Framed: Visible Minorities, the Media and Politics in Canada

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Where my research comes in

- Media are key source of information about politics
  - Raises questions about the quality of coverage and information that voters receive
- Research suggests coverage is not always accurate
  - Women in politics: gendered mediation
  - US research: racialized coverage
- Do these patterns extend to visible minority candidates in Canada? Do we see racial mediation?

What we already know

- Heuristics: cognitive short-cuts

- Editors and journalists use heuristics
  - Availability heuristic: accessibility
  - Representativeness heuristic: categorization
  - Exacerbated by time pressures, ideas about “newsworthiness”

- Voters use heuristics too
  - Party identification
  - Trait stereotypes such as race, gender, and age
  - Media can provide these cues (e.g. through frames)

- Race is salient (“simplest shortcut of all”)
  - 79% of voters less likely to vote for party if leader is Black
  - Prejudices may be subtle, nuanced, implicit (“modern racism”)

Project overview

- Analysis of media coverage in 2008 federal election
  - Candidate-centred coverage
    - 34 visible minority candidates
    - 26 non-minority candidates (racially diverse and non-diverse ridings)
  - Plus “average” election stories

- Two-pronged approach to media analysis
  - Traditional hand-coded content analysis
  - Computer-aided text analysis

- Key question
  - Are differences in coverage correlated in any way with candidates’ personal characteristics or backgrounds?

- Compare candidate <u>portrayal</u> to candidate <u>self-presentation</u>
  - Interviews with candidates and staffers to come

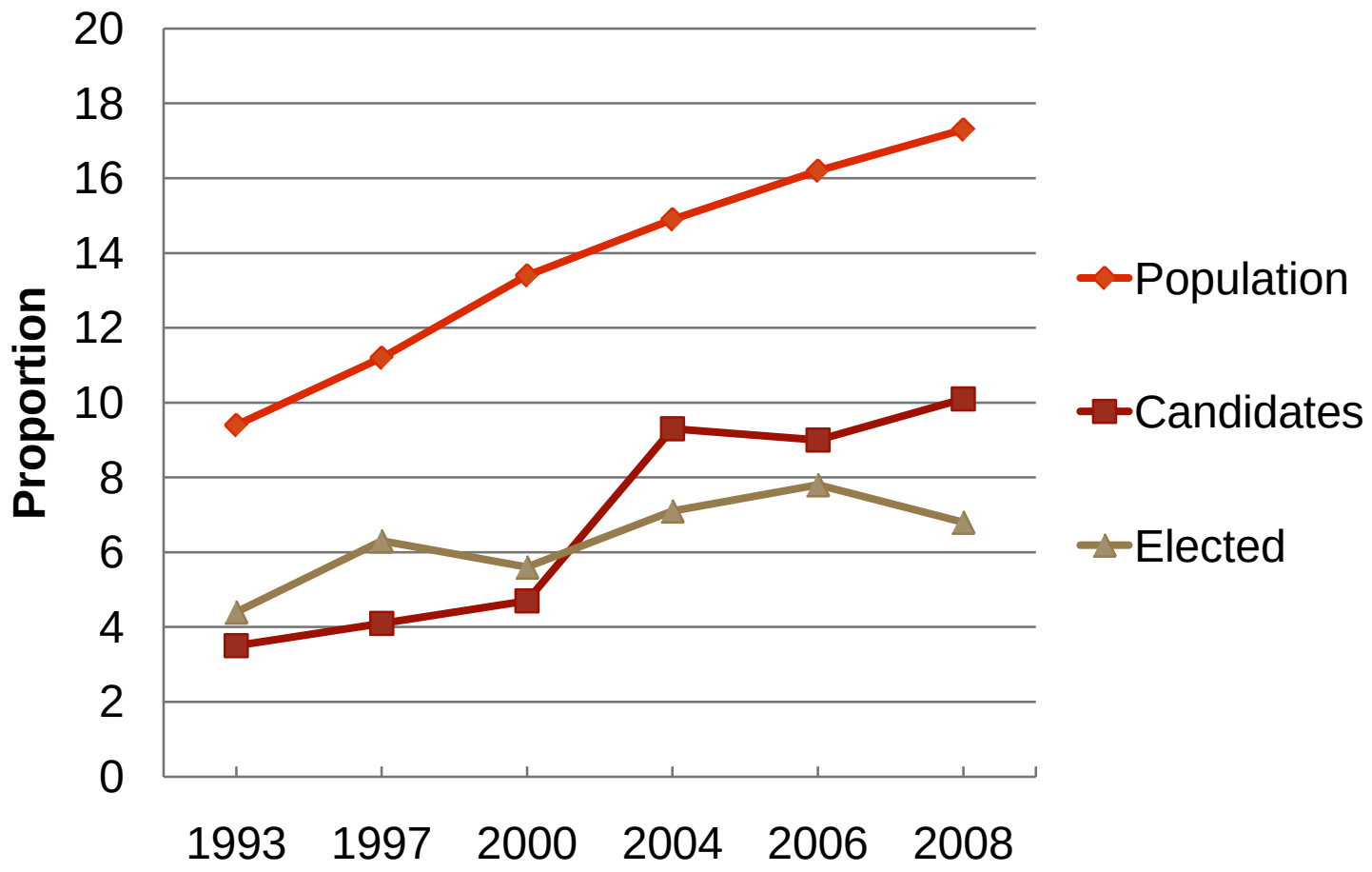
Early findings

- Amount of coverage not determined by candidate race
  - Incumbency, “star” status and media market the key factors
  - Scandal can also increase coverage (but not in a good way)
- Your background matters… as long as it’s interesting
  - Rarely mentioned in stories about non-minority candidates
- Minorities in politics = fear and perceived threat
  - “Ethnic voting blocks” over-emphasized, rarely contextualized
- Not just race, but gender too
  - Bollywood-ification, focus on novelty, multiple markers of difference
- “We didn’t make it up… we just reported it”
  - Quotes and “sources” are used to convey racial narratives

Why it matters

- Potential disconnect between commitments to multiculturalism and apparent (dis)comfort with diversity
  - Cannot just focus on successes; must look at gaps / failures
- Suggests that the political playing field remains uneven
- Draws attention to the media's objectivity and their capacity to report on race and diversity
- Raises questions about the quality and accuracy of information that voters receive
  - Do we have the tools we need to make informed political decisions?

APPENDIX:
VISIBLE MINORITIES AS CANDIDATES AND MPS, CANADIAN FEDERAL POLITICS (1993-2008)



Source: Black (2011)