engage in strategic outreach to minority and immigrant communities, providing crucial information about political platforms and mobilising them to vote as well as

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affording some influence in candidate selection (Bird et al. 2011; Sobolewska 2013). While recruitment of women varies widely, parties can and do increase women's candidacies in some circumstances (Caul 1999; Fox and Lawless 2010; Krook 2010; MacIvor 1996; Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Tremblay 2009). It has also been argued that, in the absence of parties, institutional variation such as district magnitude might affect the success of women and racialised candidates (Spicer et al. 2017). Moreover, a prevailing assumption has been that high rates of incumbency and the mostly non-partisan nature of Canadian municipal elections work against traditionally underrepresented groups at the ballot box (Gidengil and Vengroff 1997; Siemiatycki 2011b). Because most municipal contests are non-partisan, voters seek other cues when making their vote choice, and incumbency is an easy indication of quality and experience. As women and minorities are less likely to be incumbents, given their historic and continued underrepresentation, they are thought to be especially disadvantaged by such a phenomenon.

However, incumbency cannot account for the totality of the situation. Affinity voting may have an important role in low information contests such as council elections, though we do not know how these dynamics play out in the presence of incumbents. The 'affinity voting' thesis postulates that voters invoke baseline preferences for candidates on the basis of shared gender, racial or other highly visible sociodemographic characteristics, and that this voting strategy will be more prevalent where other information is scarce (Dolan 2008; Matson and Fine 2006; McDermott 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002). If voters tend to be more male or white, voter affinities would help to explain the persistent underrepresentation of women and minorities. In this study, we focus on understanding how these two 'shortcuts' to vote choice—incumbency and affinity voting—affect electoral support for women and visible minority candidates in a non-partisan, low information context. Previous studies have examined the effects of incumbency or affinity voting in isolation. No study has considered the interaction of these two voting strategies, even though there are reasons to suspect that both may play a key role in voter choice, especially at the non-partisan municipal level. We thus consider how the presence/absence *and* the sociodemographic characteristics (sex, race) of an incumbent candidate affect voter evaluations. We further consider whether this impact differs among male and female voters, and among white and visible minority voters.

This study takes advantage of the non-partisan and low information context of ward-level elections in the City of Toronto, and draws on a unique municipal voter survey to evaluate how incumbency and voter affinities factor into vote choice. We ask three questions. First, is there evidence of gender and visible minority affinity voting in council races in the 2014 Toronto Municipal Election? Second, is affinity voting stronger in the absence of an incumbent? Finally, is there any evidence that incumbency and affinity effects depend upon the gender or visible minority status of the incumbent? Our findings confirm that incumbency is an overwhelming factor at the ballot box, but that female and racialised incumbents benefit from a 'boost' in support from *all* voters. We find no evidence of a gender affinity effect, even in wards without incumbents. In contrast, racial identity does tend to predict whether or not voters support a minority candidate, but only in wards without an incumbent. In a racially diverse city where the lion's share of visible minority candidates are challengers, but the majority of voters are white, the finding that, absent an incumbent, white voters are drawn disproportionately to white candidates appears to be an important contributor to visible minority underrepresentation. Further, these results suggest that quite different mechanisms are contributing to racialised, as compared to gendered disparities in descriptive representation in Canadian municipal politics.<sup>1</sup>

## Why Toronto?

While perhaps a seemingly an unorthodox site for analysis, the 2014 ward-level Toronto municipal elections present a good ‘crucial case’ to test for incumbency and affinity voting effects (Gerring 2007; Levy 2008). There are several reasons for this. First, we expect incumbency and affinity effects to be greater in a context where voters are not overwhelmed by partisan considerations. Second, ward-level elections tend to be low-profile contests, where voters are more apt to resort to cues and heuristic shortcuts in making ballot decisions. This was especially likely in Toronto in 2014, as the shenanigans of incumbent mayor Rob Ford drew record voter participation. The exceptionally high turnout in this election increases the probability that voters suffered an information deficit when faced with the ‘down-ballot’ decision among their local ward-level candidates (Koppell and Steen 2004). A third important advantage of the Toronto case is that it contains a large number of wards (44), which provides sufficient variation on three key independent variables (presence of incumbents, race and sex of incumbents). Finally, as the largest municipality in Canada, our study of Toronto is not inconsequential for understanding what drives voter choice, and what accounts for the underrepresentation of women and visible minorities in local Canadian politics. While the context of Toronto (and more broadly Canadian) local politics is different in many respects from other jurisdictions, such as the United States—especially with respect to racial politics—our findings nevertheless provide an important empirical window for observing how incumbency and candidate sociodemographics interact in the minds of voters.

## Heuristic Cues and Voting in Low Information Elections

In an ideal world, every time a voter casts a ballot he or she would be fully informed about candidates and issues. We know, however, that the ideal is rarely the reality. In municipal elections especially, voters face a daunting task if they wish to gather such information, as the context is usually far less information-rich than is the case of national-level elections. How do voters make decisions in such a context? Cues such as partisanship, candidate sociodemographic characteristics and incumbency provide voters with a means of ‘economiz[ing] by making political judgments according to knowledge they already have about politics and the world’ (McDermott 1998: 897). Partisanship has been shown to be a crucial heuristic cue that can override other policy relevant information about candidates (Rahn 1993). Party cues, however, are not always available to voters, as most municipal elections in Canada are non-partisan in nature.

Absent this informational shortcut, what cues do voters use to assess candidates’ electoral suitability? We focus on two options. First, incumbency has been shown to be an important cue where partisan information is absent. Research suggests that voters understand incumbency to indicate candidate experience, reliability and competence, and thus draw heavily on this information when making decisions (Krebs 1998; Kushner et al. 1997; Schaffner, Streb and Wright 2001; Trounstone 2011). Second, there is evidence that voters in low information contexts use informational cues based on candidates’ sociodemographic characteristics to guide their choices (Matson and Fine 2006; McDermott 1998; Sanbonmatsu 2002). There is less understanding of which of these cues matter most, or how voters react when both cues are available. In order to properly understand support for women and visible minority candidates in municipal elections, it is necessary to examine the research findings on incumbency voting and sociodemographic cues, and then consider how they might interact to affect vote choice.

### Incumbency as a Voter Cue

Incumbency is a particularly important factor in municipal elections in Canada. Kushner et al. (1997: 544) found that the re-election rate of incumbents in large Ontario cities was over 88%, on average, from 1982 to 1994. In the 2014 Toronto election, 36 of 37 incumbent councillors (or 97.3%) seeking re-election won their seats. Incumbents gain from the skills and expertise acquired while serving in office, insofar as voters reward governing experience and casework. Research also points to significant structural advantages enjoyed by incumbents with respect to fundraising, endorsements and media visibility, all factors that appear to be abetted by the non-partisan context (Kushner et al. 1997; Marland 1998; McDermid 2009).<sup>2</sup>

Beyond the structural advantages presented by incumbency, a good deal of research has probed the psychological implications for voters, especially in low information, non-partisan elections. Incumbency can be conceived as 'an anchor that secures weakly partisan and independent voters' with this effect becoming more widespread where party cues are less accessible (Desposato and Petrocik 2003: 19). While incumbents often run on the record of their political party, in non-partisan elections, councillors' voting records and political behaviour usually are not well known. Incumbency and the name recognition it generates thus provide a crucial signal concerning a candidate's experience and credibility and, in the absence of other information, offer a sense of comfort and predictability that is attractive to voters (Kushner et al. 1997; Siemiatycki 2011a; Zajonc 2001). Kam and Zechmeister (2013) found that, in low information contexts, even very minimal exposure to a candidate's name has a significant, positive effect on voter choice and perceptions of candidate viability. Finally, there is evidence that voters are more likely to take the informational shortcut of relying on incumbency as the information-gathering demands of a particular local election increase. In their study of California municipal elections, Hajnal et al. (2002) found that the re-election rate of incumbents grew where municipal elections were held concurrently with state-level elections, and where voters had to select multiple office holders at the same time.

### *Sociodemographic Voting Cues*

Like incumbency, sociodemographic information can provide an accessible and easy cue for many voters. Photos of candidates can signal considerable sociodemographic information to voters, and one can reliably assess candidates' gender and often their ethnic background based simply on the name printed on the ballot (Matson and Fine 2006; McDermott 1998). If such information is more readily accessible than substantive information on candidates' partisan affiliation, experience or issue positions, voters may behave quite reasonably in seeking to 'extrapolate stereotypical information from candidate demographics and then use this information to make a voting decision' (McDermott 1998: 898).

Affinity voting is a particular consequence of such cues in which a shared sociodemographic trait triggers a bond or affinity from the perspective of the voter. Both affinity voting and more generalised race- or sex-based voter discrimination are arguably rooted in social stereotypes and schemata, that allow us to impute quickly and with little cognitive effort a broader set of traits and characteristics to a given stimuli (Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; King and Matland 2003; Koch 2002; Markus and Zajonc 1985; McDermott 1998). For example, voters may draw on stereotypes associated with gender to assess a candidate's personal traits (e.g., warmth, intelligence), policy positions (e.g., left- or right-wing, dovish or hawkish) and suitability for different types of office (e.g., consultative and a team player vs.

decisive and authoritative). While voter discrimination can be conceived as a general disposition to vote against a candidate on the basis of such stereotypes, affinity voting manifests as positive bias based on a voter's assumptions about a shared sociodemographic trait. Affinity voting thus captures the likelihood that voters who share a trait with a candidate will place a different value or emphasis on the content of a given stereotype, or may even consciously reject the stereotype. For example, female voters may place more emphasis on a female candidate's presumed compassion or consultative style, and cast their ballot for her as a result.

More linear self-interested motivations related to group identity may also be at play. Candidates' sociodemographic characteristics can suggest to same-group voters that the candidate shares similar experiences or perspectives, and that they have a better understanding of, and an increased likelihood of acting in ways that advance, those voters' substantive interests (Bird 2011, 2015; Mansbridge 1999; McClain et al. 2009). Candidates may also strategically emphasise shared sociodemographic characteristics among segments of the population, thus 'reinforcing the bond' (Barreto 2007: 426; see also Collet 2008; Leighley 2001; Tate 1991). Finally, voters may be inclined to vote for same-group members if they place greater emphasis on issues of equity and fair representation when it concerns their own group. Thus female voters may be more inclined to vote for female candidates because they see gender parity in elected office as a more important goal than do men.<sup>3</sup>

Using experimental designs that require subjects to choose between fictional candidates who differ only in their gender or ethno-racial background, research in both the United States (McConaughy et al. 2010; McDermott 1998; Philpot and Walton 2007; Sigelman et al. 1995) and Canada (Besco 2015a, 2015b; Bird 2016; Goodyear-Grant and Tolley forthcoming) has produced fairly strong evidence of affinity voting. The effects in both countries appear to be stronger for racial affinity than gender affinity voting (Dolan 2008; Goodyear-Grant and Tolley forthcoming; Philpot and Walton 2007).<sup>4</sup> However, there is little evidence that affinity voting has any substantive effect on vote choice in actual elections (Brians 2005; Dolan 2008; Gidengil, Everitt and Banducci 2009; Kaufmann 2004; King and Matland 2003; McElroy and Marsh 2009). This is presumably because the salience of partisanship, issues, candidate personalities and other contextually important information can obviate the need or salience of sociodemographic cues. Research on Canadian federal elections has found that partisan information washes out any effect of local candidates' gender or visible-minority background (Goodyear-Grant and Croskill 2011; Murakami 2014). Once the effects of party leaders and partisanship are controlled, there is little evidence that women vote for women in greater numbers than do male voters, or that minority voters are more likely than non-minorities to support minority candidates. Given these mixed findings, it seems reasonable to presume that affinity voting may be more pervasive and effective in low information, non-partisan municipal elections. However, the prevalence of incumbency at this level must be considered in any evaluation of actual voting dynamics. We take up this task in the following discussion.

### *The Interaction of Incumbency and Affinity Voting*

As discussed above, incumbency is a major factor in voting at the municipal level. It may be so strong that voter affinity effects only appear in the absence of an incumbent candidate. To our knowledge, neither experimental nor survey research has thus far examined what happens when incumbency and candidate sociodemographic cues combine, nor what it means for support for women and visible minority candidates. We address this void in the literature through consideration of three research questions. First, is there evidence of gender

and visible minority affinity voting in council races in the 2014 Toronto Municipal Election? Second, is affinity voting stronger in the absence of an incumbent? Finally, is there any evidence that incumbency and affinity effects depend upon the gender or visible minority status of the incumbent?

### Data and Methodology

Our empirical investigation relies on several sources of data. Individual-level data on voters comes from the Toronto Election Study (TES), a two-wave internet survey of Torontonians that was conducted around the time of the 27 October 2014 municipal elections.<sup>5</sup> The TES includes a variety of questions about attitudes and behaviour, similar to those contained in many national or provincial election studies. This is the first dataset in Canada to have individual-level data on ward-level vote choices, and thus the first that allows for a thorough consideration of voting behaviour at the ward level. Of relevance to our study, the TES includes information on the gender and visible minority status of voters, which ward respondents live in and how respondents voted.

Information on incumbency and candidate vote share was compiled using the Toronto City Clerk's official election results (Toronto City Clerk 2014). We also collected data on the gender and visible minority status of all 384 registered candidates for City Council, across Toronto's 44 wards. To accomplish this, research assistants were trained to code candidates' sex and visible minority status using publicly available photographs, names and biographical descriptions from candidates' websites, news articles and news media's candidate profiles.<sup>6</sup> Coding of each candidate was conducted twice by independent coders, and all ties were broken by a third researcher. The Ontario Human Rights Commission has lauded this method for its transparency and reliability (OHRC 2010).

We therefore have information on the gender and visible minority status of survey respondents and ward-level candidates, and have created gender and race dummy variables for respondents (our key independent variables), as well as for the candidates they voted for (our dependent variables).<sup>7</sup> Also available is information on the presence, as well as the gender and race, of ward incumbents. Across 44 wards in the 2014 City of Toronto elections, there were seven wards that had 'open' races with no incumbent running; amongst incumbents, 13 were women and six were visible minorities. These variables can be combined to test for the presence of affinity effects, and to consider whether these effects are moderated by the presence and type of incumbent. Note that the appendix contains more information on the wards and voters included in our analysis.

Our analysis consists of two sets of random effects logistic regression models—one for gender and another for race. For each, we run models with voter gender (visible minority) status only, another with incumbency variables added, and still another where we interact candidate sociodemographic variable with the incumbency variables.<sup>8</sup> This third model tests for potential differences in effects across different types of incumbents; thus we include a variable for both female (visible minority) and male (non-visible minority) incumbent candidates. We omit those wards without candidate variation with respect to gender or visible minority status (i.e., if all candidates are men, voters do not have the option to vote for a woman).<sup>9</sup>

Given the well-established influence of incumbency at the aggregate level, we expect our individual-level analysis to reveal a strong voter preference for incumbents. We also anticipate that the presence of an incumbent will dampen affinity affects, relative to those races without an incumbent. Finally, we investigate whether the gender (visible minority) status

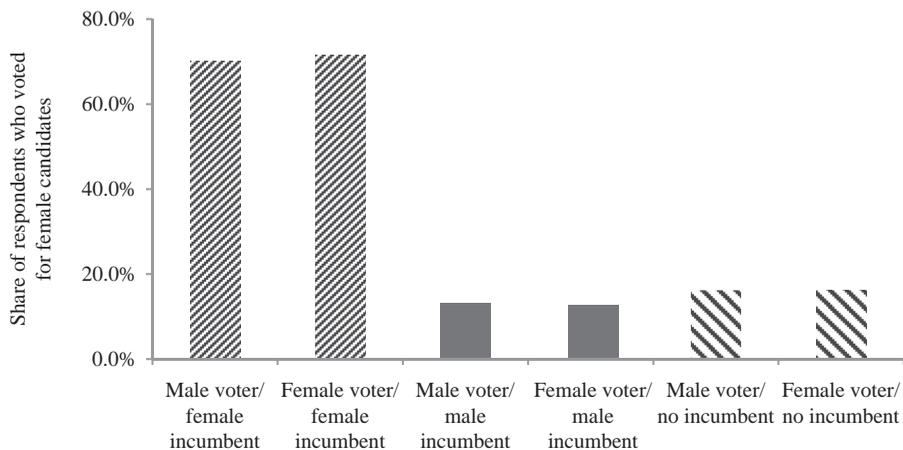
of a candidate combine with incumbency to produce distinctive effects among voters, though we have no clear expectation in this regard.

## Results

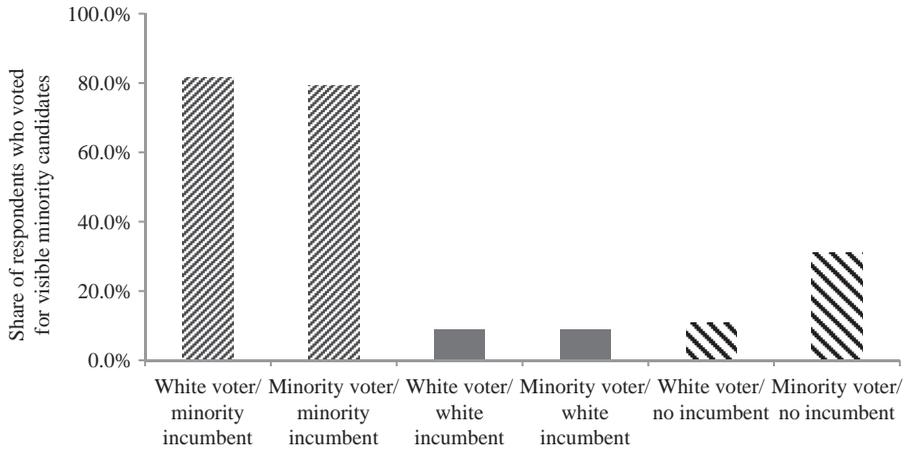
Prior to testing for the presence of affinity effects, it is worth describing the performance of women and visible minority council candidates in the 2014 Toronto election. As noted above, both groups are significantly underrepresented on council, but also in terms of candidacy; the share of female and minority candidates is lower than each group's share of the population. A mere 22.5% of candidates were female, while 29.8% were visible minorities. Female candidates received 30.6% of the vote share—a jump of about 36%—while minority candidates received only 20.0% (a drop of 33%). Such a finding is consistent with existing work on Ontario municipalities, which shows that women's share of council seats outstrips their share of candidacies, while the opposite is true for visible minorities (Bird 2016).

We turn now to consider if and how gender and ethnic affinity voting, or the presence of an incumbent, helps to explain these patterns. We begin by presenting Figures 1 and 2, which show the effects of gender and visible minority status upon vote choice, depending upon the presence and type of incumbent. The height of the bars in Figure 1 represents the shares of men and women, respectively, who voted for female candidates. Wards have been broken down into three types: those without an incumbent (the two bars on the right), those with a male incumbent (the two bars in the centre) and those with a female incumbent (the bars on the left). We also differentiate between the gender (visible minority status) of survey respondents, to examine whether men and women (non-minorities and minorities) vote differently from one another. Figure 2 is set up in an analogous manner, except substituting visible minority status for gender.

Put plainly, Figure 1 reveals no evidence of a gender affinity effect, regardless of the presence or type of incumbent. Female candidates perform very well in wards with a female incumbent candidate, but men and women are equally likely to support female candidates in these settings—around 70% of both men and women vote for female candidates when the incumbent is a woman. In wards with a male incumbent, relatively few men or women vote for



**FIGURE 1**  
Gender, incumbency and vote choice.



**FIGURE 2**

Visible minority status, incumbency and vote choice.

female candidates, but there is no difference between the genders in this respect. Even in wards without incumbents, where the gender cue should be particularly effective, there is no evidence of an affinity effect.

In contrast to the gender results, [Figure 2](#) suggests that racial identity does tend to predict whether voters support a minority candidate, but only in wards without an incumbent. As with gender, minority candidates perform better when the incumbent is a minority than when she or he is white. Regardless of incumbent minority status, however, minority voters behave no differently from their non-minority counterparts when an incumbent is present. However, in the absence of an incumbent, visible minority voters are nearly three times as likely to support a minority candidate than are white voters (30.9% vs. 10.8%). Such a finding suggests racial affinity effects are stronger in the absence of an incumbent.

The results in [Figures 1](#) and [2](#) are drawn from simple descriptive data on voters from each type of ward. To properly test for the presence and strength of affinity effects, however, multivariate analyses are necessary. On this front, we once again begin with gender. [Table 1](#) shows the results of three logistic regression models, with each subsequent model introducing additional variables. A vote for a female candidate (1) versus a male candidate (0) is the outcome variable. If a gender affinity effect exists, the 'female voter' variable should be positive and statistically significant, as will the 'female × female incumbent' term if this effect is enhanced by the presence of a female incumbent. The variable for female (male) incumbent (compared to the baseline of no incumbent) will reveal whether the presence of a female (male) incumbent is associated with greater overall support for female (male) candidates. Note that we employ a random effects logit model to account for the multi-level nature of the data (grouping observations by ward).

Consistent with the findings in [Figure 1](#), multivariate analysis reveals no evidence of a gender affinity effect, regardless of whether an incumbent (either male or female) is present. In none of the three models is the female voter variable statistically significant. However, the female incumbent variable is positive and significant in Models 1B and 1C, suggesting that the probability of voting for a woman increases amongst all voters (not just women) when the incumbent is a woman. Interestingly, however, the male incumbent variable

**TABLE 1**  
Vote for female candidates

	Model 1A	Model 1B	Model 1C
Female voter	0.135 (0.017)	0.132 (0.171)	0.125 (0.357)
Female incumbent		3.070 (0.641)**	3.030 (0.666)**
Male incumbent		-0.744 (0.630)	-0.670 (0.659)
Female × female incumbent			-0.111 (0.458)
Female × male incumbent			0.116 (0.448)
Constant	-1.320 (0.41)**	-1.883 (0.526)**	-1.880 (0.544)**
Lnsig2u	1.73	0.455	0.454
Sigma_u	2.375	1.255	1.255
Rho	0.632	0.324	0.324
N		1273	
Number of groups		38	

Note: Entries report coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

is not significant. This finding suggests that voters are more likely to support female candidates in wards with a female incumbent than in wards with either no incumbent or a male incumbent.<sup>10</sup> Finally, there is no evidence that affinity voting is affected by the gender of the incumbent. Neither of the interaction terms in Model 1C is significant, suggesting that the relationship between voter sex and vote choice is no different in wards with incumbents (either male or female) than without.<sup>11</sup>

We now turn to conduct the same analysis as above, but for visible minority status. The setup of Table 2 mirrors that of Table 1, but here the probability of voting for a visible minority candidate is the dependent variable. If a racial affinity effect exists, the 'visible minority voter' variable should be significant, and if this effect is moderated by the presence of an incumbent, the interaction terms should be significant.

In contrast to the gender results, Table 2 provides evidence of racial affinity voting, but only when there is no incumbent present. The 'visible minority voter' variable is insignificant in Models 2A and 2B, which do not take into account the possibility that affinity effects might be moderated by the presence of an incumbent. The variable only becomes significant in Model 2C, which includes the interactions between voter minority status and incumbency. In this

**TABLE 2**  
Vote for visible minority candidates

	Model 2A	Model 2B	Model 2C
Visible minority voter	0.273 (0.240)	0.292 (0.241)	1.033 (0.418)*
Minority incumbent		4.239 (0.891)**	4.805 (0.929)**
White incumbent		-0.804 (0.634)	-0.571 (0.660)
Minority × white incumbent			-0.788 (0.540)
Minority × minority incumbent			-1.813 (0.661)**
Constant**	-2.424 (0.446)**	-2.214 (0.559)	-2.440 (0.576)**
Lnsig2u	1.803	0.508	0.524
Sigma_u	2.464	1.289	1.299
Rho	0.648	0.336	0.339
N		1162	
Number of groups		37	

Note: Entries report coefficients and standard errors (in parentheses).

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

model, the visible minority constituent term is to be interpreted as the effect of being a visible minority, as compared to a non-minority, in wards without an incumbent candidate. The statistically significant result for this term suggests that racial affinity effects are indeed at work in such contexts. Failing to distinguish between wards with and without incumbents therefore masks the presence of racial affinity effects.

As with the gender results, the minority incumbency variable is statistically significant in Models 2B and 2C. Again, such a finding suggests that, as a group, voters are more likely to support a minority candidate when the incumbent is a minority, than if the incumbent is white or if no incumbent is present. Finally, the minority voter  $\times$  minority incumbent interaction term is significant, and in the opposite direction to that of the visible minority constituent term. This suggests that the effect of race upon vote choice is weaker in wards with a minority incumbent than in those without an incumbent. In effect, the presence of a visible minority incumbent cancels out the effect of racial affinity voting.

The results in Tables 1 and 2 are therefore congruent with those from Figures 1 and 2. Though gender affinity voting appears to have been absent in the 2014 Toronto council elections, the finding that racial affinity voting occurs in the absence of an incumbent is consistent with expectations. In the absence of an incumbency cue, it appears that many voters relied upon race as a shortcut. When an incumbent is present, however, voters have no need to fall back upon race when making their decision. There is no comparable gender affinity effect, however, as gender does not appear to affect whether voters support a male or female candidate, regardless of the presence of an incumbent.

## Discussion

There is no denying that women and visible minorities are vastly underrepresented in municipal government in Canada, including on Toronto City Council. Relatively few members of either group contest elections, and neither comes close to achieving a level of representation that their populations within the electorate might warrant. One factor hindering proper descriptive representation is the power of incumbency. Though TES data suggest that the presence of female or minority incumbents does lead to a boost in support for candidates of these types among all voters, few incumbents are either female or visible minorities. Absent greater turnover among sitting politicians, increasing representation of these groups will be difficult.

While women and visible minorities have this much in common, there are important differences between the mechanisms behind their underrepresentation. Though few female candidates contest elections, those who do run tend to be more successful than visible minority candidates. Female council representation and vote share outpaced candidate share, while the opposite is true for visible minorities. Such a finding suggests that one way to achieve higher levels of female representation on council may be simply to have more women candidates contest elections. We find no evidence of gender affinity voting, regardless of the presence or gender of an incumbent, so it is not a factor in the representation of women on council.

The story for visible minorities, however, is not so straightforward. The vast majority of Toronto councillors are non-minorities. In a system where incumbency is so powerful, this makes it difficult to increase minority representation. Moreover, in wards without an incumbent, a racial affinity effect appears to have worked to the disadvantage of minority candidates. In those wards without incumbents, 24.0% of candidates were minorities. Only 10.8% of white voters supported such candidates, while 30.9% of visible minority voters did the same. The data therefore suggest that a racial affinity effect appears evident for both groups—white

voters are drawn disproportionately to white candidates, and minority voters are drawn disproportionately to minority candidates. However, as voter turnout rates are higher among whites than visible minorities (Hicks 2006; Siemiatycki and Marshall 2014), such a pattern works to systematically disadvantage minority candidates.

Assuming that racial affinity effects are unlikely to disappear, the results of this study point to several possible methods of improving minority representation at the municipal level. First, turnout rates among visible minorities need to increase. Evidence from the United States shows that low and uneven turnout across ethnic and racial subgroups leads to poor outcomes for racial minorities, especially in cities (Hajnal 2009). The presence of racial affinity voting means that minorities must be properly represented at the ballot box in order to be properly represented on council. Such a suggestion is not necessarily far-fetched; voter mobilisation efforts have been shown to improve turnout among visible minorities more than among white voters (McGregor and Anderson 2014). Second, an increase in minority turnout could also be accompanied by the implementation of term limits. Incumbency is an almost insurmountable advantage at the municipal level in Canada, and given the low level of current visible minority representation, it poses a significant barrier to entry for aspiring municipal politicians, and to visible minorities in particular (Carroll and Jenkins 2005). Another way to reduce the incumbency advantage would be through regular revision of ward boundaries to address population disparities.<sup>12</sup> This could be undertaken with the explicit aim of improving visible minority representation, as has been done for black and Latino representation in the United States (Lien et al. 2007; Lublin 1999). Canada has a largely successful framework for federal redistricting practices and constituency composition that could easily be extrapolated to accommodate visible minority representation in local politics, whether to ensure that ward boundaries envelope distinct communities or diversities of interest, or to correct the dilution of votes of citizens from visible minority communities who tend to be concentrated in more highly populated urban wards within a municipality (Courtney 2001; Forest 2012; Pal and Choudhry 2007). However, until now there has been little political imperative to apply this framework at the municipal level. A final approach to improving diversity of representation is candidate quotas. Some parties have applied such measures for federal and provincial elections in Canada.<sup>13</sup> While this would help to address the dearth of female candidates, which appears to be a major obstacle to gender equity in municipal councils, it is less evident that the barriers facing visible minorities fall as clearly on the 'supply side' of the electoral process. But without parties, candidate quotas remain the least realistic option for achieving diversity in municipal councils in Ontario. Still, assuming that racial affinity voting effects persist, these options present several ways of improving minority representation. Given the growing emphasis on inclusions in multicultural cities, local policy-makers and community advocates are well advised to consider these strategies for allowing the composition of governments to more accurately reflect the population that they represent.

## DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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## NOTES

1. Our paper looks exclusively at descriptive representation. Questions about the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation, including whether this might be enhanced in the non-partisan, ward-level context, are ripe for future study.
2. While we know that local incumbents tend to win reelection at high rates, it has been unclear whether this is due to advantages accrued while in office (incumbency effect), or to the pre-existing quality of incumbent candidates (selection effect). Using a regression discontinuity design that effectively rules out other factors, Trounstine (2011) shows convincingly that council incumbents are in fact more likely to win their next elections because they served a term in office.
3. For an in-depth discussion of alternative causal mechanisms underlying affinity voting, see Besco (2015a).
4. Racial affinity's apparent strength relative to gender affinity is notable. While an in-depth examination of such differences is outside the scope of this paper, this may be related to a stronger 'group consciousness' among racialized minorities compared to women. Having more shared experiences, from culture to discrimination (Barreto 2007), that delineate *in* versus *out*-group members may foster mobilization to counter inequality. Women's hesitancy to align with feminist motives or leaders (Modleski 2014) may not condition women to vote exclusively *for* men, but these looser group ties may help explain a lower likelihood of same-gender voting.
5. As a quality control measure, the TES included a question to ensure that respondents were answering questions seriously (respondents were reimbursed for their participation in the TES). The 3.1% of respondents who 'failed' this question are excluded from our analysis.
6. The 'visible minority' label applied here, for both candidates and voters, is a construction of the Canadian state, first introduced in the context of the federal Employment Equity Act of 1986 and subsequently adopted as a departmental standard by Statistics Canada. Officially, the term refers to non-white, non-Aboriginal persons. Note that we drop the very small number of Aboriginal respondents from our analysis, as this group differs qualitatively from visible minority and white voters.
7. While we operationalize race here as dichotomous, as is consistent with the existing literature, we recognize that great variation may exist within the two racial categories.
8. Several controls were considered before we settled upon the parsimonious models seen in Tables 1 and 2. First, we considered controlling for voter sophistication, as it has been shown to shape the strength and direction of voter affinities (Anderson et al. 2011). However, aside from gender and ethnicity, our theoretical interest here is the effect of ward-level factors (including the presence and type of an incumbent) upon affinity effect. We thus exclude sophistication from our analysis. Second, we considered adding a variable to account for the share of respondents in each ward who were female or visible minorities, under the assumption that, *ceteris paribus*, the more women (visible minority) candidates contesting a race, the more votes these types of candidates will receive. However, given our expectation that incumbency should be overwhelmingly powerful, the effect of such a control variable may not be the same in wards with and without incumbents. Nevertheless, we ran the models in Tables 1 and 2 with such a candidate share variable (results not shown, but available from the authors) and the substantive conclusions of the tables remained unchanged. Third, we recognize the role that candidate spending plays in shaping municipal election outcomes, but due to a lack of available data, we exclude this variable from our analysis. If reliable data were available,

we could include a control based upon the overall share of spending by men/women or by visible minorities/non-minorities in each ward. To create such a variable, spending information from all candidates is required. According to the City of Toronto, however, dozens of candidates failed to file their spending disclosure statements for the 2014 campaign. As many of these candidates may never file statements, an appropriate spending control cannot be included. Nevertheless, we argue that the omission of this variable is acceptable because there is no theoretical reason to suspect that women and visible minorities would react differently to candidate spending than men or white voters. Data on those candidates who did submit spending statements suggest that there are spending differences on the basis of both gender and visible minority status. Data from the 284 ward candidates for whom data are available suggest that the average female candidate spent more than the average male (\$21,427.58 vs. \$15,188.18) and that minorities were outspent by white candidates (\$13,580.96–\$17,804.50). However, while these differences might affect a candidate's rate of electoral success or overall vote share, we are not convinced that spending would influence gender and racial affinity effects, or that these two types of effects might be influenced differently. We can also think of no reason why differences in candidate spending might influence affinity effects differently in wards with and without incumbents.

9. Several wards lacked variation in terms of visible minorities: 6, 11, 19, 21, 30, 40, 41, while wards 7, 10, 12, 37, 40, 43 had no variation in gender. Wards 2, 3, 4, 5, 16, 20 and 39 had no incumbent.
10. [Table 1](#) reveals that, as a group, women perform better than men when the incumbent is female. A cursory analysis suggests, however, that female incumbents, in particular, seemingly perform better than their male counterparts. In wards where the incumbent was a female, 65% of TES respondents voted for the incumbent. The corresponding value in wards where the incumbent is male is 42.7%. We find a similar result for minority and white incumbents, who received the support of 71.6% and 45.3% of TES respondents, respectively.
11. Indeed, the *R*-squared value increases by a mere 0.0001 from model 2B to 2C, suggesting that the interaction terms do not add to our ability to explain why voters select a male or female candidate.
12. Municipal councils have the legal right to create, change and even eliminate ward boundaries as per the Ontario Municipal Act (sections 222 and 223). However, unlike at the federal level in Canada, there is no requirement for periodic review of electoral boundaries.
13. Most notably, the New Democratic Party has clear affirmative action guidelines for nomination and candidacy of women and visible minorities, among other targeted groups.

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**R. Michael McGregor** is at the Department of Politics and Public Administration, Ryerson University, Canada. E-mail: [mmcgregor@ryerson.ca](mailto:mmcgregor@ryerson.ca)

**Aaron Moore** is at the Political Science department, The University of Winnipeg, Canada. E-mail: [aa.moore@uwinnipeg.ca](mailto:aa.moore@uwinnipeg.ca)

**Samantha Jackson** is at the Faculty of Social Sciences, McMaster University, Canada. E-mail: [sjackson@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sjackson@mcmaster.ca)

**Karen Bird** is at the Department of Political Science, McMaster University, Canada. E-mail: [kbird@mcmaster.ca](mailto:kbird@mcmaster.ca)

**Laura B. Stephenson** is at the Department of Political Science, Western University, Canada. E-mail: [lstephe8@uwo.ca](mailto:lstephe8@uwo.ca)

## APPENDIX

TABLE A1 Ward and voter characteristics

	Ward characteristics						Voter characteristics		
	Average share of candidates who are women	Minimum	Maximum	Average share of candidates who are minorities	Minimum	Maximum	Number of voters surveyed <sup>a</sup>	Share of survey respondents who are female <sup>b</sup>	Share of survey respondents who are minorities <sup>c</sup>
Wards with incumbents	23.0%	0.0%	66.7%	28.0%	0.0%	100.0%	1144	38.3%	21.6%
Wards without incumbents	22.0%	10.0%	32.0%	23.0%	10.0%	44.4%	272	42.4%	24.1%

<sup>a</sup>Values based upon those wards that have variation on either gender or ethnicity of candidates.

<sup>b</sup>Values based upon those wards which have variation on candidate gender (to correspond to analysis in [Table 1](#)).

<sup>c</sup>Values based upon those wards which have variation on candidate ethnicity (to correspond to analysis in [Table 2](#)).