

COALESCING AROUND NARRATIVES OF GENDER INEQUALITY ON TWITTER:
THE USE OF INFORMAL COALITIONS ONLINE IN THE TORONTO
2018 MUNICIPAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT

This project looks at informally coordinated Twitter campaigns that focus on gender-identity and inequality, and how these frames are utilized by female-identifying municipal electoral candidates, who coalesce around these narratives to help increase their engagement and presence online, in hopes of improving their campaigns reach and success.

Looking at the October 2018 Toronto municipal election, we focus on informal coordination of messaging around a push to elect more women. A number of challenger candidates have begun to employ concepts on SM to frame their candidacy around the lack of representation of marginalized identities (gender) in traditional political spaces, framing their electoral-run narrative around unifying themes of inclusion, equality and diversity. While the use of these themes is not new, here narratives are being employed by a diverse and largely disconnected set of candidates tied only by their use of these terms, hashtags and networks that highlight a lack of gender (and intersectional) diversity in local politics, acting as a fundamental frame and platform for their initial electoral bid.

Given the context of gendered conversations online, our interest is in exploring whether candidates coalescing around these narratives impacts the way the voting public interacts with candidates largely underrepresented in traditional media, the quality and type of conversation or interaction it creates, and what this means for the traditional incumbent/challenger dynamic.

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