TOWARD THE CATEGORIZATION OF ONLINE POLITICAL PREJUDICES: THE CASE OF THE NEW BRUNSWICK 2020 PROVINCIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

This paper is qualitative case study of political prejudices on the internet. Negative social media remarks received by candidates in the 2020 New Brunswick provincial election were analyzed. The paper presents a typology for classifying such comments and offers a model for comprehending online prejudices, employing grounded theory techniques. Analysis of the comments reveals some of the challenges faced by contemporary political figures.

Résumé

Cet article est une étude de cas qualitative sur les préjudices politiques sur internet. Les remarques négatives sur les médias sociaux reçues par les candidats lors des élections provinciales du Nouveau-Brunswick en 2020 ont été analysées. En utilisant les techniques de théorisation ancrée, l'article présente une typologie pour classer de tels commentaires et propose un modèle pour comprendre les préjugés en ligne. L'analyse des commentaires révèle certains des défis auxquels sont confrontés les personnalités politiques contemporaines.

Introduction

Social media is a seamless part of our daily lives, providing accessibility, affordability, and simplicity. Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter (X) enable people to take part in public dialogue without significant cost or time. They have revolutionized the interactions between political actors and citizens by creating digital space for the exchange of ideas. For their part, many politicians use social media to communicate efficiently with constituents (Graham and Broersma, 2016; Lilleker et al., 2011; Karlsen and Skogerbo, 2015). They may showcase fresh information, engage in self-promotion, and even pay to distribute tailored material to their target audience through social media, transcending the constraints of traditional media (Theocharis et al., 2016).

Of course, social media can also have a negative impact on political life. Conspiracy theories (Reichstadt, 2015), cyberhate (Coliandris, 2016), fake news (Lee, 2019), and online prejudices (Rheault et al., 2019) are all on the rise and pose a serious problems obstructing politicians in their work (Dubois and Owen, 2019). The European Union and the United Nations have both proposed ways to reduce such abuses (Council of the European Union 2019). Similarly, to control online trade platforms, the Canadian government unveiled a digital charter in 2019. Later, Bill C-36, in 2021, amended the *Criminal Code*, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act,* targeting hate speech, hate crimes, and advocacy for hatred (Ministre de la Justice, n.d.). It is now a discriminatory practice to communicate hate speech by means of the internet. The new bill also allowed the Canadian Human Rights

Commission to receive complaints, and the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to adjudicate any disputes (Library of Parliament, n.d.).

Similarly, media coverage of federal members of Parliament (MPs) (Dubois and Owen, 2019; Tunney and Burke, 2019) and provincial (Nadon 2021) members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) publicly expressing their opposition to this problem is common in Canada. Also, local government, elected officials encounter online abuse. Racist and sexist remarks frequently target politicians (Fionda 2019). Indeed, an increase in hateful remarks received online prompted the Union of Quebec Municipalities to launch a campaign to promote respect for elected officials (UMQ, n.d.).

This article proposes a classification system for disparaging remarks made online about political candidates. Previous work has established typologies of online prejudices in various sectors, including the LGBT+ community, women, races and ethnicities, and faiths (Mondal et al., 2017, 89). However, less consideration has been given to the circumstances of political candidates. My purpose is to introduce a model specifically designed for the political sphere and that incorporates different types of online biases as well as pertinent sociodemographic characteristics. It is hoped that this approach results in a better understanding of the challenges faced by political figures today.

In order to gather a corpus of negative comments, I monitored the Facebook sites of candidates during the first Canadian election to take place during the pandemic: the New Brunswick provincial election of 2020. Online activity spiked at that time because many candidates limited direct contact by campaigning over the internet. Because the research concerns New Brunswick, an officially bilingual province, it serves as a possible microcosm of the rest of Canada.

In the next section, we will discuss the political context of the province of New Brunswick. It will be followed by a literature review of existing research on online hostility, including studies that quantify the phenomenon among candidates and those that address the classification of hostile messages. We will justify our conceptual and methodological approach, using grounded theory and open coding. The results of our analysis will be presented, followed by a discussion of the proposed model. The conclusion will outline future avenues of research.

Background

Before the pandemic, New Brunswick experienced a noticeable polarization expressed by the relative success of third parties. In the 2018 election, the Green Party elected three MLAs, as did the People's Alliance Party (PA), newcomers to the political stage (2010). The 2018 election was marked by an ethnic divide between the French Acadian majority in the north and the English majority in the south. The Conservative Party leader, Blaine Higgs, a former member of the anti-Bilingualism Confederation of Regions (COR) Party, formed a minority government despite having only one Acadian member, Robert Gauvin. Despite linguistic tensions, Higgs did not hesitate to ally with the PA who, like the COR Party, were openly hostile to official bilingualism.

The resignation of Gauvin, on February 14, 2020, made the Higgs's minority even more fragile. Then, beginning in March 2020, the pandemic inflicted stress on politicians and the public alike. At first, though, New Brunswick seemed to be doing well compared to other provinces.[1] Seeing his popularity improving, Higgs called an election, arguing that stability was required for the next phase of the pandemic. After negotiations failed with other parties to secure the government until the end of the

pandemic (or 2022, as determined by the fixed-date election law), the premier requested the dissolution of the legislature on August 17, 2020. New Brunswick thus became the first province to have an election during the pandemic. Given social distancing, the campaign was of course very different from previous ones. Face-to-face contact was largely replaced by contact via social media. Candidates suddenly needed to learn how to navigate the dangers and rewards of online interaction.

Literature Review

Prejudices toward politicians was present long before the internet. Many forms of physical and verbal violence, such as threats, assaults, vandalism, and property damage, were observed (Every-Palmer et al., 2015). In a study of offline harassment of federal and provincial lawmakers in Canada nearly 30% of respondents (25% federal and 35% provincial) said they have been the victim of criminal harassment (Adams et al., 2009). Understandably, many Canadian politicians experience stress as a result. It is also worth noting that some 40% of British MPs have increased their security both at home and work (James et al., 2016). However, there is a dearth of studies on the scale of the offline phenomenon in Western democratic societies.

The internet, however, makes people even freer to express hostility; its very anonymity has a disinhibiting effect (Suler, 2004). Abuse has fewer consequences on the internet than in the real world. Individuals thus have higher preferences and are able to calculate the immediate benefits of their actions (Robitaille, 2020). Online harm gets a lot of attention from researchers. One of these reasons is that internet accessibility led to an explosion of prejudicial speech online has led researchers to study various aspects. The internet also makes easier for researchers to study the prejudice phenomenon.

Its effects on youth (Tokunaga, 2010; Tynes et al., 2010.), the function of prejudiced humour (Weaver, 2010, 2011), racism in video games, and the influence of political ideas (Rains et al., 2017, 173). In particular, as is well known, hate groups use the internet to recruit and to proselytize. Many researchers have therefore examined the rhetoric and behaviour of hate groups as expressed via the internet (Peck, Ketchum, and Embrick 2011; Selepak 2010). The use of the internet to spread ideas (Douglas et al. 2005), the analysis of website rhetoric (J. Adams and Roscigno 2005; McCluskey 2013), and the study of interactions in online forums (W. Wagner, Holtz, and Yoshioka 2009) have all been topics of research into hate groups (Burke and Goodman 2012; Perry and Scrivens 2016). Additionally, researchers have examined the behaviour of people who send or receive these kinds of communications (McNamee, Peterson, and Pena 2010) on websites including blogs (Chau and Xu 2007; Clark et al. 2011), website comments (Erjavec and Poler 2012; Harlow 2015), YouTube (Guo and Harlow 2014), online forums (Steinfeldt et al. 2010), and more.

It is emphasized in a systematic review done by Biluc and her team that certain organizations use hate speech to strengthen their cohesiveness, draw in new members, spread ideas, and promote a sense of belonging on a global scale. On the other hand, those who participate in such behaviour degrade and harm the well-being of the targeted groups. Situations where the group is disparaged, news articles are reframed, and moral panic is generated are caused by both groups and individuals (Bliuc et al. 2018, 81–83). Coliandria emphasises the perilous aspect of this phenomenon by pointing out how de-individualization, unrestrained behaviour, and the use of incendiary statements that can quickly transcend legal lines thereby enhancing online animosity. Defamation, harassment, and other forms of aggression are violent behaviours that have the potential to move into the real world (Coliandris 2016, 85).

Hostility Toward Political Candidates

Although not as extreme as hate speech, political incivilities have grown to be commonplace, particularly given the increasingly fragmented and polarized media environment (Raines et al., 2017, 164). For example, one study found that almost 40% of tweets addressed to politicians "lacked decorum" (Tenove and Tworek, 2020, 5, 10). Herbst (2010) points out that even political officials themselves may use harmful rhetoric against their opponents. Potential negative consequences include reduction in political credibility, lower evaluations of political institutions, and increased political polarization. Social media prejudices, which has increased over the past ten years, endangers democratic norms and principles. Furthermore, it is asserted that such prejudicial online behaviours might have a negative influence on democratic participation and governance, which could eventually affect recruitment and retention. Additionally, Herbst (2010) argues that harmful rhetoric is often used as a political tactic against adversaries. In that way, even political officials are concerned about adopting hostile behaviours online.

Empirical studies have been done to examine prejudice toward political candidates. Adams, Pitre, and Bedard (2016, 805) performed research on the offline harassment that federal and provincial lawmakers in Canada had to deal with. According to their findings, 29.9% of respondents (25.5% federal and 36.6% provincial) said they have been the victim of criminal harassment in some capacity. Rheault et al. (2019, 4) conducted a study to examine how women are treated on Twitter. They found that using a comparison method, 14.2% of U.S. senators and 10.7% of Canadian parliamentarians had received unfriendly letters. It is interesting that their research reveals that males are more influenced by this issue than women are in Canada, where about 11.7% of men and 8.6% of women are affected. Tworek and colleagues discovered that less than 10% of comments on social media platforms during the 2019 federal campaign were harmful or disrespectful and almost 40% of tweets addressed to politicians lacked decorum. Notably, they identified one of the crucial factors, the candidate's popularity (Tenove and Tworek 2020, 5 and 10).

The Taxonomy of Online Hostility

Most researchers who have studied online hostility appear to advocate a "binary" approach: e.g., hate vs. offensive speech, the phenomenon's presence vs. absence (Davidson et al. 2017, 512–515), or interpersonal vs. public swearing (Kwon and Gruzd, 2017). Others concentrate on a precise category, including racism towards persons of colour. Instead of displaying a whole classification scheme, this categorization is frequently motivated by the need to pinpoint the precise study item. Sood and his team (2012) identify the sectors—politics, business, entertainment, health, lifestyle, current affairs, science, travel, and sports—where online bias is most pervasive. More specifically, attempts have been made to identify various categories of online hostility. Badjavativ et al. (2017) mention racism, sexism, and religion, and Mondal et al. (2017, 89) add to the list physical appearance, sexual orientation, social class, and ability. Each of these categories may have an effect on certain target populations, such as the Black community, transgender people, or supporters of the Muslim religion, etc. (Mondal, Silva, and Benevenuto 2017, 89).

Salminen and his colleagues (2018, 5) proposed a classification of online hostility based on language. They compiled a long list of qualifiers such as "stupid," "disgusting," "pathetic," "ugly," "crappy/shitty," "greedy," "retarded," as well as verbs like "fuck/fucked/fucking/motherfucking" and "kill/be killed." As shown in Figure 1, such language can be classified according to four main

categories: (1) *Accusations* made without any supporting proof: people are said to be guilty of wrongdoing, malice, or other unpleasant behaviours. (2) *Promotion of violence*: someone encourages others to use verbal or physical violence of any kind—up to and including murder. (3) *Humiliation:* the target individual is called "idiot," "retarded," "stupid" and the like. (4) *Abusive language:* people use coarse or swear words to purposely hurt other people. My approach was broadly similar to that of Salminen et al.; that is, it was language based.

Present Research: Methodology

I chose the election season because political candidates have increased contact (virtual and in-person) with voters during a campaign. The number of political actors is also at its maximum at this time.

The goal was to identify and categorize examples of internet prejudice that candidates encountered during the 2020 provincial election. We want to learn more about the types and patterns of harmful remarks made towards political actors during this specific election by looking at the substance of online exchanges (Lord 2020). This research is qualitative in nature and seeks to identify typical ideals of online prejudices that candidates may have received during the 2020 New Brunswick provincial election.

Method

Of several social media websites, Facebook was by far the most popular; therefore, this study is limited to comments on candidates' Facebook pages. Of 227 candidates officially registered, 53 did not have a Facebook profile and were therefore excluded, leaving 174 in the sample. The election was held on September 14, 2020. Facebook comments were collected on September 14 and 15.

Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to analyze the data. Featuring "open coding," Nvivo helps researchers categorize qualitative data. Categorization is a dynamic process in which categories are proposed, deleted, and combined into larger ones. Two main principles guide the process: first, identify primary topics (themes) and sub-themes; second, consider both the target and the intended meaning (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). An open coding method gives you the freedom to arrange the categories in a way that makes it easier to comprehend the many forms of bias being conveyed and their common traits. By catching the intricacies of online bias and the specific sorts of prejudice experienced by the political contenders, provides a heuristic advantage.

Theory

The suggestion to develop a new classification for online biases arises from the realization that most of the work to date has been devoted to developing models for computer programming. Effectively detecting and resolving problematic internet use is difficult. A significant part of creating these categories is statistical analysis. It's crucial to categorize ideas and phrases before investigating a novel phenomenon. There might be one or several phenomena at play in the political sphere. Future research will benefit from the classification created in this study since it makes it easier to analyze online biases in conjunction with other sociodemographic factors like gender, ethnicity, and religion. The main objective of the present research is to investigate the possibility of cross-referencing variables in a separate publication.

For the time being, it is critical to begin by developing a qualitative typology of negative remarks directed at candidates was developed. Using grounded theory to theorize the primary findings, I employed the Paillé (1994) approach, which breaks down the analytical process into six phases (Glaser and Strauss, 1967): (1) Coding. A careful study of the content while considering the question, "What is this comment about?" The work currently resembles description more than interpretation. (2) Classifying: Re-reading the content and asking yourself, "What sort of harm am I dealing with online? The descriptive level (the codes) of the analytical process is moved to the comprehensive level through categories. (3) Connecting: identifying links between and patterns across categories. What logical or aesthetic patterns or orders do they show? (4) Including: identifying the overarching subject of the categories. (5) Modelling: formalizing the resulting categorization system. (6) Theorizing: strengthening the model by applying the theoretical sampling principle and testing (Paillé, 1994).

Key Concepts

The conceptual language used by researchers in the study of online hostility is not uniform. Many different terms have been used: cyber-racism (Jakubowicz et al., 2017), cyberhate (Perry and Olsson, 2009), abusive messages (Tenove and Tworek, 2020), trolling (A. Wagner, 2020), fear speech (Gagliardone, 2019), lack of civility (Papacharissi 2004; Stryker et al., 2016), cyberstalking (Coliandris, 2016,) and online hate (Gagliardone, 2019; Awan, 2014).

I have chosen, however, to follow Iganski (2010; see also Jacobs and Porter, 1998), and use the concept of prejudice or bias. Iganski defines prejudice as any statement designed to impair the rights or advantages of the targeted individual or group and that has a prior unfavourable judgment. This definition seeks to cover different harmful online behaviours and a wide variety of unfavourable judgments. It accounts for the cultural and legal variations among nations and mitigates researcher bias by incorporating all adverse judgments. In contrast to focusing only on whether a statement is seen to be impolite, the idea of prejudice emphasizes the motivation behind unfavourable judgment. Although it is a more limited term than incivility, it still encompasses the most prevalent types of negative online behaviour.

Data Analysis

I identified five major types of prejudice in the Facebook comments. Online prejudices can aim to (1) qualify a person, (2) qualify an idea, (3) qualify an effect, (4) qualify an action, or (5) share intentions of actions or feelings. These categories offer a framework for comprehending the many ways that biases may be expressed online in the context of the provincial election in New Brunswick in 2020. The categories and the model will be explained in this section.

Prejudices Aimed at Qualifying a Person

Personal insults directed at political candidates were found frequently. Indeed, *ad hominem* assaults are a common type of prejudice in the literature. They criticize an individual rather than address their ideas or arguments. Three subcategories were also noted:

Abusive words: This subcategory covers online animosities that entail disparaging words. Epithets, obscenities, and other verbal abuse is meant to humiliate or discredit the targets. Candidates were called

"jerk," "puppet," "whiner," "dick," "sore loser," and the like.[2] Sometimes they addressed candidates' lifestyle by insulting their clothing or manners. Others commented on the candidate's public statements: "He's playing a political whore I call that," "A true opportunist," "He is just another puppet," or "I'm going to eye roll myself into another dimension at your lame attempts to justify being a garbage person." The objective seems to be to hurt the candidate. The authors of these comments do not put forward any new ideas or solutions to the problems posed.

Naturalization of disparities: Some statements focus on candidates' race, gender, or physical traits. These frequently use stereotypes to stigmatize or marginalize candidates based on real or imagined differences. In this category are racist, sexist, xenophobic, Francophobic, and ageist comments. When one candidate objected to a transphobic remark directed at her, the response was "It's a fucking joke you fucking prude." Other comments sexualize female candidates by offering them money for sex or diminish them by calling them a "bad mom."

Vices: Some comments accuse candidates of being morally deficient or lacking integrity. Accusations of corruption, dishonesty, and unethical behaviour are made without any evidence. In the sample, candidates are accused of "lacking warmth" and of being "arrogant," "dishonest," "hypocritical," and "narcissistic." The intention seems to be to disqualify them as suitable MLAs. Personal criticisms are often directed at their ability to do the job: "You don't present yourself as a strong candidate" or "She's incompetent and should never be allowed near power."

Prejudices Aimed at Qualifying an Idea

Compared to the previous category, these are aimed more at the candidates' ideas than at their personal attributes. Three main types were identified:

Authoritarianism: Online prejudice that depicts the candidates' positions as authoritarian or constrictive of individual liberty falls within this class. Internet users may object to the politicians' policies, claiming that they restrict people's rights and liberties. These allegations are frequently made without compelling proof or arguments, and they may be especially common in debates on topics like vaccination and health regulations. Some comments point out the alleged "tyranny" of their candidate: "Hopefully you'll enjoy the tyranny you useful idiots are ushering in."

Ideology: Comments that describe politicians' positions as being overly ideological or political fall under this group. With no intentional irony, online commentators may accuse candidates of being "extremist" or "radical" or being an "ideologue." For instance, one commenter qualifies the Green Party as "eco-nazi," while another describes the present government as the "most corrupt communist government ever."

Intelligence: Stereotypes are expressed that cast doubt on the candidates' intellectual prowess. Internet users may ridicule the candidates' views or use pejorative language to insinuate that they are illogical or unsubstantiated. Such prejudices aim to discredit the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the candidates' views by raising questions about their intelligence. Some political ideas are simply described as unintelligent; candidates are advised to "educate yourself." One directly addresses the candidate by writing: "Your incompetence and ignorance are outrageous!" Other citizens point out the lack of seriousness of some proposals: "That is so dumb and yet, right wingers say it all the time." In this case,

the goal seems to be to attack the credibility of a proposition. Pointing out the lack of seriousness is an easy way to discredit an idea: "I'm sorry, but it's way too hard to take your party seriously."

Prejudices Aimed at Qualifying an Effect

Inevitably, political actions have consequences, and such effects are often the target of disparaging remarks. Four types may be identified:

Damage in general: Political actors are frequently accused of causing harm ("destruction," "killing," "mess," etc.). Referring to Premier Higgs, one commenter wrote, "He's just there to destroy what we have." Some go even further: "Wow liberal always promises big things till they get in look at the mess we are in now with liberal dictator he never did one thing for Canadians. Liberals = degeneracy."

Economic harm: A particular type of damage often cited is harmful effects on the economy and employment. This topic was dominant in the election. It is not surprising that it generates a lot of prejudicial comments. Many comments are critical of political support for immigration and the "welfare state." The previous government was often accused of economic and employment failings. One commenter feared an economic collapse: "Green Party is a joke! Trudeau is bad enough, but the Greens would bankrupt the country!"

Dictatorship: Some commenters complain that citizens are being kept in a state of ignorance, poverty and/or slavery ("brainwash," "enslave," "deprive liberty," and the like). One person wrote, "No thanks not after coon said he'd force vaccinate us to even be able to enter any building in NB. I'd rather not have a dictator rule over me when your job is to work for us not enslave us."

Flawed system: Another subcategory of comments centred on the idea that the political system itself is fundamentally defective ("flawed," "corrupt," "divided"). Internet users frequently express this opinion, indicating a pervasive conviction that the political system is fundamentally defective and accountable for the condition of the province.

Prejudices to Qualify an Action

Prejudices aimed at qualifying action take two main forms:

Bad actions: Facebook commenters accuse candidates of lying, discrimination, criminal behaviour, and ethical misconduct, to name just a few: "Higgs is a total clown. Treats the nurses like garbage. Give below cost-of-living wages. Tried to cut health care. But gives Irving. He's are guy. Not."

Bad motivations: Candidates are regularly accused of hidden agendas. They may be favouring the wealthy and elite, their families, or themselves—or simply being opportunistic and untrustworthy generally:

> Won't be voting for you. Where the hell have you been? Police firefighters and outside workers all be cut and not a sound from you. My taxes go up and Irving's go down. Who are you working for? Not the people in your riding. Just collecting a pay cheque. Useless Enjoy your pension. Crooks helping crooks.

On the Facebook sites of political candidates, there are many charges made about their motivations and their dishonesty. These criticisms call into question not just the viability of their arguments but also their legitimacy and motivations for doing so. Such attacks seek to invalidate the candidates' positions as well as the concepts that they have advanced.

Prejudices Aimed at Sharing Feelings and Demands for Action

Online commenters frequently express their animosity toward candidates by using language meant to offend them. Two types emerged:

Sharing feelings: Assignment of feelings that could be detrimental to the candidates. "Im in shock…guess people really don't care about NB or a positive change…disgusted." Another commenter claimed to be ashamed that the candidate was their MLA: "[Candidate's name] is an embarrassment as a political representative." Thus, we can see online some messages underline disgust, disappointment, and embarrassment. The goal is to use personal feelings to hurt others.

Call for action: Many comments call for the candidate to resign, to be condemned by the justice system, or to be interned in a mental health hospital. One commenter was specific about what should happen: "The Liberal mafia needs to be charged, judged, sentenced, and jailed for life in a hard labor camp in the North." Another suggestion was even more graphic: "[Candidate name,] take your toxic masculinity and choke on it."

Summary

Five main categories of hostile language were identified: qualifying a person, an idea, an effect, or an action, and expressing an emotion or calling for action. Most can be further categorized at a second level of analysis, yielding nine subcategories. Figure 1 presents a summary of the full model.
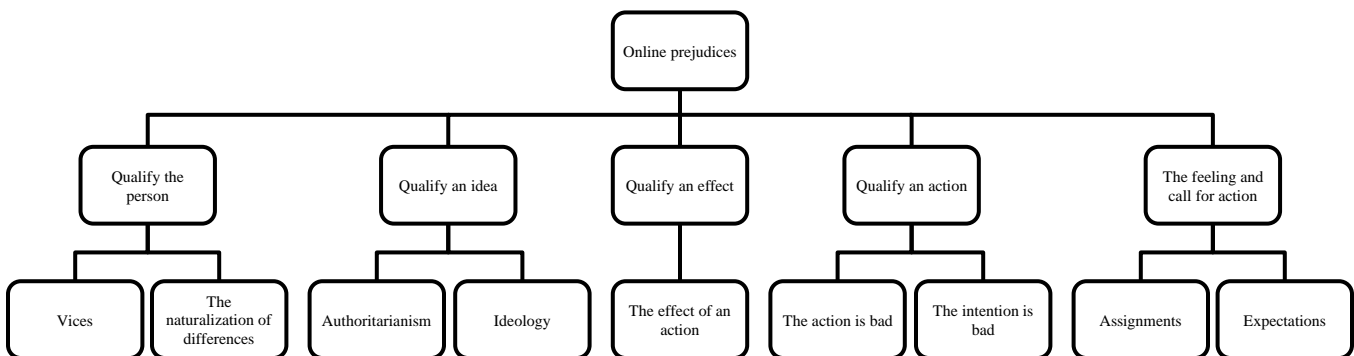

Figure 1. Categories of online prejudices towards political candidates in New Brunswick, 2020.

Comparison with Other Approaches

Most of the categories named by Mondal and colleagues (2017, 89)—race, behaviour, physical appearance, sexual, class, gender, disability—are implicitly covered in the present scheme. Although the authors offered a useful method for classifying online biases, they did not theorize these categories in

order to combine them from a more comprehensive analytical viewpoint. To incorporate the classic themes of bias into major categories, I suggest an extra level of analysis in Figure 2.
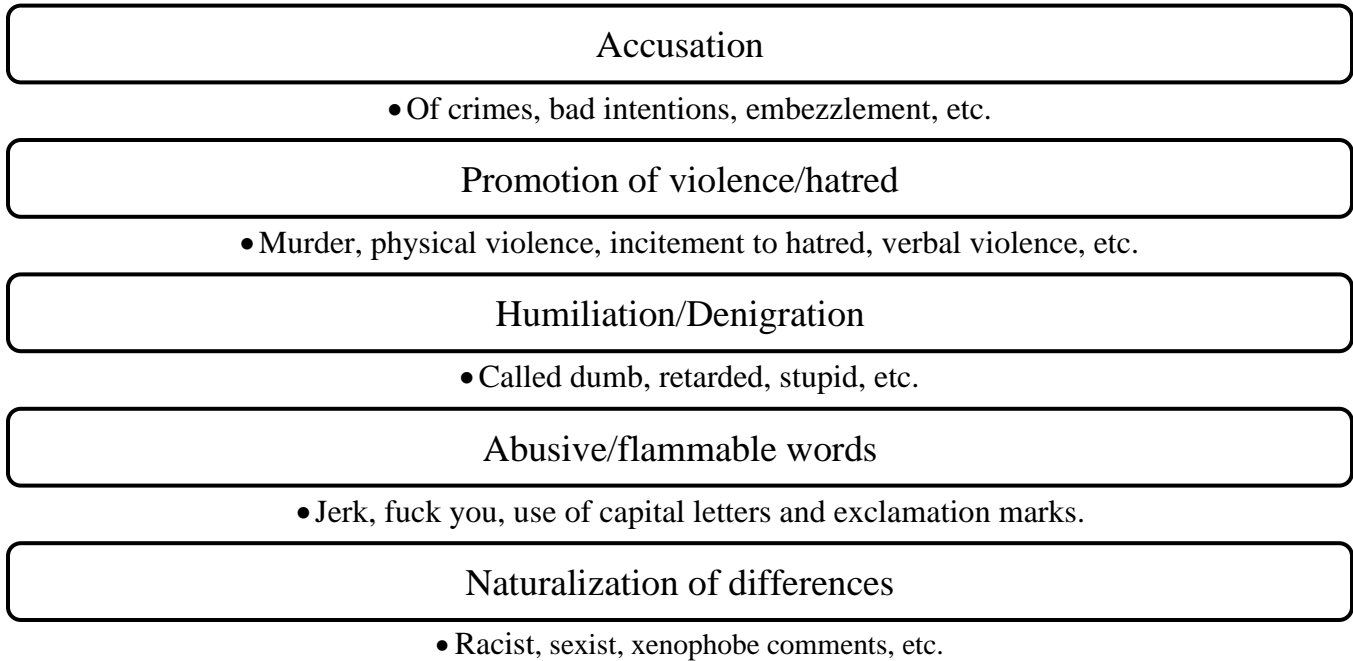
Accusation

• Of crimes, bad intentions, embezzlement, etc.

Promotion of violence/hatred

• Murder, physical violence, incitement to hatred, verbal violence, etc.

Humiliation/Denigration

• Called dumb, retarded, stupid, etc.

Abusive/flammable words

• Jerk, fuck you, use of capital letters and exclamation marks.

Naturalization of differences

• Racist, sexist, xenophobe comments, etc.

Figure 2. Modified categorisation of Salminen et Al. (2018).

Similarly, the four categories identified by Salminen and his team (2018, 6)—accusation, promotion of violence/hatred, humiliation/degradation, and abusive/flammable words (see Figure 1, above)—are consistent with the present analysis. Four meta-categories may be formed from these discriminatory categories. In the first category, *accusation* is made without any supporting proof, accusing people of wrongdoing, malice, or other unpleasant behaviours. The second category is the *promotion of violence*, which happens when someone encourages others to use violence of any kind, including murder, whether it be verbal, physical, or both. The third type is *humiliation*, which is characterized by the target individual being called names like "idiot," "retarded," or "stupid." Finally, there is the category of *abusive words*, when people use coarse words to purposely hurt other people. This analysis confirmed the targets of these biases, correlating with Salminen and his team's findings.

Salminen's team may have not covered here is a potential meta-category, namely, the generalization or naturalization of differences. This phenomenon entails identifying certain qualities, generalizing to the entire population, and claiming they are innate or "natural" attributes. One example of this meta-category is sexist and racist remarks. Such language supports bias and discrimination by basing generalizations about people on preconceptions and prejudices based on their gender or ethnicity. As this meta-category emphasizes the intersectionality of bias and the manner in which people are targeted depending on their inborn qualities, it is important to understand its relevance. We may endeavour to eliminate negative preconceptions and promote tolerance by recognizing and addressing this sort of bias.

Conclusion

This study underlines some of the challenges faced by political figures given today's online culture. Candidates in the 2020 New Brunswick election received many types of prejudicial messages. As we have seen, commenters are uninhibited about sending hurtful and abusive messages to candidates. In fact, this study may have underestimated the level of abuse, as candidates may have deleted the most vitriolic from. This paper's primary goal was to offer a hypothetical model of the kind of prejudicial remarks that political figures can encounter online in this province.

Prejudices were incorporated and categorized using grounded theory and open-coding approaches. It is crucial to understand that the model has some drawbacks that should be taken into account. The difficulty of assessing the extent of prejudice brought on by discriminatory remarks is a serious constraint. The most severe and destructive remarks could not always be documented since candidates have the option to delete or filter comments on their profiles. Another limitation of the study is that it was restricted to Facebook; other platforms can and should be monitored. Although a more thorough and quantitative picture is desirable, the method and model described in this article may provide a useful framework for classifying negative remarks about political figures.

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Notes

[1] However, as Steuter and Martin (2023) pointed out in the pages of this journal, this relative success in dealing with the pandemic early in the pandemic was largely illusory.

[2] All comments are transcribed as they appear online without translation or modification.

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