

**First Nations Candidacy and On-Reserve Voting in Manitoba:
A Research Note**

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Introduction

According to media reports, provincial and federal parties operating in western Canada now pay greater attention to Aboriginal voters.¹ In the 2007 Saskatchewan election, the Saskatchewan Party was reported to have made deliberate overtures to the Aboriginal community (Cuthand 2007) and in the 2009 BC election, “Both the NDP and Liberal party leaders were courting the [A]boriginal vote during campaign tours” (CBC 2009). More recently, in the 2011 Federal Election, according to *The Globe and Mail*, all three of the national parties were making greater efforts to reach out to Aboriginal voters (Wingrove 2011). These efforts produced a record seven elected Aboriginal MPs—five of whom were elected as part of the Conservative governing caucus, including two from Manitoba.

Doing so makes political sense. Given their population size, particularly in provinces with large Aboriginal populations such as Manitoba, Aboriginal voters have the potential for considerable political influence. According to one calculation, by the beginning of the current century the Aboriginal population constituted over thirty percent of the population in eight of Manitoba’s provincial electoral ridings, and over fifteen percent of the population in another nine ridings (Silver *et al.* 2005, 3). Thus, with 57 seats in the Manitoba legislature, Aboriginal residents have become a significant presence in almost one-third of the province’s ridings. Of importance also is that Aboriginal populations are proportionately very high in the province’s five sparsely populated northern electoral districts: Rupertsland (90.5% Aboriginal), Flin Flon (39.4%), Thompson (49.7%), The Pas (69.9%), and Swan River (38.2%) (Silver *et al.* 2005).

Despite decades of scholarship exploring the broad topic of political engagement, Canadian understandings of Aboriginal political behaviour remain incomplete. This study aims to expand scholarly interest in the still nascent topic of Aboriginal political engagement in Canada. In recent years greater attention has been paid to the number of Aboriginal candidates running for major political parties at the provincial and federal levels, with questions raised about the potential effect of Aboriginal candidacy on turnout and vote choice. This paper provides an examination into the relationship between Aboriginal candidacy and voting

behaviour using the 2007 Manitoba provincial election as a case study. Essentially, we ask: “Does the presence of First Nations candidates appear to influence on-reserve voting behaviour?”

Aboriginal Candidates and Voting Behaviour: Theoretical Considerations

It is occasionally argued that the presence of Aboriginal candidates can influence on-reserve voting behaviour. Roger Gibbins writes that on-reserve turnout in select constituencies in the 1984 and 1988 federal elections was occasionally higher than expected, “particularly in northern polls, where, not coincidentally, Aboriginal candidates were present” (1991, 160). Based on their analysis of federal voting from 1965-1993 in three Alberta First Nations communities, Russell Lawrence Barsh *et al.* (1997) suggest that the presence of First Nation candidates can improve on-reserve voter turnout, and that the presence of First Nations candidates can increase a political party’s on-reserve support. They write, “To the extent that the Tories and Liberals have experimented with local Indian candidates, they have strengthened their Indian support” (1997, 15).

More recently, anecdotal evidence suggests that Aboriginal candidates may increase on-reserve turnout in Manitoba. For example, on the topic of Aboriginal voting, Mia Rabson of the *Winnipeg Free Press* reported:

Having a local [A]boriginal candidate can make a big difference. In 2007, when Garden Hill Chief David Harper of Manitoba was running for the provincial Tories in Rupertsland turnout on his reserve was 31 per cent ... Four years earlier, when Harper wasn’t on the ballot, turnout was just 13.6 per cent (Rabson 2010).

In another article, and while reflecting on the same constituency election, Rabson discussed Aboriginal candidacy and vote choice: “Harper lost to incumbent NDP cabinet minister Eric Robinson but he gave the Tories their best showing in that riding in years. Robinson’s margin of victory dropped to under 900 votes, compared to almost 2,000 in 2003” (Rabson 2008).

While the empirical evidence is scant, there are theoretical reasons to suspect that the presence of Aboriginal candidates may influence voting behaviour.

Previous research regarding, for example, gender and ethnic identity has found that voters may be more likely to vote for someone who shares their personal demographic characteristics. In other words, voters have been found to practice what can be termed “affinity voting.” For example, it is suggested that a “gender affinity effect” can occur by which female voters compared to male voters are more favourably disposed to female candidates (see, for example, Dolan 2007). Similarly, racial/cultural affinity effects have been found; for instance, self-identified Latino voters in the United States are more likely to vote for Latino candidates (Stokes-Brown 2006).

If affinity voting exists, we would expect an elevated turnout among Aboriginal voters when there are Aboriginal candidates, and a relatively higher tendency towards voting for these candidates. It is along these lines that Gibbins (1991, 160) asserts that “turnout rates for Aboriginal communities could be significantly increased if the political parties would nominate more Aboriginal candidates, and if they would do so in circumstances where such candidates stood a reasonable chance of success.” Similarly, Jennifer Dalton writes “Aboriginal peoples may be more likely to participate in Canadian electoral politics if there are candidates with whom they can relate, both politically and culturally; these candidates are also considered potentially more effective in advancing community interests” (2007, 259).

Affinity voting may also be linked to how we rely on social cues rather than technical information when making voter choices. Research done by Monika McDermott reveals how voters will make assumptions about candidates based on gender and race (McDermott 1998). While some argue that individuals who are less well informed are more likely to rely on such informational shortcuts, researchers such as Fred Cutler have found that even well-informed voters are influenced by socio-demographic cues (Cutler 2002). Therefore, from these and other findings relating to affinity voting, we expect also that Aboriginal voters may use social cues when making choices about their vote.

Within the affinity voting process, Aboriginal voters may simply be more comfortable (or trusting) when they encounter Aboriginal candidates. Alfred and

Corntassel (2005) argue that the electoral process is alien to Indigenous communities and their own political culture, and Howe and Bedford (2009) find that Aboriginal Canadians report a low confidence level in Canadian political institutions, and this has a negative influence on voter turnout.

Such findings are not surprising. After all, while Métis people and non-status Indians were always legally able to vote, it is only since the 1950s that Manitoba's on-reserve First Nations were allowed to vote in provincial elections. At the time that Manitoba entered into Confederation, Treaty Indians who met the general qualifications for citizens of the province were able to vote in the first provincial election of 1870. However, in 1886 the *Manitoba Election Act* was revised to exclude any Indian who received annuity from the Crown, thereby disenfranchising First Nations Manitobans who received Treaty benefits (those who relinquished Treaty status could vote). This was revised in 1931 to recognize the voting rights of those serving in the Armed Forces and veterans. It was not until two decades later, in 1952, that all First Nations of voting age were provincially re-enfranchised (Adams, 2008, 117; Elections Manitoba 2007, 197; Friesen *et al.* 1996, 68). Therefore, it is reasonable to assert that many First Nations voters grew up in households where the parents and other adults were not allowed to vote, and in turn were not politically socialized in the same way as those raised in other households within the general population, including those headed by New Canadians who were immediately enfranchised upon receiving their Canadian citizenship.

What children learn in their family environment will influence later behaviours (Lenski and Lenski 1982, 31; Mackie 1986), including, no doubt, a propensity to vote. Based on their own research findings regarding the views of young Aboriginal people regarding political participation, Taiaiake Alfred *et al.* (2007, 7) tie together early learning with the need for Aboriginal candidates, and report that in addition to what happens at home, many youth who were interviewed “argued that supporting, encouraging and voting [for] Aboriginal candidates was paramount.”

Looking beyond affinity voting, Aboriginal candidates may also influence voting behaviour by their activities during the campaign, including community

engagement (Guerin 2003). For example, research has shown that individual contact can increase voter turnout rates, and face-to-face contact through personal canvassing helps to mobilize potential voters (Gerber and Green 2000). If Aboriginal candidates are more likely than non-Aboriginal candidates to campaign and canvass on-reserve, the presence of Aboriginal candidates may result in increased on-reserve voter mobilization.

Finally, Aboriginal candidates may enjoy the support of Aboriginal political elites, and these elites may help to mobilize voters both to turn out and to vote for the Aboriginal candidate. Ethnic mobilization theory, an approach pioneered by theorists such as Fredrik Barth and applied by scholars such as Cornell (1988) and Nagel (1997), encompasses the idea that through shared historical experiences, racial, linguistic, religious and other markers, ethnic elites are at times able to mobilize members of a particular group in the pursuit of collective objectives. It is therefore highly plausible that Aboriginal elites are able to mobilize Aboriginal voters toward Aboriginal candidates by appealing to Aboriginal identity. Such an identity is linked to the fact that First Nations people, both in Manitoba and across Canada, have a unique and well-documented political history of disenfranchisement, assimilation and segregation including the establishment of reserves, band governments, and residential schools, and a range of other provisions in the *Indian Act*, among other things. While the promotion of identity can sometimes promote political participation, ironically, by setting First Nations people apart from the rest of society through numerous social and institutional measures, contradictory segregationist politics reinforced the politics of “otherness” and a weaker attachment to the existing electoral, governing institutions, including Parliament, and even Canada as a nation-state (Comeau and Santin 1995, Poelzer 1996, Soroka *et al*, 2007, 26) and a relatively stronger attachment to First Nations political communities.

It should be further noted that kinship and family ties continue to play a much more important role in First Nations political life than is the case in the broader Canadian society. These ties not only help reinforce distinctive political identity, but also serve as important mechanisms both for the transmission of political

information and in the mobilization of political support, including electoral support. The role that kinship and family ties play in the political party and political candidacy support, if any, requires empirical study.

It should be said that not everyone believes that Aboriginal candidates have a positive influence on Aboriginal voting behaviour. Kiera Ladner is sceptical about this influence on both turnout and political participation, while noting also that some Aboriginal candidates even experience backlash “on the basis that they had failed to live as members of their nation” (2003, 24). Alternative forms of action may bring about more meaningful outcomes, including developing the organizational capacity of First Nations governments and institutions to further the interests of Aboriginal peoples (Ladner, 2008; Sawchuk, 1995). Another cautionary perspective comes from those writing about women and elections who argue that women candidates (or those representing other socially marginalized groups) are often placed in “unwinnable” ridings while bolstering the party’s need to exhibit its sense of equality. In other words, the parties are exploiting these candidates. To make these actions meaningful, it is argued, these candidates need to be put forward in ridings where there is a realistic chance of success (Bashevkin, 1993; Sampert, 2011). These perspectives certainly have merit; however, at this stage of the research, we limit our analysis to the impact of Aboriginal candidacy, and leave it to others to further explore these other important issues.

Methodology

While there are both theoretical and anecdotal reasons to believe that Aboriginal candidacy may influence Aboriginal voting behaviour, this relationship has yet to be considered empirically. The lack of statistically reliable research likely reflects two practical constraints. The first challenge is data availability. Political participation surveys with sufficiently large and reliable samples of Aboriginal respondents are rare, and survey data relating to this topic that can also be correlated with information on local candidates simply do not exist. As a result, using electoral returns data is the only option that is currently available for testing the linkage between Aboriginal candidacy and voting behaviour. This can be done

by identifying the on-reserve poll results within the aggregate electoral returns data that are collected by Elections Canada or those of similar provincial agencies. This approach is not new, and has been used extensively to study on-reserve voter turnout and vote choice in Canada (see, for example, Bedford and Pobihushchy, Barsh *et al.* 1997, Bustros (as cited in Guérin 2003), Pitsula 2001, Bedford 2003, Guérin 2003, Kinnear 2003, and Dalton 2007).

There are a number of advantages for using electoral returns to conduct an analysis of the influence of Aboriginal candidacy. It allows for us to study the full population rather than samples, it allows us to explore behaviour at the constituency-level, and it allows us to consider actual, as opposed to self-reported, voting behaviour. (Self-reported voter turnout is usually inflated, as made evident in a post-election poll of 1,000 Manitobans in which 69% of adults said they had voted in the 2003 provincial election when the actual turnout was 54% (Probe Research, 2003)). At the same time, it must be noted that because electoral returns are aggregated rather than reported as individual data, it is difficult to assess precisely the connection between variables such as age, gender, or socio-economic status on voting behaviour. Nor can the electoral returns data be used to differentiate the First Nations voters from non-First Nations voters in polls that are not exclusively on-reserve, and it is not possible to use these data to determine broader Aboriginal (including off-reserve First Nations, non-status Indian, Métis and Inuit) voting patterns.

A second challenge for those seeking to examine the influence of Aboriginal candidates on Aboriginal voting behaviour is that, in any given election, the number of Aboriginal candidates is very small; just as women and visible minorities are proportionately underrepresented in provincial and federal elections (Bashevkin, 1993, Young and Campbell, 2001), so too are there fewer Aboriginal candidates than their population in many parts of the country would warrant, with an example being the 2005 BC provincial election which included only four ridings in which Aboriginal candidates were running (Smith 2006, 2).² Complicating matters is the fact that electoral returns analysis is limited to those constituencies that include reserves; as some Aboriginal candidates run in ridings that do not include reserves, such as

cities, the number of cases available for analysis is reduced even further. Overall, “small N-sizes” signify a limitation on the conclusions we may draw on the influence of Aboriginal candidates on on-reserve voting behaviour. Worth noting is that research on gender affinity voting also began with the analysis of small case numbers; for example, Eric Plutzer and John Zipp’s 1996 analysis of voting for female candidates in the 1992 American election considered 14 candidates for governor or US Senator – a record number of female candidates at the time.

The 2007 Manitoba provincial election presents us with a good opportunity for examining the relationship between Aboriginal candidacy and on-reserve voting behaviour. Information provided to the research team by the three major political parties, the New Democratic Party (NDP), the Progressive Conservatives (PC) and the Liberals, identifies a total of eleven Aboriginal candidates who ran for one of the three parties in constituencies containing reserves. Nine of these eleven Aboriginal candidates were First Nations and two were Métis; given that Aboriginal status may have bearing on possibility of affinity voting, we have limited our analysis to the nine First Nations candidates.

The nine First Nations candidates included in this study ran for office in six constituencies; four of these constituencies, Russell, Ste. Rose, Swan River and Thompson, had one First Nations candidate, one constituency, The Pas, had two First Nations candidates, and, in one constituency, Rupertsland, all three parties put forward Aboriginal candidates. In a manner that is consistent with the research discussed earlier with regard to on-reserve voting, we consider on-reserve voting behaviour by analyzing aggregate electoral returns data arising from the 2007 Manitoba election based on a poll-by-poll list provided by Elections Manitoba. Results from the election in each riding were divided into two distinct categories: those from on-reserve polling stations and those from non-reserve polling stations. In total, fifteen of the province’s 57 constituencies contain on-reserve polls. All registered voters in the on-reserve polls are presumed to be First Nations on-reserve residents³ while, at the same time, on-reserve polls for which Election Manitoba notes the data “may include some off reserve voters” are assigned to the non-reserve category.⁴ Of course, non-reserve polls include non-Aboriginal voters as

well as First Nations persons living off reserve, as well as other members of the Aboriginal population, including non-status Indians and Métis. It must be stressed that this analysis therefore is aimed at on-reserve voting only; no claims are made that the results extend to Aboriginal populations living in a non-reserve setting.

Two other cautions should also be noted. First, the data do not allow for causal analysis. If on-reserve turnout is higher and/or if on-reserve vote choice differs in ridings with First Nations candidates, this may reflect the influence of First Nations candidacy, yet other factors may also explain the relationship and should also be considered. Second, this analysis is put forward as a starting point for discussion and a basis for future research. By analyzing a single provincial election, we do not presume to put forward universal principles or statements.

First Nations Candidacy and On-Reserve Voter Turnout

Our analysis of aggregate electoral returns data for the 2007 Manitoba election confirms previous research regarding on-reserve voter turnout: large differences are found between on-reserve and non-reserve polls, with on-reserve polls across Manitoba having a turnout rate of only 27.8%, and non-reserve polls across the province having a turnout rate of 58.0%. Yet can we say the presence of First Nations candidates promoted higher on-reserve turnout in the 2007 provincial election? In other words, was on-reserve turnout higher in constituencies that featured First Nations candidates?

The 2007 Elections Manitoba data do not provide support for the argument that the presence of a First Nations candidate is related to increased on-reserve turnout. Looking at each of the individual fifteen constituencies in which there were on-reserve polling stations (Table 1), it is seen that there is considerable variation in on-reserve turnout rates, with on-reserve polls having turnout rates ranging from 15.0% (Carman) to 57.5% (Selkirk). Furthermore, while some of the ridings with higher than average on-reserve turnout featured First Nations candidates (Russell, Swan River), other ridings with higher turnout had no First Nations candidates to choose from (Dauphin-Roblin, Portage La Prairie, and Selkirk). The average turnout for on-reserve polls with no First Nations candidates was 25.7%, while the average

turnout for on-reserve polls with one or more First Nations candidate was 28.7%. Overall, the results provide only limited support – if that – for the idea that the presence of First Nation candidates positively influences on-reserve turnout.

Table 1: Constituency-Specific On-Reserve Turnout

	On-reserve Turnout
0 First Nations Candidates	
Arthur-Virden	20.6%
Carman	15.0%
Dauphin-Roblin	42.4%
Emerson	33.9%
Flin Flon	18.9%
Interlake	32.3%
Lac Du Bonnet	22.8%
Portage La Prairie	37.9%
Selkirk	57.5%
1 First Nations Candidate	
Russell	40.7%
Ste. Rose	22.4%
Swan River	50.7%
Thompson	30.1%
2+ First Nations Candidates	
Rupert's Land	26.8%
The Pas	26.6%

Source: Elections Manitoba data, as derived by authors, and personal communications with political parties

On-Reserve Vote Choice

Before considering the effect of First Nations candidacy on vote choice, it is valuable to first consider the general variations between on-reserve and non-reserve vote choice within specific ridings in Manitoba. Aboriginal voters are often presumed to support the Liberals or New Democrats (see, for example, Macleod 2010). Yet, only three published studies that examine this topic in a quantitatively reliable manner could be found by the research team. All three studies focus on the Canadian prairies. Russell Lawrence Barsh *et al.* (1997) examine electoral returns data for three Alberta reserves (Blood Tribe, Peigan Nation, and Four Nations). Although the analysis is focused on voter turnout, the authors do report on the distribution of vote across the different political parties. Comparing on-reserve voting with the constituency averages (which include the reserves), they find that

on-reserve voters are less supportive of right-of-centre parties and more supportive of the Liberals and NDP. They conclude that First Nation voters on three Alberta reserves were “to the [l]eft relative to their neighbors.” Given that the analysis compares on-reserve voters to the full constituency, rather than to the non-reserve population, the on-reserve and non-reserve differences are likely understated.

James Pitsula’s (2001) historical analysis of First Nations engagement in Saskatchewan politics includes a brief discussion of on-reserve provincial voting between 1967 and 1995. He reports that while the Liberals enjoyed the plurality of on-reserve support between 1967 and 1975, “[f]rom 1978 onward the Indian vote moved strongly to the NDP” (Pitsula 2001, 365). In the five elections in the 1978 to 1995 period, the NDP received over 50% of the on-reserve vote – and over 80% of the on-reserve vote in the 1991 election. Pitsula suggests that the on-reserve support may relate to the party’s efforts to reach out to the Aboriginal community: “The NDP, under [Woodrow] Lloyd and [Allan] Blakeney, was the first party to recognize and support the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, and that relationship appears to have continued in the Romanow era” (2001, 365). Pitsula’s analysis does not compare the on-reserve vote to the non-reserve vote, therefore he is unable to comment on the degree to which the on-reserve differed with the broader provincial vote.

Because of his focus on Manitoba on-reserve voting, it is worthwhile exploring in some detail Michael Kinnear’s analysis (2003) regarding on-reserve electoral behaviours in both federal and provincial elections from 1960 to 2000. While he more closely examines turnout rather than vote choice, the presentation of his data allows readers to obtain an overview of on-reserve voting patterns. At the federal level, he shows that on-reserve First Nations support for the Progressive Conservatives declined over time. With regard to the NDP, on-reserve support leaned towards the party in the federal elections of 1979, 1984, and 1988, then after the 1993 election the NDP finished second to the Liberals. In the 2000 federal election, the last for which he provides figures, he reports that 63.3% of on-reserve voters supported the Liberals, 28.4% supported the NDP, and 2.5% supported the PCs (with his results excluding Reform Party or Canadian Alliance federal voting).

Turning to the provincial level, Kinnear also finds that provincial PC on-reserve support declined over time, from a high of 36.8% in the 1969 election to 6.0% in the 2003 election. His data show that on-reserve NDP support in 1969 (the year of the NDP breakthrough in winning its first provincial election) was 28.8% – eight percentage points below the on-reserve PC support. However, on-reserve NDP support rose in the 1970s, reaching a staggering figure of 79.8% in 1981; between 1986 and 2003, NDP ranged from a low of 56.5% in 1988 to a high of 83.1% in 2003. In total, on-reserve NDP support was above 50% for eight out of ten provincial elections between 1969 and 2003, and above 70% for four out of ten. Overall, Kinnear’s figures show that, after rising in the 1970s, on-reserve support for the provincial NDP has been consistently strong, although on-reserve support for the provincial NDP has not necessarily translated into on-reserve support for the federal NDP. Like Pitsula, Kinnear does not contrast the on-reserve vote to the non-reserve vote.

Together, these three studies suggest that on-reserve voters, at least on the prairies, tend to favour left-of-centre or centrist parties, or at least tend to disfavour right-of-centre parties. What remains unknown, however, is the extent to which on-reserve vote choices are similar to, or distinct from, non-reserve voting. The Saskatchewan and Manitoba studies discussed above do not present non-reserve comparisons, while the Alberta study only compares on-reserve voting with the constituency average (thereby blending on-reserve and non-reserve voters into the latter category).

To what extent can we say that on-reserve voting differs strongly from non-reserve voting (i.e., the general population residing in non-reserve settings)? The first row of Table 2 contrasts on-reserve vote choice (including all 15 constituencies that include reserves) and non-reserve vote choice across the province. Here it is seen that, on average, the on-reserve support for the NDP is almost 20 percentage points higher than the non-reserve support, and that on-reserve support for the PCs is almost 17 percentage points below the non-reserve support. These data support the notion that on-reserve voters are more supportive of the NDP than the

Progressive Conservatives. On-reserve voters do not differ from non-reserve voters with respect to support for the Liberals.

Table 2: On- and Non-Reserve Voting

Riding	NDP			PC			Liberal		
	On	Non	Diff	On	Non	Diff	On	Non	Diff
Provincial Average	66.36	47.37	18.99	21.42	38.04	(16.62)	11.72	12.34	(0.62)
Arthur-Virden	82.88	29.57	53.31	4.11	65.07	(60.96)	12.33	4.96	7.37
Carman	62.93	20.97	41.96	7.76	58.85	(51.09)	29.31	19.32	9.99
Dauphin-Roblin	61.43	53.43	8.00	24.29	41.50	(17.21)	14.29	4.80	9.49
Emerson	50.00	20.55	29.45	25.71	60.35	(34.64)	23.57	18.17	5.40
Flin Flon	78.03	76.48	1.55	No PC candidate			20.71	22.43	(1.72)
Interlake	90.06	54.22	35.84	3.21	41.19	(37.98)	6.63	4.18	2.45
Lac Du Bonnet	60.71	32.57	28.14	9.64	60.54	(50.9)	29.29	6.57	22.72
Portage La Prairie	52.78	42.18	10.60	44.44	48.13	(3.69)	2.78	9.29	(6.51)
Rupertsland	47.90	72.57	(24.67)	47.23	19.77	27.46	4.45	7.26	(2.81)
Russell	31.73	33.58	(1.85)	25.10	60.82	(35.72)	42.97	5.03	37.67
Selkirk	88.35	54.84	33.51	4.85	35.96	(31.11)	5.83	8.52	(2.69)
Ste. Rose	89.04	28.67	60.37	2.91	63.30	(60.39)	7.61	7.61	0.00
Swan River	89.95	55.73	34.22	2.69	40.19	(37.50)	7.00	3.70	3.30
The Pas	68.66	68.05	0.61	26.55	17.67	8.88	4.12	13.36	(9.24)
Thompson	66.50	74.64	(8.14)	2.13	11.43	(9.30)	30.71	13.30	17.41

Source: Elections Manitoba data, as derived by authors

Although there are variations between the 15 provincial ridings in Manitoba that contain First Nations reserves, these patterns generally hold across constituencies. Looking first at NDP voting, it is found that in ten of the 15 ridings, on-reserve voters were considerably more likely than non-reserve voters to vote for the NDP, with the difference in the ten ridings ranging from eight percentage points up to 53 percentage points. In three of the remaining five ridings, the difference was less than two percentage points, while in the final two ridings, Rupertsland and Thompson, on-reserve voters were actually less likely than non-reserve voters to vote for the NDP. (This result may have been influenced by the presence of First Nations candidates running for other parties in both ridings, as discussed later in this paper.)

The higher on-reserve vote for the NDP is paralleled with lower levels of on-reserve support for the PCs. In 11 of the 14 ridings in which there were PC

candidates (the PCs were absent in Flin Flon), on-reserve voters were considerably less likely than non-reserve voters to vote for the PCs, with the difference ranging from nine to over 60 percentage points. In one riding (Portage la Prairie), the difference was less than four percentage points, while in two ridings with PC Aboriginal candidates, the northern ridings of Rupertsland and The Pas, on-reserve voters were more supportive of the PCs than were non-reserve voters.

On- and non-reserve voting differences are also found with respect to the Liberal Party. In seven ridings of the 15 ridings, on-reserve voters were more likely than non-reserve voters to support the Liberals, with differences ranging from five to almost 38 percentage points. In six ridings, the differences were less than five percentage points. In two ridings, on-reserve voters were less likely to support the Liberals, with differences ranging from seven to nine percentage points.

Overall, the electoral returns data provided here demonstrate the existence of on- and non-reserve voting differences, with most ridings showing that on-reserve voters are more supportive for the NDP and less supportive of the PCs when compared to non-reserve voters.

First Nations Candidacy and On-Reserve Vote Choice

When a party puts forward a First Nations candidate, does this affect the choice of First Nations on-reserve voters? There does appear to be some support for this possibility. Looking at the individual constituencies in which there are both First Nations candidates and on-reserve polls, Table 3 shows that of the four constituencies with only one First Nations candidate, in all but one instance (Swan River), the party with the First Nations candidate increased its on-reserve support relative to its party's provincial on-reserve average. In the three contests with more than one First Nations candidate, vote splitting inevitably occurred. Here it is notable that, in the two constituencies to feature First Nations PC candidates, The Pas and Rupertsland, the PCs increased their on-reserve support relative to the PCs' provincial on-reserve average; while the increase was modest in The Pas, it was considerable in Rupertsland. Overall, these data suggest that running a First Nations candidate increases a party's electoral fortunes in the on-reserve polls when no

other First Nations candidate is present. Additionally, the limited data available suggest that running a First Nations candidate may increase the PC party's on-reserve support, even in the presence of other First Nations candidates.

Table 3: Party Support and First Nations Candidacy

	Candidate	On-reserve (%)	Average Party On-Reserve Support (%)	Diff.
One Aboriginal Candidate				
Russell - Liberal	Clarice Wilson	42.97	11.72	31.25
Ste. Rose - NDP	Denise Harder	89.04	66.36	22.68
Swan River - Liberal	Niomi Spence Pranteau	7.00	11.72	(4.72)
Thompson - Liberal	Kenny M. Braun	30.71	11.72	18.98
Two Aboriginal Candidates				
The Pas - NDP	Oscar Lathlin	68.66	66.36	2.30
The Pas - PC	George Muswaggon	26.55	21.42	5.13
Three Aboriginal Candidates				
Rupert's Land - Liberal	Earl Fontaine	4.45	11.72	(7.28)
Rupert's Land - NDP	Eric Robinson	47.90	66.36	(18.46)
Rupert's Land - PC	David Harper	47.23	21.42	25.81

Source: Elections Manitoba data, as derived by authors

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, the data presented here are intended to serve as a small step towards further discussions about on-reserve voting patterns and how the presence of First Nations candidates might influence voting behaviour. We found strong variations between on-reserve voting preferences when compared to the general population within non-reserve settings. With regard to the direct effect of candidacy and affinity voting, a key challenge faced by researchers is the limited number of cases for study; that is, the small number of ridings with First Nations candidates, as well as the fact that electoral returns analysis can only be applied where there are reserves within the ridings that are contested by First Nations candidates. The findings put forward here should be pursued further in other provinces and in the federal context to provide a larger number of cases for studying and to provide a comparative context for the findings.

Our findings suggest that the presence of First Nations candidates has limited influence on on-reserve voter turnout, but may positively influence on-reserve support for parties that nominate Aboriginal candidates. While the findings indicate that there may be a relationship *between* Aboriginal candidacy and voting behaviour, at this stage the data are silent regarding *why* this happens. Future empirical research is required for questions regarding what shapes voter preferences among First Nations voters: To what extent do First Nations political elites mobilize First Nations voters when there are First Nations candidates? How do voters become informed about the identity of the candidates for whom they vote? How important is First Nations identity to voting for First Nations candidates? What role do kinship networks play in transmission of political information and in mobilization of voters? And to what extent is First Nations political mobilization the same as, or distinctive from, ethnic and other group based political mobilization? Qualitative research could be used to explore the answers to these questions in addition to quantitative approaches.

Aboriginal Canadians face significant social and economic challenges, but also continue to build an expanding, though less well-known, legacy of success stories in new governance arrangements, economic enterprises, and post-secondary educational achievement. Aboriginal Canadians are the fastest growing population in a number of ridings in Canada and their votes have the potential to help determine which party forms government or not. Given the findings in this paper, political parties might wish to find ways to facilitate the successful nomination of Aboriginal candidates. This could involve the recruitment of Aboriginal candidates, financial support, and assistance in contesting nominations.

In recent decades, concerns have been raised about the quality of democracy in Canada; in particular, voter turnout and the representativeness of political institutions have been identified as areas for improvement. If Canada, at both the federal and provincial levels, is to be successful as a modern democratic polity, Aboriginal political participation through voting and standing for elected office must be strengthened. As the past federal election demonstrated, the results are worth the effort. The overwhelmingly positive reaction from Inuit, First Nations, and Metis

leaders across Canada about the record number of Aboriginal MPs who were elected and the ensuing record number of Aboriginal cabinet ministers who were appointed should be seen as a very positive signal that Canadian political institutions do matter to Aboriginal Canadians. Perhaps the elimination of the 'democratic deficit' in Canada should first start with Canada's First Peoples.

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Endnotes

¹ We use the term “Aboriginal people” to include those who identify themselves as First Nations, Inuit or Métis. We use the more specific identifiers when referring to the specific populations that fall within this general population descriptor.

² Reflective of the larger number of seats within the House of Commons, the number of Aboriginal candidates is greater in federal elections: for example, there were 23 Aboriginal candidates for major political parties (the Conservative, Liberal, New Democratic and Bloc Québécois parties) in the 2011 federal election (Fontaine 2011). But even at the federal level, the number of cases is low, and federal analyses must also take into account regional variations in the federal party system.

³ This also includes polls in which all of the registered voters are presumed to be members of the specified First Nation, but that only capture part of the First Nation. These consist of: Buffalo Point First Nation (Emerson, voting area 50); Gamblers First Nation (Russell, voting area 47); and Ebb & Flow First Nation (Ste. Rose, voting area 4).

⁴ These consist of: Fisher River Cree Nation (Interlake voting areas 24, 25); Berens River First Nation (Rupert'sland voting areas 25, 36); Bloodvein First Nation (voting area 29); Hollow Water First Nation (Rupert'sland voting area 30); O-Cho-Chak-Ko-Sipi First Nation (Ste. Rose voting area 1); Chemunwawin Cree Nation (Swan River voting areas 2, 3); Skownan First Nation (Swan River voting area 53); Wuskwi Sipiik First Nation (Swan River voting area 9); Opaskwayak Cree Nation (The Pas voting areas 15 and 16).