THE COLOUR OF YOUR SKIN, OR THE CONTENT OF YOUR CHARACTER? RACE FRAMING IN THE 2008 CANADIAN ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

Race remains one of the most salient – and visible – markers of identity, but Canadian political science has yet to turn significant attention to its study. Although existing evidence points to a dearth of visible minorities in elected bodies, we know less about the factors that drive their participation nor about the role that the media plays in linking these candidates to voters and the political arena. Importantly, while the literature on gendered mediation suggests that the media cover female politicians differently than male politicians, we do not know whether these patterns of coverage persist for other politically marginalized groups. This paper proposes a theory of racial mediation and adopts a mechanized content analysis to examine the English-language print media's coverage of candidates in the 2008 federal election. Focusing in particular on the media's emphasis on candidates' socio-demographic characteristics, the analysis suggests that a race frame structures the media's portrayal of visible minority candidates, whose ethnocultural backgrounds are more likely to factor into their news coverage than is the case for other candidates.

INTRODUCTION

Earlier this year, the leaking of a Conservative Party strategy for targeting so-called "very ethnic" ridings brought into sharp relief the salience of ethnocultural diversity in Canadian politics (Conservative Party 2011). As critics decried the commodification and homogenization of minority voters, journalists and observers fumbled over descriptors and struggled to name the phenomenon that was occurring. Code words like ethnic, multicultural, and diversity stood in for more loaded terms like immigrant or minority, and commentators skirted around the racialization of political communications and messaging. While the strategy itself raises questions about the place of race in Canadian politics, so too does the media's coverage. How is race portrayed? And is it only newsworthy when it is "different", "minority", or outside the "mainstream"?

This paper presents preliminary data on the media's coverage of candidates in the 2008 Canadian federal election. It begins with an overview of the news media. It then uses the literature on women and politics, political communication, and modern racism as a launch point to develop a theory of racial mediation. Departing in some respects from existing research, the paper then uses a mechanized dictionary-based approach to content analysis. It explores one facet of racial mediation, looking specifically at the media's emphasis on candidates' socio-demographic features. The findings suggest that a race frame structures the coverage of visible minority candidates. While the racial, linguistic, and religious backgrounds of so-called "White" or non-minority candidates rarely factor into their coverage, this is not the case for visible minority candidates. Moreover, when socio-demographic features are mentioned in stories about White candidates, these attributes are typically de-personalized and de-racialized, with the coverage focusing on candidates' efforts to attract, woo, or target so-called "ethnic" voters; this is particularly common in reporting on Conservative candidates. Importantly, the intersection of a (minority) race and gender seems to alter the portrayal of socio-demographic characteristics, with the attributes of visible minority women described using much less racialized, yet still highly sexualized, descriptors. After discussing these findings, the paper concludes with an outline of next steps, which situate the findings within the context of a larger project on the media's coverage of federal electoral candidates.

STORY-TELLERS AND STORY-MAKERS

The media play a central role in democratic politics and are citizens' primary source of information (Brody and Page 1975; Campbell 1995; Johnson-Cartee 2005; McCombs and Shaw 1972). During election campaigns, the importance of the news media arguably increases with a greater proportion of coverage devoted to politics and citizens more likely to consume that coverage, particularly if it is somewhat interesting, informative, or helps them identify the most pertinent issues and actors (Pickup et al. 2010). Because most voters have little first-hand experience with politics and are not likely to be personally acquainted with all of the candidates in their riding, it is the media that provide them with the information they need to interpret the election, judge the players, and ultimately make political decisions. In this sense, the media act as a gatekeeper, determining which information citizens should receive, deciding how that information should be conveyed, and how prominent it should be. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) argue that gatekeeping occurs at the level of individual journalists and editors, within news organizations, through established communications routines, and across social institutions and systems. Among each of these actors and at all of these stages, various forces and decisions influence the shape that news takes. In this way, the media do not simply tell stories. Rather, they create and craft stories; they are, in essence, story-makers.

To guard against this, news organizations have put in place standards related to objectivity, fact-checking, reliance on diverse sources, the inclusion of opposing viewpoints, and the separation of reporters and editors. Nonetheless, gatekeeping theory posits that other norms, values, and considerations may influence and override these choices. In particular, evaluations of newsworthiness, editorial preferences, commercial interests, and judgments about the appropriateness or appeal of a particular story or narrative may all affect the prominence, tone, and tenor of the news. Newsmakers are more likely to select stories that include elements of conflict, novelty, or sensationalism, as well as those that are geographically or temporally closer to the audience, more emotionally charged, anecdotal or replete with "vivid" information (Nisbett and Ross 1980, 45; Shoemaker and Vos 2009). Newsmakers are not simply looking for facts or data, but for stories.

Here, we can draw on the literature on heuristics. Heuristics are essentially cognitive short-cuts that individuals use to help them sift through information (Popkin 1991). The literature on heuristics is based on the assumption that we are all essentially "cognitive misers" and thus seek out the most economical means of obtaining, storing, and evaluating information. We do this by extrapolating what we already know and by applying these cues, stereotypes, and schemas to new situations (Fiske and Taylor 1991; Lau and Redlawsk 2006). Information is not treated as an independent commodity but is "assimilated into pre-existing structures in the mind" (Nisbett and Ross 1980, 36). In a media context, ideas that are linked to information already stored in a reporter's memory are more likely to pass through the metaphorical gate and thus be covered (Shoemaker and Vos 2009).

Voters also rely on short-cuts to help them sift through political information, infer, and make connections to their own issue preferences and to render an electoral decision. Research has established, for example, that voters use partisan affiliation as a cue for a candidate's ideological stance and policy preferences (Gidengil et al. 2004; McDermott 2009). Voters may also make political decisions on the basis of their socio-demographic similarity to the candidates, which Cutler (2002, 467) refers to as the "simplest shortcut of all." Socio-demographic distance may be an important factor in voters' political calculus either because they automatically or subconsciously attribute more desirable traits to individuals with demographic features similar to their own or because they believe that someone from their own socio-demographic group is most likely to promote their interests (Cutler 2002; see also Fiske 1998; Johnston et al. 1992). Finally, on the basis of a candidate's demographic characteristics, voters may infer particular traits, including policy preferences, issue priorities, or general competencies (Golebiowska 2001; Huddy and Terkildsen 1993; McDermott 1997, 1998, 2005, 2009). Visible minority candidates may, for example, be trait stereotyped as most qualified to address issues related to immigration, multiculturalism, poverty, and other so-called minority issues (McDermott 1998), as singularly interested in the concerns of their particular ethnocultural communities (Larson 2006; Zilber and Niven 2000), or as politically ineffective, inexperienced outsiders (Haynie 2002; Zilber and Niven 2000). The media may play an important role in this equation. In particular, through their framing of stories and the relative emphasis of their coverage, the media may activate race as a salient consideration for assessing and comparing electoral candidates (Haynie 2002).

POLITICS AT THE MARGINS

Although the literature on women in politics is perhaps the most developed, youth, persons with disabilities, LGBT communities, Aboriginal peoples, immigrants and ethnocultural minorities all experience some degree of political under-representation, with their numerical presence in elected bodies falling short of their presence in the population (Andrew, Biles, Siemiatycki and Tolley 2008). My research focuses on just one of these marginalized groups, visible minorities, a category defined in the

Census and the *Employment Equity Act* as individuals "who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in colour" and which excludes Aboriginal peoples (Statistics Canada 2007). Visible minority groups include the Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latin American, Southeast Asian, Arab, West Asian, Korean and Japanese populations. The term "visible minority" has been criticized because it uses "whiteness" as the standard against which to judge other races (United Nations 2007). I acknowledge the limitations of the term, but use "visible minority" or "racial minority" to refer to those who would generally be thought of as non-white, while I use the terms "non-minority" or "White" to describe those who are not visible minorities.[1] These are categories based on perceived racial identities; they do not necessarily imply fixed or homogeneous memberships. Moreover, even within "non-minority" category, there may be individuals who, while not technically *racial* minorities, nonetheless experience marginalization or discrimination as a result of (perceived) ethnocultural characteristics, such as religion, accent, or region of origin. That being said, this paper focuses on race as a primary marker of identity.

While scholars have largely rejected the claim that there is a scientific basis to racial classifications, racial differentiation is real and persistent. Recognizing that race is socially constructed does not, in other words, erase its salience in society. Race and racial discourse continue to structure institutions, perceptions and human interactions. As such, even while rejecting the notion of race as an objective concept, I argue that the experiences of those marked by racial marginalization merit attention. Visible minorities experience discrimination more often than Whites (Tran 2006), they are the victims of racially motivated hate crimes (Silver et al. 2004), face disadvantage in the workplace (Statistics Canada 2003) and, on average, earn less than their White counterparts (Pendakur and Pendakur 1998). Marginalization is found in politics, as well. For example, in a 2004 poll, 79% of Canadians said that they would be less likely to vote for a party if its leader was Black, 78% would be less likely if the leader was Jewish, 71% if the leader was Aboriginal, and 63% if the leader was Muslim; 71% said they would be less likely to vote for a party led by a woman (CRIC 2004). In addition, following the 2008 federal election, visible minorities occupied 7% of seats in the House of Commons even though they comprised 16% of the population, a situation that is reproduced at most other levels of government (Andrew, Biles, Siemiatycki and Tolley 2008). Moreover, visible minorities' numerical gains have in effect stagnated, with their population growth far out-pacing their entry into the electoral arena.

A number of studies have documented the electoral under-representation of visible minorities (Black 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Black and Hicks 2006; Black and Lakhani 1997; Tossutti and Najem 2002). Nonetheless, research has tended to focus on the mere absence of minorities from politics and the institutional factors that have contributed to this deficit, including the electoral system, financial barriers, and a lack of political networks among visible minorities. Less attention has been given to cognitive and affective explanations, including attitudes and perceptions. Where these have been the focus, the emphasis has been on the effect of voter bias on electoral outcomes (Black and Erickson 2006; Tossutti and Najem 2002). We know comparatively little about how perceptions affect the supply of visible minority candidates, whether party elites are less likely to recruit visible minorities because they think they will be less likely to win, or whether visible minorities are less inclined to run because they are not sure they would be favourably received. More to the point, we know little about the information that citizens receive about visible minority candidates, about the patterns of coverage, and about the effect of race on their media portrayal and experiences in electoral politics.

[1] The labeling of individuals who are "not visible minorities" is also problematic. The Government of Canada appears to favour the expression "non-visible minorities." This engenders confusion, however, with some believing the term refers to people who *are* minorities but just not *visible* minorities. While "on-minorities" is the label adopted here, I recognize that it too is imperfect.

This is an important oversight given that the media are not only a conduit between citizens and candidates, but also an avenue through which we learn about people who are "different" from ourselves. Moreover, even as the visible minority population increases in Canada, and ethnocultural diversity has shot onto the political landscape as a salient marker of identity, analyses of the media's portrayal of visible minorities in Canadian politics are largely absent in the literature. Two notable exceptions are an article by Abu-Laban and Trimble (2006), which looked at the media coverage of Muslim voters in recent federal elections, and an older study by Saunders (1991), which examined the coverage of ethnic minority groups and issues in the 1988 federal election. While important, this work looked at minorities as *electors* rather than electoral *candidates*. By contrast, there is a significant body of comparative work on media portrayals of minority politicians, but this has tended to be American and may not be wholly applicable to Canada, given differing histories of immigration, colonialism and race relations. There is thus a need to remedy this gap.

RACIAL MEDIATION

The media play a crucial role in interpreting, analyzing, and evaluating political events and help shape citizens' understanding of elections and candidates (Ericson et al. 1987; Johnson-Cartee 2005; Schudson 1989). Far from being a neutral reflector, the media have a hand in constructing political reality. Theories of gendered mediation are well-documented and developed in the literature on women and politics (Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ross 1996; Gidengil and Everitt 1999; 2000; 2003a; 2003b; Goodyear-Grant 2007, 2009). According to this body of work, the media "filter and shape our understanding of what is politically relevant" through the use of framing, stereotypes, encoded language, and symbols (Gidengil and Everitt 2003b, 197). The evidence confirms that the media focus on the demographic characteristics of female politicians more so than male politicians, with coverage tending to emphasize women's appearance, wardrobe, femininity, family life, and "soft" policy interests (Gidengil and Everitt 2000, 2003a; Heldman et al. 2009; Sampert and Trimble 2003). Further, masculine assumptions underpin the media's reporting on politics, and this reinforces male political norms (Jalalzai 2006; Kahn 1994). All of this research makes clear that women's political experiences and electoral fortunes can only be understood within the context of their media coverage.

Consistent with this literature, I propose a theory of racial mediation that captures the ways in which the media frame and portray visible minority politicians. I posit that politics are covered in ways that reflect dominant cultural norms, ideologies that are embedded in social, political and economic institutions, and the assumption of "whiteness" as the standard. Racial mediation may be explicit, but is more likely implicit, manifesting itself in subtle ways through the selection of stories, sources and images, in language and slant, and in the practices and norms that structure the construction and production of news. Racial mediation draws attention to the ways in which race is integrated into news stories as a criterion against which politics and candidates may be evaluated (see also Entman and Rojecki 2000).

While most media refrain from explicitly racist framing, racial considerations may still affect the content, tenor, or direction of coverage and cause journalists to disproportionately emphasize the racial aspects of a story. I refer to this as racialized media coverage. Racialized media coverage may appear balanced or even positive, but it nonetheless puts the focus on race, rather than on the subject's other attributes, qualifications, or policy interests. This operationalization is not about racism, per se, but rather about the relative racial emphasis of the media's coverage, whether conscious or not. Given that each one of us has an ascribed "race," racialization is not confined to individuals with minority backgrounds, although existing evidence suggests that this is when it will be most prevalent.

The notion of racialized coverage is consistent with theories of modern racism, which suggest that racism is now more subtle, symbolic, nuanced, and implicit (Campbell 1995; Citrin et al. 1990; Fleras and Kunz 2001; Henry and Tator 2002). At the individual level, modern racism may range from hostility to ambivalence, and it manifests itself through negative body language, inward discomfort, a conscious suppression of identified racial biases, a subtle incorporation of stereotypes into attitudes and actions or an avoidance of those deemed to be culturally "different" (Fleras and Kunz 2001). At an institutional level, modern racism is systemic and includes norms that privilege mainstream behaviour, styles of dress or religious practices, even while promoting a commitment to values and procedures that are, on the surface, universal and race-neutral (Fleras and Kunz 2001). Modern racism gets beyond the notion of explicit racism and suggests that racialized norms may be so deeply entrenched that they are invisible or simply regarded as "natural." This tendency may be exacerbated by strong equality norms that provide an incentive to communicate racial messages in ways that will not be seen as racist (Mendelberg 2001).

Modern racism provides a theoretical framework for analysing and understanding the ways in which individuals and institutions are influenced by race. When coupled with what we know about news production itself, the tendency toward racial mediation may thus be somewhat expected. For example, because there are incentives to produce stories in ways that will appeal to the widest audience, the news is not likely to challenge dominant racial narratives (Fleras and Kunz 2001; Norris 2000). The demographics of media outlets and their boards of directors – disproportionately white, male, educated and professional – may result in a lack of exposure to alternatives (Henry and Tator 2002; Miljan and Cooper 2003; Miller and Court 2004). Moreover, because of their interest in exceptions (Johnson-Cartee 2005), reporters may be drawn toward visible minority politicians and focus their attention on the novelty or incongruence of their presence. In the context of space constraints and tight deadlines, reporters may also rely on impressions or short-cuts, categorizing candidates on the basis of the issues in which they are likely to be interested, with subtle racial stereotypes confining visible minority candidates to a particular range of issues (Niven and Zilber 2001). In addition, in an effort to deliver stories that are more easily understood, journalists may use metaphors and dominant narratives that can marginalize minority groups (Johnson-Cartee 2005).

While we know much about the factors that influence the way that the news is reported, we actually know very little about its relative racial content, particularly in political reporting. There has been insufficient analysis of the media's coverage of visible minorities in politics, and we do not yet know enough about the narratives and images that dominate. We can draw on the literature for insights, with analyses of framing being particularly relevant. Framing is concerned with the selection and salience of the stories and issues that the media cover. Frames tap information that a consumer has previously deemed to be significant, and this alters the weight and relevance accorded to that consideration, essentially making it "more noticeable, meaningful or memorable" (Entman 1993, 53). Framing is particularly important to research on race in politics because the magnitude of framing effects is likely to be greatest when coverage relates to issues that are perceived as being important, but for which consumers have no first-hand knowledge (Johnson-Cartee 2005). Given that most citizens have limited personal experience with elected officials and minimal knowledge of racial groups apart from their own, framing effects may be stronger for stories about politicians of other races.

In my theorization of racial mediation, I propose three frames that the media may use in their reporting on candidates. These are the race frame, the minority issues frame, and the outsider frame. It should be noted that racial mediation is not simply a "minority" phenomenon. Rather, these frames may be applied to both White and visible minority candidates. Below, I provide a brief overview of each frame, but I should emphasize that the race frame is the primary focus of this paper; the other two frames will

be addressed in subsequent research. Moreover, while the frames are presented as mutually exclusive, they do overlap, and stories may include more than a single frame.

Race Frame

The race frame highlights, as the name implies, the race of the politician. This might be an explicit description of a candidate as Black, South Asian or visible minority, or it might be more implicit, such as a reference to a politician's country of origin or religious affiliation (Terkildsen and Damore 1999). The coverage may draw attention to candidates' support from particular ethnic communities or describe the racial composition of their constituency, thereby reinforcing the particular appeal of their candidacy (Terkildsen and Damore 1999; Zilber and Niven 2000). The inclusion of a candidate's photograph may further aid in the transmission of a race frame (Jeffries 2002). Research suggests that the coverage of electoral contests with at least one minority candidate is more likely to mention race than those where the candidates are all White, and it is the race of the minority candidate that is most often mentioned (Terkildsen and Damore 1999; Caliendo and McIlwain 2006). This suggests that the coverage of candidates is not race-blind.

Minority Issues Frame

Issue frames focus on substantive policy matters, ideological positions, and candidates' issue priorities. For example, Schaffner and Gadson (2004) found that while Black members of Congress received more local television news coverage than their White counterparts, the coverage suggested that minority politicians concentrated on a narrow set of minority issues. This framing suggests that minority politicians are self-interested or ill-equipped to deal with broader "mainstream" issues. Moreover, when minority politicians are stereotyped in positive ways, such as being more capable of handling social justice issues, the effects are usually off-set by perceptions of incompetence in other areas (Sigelman et al. 1995). Importantly, minority issue framing occurs even when minority politicians' publicly expressed areas of interest lie elsewhere (Zilber and Niven 2000).

Outsider Frame

Finally, news coverage may frame particular candidates as political outsiders, oddities, or less viable. Zilber and Niven (2000) have found that Black Congressmen were more likely than White Congressmen to be portrayed as "parochial outsiders," often by situating the coverage of Black members in their districts rather than in Washington, or by discussing their lack of political experience. When there is a desire for change, this frame could work to the advantage of visible minority politicians, but they may have to overcome suspicions about their credentials or motives for entering politics. This is because the outsider frame can result in visible minority candidates being viewed as interlopers with less dedication to the party or politics (Sayers and Jetha 2002). The outsider frame may also be conveyed by highlighting visible minority candidates' "novelty," "trail-blazing" or famous "firsts". This can disadvantage visible minority candidates because it leaves the impression that they are political anomalies and do not necessarily belong in electoral institutions (Braden 1996; Gidengil and Everitt 2003b; Heldman et al. 2009; Zilber and Niven 2000). Granted, this "novel" status may potentially advantage candidates by providing an angle for a story that would not otherwise be there (Schaffner and Gadson 2004). However, the story is not about a candidate's policy agenda or qualifications – characteristics that voters weigh when making electoral decisions – but instead about their difference. Given that dominant or "culturally mainstream" criteria are often used as the basis for judgments about a candidate's suitability for a position, the outsider frame may lead voters to believe that visible minorities simply lack the qualifications for political life (Eagly and Mladinic 1989; Esses et al. 2006; Zilber and Niven 2000).

METHODS AND DATA

This paper looks specifically at the use of the race frame in reporting on candidates in the 2008 Canadian federal election. In line with my theorization of racial mediation, I expect that the print media's coverage of visible minority candidates will be more racialized than that of White candidates; emphasis will be placed on visible minorities' racial or ethnocultural backgrounds, their immigration histories, and their support from so-called minority communities. This will not be the case in the coverage of non-minority candidates, not even those who run in racially diverse constituencies. At the same time, however, I do not expect the race frame to be absolute. Rather, I expect variations on the basis of a number of factors. In this paper, I look specifically at the effects of riding diversity, candidate gender, and party affiliation; other factors will be examined in future analyses.

Using a mechanized dictionary-based approach, I conducted a content analysis of articles that appeared in 18 English-language Canadian daily newspapers during the period from the dropping of the writ on September 7, 2008 until the day of the 40th general election on October 14, 2008.[2] The print media were selected in part because of the greater availability of full-text electronic records, but also because this is where local candidates are likely to receive the most intensive coverage. In order to capture candidate-centred election coverage, I chose a sample of 34 visible minority and 34 non-minority candidates who ran in ridings outside of Quebec.[3] Although establishing the "race" of candidates is inherently problematic, I relied on candidates' published biographies, media accounts, and photographs; the results are in line with those obtained by Black (2008b; 2011) and Bird (2008).

The candidate sample was stratified so it would include visible minority candidates who had won and lost, as well as non-minority candidates who ran in ridings with varying levels of diversity. Within these categories, the sampling was random, and there is variation with respect to candidate gender, incumbency, and electoral outcome. While there is variation along party lines, the sample includes only those who ran for the Conservative, Liberal, and New Democratic parties and who were thus most likely to receive media coverage. Unlike a purely random approach, which may have resulted in too few visible minority candidates to even permit an analysis, this strategy ensured sufficient variation along the main categories of interest. The characteristics of candidates included in the analysis are shown in Table 1.

Using the names of these candidates and the dates of the writ period as the search parameters, full-text articles were retrieved from Canadian Newsstand and Eureka. All news stories were included, with the exception of letters to the editor or simple lists of riding candidates. Given the way in which news stories are constructed, two or more candidates are frequently mentioned in a story which, in effect, results in the inclusion of duplicate articles. Once duplicates were removed, we are left with a total sample of 740 stories. Stories averaged just over 630 words in length. The bulk of these (83%) were news articles, while 14.9% were columns and just 2.2% were news editorials. The largest number of stories (12.2%) appeared in the Toronto Star, which is in part a reflection of the candidates included in the sample; 9.5% of the

[2] The newspapers included were the Globe and Mail, National Post, Vancouver Sun, The Province, Times-Colonist, Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Saskatoon Star Phoenix, Regina Leader Post, Winnipeg Free Press, Toronto Star, Ottawa Citizen, Windsor Star, Montreal Gazette, Halifax Chronicle Herald / Sunday Herald, Saint John's Telegraph Journal, St. John's Telegram and the Charlottetown Guardian. Although content analyses can be conducted in more than one language, when dictionary-based methods are used, this is not generally advised because of the difficulties associated with operationalizing concepts identically in multiple languages. As such, French- and foreign-language papers have been excluded from the study.

[3] Because only English-language newspapers are included in the analysis, candidates who ran in ridings in Quebec have been excluded.

stories came from the Globe and Mail, 8.5% from the Ottawa Citizen, 8.1% from the Calgary Herald, and 7.7% from the Edmonton Journal. White candidates were mentioned in 70.7% of these 740 stories, while visible minority candidates were mentioned in 56.4%. Too much should not be made out of this, however, given that a number of other factors – including candidate incumbency, viability, and media market – may all influence amount of coverage.

[Table 1 about here]

Although hand-coded content analyses are perhaps more common in the politics literature, researchers are increasingly experimenting with mechanized and dictionary-based approaches (Andrew et al. 2006; Andrew, Young and Soroka 2008). Dictionary-based content analysis assumes that the meaning of a set of texts can be derived through an analysis of the presence of particular words, word co-occurrences, and word patterns. Because of this, the unit of analysis is typically the sentence or paragraph, rather than the story. What is of particular interest is the frequency with which words appear or co-occur. Aided by computer software, the words in the corpus are counted and organized according to theory-driven *a priori* categories, which comprise the dictionary (see Popping 2000). In this analysis, the categories reflect the three frames outlined earlier, and the keywords are those that might be used to communicate those frames.

Early mechanized approaches were critiqued because they simply counted the frequency with which particular words appeared in a corpus of texts and thereby ignored their context and sense. Software is becoming increasingly sophisticated, however, and many programs now include tools that help to hone in an actual usage and to weed out incorrect matches. Some may nonetheless question the extent to which a computer can detect something as subtle as racialization. For this reason, I am replicating the analysis in a separate study that uses a traditional hand-coded approach. This will offer an additional avenue for validating the results I present here as well as the potential to discuss the methodological strengths and weaknesses of both approaches to content analysis.

Although validity remains a key concern in mechanized approaches, when the dictionary is comprehensive and well-designed, one can reliably and efficiently study many cases and, arguably, reduce the error and bias that is sometimes associated with human coding (Soroka et al. 2009). To construct the dictionary, I used several strategies. First, I drew on the existing literature and a sample of stories from the 2006 federal election to compile a list of words and phrases used to describe candidates. These lists were supplemented with those compiled by other researchers working on related projects. This was particularly the case with the compilation of "issue" words, which was informed by the Canadian Policy Agendas Topic Codebook that has been developed by Stuart Soroka.[4] For additional validation, I consulted a number of scholars who have done research on the media or race in politics and who provided suggestions for refinement. [5] Finally, relevant synonyms were identified using the dictionary-building tools in WordStat, a commercially available text analysis program.

Once the word lists were completed, and the texts' spelling and punctuation were standardized, I used WordStat's keyword-in-context (KWIC) capability to examine the dictionary keywords in conjunction with the textual segments that appeared before and after their usage. This step verifies that each use of the

[4] The Canadian Policy Agendas Topic Codebook can be found at http://www.snsoroka.com/files/QPDataSoroka.pdf.

[5] Thanks are extended to Yasmeen Abu-Laban, Abigail Bakan, Keith Banting, Jerome Black, Karen Bird, Rita Dhamoon, Victoria Esses, Elizabeth Goodyear-Grant, Allison Harell, Frances Henry, Scott Matthews, Stuart Soroka, and Linda Trimble; all provided insight and advice that helped strengthen the dictionary.

keywords is consistent with the meaning intended in the dictionary. It facilitates, in particular, the removal of false positives. The most common false positives are homographs, which are words with identical spellings but different meanings (e.g. *minority* groups versus *minority* government; the human *race* versus an electoral *race*). False positives were identified and added to an exclusion list so that the analysis would include only the socio-demographic usage of keywords.

Proximity rules were also set so that the racialized coverage of *candidates* could be distinguished from the racialization of *articles*. This is important given that most articles about politics refer to more than one candidate at a time. In the absence of such rules, WordStat will simply calculate the frequency with which keywords occur in the corpus of texts, which will tell us something about the racialization of articles, but not about the racialization of particular candidates. Proximity rules can help overcome this by zeroing in on the co-occurrence of keywords with the names of particular candidates (see Soroka et al. 2009). This allows us to detect patterns of coverage that are associated with particular candidates rather than those that characterize the set of articles, in general.

The dictionary includes the sampled candidates' names in addition to the keywords. The keywords are divided into three categories, which reflect the proposed news frames: (1) the socio-demographic category, which is indicative of the race frame; (2) the policy issues category, which is indicative of the minority issues frame; and (3) the political viability category, which is indicative of the outsider frame. Although the larger project will include an analysis of all three dimensions and frames, in this paper, I examine only the race frame and therefore focus on the socio-demographic category.

Socio-demographic keywords describe candidates' racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic features, the ethnocultural composition of their ridings, or their support from so-called ethnic or multicultural communities. Examples include *Anglophone, Black, Catholic, Chinese, English-speaking, ethnic, evangelical, French, first language, foreigner, mainstream, multicultural, new Canadian, old country, old stock, religious,* and *South Asian*. Some words, such as *majority* and *newcomer*, generated a number of false positives and in these particular cases, proximity rules could not be made sensitive enough to appropriately distinguish a socio-demographic usage from some other usage. To guard against over-estimation, these keywords were simply excluded from this component of the dictionary. In sum, the socio-demographic category includes just over 230 words.[6] In terms of overall frequency, socio-demographic keywords are included in slightly fewer than 5% of all sentences and are found in 44.2% of all articles in the corpus. This suggests that the bulk of political coverage does not in fact focus on candidates' socio-demographic characteristics, a finding that may give small comfort to those dismayed about the personalization of politics (e.g. Van Zoonen 2005). As we shall see, however, when socio-demographic characteristics are covered, there is a distinctive race frame.

FINDINGS

References to candidates' socio-demographic characteristics

The first step in the analysis was an examination of the co-occurrence of candidates' names and the socio-demographic keywords contained in the dictionary. A conservative approach was adopted, and the sentence was selected as the unit of analysis. In essence, if a candidate's name appeared in the same sentence as any of the socio-demographic keywords, it was processed as a "match." The analysis thus imposed a fairly stringent standard in that a match depended on the use of a candidate's full or last name and not simply a pronoun, such as he or she. Although this approach will not capture all of the

[6] The complete word list can be requested from the author.

instances in which candidates' socio-demographic features are mentioned in the media, it does ensure sensitivity in the analysis.

Even when such a stringent standard is imposed, we find that socio-demographic characteristics are more commonly linked to visible minority candidates than to White candidates. In the 4444 sentences that include a visible minority candidate's name, 45.5% also include a socio-demographic keyword. By comparison, in the 5545 sentences that include a White candidate's name, just 33.0% include a socio-demographic keyword. We can measure these co-occurrences using the Jaccard coefficient (J), a statistic that expresses the similarity between the set of candidate names and the set of socio-demographic keywords. The coefficient is calculated as follows:

$$J = \frac{c}{a+b-c}$$ where J = Jaccard coefficient

a = frequency of target in the corpus (e.g. candidate names)
b = frequency of keywords in the corpus (e.g. socio-demographic keywords)
c = frequency of co-occurrence of target and keyword

The Jaccard coefficient ranges from 0 to 1, with a 0 suggesting that the two sets are not at all similar, while a 1 indicates they are identical. Expressed as a percentage, a Jaccard coefficient of 0.05 indicates that of all the sentences containing *either* a sampled candidate's name *or* a socio-demographic keyword, 5% of the time the sentences will contain both. These are the cases that are of greatest interest because they suggest a linkage between candidates and socio-demographic features and, more to the point, a possible race frame.

When all of the socio-demographic keywords are considered collectively, we find they co-occur more frequently with visible minority candidates' names (J=0.207; data not shown), than with White candidates' names (J=0.165; data not shown).[7] Moreover, as is shown in Figure 1, keywords that might be considered indicative of minority racialization, such as *immigrant, Chinese, Sikh, Indo-Canadian*, and *visible minority*, are much more likely to co-occur with visible minority candidates' names than with White candidates' names. Meanwhile, words like *French, Jew*, and *religious* are more likely to co-occur with White candidates' names than with visible minority candidates' names. These findings align with our expectations in that (minority) race framing is more prevalent for visible minority candidates. There are some co-occurrences that may come as a surprise, however.

[Figure 1 about here]

First, the word *ethnic* co-occurs more often with White candidates' names (J = 0.049) than with visible minority candidates' names (J = 0.025). A closer inspection of the articles suggests that *ethnic* is often used as a stand-in for several types of diversity, including racial, religious, and linguistic differences, which to some extent conceals the conceptualization of race as a political organizing principle. Such a finding is consistent with Thompson (2008) who draws attention to the absence of racial analysis in Canadian political science. Moreover, when the word *ethnic* is used in the context of a White candidate's coverage, it is often a reference to ethnic targeting, "wooing" of so-called ethnic voters, and attempts to appeal to minority constituents. While the differences are small, *ethnic* tends to co-occur more frequently with the names of White candidates who ran in the most racially diverse ridings (J = 0.023; data not shown) – those where visible minorities and where ethnic targeting is more likely to occur –

[7] Data used to tabulate all Jaccard coefficients are available from the author.

than with the names of White candidates who ran in the least racially diverse ridings where ethnic targeting is much less likely (J = 0.017; data not shown).

Second, while *new Canadian* co-occurs with visible minority and White candidates' names with about the same frequency (J = 0.014 for non-minorities; J = 0.010 for visible minorities), the word *immigrant* is more likely to be attached to visible minorities (J = 0.073 for visible minorities; J = 0.043 for non-minorities). This is somewhat curious given that the two words are more or less synonymous. In spite of this, the arguably more loaded word – *immigrant* – is more likely to be used in reference to visible minority candidates.

Third, the word *English* co-occurs more frequently with the visible minority candidates' names (J = 0.028) than with non-minority candidates' names (J = 0.018) and more commonly than any other linguistic identifier. This is, in part, a function of the tendency of journalists to refer to the English-language abilities of visible minority candidates. This typically occurs when the candidates are South Asian, a group noted for its English-language fluency. References to the English-language abilities of visible minority candidates, in particular, are consistent with the media's predilection for the unexpected and, while perhaps well-intentioned, do reinforce stereotypes about "desirable" immigrants and "model" minorities.

Finally, the word *Evangelical* co-occurs more frequently with visible minority candidates' names (J = 0.015) than with non-minority candidates' names (J = 0.001) although this may simply be a reflection of the candidates who were included in the sample. In particular, the sample of visible minority candidates includes Raymond Chan, a Liberal and Canadian of Chinese descent who is also an Evangelical Christian. His electoral race was hotly contested, and Mr. Chan himself made references to his religious background as a means of drawing a distinction between himself and his opponent, Alice Wong.

Party Affiliation

Reporting on candidates' socio-demographic characteristics also varies by party; this is illustrated in Figure 2. In particular, we see that *ethnic* appears more frequently in reporting on the Conservative Party's White candidates (J = 0.069) than for its visible minority candidates (J = 0.027) and more than it does for candidates from either the Liberal or New Democratic parties. Given the Conservative Party's recent attention to minority voters, this is perhaps not surprising. Indeed, among Conservatives, it appears that *ethnic*, *multi-,* and *new Canadian* are being used to describe White candidates' vote-getting strategies, while the words *immigrant* and *visible minority* are used to describe visible minority candidates themselves. Although the data are not shown, we also find that candidates from the other two parties are more likely than the Conservatives to be linked to "traditional" minority groups, including Jews for the Liberals and Italians and the Portuguese for the NDP. This is, again, in line with the Conservative Party's history and its recent shift toward ethnic targeting.

[Figure 2 about here]

Riding Diversity

Candidates' media portrayal may, of course, be a reflection of their own characteristics, but also those of their constituents. This is particularly the case when examining local papers, which are likely to highlight issues and attributes of interest to readers in their area. Because of this, we might expect to find a racial frame in stories about candidates from very racially diverse ridings, whether those candidates are visible minorities or not. To examine this, ridings were categorized according to the relative size of their visible minority populations. Ridings where visible minorities comprised 15% of the population or less are

referred to as low-diversity ridings; those where visible minorities comprised between 15.1% and 49.9% of the population were characterized as medium-diversity ridings; and those where visible minorities comprised 50% or more of the population were referred to as high-diversity ridings.

Socio-demographic keywords characterized the coverage of visible minority candidates running in high-diversity ridings (J= 0.137; data not shown) more so than that of White candidates running in high-diversity ridings (J=0.075; data not shown). In addition, as is shown in Figure 3, of the 20 keywords that co-occurred most frequently with candidates' names in the high-diversity ridings, 11 could be considered indicative of a decidedly minority race frame (*Sikh, Chinese, Indo-Canadian, Malay, Pakistan, Punjab, South Asian, visible minority, Hong Kong, minority, Black*), while three (*immigrant, ethnic/ ethno*, and variants of *multicultural*) are indicative of a more nuanced minority race frame. All of these words co-occurred more frequently with visible minority candidates' names than with White candidates' names suggesting that the race frame is being driven by candidates' characteristics and not by the complexion of the riding.

[Figure 3 about here]

Gender

Just as politics are not race-blind, nor are they gender-blind. Among visible minority candidates, some words co-occurred without any notable gender differences; this was the case for *immigrant* (J = 0.069 for visible minority women; J = 0.068 for visible minority men) and *Sikh* (J = 0.040 for visible minority women; J = 0.037 for visible minority men). That being said, Figure 4 does point to some important disparities. In particular, female visible minority candidates' names were twice as likely to co-occur with the generic *South Asia(n)* than were male visible minority candidates' names (J = 0.022 for women; J = 0.011 for men). Meanwhile, male visible minority candidates' names were much more likely to co-occur with more specific identifiers, like *India / Indo-Canadian*, *Pakistan* and *Punjab,* than were female visible minority candidates' names. Although female visible minority candidates' names were more likely to co-occur with *Chinese* (J = 0.095) than were male candidates' names (J = 0.051), this is largely because Olivia Chow – a Member of Parliament of Chinese Canadian descent and the wife of NDP Leader Jack Layton – received much more coverage than any Chinese-origin male politicians.

Moreover, variants of *multicultural* were much more likely to co-occur with female visible minority candidates' names (J = 0.026) than with male visible minority candidates' names (J = 0.011). By replacing specific racial identifiers with *multicultural* labels, the coverage succeeds in signaling women candidates' difference, but more obliquely. Consistent with theories on modern racism, the cueing of difference is implicit, and its de-racialization provides the cover of plausible deniability. Although purely speculative, one wonders if the race / gender combination embodied by visible minority women heightens journalists' sensitivities about demographic descriptors and, as a result, sub-consciously contributes to an apparent downplaying of the racial identity.

[Figure 4 about here]

Importantly, the analysis of keyword co-occurrences does not get at many of the qualitative gender differences in the media's coverage of visible minority candidates, which are often woven into the narrative subtly and through the use of innuendo, which a mechanized approach is less likely to detect. Indeed, a more discursive reading of the articles in the sample suggests that the presence of visible minority women in politics offers the media an irresistible "novelty" angle, with stories highlighting candidates' sexuality, including past appearances in Bollywood films or their appearance on Maxim's list of the World's Hottest Politicians (Martin 2008). Additional markers of difference only heighten the

appeal, with the Chronicle Herald referring to one candidate as an "African Nova Scotian lawyer and lesbian activist" and describing her dress as an "African-style outfit" (Halifax Chronicle Herald 2008; Smith 2008). Moreover, regardless of race, the marital status of female candidates could be found in a number of stories, particularly if their husbands were also political figures. In other words, gendered differences persist alongside candidates' racialized identities.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This paper has provided a first look at the print media's coverage of visible minority candidates in the 2008 federal election. While there are gender and party differences, the paper suggests that visible minority candidates are, in general, more likely than non-minority candidates to be situated in socio-demographic terms with a (minority) race frame characterizing this coverage. This framing is important because it may prime voters to consider visible minority candidates as only a product of their race, which may cue out-group associations, or perceptions of competence rooted in a stereotypical understanding of what the candidates will be "best" at – namely the so-called minority issues like immigration and multiculturalism.

Clearly, this paper represents only a first step in the analysis. Additional research is needed to investigate the impact of other factors on candidate coverage; among the most important is incumbency and the candidate's eventual success or defeat. Story type and length may also be important, and I may also find differences across media markets. Further, this paper has examined just one of the potential frames. In addition to replicating the analysis using a hand-coded approach, future research will look at the media's coverage of candidates' policy interests and perceived political viability and the presence or absence of the minority issues and outsider frames.

Finally, although a candidate's coverage is important in and of itself, we cannot overlook the fact that media portrayals are in part a function of the subject's self-presentation. Through their words, actions, communications, and electoral strategies, candidates can themselves contribute to the shape, tone, and emphasis of their own coverage. As such, the content analysis will be complemented by interviews with candidates, campaign staffers, and party officials, which will allow for a comparison of candidates' messages, positions and strategies, and overall media portrayals.

Table 1. Candidate Characteristics

	Visible Minority Candidates (n)	Non-minority Candidates (n)	All Candidates (n)
Number	34	34	68
Provinces	Ontario (14) BC (10) Alberta (6) Saskatchewan (1) Manitoba (1) Nova Scotia (2)	Ontario (16) BC (7) Alberta (3) Saskatchewan (1) Manitoba (3) Nova Scotia (1) New Brunswick (1) PEI (1) NFLD (1)	Ontario (30) BC (17) Alberta (9) Saskatchewan (2) Manitoba (4) Nova Scotia (3) New Brunswick (1) PEI (1) NFLD (1)
Visible Minority Population in Riding	> 50% (17) 15.1% - 49.9% (7) < 15% (10)	>50% (16) 15.1% - 49.9% (8) < 15% (10)	> 50% (33) 15.1% - 49.9% (15) <15% (20)
Gender	Male (22) Female (12)	Male (22) Female (12)	Male (44) Female (24)
Party	Conservative (17) Liberal (13) NDP (4)	Conservative (10) Liberal (20) NDP (4)	Conservative (27) Liberal (33) NDP (8)
Incumbents	Incumbents (18) Non-incumbents (16)	Incumbents (20) Non-incumbents (14)	Incumbents (38) Non-incumbents (30)
Elected / Defeated	Elected (17) Defeated (17)	Elected (28) Defeated (6)	Elected (45) Defeated (23)

Figure 1. Co-occurrence of socio-demographic keywords and candidate names
Same sentence, English-language dailies, 2008 federal election

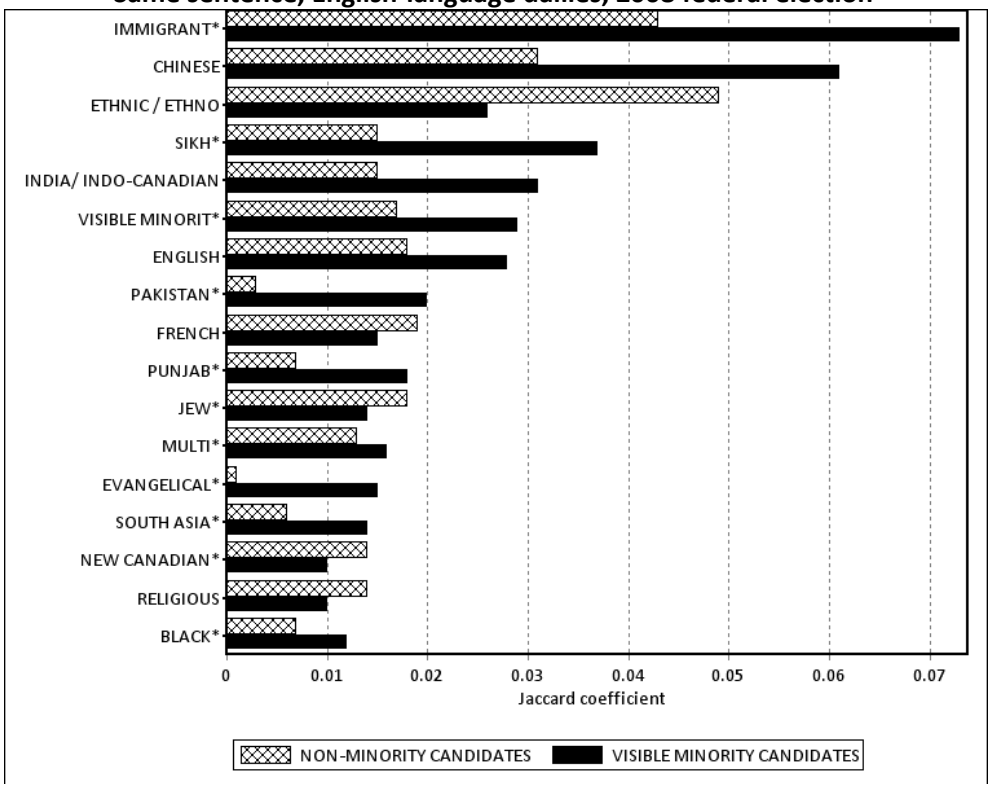


Figure 2. Co-occurrence of keywords and candidate names, by party
Same sentence, English-language dailies, 2008 federal election

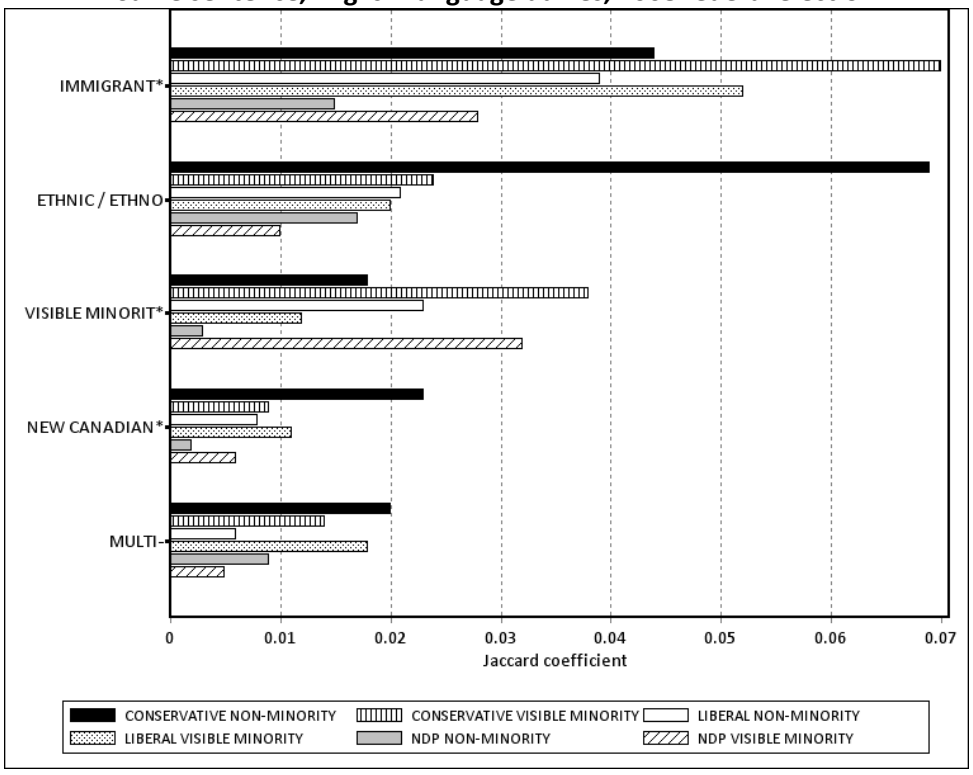


Figure 3. Co-occurrence of socio-demographic keywords and candidate names, high-diversity ridings
Same sentence, English-language dailies, 2008 federal election

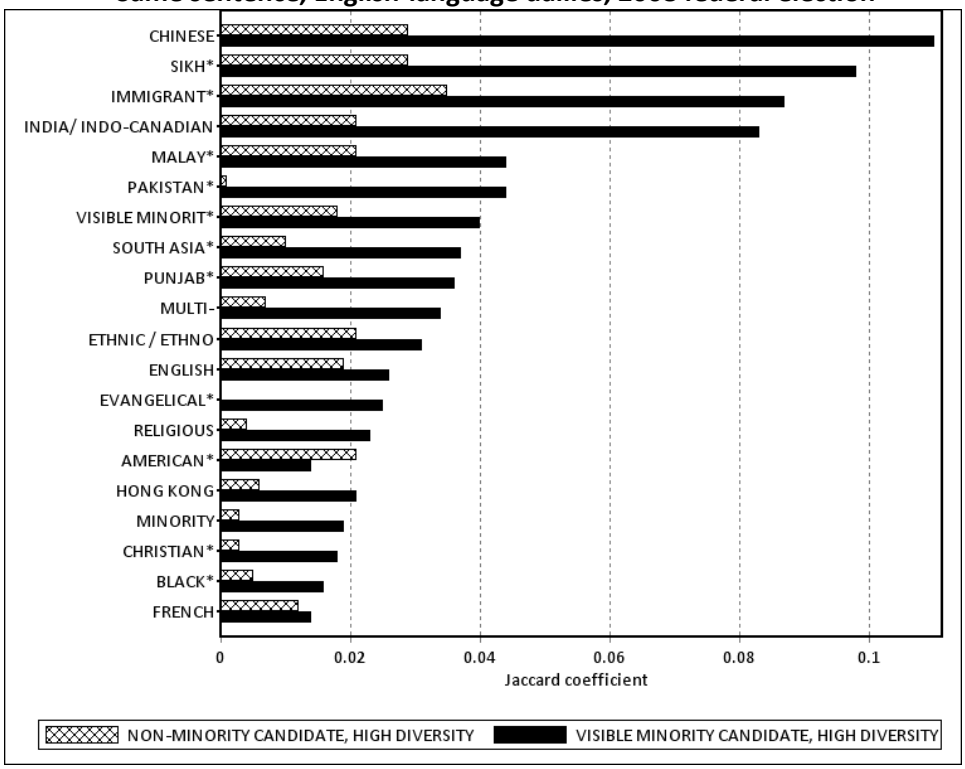
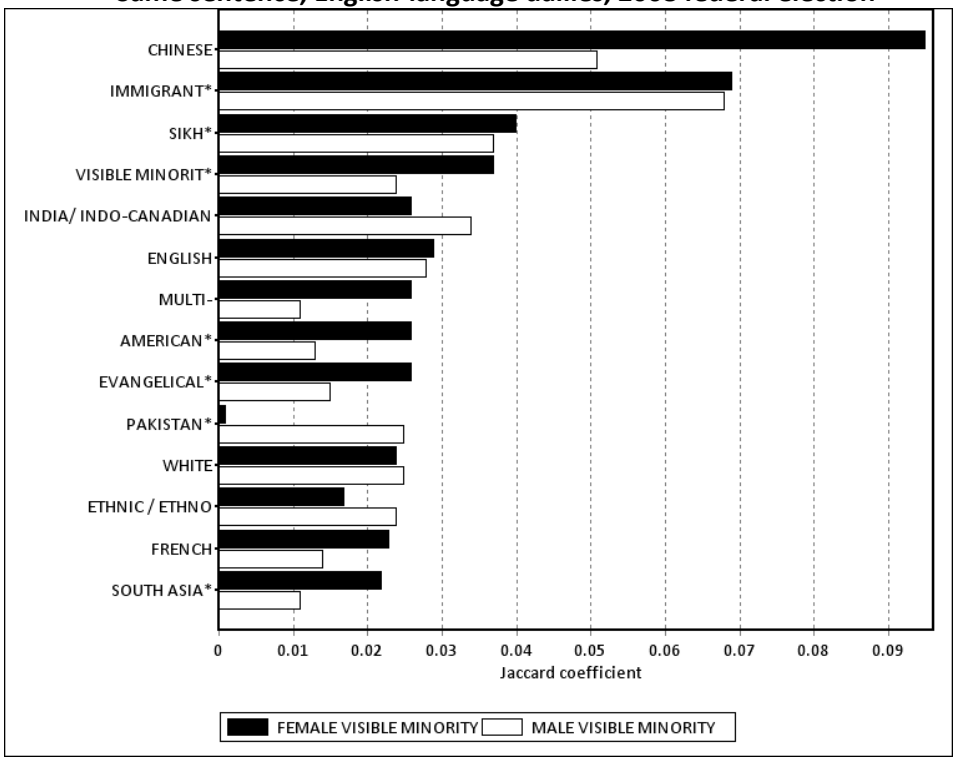


Figure 4. Co-occurrence of socio-demographic keywords and candidate names, by gender
Same sentence, English-language dailies, 2008 federal election



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