

PREJUDICE AGAINST POLITICAL CANDIDATES: THE CASE OF THE 2020 ELECTION IN NEW BRUNSWICK

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Abstract

The apparent surge in prejudices against politicians has forced elected representatives to fear for their personal safety. To grasp the factors driving susceptibility to online and offline prejudices, this study investigates individual and representative attributes of candidates during the electoral campaign in New Brunswick, Canada. The province's 2020 election provides an opportunity to explore prejudice toward public figures. Survey data from 114 candidates informs our logistic model, pinpointing variables contributing to susceptibility to prejudice. Findings highlight the predominant role of representational traits in anticipating online prejudices, emphasizing the imperative of acknowledging threats against politicians.

Résumé

La hausse apparente des préjugés contre les politiciens a amené les élus à craindre pour leur sécurité personnelle. Afin de comprendre les facteurs qui contribuent à la propension à faire l'objet de préjudice en ligne et hors ligne, cette étude examine les caractéristiques individuelles et représentatives de candidats pendant la campagne électorale au Nouveau-Brunswick, Canada. Les élections de 2020 dans la province offrent l'occasion d'explorer la notion de préjudice envers les personnalités publiques. Les données d'une enquête menée auprès de 114 candidats alimentent notre modélisation logistique, mettant en évidence les variables qui contribuent aux risques de faire l'objet de préjudice. Les résultats soulignent le rôle prédominant des traits de représentation dans la prédiction des risques en ligne, soulignant l'impératif de reconnaître les menaces contre les politiciens.

Introduction

Prejudices against political actors threaten representative democracy by discouraging potential candidates from running for elected public office (Fionda, 2019). Anecdotal evidence reports that some Canadian elected officials are threatened and fear for their safety (Boutilier & Leavitt, 2020). Others also spoke out publicly about receiving several abusive, racist, and sexist comments (Proudfoot, 2019). In Canada, prejudices exist at all levels of government. Exploring the unique dynamics of New Brunswick is intriguing, especially in the context of the global pandemic, as it was the first province in Canada to hold an election. In this paper, we inquire about the parameters that could impact the susceptibility to encountering prejudicial treatment during the 2020 election campaign in New Brunswick.

Our choice for employing the concept of prejudice is underpinned by two distinct rationales. First, the conceptual language around harm is not uniform among researchers. This makes it difficult to draw the line between online hate and lack of civility (Keipi et al., 2019, p. 59): “cyber-hate” (Perry & Olsson, 2009), “abusive messages” (Tenove & Tworek, 2020), “gendertrolling” (Wagner, 2020), “fear-

mongering” (Gagliardone, 2019), “lack of civility” (Stryker et al., 2016), “cyber-stalking”, (Coliandris, 2016) or “prejudice” (Jacobs & Porter, 1998). Gender trolling exemplifies the challenge of delineating the line between hate and incivility. It perpetuates conservative gender ideologies, targeting women to reinforce traditional hierarchies that position men in the public sphere and confine women to domestic roles. A remark from a gender troll could be: “Women should stay at home because they are not competent enough to contribute significantly to society.” According to Wagner (2020), the purpose would distinguish hate and incivility, but we do not have access to it. This highlights the challenge of distinguishing hate and ideological opinions that lack civility.

Second, the concept of prejudice places derogatory messages on a “continuum toward violence” (Charkraborti & Garland, 2015, p. 100; Iganski, 2010). In this sense, prejudice is more inclusive than hate as it better captures different types of abuse, including verbal abuse and physical harm. Thus, we define prejudice as any verbal or physical action by an individual expressing a preconceived negative judgment that is explicitly intended to cause harm to a targeted individual or group.

The study of prejudices against politicians in Canada is primarily focused on the national level. For example, according to Dubois and Owen’s study, 11.1% of Twitter messages in the 2019 federal election were toxic or abusive (Dubois & Owen, 2019, p. 30). This result is similar to what Rheault and her team estimated in 2017. They found that 8.6% of females and 11.7% of males in federal and provincial elections received uncivil messages on Twitter (Rheault et al., 2019, p. 4). However, regional nuances remain relatively unexplored. Offline prejudices directed at Canadian politicians are less documented than online threats. The most recent study was conducted almost two decades ago—at a time when the internet was much less prevalent than today. Adams et al. surveyed Canadian MPs in 1998; 29.9% of them indicated that they had experienced harassment at some point in their term of office (Adams et al., 2009, p. 805 and 808). Our study is the first one in Canada to use survey data to address both online and offline prejudices faced by the candidates in an election.

The research aims to investigate and compare the factors influencing the likelihood of politicians being targeted online and offline during the 2020 provincial electoral campaign in New Brunswick. Specifically, it seeks to determine whether the correlates of prejudice differ between contexts and assess the distinct explanatory contributions of individual and representational attributes in online and offline prejudice. Based on routine activity theory and Goffman’s seminal work on impression management, the data used in this research comes from a survey administered to candidates. We conducted two logistic models to identify variables that contribute to the likelihood of a candidate becoming a target of online and offline prejudice.

In the next section, we review the literature addressing prejudices against political actors in the western democratic system for comparability purposes. We then introduce a theoretical proposition based on the routine activity theory to study this phenomenon, followed by our two working hypotheses. The focus is particularly on target suitability, as it includes political actors. The methodology section provides a description of the data and how we conducted the study. In the analysis, we present results from nonparametric bivariate analysis and two logistic regressions. The results are discussed in the last section. This study contributes to a better understanding of the prejudices experienced by candidates in the Canadian democratic context.

Literature Review: Why Are Some Politicians Are Targeted More Than Others

Studies on prejudice against politicians tend to focus on the online rather than the offline aspect of the phenomenon. Although it is possible to find some survey-based quantitative analysis, researchers typically favour web scraping, qualitative and content analysis from social media over surveys. Therefore, few studies were able to identify factors related to the likelihood of becoming a target of offline or online prejudices.

Visibility is reportedly one of the most important factors increasing the risk for politicians of being targeted online. However, this concept is measured in different ways depending on the data source. Every-Palmer et al. surveyed New Zealand MPs in 2014 (Every-Palmer et al., 2015, p. 638). Their results indicate that MPs reported being slightly more exposed to prejudice online (60%) than offline (50%). According to their qualitative interviews, MPs felt that the internet increased their exposure to prejudice. The anonymity and the current legal framework pose challenges to limiting prejudices (Every-Palmer et al., 2015, pp. 636–637). Visibility was also underlined by a Canadian study. After surveying 1,026 provincial and federal MPs in 1998, the authors indicated that the number of years in office was directly related to the propensity of harassment of federal politicians (Adams et al., 2009, p. 804). Those who had been in Parliament for a longer time appeared to be at greater risk of harassment than those who had been there for less time (Adams et al., 2009, p. 808). In this study, those “visible” candidates were seen as more accessible by potential harassers, thus explaining an increased risk of harassment. Another study examined the visibility of women as candidates. Through web scraping Twitter data from 2017, Rheault and her team compared the number of followers of each politician from two samples of Canadian and American elected officials. Using a binary variable to identify “uncivil” tweets, results indicate the more visible women in politics are, the more they receive uncivil messages (Rheault et al., 2019, pp. 4–5). The importance of the gender factor in studying prejudices in New Brunswick is underscored by a historic number of fourteen women securing seats throughout the province in the 2020 provincial election (Kaiser, 2020).

Other studies proposed statistical models based on social media data. Twitter data analysis during the 2015 and 2017 elections in the UK indicates that males, ethnic minorities, members of the Conservative Party, and popular candidates have an increased likelihood of receiving abusive comments. The visibility of candidates is measured in attention received from the Twittersphere (e.g. numbers of tweets sent and received, trend searches) (Gorrell et al., 2018, pp. 601–602). In the general election of 2019, the authors propose a four-factor model that predisposes a political candidate to receive abusive comments: attention, event emergence, online engagement, and candidate identity. Attention is derived from search data trends and is limited to certain individuals in the public spotlight. Event emergence encompasses distinct political events or media appearances that have the potential to attract attention and hostility toward a particular individual. Online engagement is measured by the number of interactions on the Twitter platform. Finally, identity is associated with political party, ethnicity, gender, and other personal factors that affect the opinions of the population (Gorrell et al., 2020, p. 7). While these studies enhance our understanding of Twitter interactions, we lack a comprehensive overview of online prejudice targeting candidates in Canada.

Collignon and Rudig proposed a model using the Audit of Britain Survey (2017–2018). The survey included 1,495 candidates running in the 2017 general election in the UK. Results indicate that candidates running for the incumbent party, young female candidates, and incumbent candidates were more likely to be harassed online. They also conclude that candidate visibility is an important factor in

predicting risks of experiencing prejudices. However, factors related to online and offline prejudicial experiences were distinct (Collignon & Düdig, 2020, p. 425). Unlike Gorrell et al., Collignon and Düdig (2020, p. 227) have observed that female candidates are more prone to online prejudices, while incumbents face an increased risk of offline prejudices. However, this study overlooked attributes that can distinguish one candidate from another such as their primary language. In New Brunswick, linguistic considerations take centre stage in political polarization (Gillies et al., 2022).

Prejudices also extend beyond party lines. Based on thirty-one interviewed candidates and campaign staff who participated in the 2019 federal election in Canada, Tenove and Tworek (2020) report the negative influence of partisanship. Interviewed candidates often blamed a minority of highly partisan supporters of rivals. Their overall impression was that the aim was to elect someone else. This suggests that political affiliation influences prejudices due to the nature of the electoral campaign where only one candidate can emerge victorious.

Studies cited above reveal a substantial gap in comparing online and offline prejudices against political actors in a Canadian context and the French-speaking context in a minority setting. Researchers seem to favour online data and descriptive analysis. Limiting analysis to public online data excludes private communications that qualify as online prejudice. Moreover, if some studies surveyed elected officials on their online and offline prejudicial experiences, none seems to distinguish between candidate attributes (e.g., such as gender, sex, or age) and representational attributes (e.g., party affiliation, or being an incumbent). This paper addresses this gap in the literature.

Theoretical Framework: Public Figures As “Suitable Targets”

The present study proposes a theoretical contribution to routine activity theory (RAT). The tenets of RAT suggest that criminal opportunities involve considering (1) the motivated offender, (2) the absence of capable guardians, and (3) a suitable target (Skubak Tillyer & Eck, 2009, p. 279). The core assumption is that changes in routine activities impact crime rates. We contribute to the theory, first, by looking at the virtual dimension of these opportunities. This aspect emerges from recent developments in the theory. Second, as we focus on the suitability of political candidates as targets, we consider its symbolic significance, meaning both its individual characteristics and its representation within the context of the election campaign. In this context, candidates are required to perform in a specific environment. This contextual feature lends itself well to Goffman's work on impression management (Goffman, 1956). These can contribute to what makes a public figure an attractive target. Thus, our theoretical contribution revolves around the target elements of RAT, as it is not developed for an online context, nor useful for an election campaign.

Internet as a Virtual Environment

In 1979, RAT was not developed to understand online offences. Studying a virtual environment means that the offenders do not meet their target face-to-face. The difficulty in mobilizing the theory in a virtual setting is to grasp the time and space opportunity convergence (Räsänen et al., 2016, p. 3). Place, proximity, and distance is central to the theory, and these elements related to physical space are disorganized in cyberspace.

Although virtual technology could develop a community-based guardianship, the risk of being an online victim increases proportionally with the time spent online and elsewhere (Arntfield, 2015).

Studying prejudices on social media implicitly excludes capable guardians that can intervene to limit the offence. An instance of effective guardianship would be a forum moderator who rejects a post, or a user-based etiquette compliance. On the one hand, moderators require resources that campaign organizers may not always have at their disposal (Tenove & Tworek, 2020). On the other hand, a virtual environment allows for relative anonymity that prevents guardians from acting, identifying, or locating the offender. The lack of structural constraints leads to little or even no consequences for the offenders (Miró-Llinares, 2014, p. 3). Social media platforms eliminate physical and social barriers, bringing victims and offenders closer. However, these platforms also serve as spaces for antisocial behaviours, where actual legal consequences remain relatively low.

Some researchers apply the main RAT elements in a virtual environment (Henson, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2016). Indeed, many virtual environments attract categories of individuals that qualify as motivating offenders (Yar, 2005, p. 410). Thus, social routine exists in virtual space and people are using the internet in physical space for different reasons including work, leisure, and criminal activities (Yar, 2005, p. 418). Routine activities of users, depending on the virtual places frequented, can be guided by structural conjunctures. These conjunctures are not independent of what happens in the real world. Yar (2005, p. 424) suggests that motivated offenders and capable guardians have their equivalents online. However, the construction of suitable targets is more complex and needs adjustments for online and offline targets in an electoral context.

Context of an Electoral Campaign: Impression Management of the Suitable Target

Focusing on the electoral setting, we explore where individuals present and embody ideologies. This temporary environment shapes the traits of appealing targets and influences who is deemed a suitable target. Miró-Llinares defines a suitable target as any “person or property that may be threatened by an offender” (Miró-Llinares, 2014, p. 2). The level of risk is influenced by four attributes: value, inertia, visibility, and access (Cohen, 2009, p. 296). These four main attributes are not tailored to public figures as suitable targets. In politics, value and visibility cannot be separated: the visibility of a person or a party has value. Defining those four attributes, value, real or symbolic, is defined by the offender. Inertia refers to any physical aspects of the person or the good that act as an obstacle to the offender. In residential security, inertia might be sophisticated locking devices on doors and windows, serving as physical deterrents for potential burglars. During an election campaign, operationalizing this trait to a candidate or a party is challenging. Candidates are on the move across the territory. Moreover, online, there are no real barriers. Visibility is related to the target exposure. In an election campaign, a candidate with value may signify a candidate with a high likelihood of winning. A potential winner typically has exposure. This candidate could, for example, have won in the past, or they could be part of a party that could form a government or at least have a voice in it. Having a voice, locally or provincially, has value in a democracy. Finally, access refers to the location of the object or the person targeted (Miró-Llinares, 2014, p. 3). While candidates move around the territory during the campaign, some of them live in the riding where they are running. These candidates are more accessible than those who do not live there. In addition, an accessible party would refer to a party that has deployed candidates in all ridings. It is more accessible than a party that has established a partial geographical presence. Therefore, the attributes of risk level are either not applicable in an electoral campaign context or the weighting of these characteristics is disproportionate—as is the case with visibility.

These adjustments to the characteristics of the attractive target highlight the fact that two targets are personified by each candidate. In addition to candidate traits, there are also the attributes of the party

they represent. To highlight both aspects in an election campaign, we utilize Goffman's work on impression management (Goffman, 1956). Image work conceives the public sphere as a stage where performance is designed to influence observers. These performances are carried out by actors who wear different masks depending on the social context. In the case of an election campaign, to project the desired impression, the candidates wear different masks. When selecting a party affiliation, the expression is deliberate. At the same time, the candidates can give off involuntary expressions to observers such as the ones that have nothing to do with the context of the campaign. For example, sex, age, and education could generate unintended impressions with potential offenders. From the candidates' perspective, these personal traits are largely unrelated to the ideology they promote during the campaign.

Hypotheses

The notion of prejudice helps us to evaluate factors that contribute to being a suitable target in an electoral context. Unlike everyday life, the number of potential targets increases momentarily: elected officials are likely to be targeted during their mandate, but during a campaign, a plethora of candidates with different attributes and representing a variety of ideologies share public and virtual space for a designated period. Electoral campaigns create opportunities where the prevalence of public figures regularly speaking out on different issues make those potential targets visible, valued, and accessible.

In addition, whether online or offline, candidates represent a double target. They can be targeted on two main dimensions: as individuals and as a representative of an ideology. Routine activity theory does not differentiate target suitability based on its representation compared to what it inherently is. Goffman's impression management notions consider this particularity of electoral campaigns. Therefore, the campaign environment revisits target suitability by including what it represents: ideas, a party leader, and a platform defended over several weeks.

In this study, RAT contributes to assessing the risk level of a suitable target. Two hypotheses are tested. The first one compares explanatory factors of offline and online prejudices:

H1: The correlates of online and offline victimization targeting candidates are different.

This hypothesis refers to the fact that RAT was not developed for either the online environment or the context of an electoral campaign. We want to verify how attributes influence the risks of prejudice in both contexts.

The second hypothesis contrasts individual attributes and representation attributes:

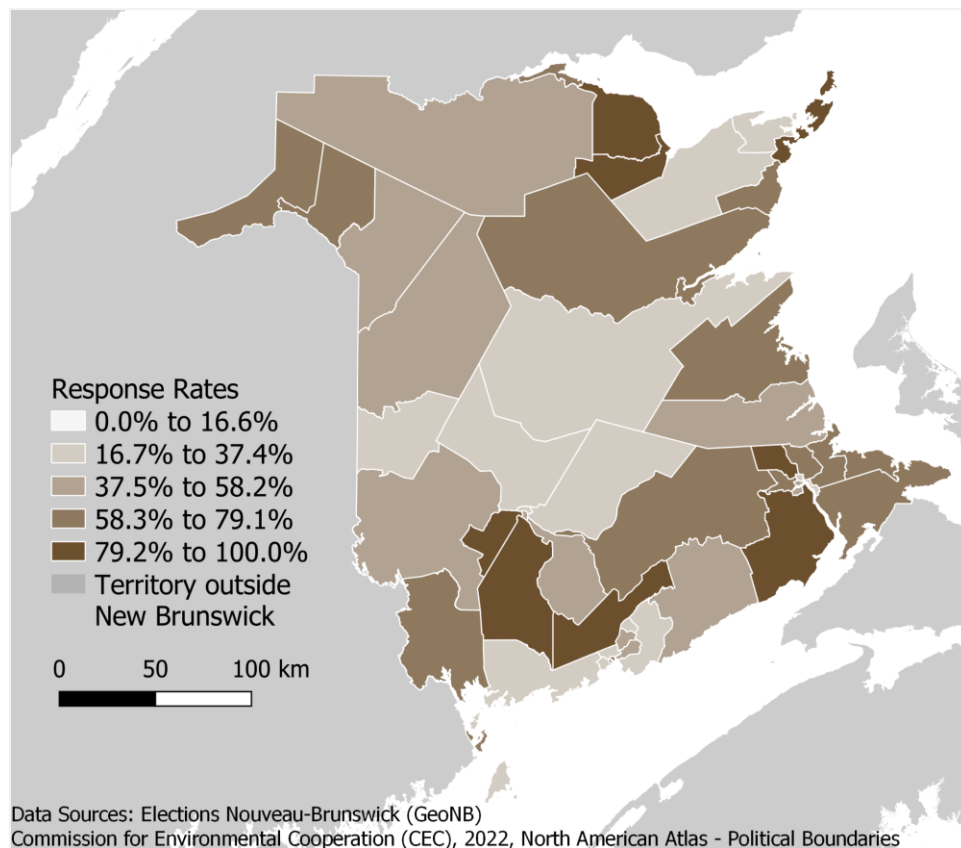
H2: Individual and representational attributes have a different explanatory contribution in the propensity to be targeted online and offline.

This hypothesis relates to the notion that candidates are people with individual characteristics, but during a temporary context, they are brought forward to promote ideas and a political platform. This concept aligns with Goffman's work of impression management and image work. We aim to examine how these attributes play a role in candidates' risks. Building on existing literature, individual and representational attributes may offer distinct explanatory contributions to the likelihood of being targeted online and offline. Therefore, a comparison of these attributes in both forms is necessary.

Data and Methods

The data used in this research comes from a survey administered by phone and online by candidates in the 2020 provincial election in New Brunswick. The survey comprises twenty-six questions covering a variety of topics related to forms and methods of prejudices as well as the sociodemographic characteristics of the candidates.¹ The data was collected after the election, between September 21 and November 21, 2020. To recruit potential respondents, an invitation was sent and linked to the online survey. As a reminder, we offered to assist them in answering the questionnaire. The last step was to communicate directly with the candidates by phone.

The study population represents 227 official candidates in forty-nine ridings (Elections Nouveau-Brunswick, s.d.). To ensure sufficient comparability of respondents, party leaders were excluded. Of the remaining 221 eligible candidates, 114 responded to the survey. Our response rate, precisely 51.58%, is higher than another Canadian study with a response rate of 41.3% (Adams et al., 2009). The map below shows candidate response rates by electoral district. It ranges from 16.67% to 100%; at least one respondent per district completed the survey (mean = 51.749; SD = 23.898).



Map 1. Response Rates by 2020 Provincial Electoral Districts (n = 49).

Response rates do not seem to be linked to population density, urbanity, number of candidates running, or linguistic characteristics associated with the territory. Response distribution by party is interesting, as it shows that the major parties have fairly comparable rates (see the variable descriptions).

Regarding the non-random sampling, each electoral campaign is distinct, and the candidate population evolves. Consequently, generalizing to other electoral campaigns is not feasible. Moreover, the 2020 election occurred early in the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to changes in campaign practices such as the prohibition of door-to-door canvassing. Yet, we inquire about the impact of practice changes on offline prejudices. Vandalism of campaign materials may occur outdoors independently of the COVID-19 context. Campaigning was predominantly virtual. Thus, changes in practice could theoretically influence online prejudice behaviours. However, without a temporal comparison, it exceeds the scope of the paper. In the analysis, the probability value enables us to capture the random nature of observed trends within the sample examined in our study.

Dependent Variables

Offline and online prejudices are the dependent variables of our study. Both variables are binary and come directly from survey questions. The question on offline prejudice was phrased as follows: "During the New Brunswick 2020 electoral campaign, did you experience offline prejudice (in person) from citizens? We define 'prejudice' as any preconceived, negative judgment or action explicitly aimed at causing harm to a candidate or the party they represent (yes/no)." The second dependent variable is related to online prejudices, it was similarly phrased.²

As the only survey that asked questions directly to Canadian politicians in the last twenty years, our short exploratory questionnaire did not cover every aspect of the phenomenon. For instance, our measure of online and offline prejudices is both devoid of the notions of frequency and severity associated with the harms experienced by the candidates. Although we are careful to take this limitation into account in interpreting the results, the positive results of this original inquiry led us to include these variables in the next survey.

Independent Variables

The correlates of prejudices during the election campaign include individual and representational attributes. By individual attributes we mean candidate traits that are not directly related to their candidacy in the election. These traits include natural characteristics such as age, but also characteristics associated with personal circumstances, such as whether the person lives in the riding. Individual variables include the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, namely: age (in years); sex (1 = female); main language (1 = French); education level (1 = high school diploma; 2 = post-secondary education excluding university; 3 = university education completed or not); marital status (1 = single); residing in the riding in which the respondent is running (1 = yes).

Representational characteristics include traits associated with the campaign and the function of a politician. These features have symbolic weight. Representational attributes include whether the respondent is an incumbent (1 = yes), their political party (Progressive Conservative, Liberal, Green, People's Alliance, New Democratic Party), and results of the election in percentage. Indeed, running for another term indicates that the candidate is already known to the voters and has a recent mandate to defend in addition to presenting a new platform. This characteristic increases the value and visibility of the candidate making them a potential target more so than those who are not incumbents.

Political party affiliation is a given. In addition to representing oneself, candidates also represent the ideas and ideology of the party, carry the message of a leader, and promote a platform.

Of the five parties represented, only two have ever held power: Progressive Conservative and Liberal. Candidates from these two parties may have a higher perceived value and visibility than candidates from the other three parties. In addition, of these five parties, two parties did not elect a representative in the previous election and in the one in this study. This is the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Keep It Simple Solutions (KISS) Party. The latter did not participate in the study. It would be plausible to say that these two parties could be considered by potential offenders to be of lesser value than the other four for this reason.

Finally, the outcome in percentages of the election indicates the extent to which voters symbolically support the candidate and their party, because it is not possible to distinguish support for the candidate or the party. A high result indicates high support and high visibility. A low score indicates low support and poor visibility. This measure, which comes from the outcome of the campaign, is individualized, unlike party affiliation.

Control Variables

Two control variables include characteristics of the constituency in which candidates are running, namely, a measure of density (km² per resident) and main language of the dominant population (1 = French). These two characteristics reflect local dynamics of francophone minority communities. Indeed, the density measure indicates the extent to which the online environment can influence places where the number of square kilometres per person is high. Typically, rural areas face internet connectivity issues. These issues may decrease the inclination to use online environments and platforms for communicating with voters or making politicians accessible. With respect to the dominant linguistic population, we included this control variable to account for the dynamics of language tensions in New Brunswick. For instance, hostility against the bilingualism policy led the People’s Alliance to run candidates only in ridings with an anglophone majority population (Gillies et al., 2020). Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of quantitative variables used to identify offline and online prejudices covariates. Frequencies and proportions for qualitative variables are included directly in the text that follows.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of quantitative and binary variables.³

Variables	n	mean	S.D.	median	min	max	skew	kurtosis
Offline prejudice (1 = yes)	114	0.47	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.10	-2.01
Online prejudice (1 = yes)	114	0.63	0.48	1.00	0.00	1.00	-0.54	-1.73
Age	113	47.69	13.75	49.00	NA	NA	-0.13	-0.77
Lives in the riding	110	0.77	0.42	1.00	0.00	1.00	-1.28	-0.35
Incumbent candidate	113	0.14	0.35	0.00	0.00	1.00	2.03	2.14
Elections results (% of votes)	110	20.71	18.67	15.03	NA	NA	1.19	0.78
Density (km ² per resident)	113	98.01	120.04	52.81	0.68	570.18	1.96	4.17

From the start, we observe a higher prevalence of online compared to offline prejudice reporting: 63.16% of respondents say they have been subject to online prejudices (72/114) versus 47.37% who say they have been targeted offline (54/114). Considering that the candidates who responded to the survey are likely the most affected by prejudice, this suggests that from the candidates' perspective, both online and offline prejudice in New Brunswick is not widespread.

In terms of individual characteristics, respondents had an average age of 47.69 years (SD = 13.75). There were thirty-nine women (34.85%; n = 112). Candidates who responded to the survey are also predominantly English-speaking. In other words, forty of the 114 survey respondents speak French as their primary language (35.09%; n = 114). This proportion is like the 31.8% of New Brunswickers who speak French as their first official language in 2016 (Páez Silva & Lavoie, 2019). Also, most participants have completed university studies (65.77%; 73/111), are married or living common-law (64.86%; 72/111) and reside in the riding in which they are running (77.27%; 85/110). Regarding the representational characteristics, we have sixteen incumbent candidates (14.16%; n = 16/113). On average, our respondents achieved a voting score of 2.71% (SD = 18.67).

Table 2 shows the total number of candidates for the election, the number of respondents, the response rate, and the percentage of votes obtained by political parties. To maintain consistency, we have excluded independent candidates, as they do not form a homogeneous group. The three political parties with the most votes have a higher response rate than the parties outside of this top-three ranking. The candidates of the Progressive Conservative Party received 39.42% of the votes, and 48.98% of them responded to our questionnaire; those of the Liberal Party received 34.41% of the votes, and 53.06% of them participated in our study. Finally, 15.27% of the votes were given to the Green Party; their response rate is 59.57%. This party is the most represented in our sample.

Table 2. Total number of candidates for the election, number of respondents, response rate and absolute proportion of votes obtained at the 2020 election by political parties.

Political party	Number of election candidates	Number of survey respondents	Response rate	Proportion of votes obtained
Progressive Conservative	49	24	48,98%	39,42%
Liberal	49	26	53,06%	34,41%
Green	47	28	59,57%	15,27%
People's Alliance	36	13	36,11%	9,21%
New Democratic	33	13	39,39%	1,66%
Other	NA	NA	NA	NA
Total	214	104	48,60%	99,97%

The two parties with the least overall support from the voters (but still managed to elect at least one candidate) show polarized responses to the survey. The People's Alliance of New Brunswick had the lowest response rate (36.11%), while the Green Party was twice as likely to respond to the questionnaire (59.57%). We note, however, that the parties forming the government and the official opposition have similar response rates, at around 50%.

Certain geographical characteristics constitute control variables. This is the case for density, represented by the number of km² per registered voter. New Brunswick is a rural province, and this

measure better captures the variations between electoral districts. Provincial counties ranges from 0.68 to 570.18 km² per registered voter. This illustrates that candidates have a variety of riding types to cover, spanning urban to sparsely populated rural territories.

Results

The first step of our analysis was to perform bivariate association tests. Continuous and binary scale quantitative variables were related in a nonparametric correlation matrix. Statistically significant associations are shown in the graphs. These graphs provide direct and indirect relationships between dependent and independent variables. The results justify the use of logistic regressions to control for the effect of all variables on candidates’ likelihood of being targeted by online and offline prejudices during the 2020 provincial election.

Bivariate Analysis

Nonparametric correlation analysis reveals direct links between the two forms of prejudices and the individual attributes of the candidates. Bivariate analyses did not capture relationships between representation variables and offline prejudices. However, indirect links have been observed between individual and representational attributes of candidates and the experience of prejudices. Table 3 represents the nonparametric correlation matrix composed of the variables in our study.

Table 3. Nonparametric correlation matrix of offline and online prejudices. Individual and representational characteristics of candidates in the 2020 New Brunswick provincial election (n = 104).

Variables	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12
V1 Offline prejudice (1=yes)	1											
V2 Online prejudice (1=yes)	.32***	1										
V3 Age (years)	-.07	-.21*	1									
V4 Sex (1=female)	-.10	-.05	.04	1								
V5 Main language (1=French)	-.15	-.12	.11	.08	1							
V6 Education level	.21*	.09	-.108	.11	.21*	1						
V7 Marital status (1=single)	-.20*	.02	-.27**	.08	-.05	-.17	1					
V8 Resides in riding	-.13	-.29**	.24**	.01	.05	-.16	-.11	1				
V9 Incumbent candidate (1=yes)	.02	.21*	.04	-.03	.08	.06	-.20*	-.14	1			
V10 % votes	.01	.109	.23*	.04	.27**	.21*	-.33***	-.15	.58***	1		
V11 Density (km ² per person)	.11	-.08	.22*	-.03	.05	.09	-.25	.11	.07	.19	1	
V12 Main language (riding) (1=French)	-.16	-.15	.09	.11	.77***	.05	-.00	.13	.07	.26**	.18	1

Offline and online prejudices are positively correlated ($\rho = .324^{***}$). People who report having been targeted by offline prejudice also tend to have been targeted online. Since the relationship is moderate, we conclude that these are two distinct phenomena; multicollinearity is ruled out.

As far as individual attributes are concerned, we observe differences in correlates to two independent variables. Offline prejudices are weakly associated with high education ($\rho = .205^*$) and not being single ($\rho = -.196^*$), while online prejudices are associated with age ($\rho = -.210^*$) and place of residence ($-.29^{**}$). Younger politicians were more likely to declare being targeted online than older candidates. Candidates who are not resident in the riding in which they are running are also more likely to experience online prejudices. Unexpectedly, sex is not associated with reporting either form of prejudices. This result will be further addressed in the Discussion section.

In terms of representational attributes, only incumbent candidates report more online prejudices compared to the new candidates (.207*). Not shown in Table 3, the relationship between declaring offline prejudices and political parties is statistically significant ($\chi^2(4, N = 104) = 16.571, p = 0.0023$). Candidates representing the Liberal and People's Alliance parties have superior observed frequencies in comparison to candidates affiliated to the three other parties surveyed. Candidates from these two parties may be at greater risk of offline prejudices. However, other factors are not held constant.

Concerning the relationship between party and likelihood of experiencing online prejudices, the assumptions for using the chi-square test of independence were not met. The expected values were too small, specifically for the "No" modality of the question. Therefore, the approximation may be poor. For example, five out of twenty-six Liberal candidates reported not being targeted by online prejudices. These results lead us to believe that the two types of prejudice are explained by different factors. The bivariate results align with Hypothesis 1, indicating that the factors associated with offline prejudices differ from those of online prejudices.

Modelling is thus justified by the fact that several correlations are indirect. Indeed, indirect relationships could be mediated by other factors. When a variable mediates a statistical relationship, part of the influence of a predictor on the dependent variable goes through the mediator variable. Therefore, if the influence of the mediator variable is statistically controlled, the relationship disappears or is attenuated. For example, the percentage of votes is correlated with age ($\rho = .225^*$), education ($\rho = .212^*$), and marital status of candidates ($\rho = -.334^{***}$). These three variables are correlated with both forms of prejudice, but the percentage of votes is not. The percentage of votes could be mediated by one or more individual characteristics. One way to highlight this is through statistical modelling. Also, for example, if a candidate is incumbent and represents the ruling party, it is not possible to isolate the party effect from the decision to run for another term. To do this, modelling is required.

Logistic Regressions

Model 1 aims to explain offline prejudice, and Model 2, online prejudice. Table 4 presents two logistic regressions. The odds ratios are shown alongside standardized coefficients, standard errors, and p -values for each predictor.

Table 4. Logistic regressions of offline and online prejudices toward candidates in the 2020 New Brunswick provincial election (n = 92 due to missing data).

	Model 1 (offline prejudice)					Model 2 (online prejudice)				
	OR	Estim.	SE	Z-value	p-value	OR	Estim.	SE	Z-value	p-value
(Intercept)		1.394	1.929	0.722	0.470		6.143	2.242	2.740	0.006 **
Age (years)	0.985	-0.015	0.024	-0.639	0.523	0.966	-0.035	0.026	-1.357	0.175
Sex (1=female)	0.372	-0.988	0.576	-1.717	0.086	0.619	-0.480	0.676	-0.710	0.478
Education level	2.026	0.706	0.415	1.700	0.089	2.006	0.696	0.425	1.640	0.101
Marital status (1=single)	0.666	-0.406	0.659	-0.617	0.537	1.542	0.433	0.749	0.578	0.563
Main language (1=French)	0.815	-0.205	0.844	-0.243	0.808	2.942	1.079	1.054	1.023	0.306
Resides in county	0.915	-0.089	0.642	-0.139	0.889	0.130	-2.042	0.983	-2.076	0.038 *
Incumbent candidate (1=yes)	1.839	0.609	1.101	0.553	0.580	100.988	4.615	1.724	2.677	0.007 **
% votes	0.964	-0.037	0.028	-1.325	0.185	0.924	-0.079	0.036	-2.187	0.029 *
People’s Alliance (ref. Progressive Conservative Party)	5.023	1.614	1.047	1.541	0.123	0.305	-1.189	1.051	-1.131	0.258
Liberal Party	3.939	1.371	0.813	1.686	0.092	1.225	0.203	1.031	0.197	0.844
NDP	0.267	-1.321	1.258	-1.051	0.293	0.010	-4.580	1.587	-2.885	0.004 **
Green Party	0.799	-0.225	0.871	-0.258	0.797	0.098	-2.326	1.084	-2.146	0.032 *
Low density (ref. High density)	0.451	-0.797	0.652	-1.224	0.221	0.254	-1.370	0.771	-1.775	0.076
Moderate density	0.306	-1.185	0.737	-1.608	0.108	1.359	0.307	0.867	0.354	0.723
Main language (riding) (1=French)	0.908	-0.096	0.901	-0.107	0.915	0.169	-1.777	1.133	-1.569	0.117

The model’s accuracy is measured as the proportion of candidates that have been correctly classified. The offline model (M1) is less accurate than the online one (M2). In Model 1, forty-seven candidates were well classified, and forty-five candidates were misclassified (51.09% accuracy rate). Model prediction accuracy for offline prejudice is close to chance. Therefore, the model is not well fitted. Also, the influence of marital status and education disappears when individual and representational attributes are controlled. When the individual and representational characteristics are controlled, no covariate contributes to explaining the likelihood of candidates to report being a victim of offline prejudices.

Results indicate that offline prejudices are possibly rooted in anecdotal evidence, associated with personal dynamics, or are randomly distributed. This result is hardly surprising; the offline measure of

prejudice is devoid of severity and frequency. These measurement limitations are compounded by the fact that this phenomenon is reported less frequently than online prejudices, thus diminishing the ability of the model to capture an effect. The interest of building a model remains in the comparison between the offline and online covariates.

Model 2 offers some interesting leads. Its predictive power is better than the first one. The accuracy rate is 64.13% (59 candidates); thirty-three candidates were misclassified. The constant in Model 2 is statistically significant, indicating a basic trend. Representational attributes are more associated with online prejudice than individual ones. Only one individual attribute is associated with online prejudice: living in the riding in which one is running. This practice decreases the risks of online prejudices by 87% ($OR = 0.13^*$) ($1 - 0.130 = 0.87$).

Three representational variables explain the risks of being targeted by online prejudices: being incumbent ($OR = 100.988^{**}$) increases the risks while voting percentage ($OR = 0.924^*$) decreases the risks. Parties can decrease the risks in some cases. Being incumbent has the highest standardized coefficient, that is, it is the most important predictor. Having run for at least one other office is associated with an increased risk of online prejudice of 100.988%. Indeed, defending a previous mandate increases the visibility of a candidate seeking re-election. These candidates have served at least one term as an MLA. They had the chance to become known to the public, to implement a previous platform and to support it. These candidates are also in a special position where symbolic attributes might weigh a little more heavily than others. This result could suggest that a candidate who is accessible in the riding, by residing in it, is less accessible online, reducing their chances of being targeted for online prejudice.

The percentage of votes indicates a negative relationship with online prejudices. Holding all other factors at a fixed value, a decrease of 1% of votes multiplies the odds of online prejudice by 0.963. In other words, obtaining a high proportion of votes during the election is associated with decreasing the risks of 7.6% ($1 - 0.924 = 0.076$). This covariate also refers to value and visibility as an output of the campaign. Vote percentage originates from the voters. Indeed, the higher the number of votes a candidate receives, the more popular they and the party they represent are in the riding. In this sense, a high vote percentage indicates more support than a low vote percentage. Unanimity can be protective of online prejudices. As an example, all other factors being constant, a candidate who has garnered 13% of votes arrives at the base risk of online targeting ($0.076 * 13 = 0.988$).

Our last covariate, party affiliation, is associated with reduced risks in two cases. We used the Progressive Conservative Party as the reference category since it was the party in power before the election. Candidates belonging to the New Democratic Party have a notably low risk of being subject to online prejudice ($OR = 0.010$). This party did not elect a candidate in the election under study or the previous one. Also, the party has the lowest result of all provincial parties. In other words, these candidates are less well known, protecting them from online prejudice. For the Greens, this risk is 0.098 times lower than for the Progressive Conservative candidates. In both cases, those two parties are neither part of the government nor the official opposition.

Discussion

By considering the motivated offender, the absence of capable guardians, and the suitable target, routine activity theory is relevant to understand prejudices against political candidates. Our main

objective remains to determine the target suitability in two different environments. The results presented in this paper support the idea that the internet should be considered a “space” as offline campaigning is (Henson, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2016). The comparison between two contexts of prejudices indicates that they are two different phenomena.

Our second proposition highlights that the candidates can also be targeted on two main dimensions: as individuals and as a representative of an ideology. As any public actor, candidates need to perform a role in the public sphere. Goffman’s “performance” refers to “all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on observers” (Goffman, 1956, p. 8). That requires a set of manners and other social norms to adjust a public persona to the role. In this political context, the role is double. You must represent yourself as a potential MLA and you must also represent and defend the party you are associated with. Findings of our study align with this perspective.

Performance and Contributions of Statistical Modelling

Low accuracy of modelling offline prejudices indicates low predictive capacity on prejudice on a physical space as reported by candidates. On the one hand, these results could be explained by specificities that we did not capture, such as personal dynamics. The variable does not distinguish petty vandalism from more serious incidents that would have been caused by an interpersonal conflict. On the other hand, offline prejudices could be randomly distributed through candidates, although this interpretation is not supported by previous studies. During the election, door-to-door campaigning was not permitted due to the COVID-19-related health measures, which could have limited opportunities for offline prejudice (Gillies et al., 2022).

When it comes to predicting prejudices in virtual space, our study reveals the contribution of some individuals and most of our representation attributes. When several factors were held constant, no demographic variable was statistically significantly associated with changes in online prejudice risks. However, living in the riding is the only individual variable that contributes to lowering this risk. Its effect is protective.

We might ask whether this attribute decreases the value of the target for offenders. Candidates from outside a riding fall typically into two main categories. In the first case, the candidates are called “poles”; that is, a person has been put there to avoid not running a candidate, but also to ensure democratic representation. In the second category of politicians from outside a riding, there are “star” candidates. To make sure that a given person is elected, parties tie the candidate to a riding where the chances of winning are high to very high. For example, since its creation in 2014, the Shédiac Bay-Dieppe riding has chosen the Liberal candidate systematically. In this riding, the Liberal Party has obtained in the last three elections scores above 59%. This riding is a relatively safe place for a star candidate. This may explain why there is no statistically significant relationship between living in the riding and the percentage of votes received in the election: star candidates from outside have good results and local candidates can exhibit varying levels of performance.

In terms of representation attributes, incumbent candidates have significantly higher risks of being targeted online. Running for office is inextricably linked to higher candidate visibility, a trait documented by previous studies (Adams et al., 2009; Gorrell et al., n.d.; Rheault et al., 2019). The vote percentage nuances this observation. The higher the performance, the greater the protection from online

prejudices. A high proportion of voters selecting a specific candidate indicate either unanimity or a star candidate. Non-incumbent winning candidates received an average of 54.25% of votes ($SD = 17.16$, $n = 5$), while non-incumbent losing candidates had average scores below 12.90% ($SD = 9.33$, $n = 88$). In addition, these unanimous candidates perform similarly to candidates who are defending their previous term. Incumbent winning candidates received an average of 53.84% of votes ($SD = 10.41$, $n = 15$). For these two winner types, the significance of past representations of the candidacy carries different weight.

With respect to political parties, the logistic regression indicates that membership in two parties decreases the risk: the Green Party and the New Democratic Party. Both parties have never gained power. In addition, the New Democrats only received 1.66% of the vote overall. We might question whether belonging to a party that is unpopular among voters decreases the risk, as potential offenders may not consider them.

Gender and Prejudice

We did not find any relationship between gender and higher risks of experiencing prejudices. That result seems surprising. We are aware that many female MPs had denounced hostile messages they received publicly (Alibert, 2020). For instance, the Ontario independent MLA, Amanda Simard, spoke out against intimidation and sexual prejudices she experienced (Nadon, 2021). In Canada, many female political actors decided to reinforce their security (Burke, 2019). Two Canadian studies concerning prejudices on Twitter's platform found no link between gender and receiving online prejudices (Dubois & Owen, 2019; Rheault et al., 2019). Ward and McLoughlin suggest, however, that the difference is more on the type of messages. The prejudices directed toward women often exhibit gender-specific content (Ward & McLoughlin, 2020, p. 11). Another intriguing aspect is women's response to prejudices. For instance, Akhtar and Morrison found that males report more concern about reputational damage while females are more concerned about their personal safety (Akhtar & Morrison, 2019, p. 326). We contemplate whether gender-associated prejudice may be linked to election outcomes or holding specific positions of power. However, this hypothesis cannot be tested in New Brunswick because there are only fourteen female elected officials in the forty-nine ridings in the 2020 provincial election (Kaiser, 2020).

Level of Risk and Routine Activity Theory

The result of the online prejudice risk modelling is a first step to understand which factors increase the odds of being targeted by online prejudices. The ability to identify characteristics of the suitable target would help us in future research to develop a risk evaluation model based on the routine activity theory. The level of risk is influenced by four attributes: value, inertia, visibility, and access (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 596). These attributes need to be adapted to the electoral context. Candidates bring a set of values to the campaign. Results identify an association with the party and reporting online prejudices. Certain topics or sets of values (e.g., identity, bilingualism, clear stance on abortion, transparent approach to public finances) could be a trigger for some offenders. Also, the internet provides direct access to candidates and breaks down physical barriers that create inertia. The obstacle to commit harm is less present in the virtual world like the possibility to establish a competent guardian. Target exposure is another important aspect of personifying a suitable target. Results of the second logistic regression indicate that incumbents tend to receive more prejudice online. This is not surprising as they have been in politics longer and therefore have a track record that many people remember. They also have higher name recognition. We wonder, however, why this desire to defend one's background as

a politician reflects online only. However, we acknowledge that there is work to be done in efficiently quantifying the visibility variable. The next survey should quantify the number of publications online, meetings, utilization of ads and flyers, etc. Finally, access refers to the location of the object or the person targeted (Miró-Llinares, 2014, p. 3).

Going Forward

Overall, our study highlights the contribution of individual and representational attributes in explaining the online prejudices experienced by New Brunswick politicians. This theoretical nuance makes it possible to consider visibility and value, two characteristics of a suitable target that are difficult to separate in a political context. The contribution of impression management theory allows us to distinguish individual from representation attributes. The latter have been so determinant that they have surpassed the contribution of individual attributes.

The context of the election campaign, where an increase in the number of potential targets is noted, has been little studied. However, this step is necessary for all those who wish to run for a seat in a democratic institution. Mobilizing routine activity theory is particularly fruitful because, to our knowledge, it has not been used in the context of a dual target. This particularity of representing oneself and having a symbolic charge of representation is also found on the side of other types of public figures, such as entertainment figures, business figures, media figures, etc.

The next step is to update the questionnaire that considers the results of these studies. Qualitative interviews could be another key addition. It will contribute to gaining insight into the experience of political actors. Political candidates also have many people volunteering and dealing with all forms of prejudices. Adding interviews could lead us to understand how political candidates managed or changed their behaviour according to the prejudices they received.

An electoral campaign is a peculiar setting where political parties and their supporters organize their effort to seek to influence the decision-making process of their community. People, ideas, and interests compete with many forms of competition, there are many formal and informal rules involved. Therefore, prejudices could be used as a tactic to destabilize the opponent. However, several questions remain: What should be the boundaries of this game? What delineates the acceptable boundaries of this political game? At what point does it cross the line?

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Notes

¹ The Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed the research proposal to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2 (2018)) and the Ontario Tech University Research Ethics Policy and Procedures. The identification number is REB File # 16205.

² In the initial survey, questions addressed the nature of prejudice, including discriminatory connotations like sexism, racism, and other characteristics subject to being targeted by prejudice and hate. However, affirmative responses by category were too scarce for inclusion in our analyses. Omitting figures prevents potential identification of candidates.

³ For confidentiality, since the percentage of votes are publicly available, the maximum and minimum for this variable as well as for age has been redacted to avoid recognizing candidates.

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