

Research Summary

Running for Elected Office: Indigenous Candidates, Ambition and Self-Government

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What you need to know

The authors examine the factors that motivate individuals to run for office and the range of candidates at the regional level in Nunatsiavut. They find that gender and, to a lesser extent, family dynamics, public attitudes towards candidates, and occasional negative attacks may serve as barriers to running for office.

What is this research about?

Since 2005, Inuit communities in Labrador have been self-governing under Canada's self-government policy as a result of signing a modern treaty with the federal and provincial governments. The Nunatsiavut Government is governed by an Executive and the Nunatsiavut Assembly, the latter of which is served by a number of elected representatives including the First Minister, Ministers, Ordinary Members (akin to Members of Parliament), AngajukKat (akin to Mayors), and Community Corporation Chairpersons. These individuals represent the five Inuit communities within the settlement region and a number of communities and individuals outside of it. The main goal is to uncover the factors that encourage and discourage Inuit members from running for these elected offices in Nunatsiavut.

What did the researchers do?

The article is based on 21 interviews with candidates who ran for office in Nunatsiavut from 2006 to 2017, including 11 individuals who ran for Ordinary Member in the 2014 general election and 10 candidates who ran for different positions in other years, excluding 2014. The interviews were conducted remotely and in Nunatsiavut in 2016 and 2017. Based on the aforementioned data, the researchers were able to identify important themes and words that were discussed in the interviews. These findings were then aggregated into descriptive statistics and interpreted either through high-level summaries of the data or through the use of direct quotes.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that the development of nascent ambition (which is the *inclination* to run for office) is the main barrier for potential candidates in Nunatsiavut and that there are fewer barriers to candidates developing expressive ambition (which is the *decision* to actually enter the election). Factors that may affect nascent ambition include gender, family dynamics, professional experiences, and political attitudes and recruitment factors, **with gender** and, to a lesser extent, **family dynamics** acting as the main barriers to the development of nascent ambition. The

evidence suggests that gender and family dynamics seem to be interconnected in Nunatsiavut, particularly with regards to women and their family responsibilities. Furthermore, the interaction between gender and family can have a deeper impact on female candidates and their inclination of wanting to run for office in comparison to male candidates.

In contrast, there are fewer barriers to candidates developing expressive ambition. Expressive ambition depends on a cost/benefit analysis of contextual and environmental factors that are external to the candidate. Despite some evidence that public attitudes and negative attacks may discourage individuals from running for office, the potential benefits of running for office seem to outweigh the costs. In considering the degree to which mainstream theories of political behaviour apply to candidates who ran for office in Nunatsiavut, the researchers did not find any strong or compelling evidence of unique Indigenous factors that affect ambition. Ultimately, the motivations and barriers that Indigenous candidates in Nunatsiavut face when running for office appear to be similar to those faced by candidates in non-Indigenous elections.

How can you use this research?

Policymakers might use this research to develop new strategies, policies, and programs to support the development of both nascent and expressive ambition among Nunatsiavut beneficiaries. Some possibilities might include creating new leadership training and childcare programs to encourage female and male candidates with young families to run for office. The idea would be to create a political and social environment that cultivates and encourages new talent to seek elected office.

Researchers might build on our work by examining other contexts within and outside of Nunatsiavut. To what extent do our findings hold at different levels (e.g. local, provincial and national) and in other Indigenous communities? Does institutional variation, in the form of government and electoral systems, affect the decision to run for office? These questions are worth exploring in future work.

About the researchers

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Nunatsiavut, Labrador Inuit, Inuit, Northern Labrador, Labrador, Indigenous Candidates, Political Candidates, Indigenous, Self-Government, Ambition, Nascent Ambition, Expressive Ambition, Political Opportunity Structure, Gender, Family Dynamics

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