

'You Got Blood from a Stone': Political Trajectories and Challenges Faced by Black Women Candidates in Brazil's 2020 Municipal Elections

Júlia Teixeira Hirschele¹

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0022-3090>

¹Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). Institute of Social and Political Studies (IESP). Rio de Janeiro/RJ, Brazil.

Abstract: In 2020, according to data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE), women saw an increase in their participation in the electoral race for municipal legislatures. Similarly, the number of self-declared Black candidates also rose. Yet despite higher participation among both groups, and even with the support of affirmative action policies in that election cycle, we still observe a persistent pattern of underrepresentation of Black women. Existing scholarship shows that several variables shape the electoral participation of minoritized groups. Drawing on a qualitative approach, this article examines the trajectories and challenges faced by Black women candidates for city council in the 2020 elections, with the aim of identifying the key obstacles they themselves highlight as obstacles to their campaign development. In doing so, we seek to shed light on the dynamics that contribute to the continued underrepresentation of this group in Brazilian politics. Our research corpus consists of interviews conducted with Black women candidates in Brazil's Northeast region. Overall, we identify key elements described by our interlocutors as central to the challenges they faced during the electoral process – factors that extend beyond campaign financing and include mental health, racial and gender-based violence, and limited familiarity with legal and electoral regulations, among others.

Keywords: Political representation; underrepresentation of marginalized groups; municipal elections; city councilors; black women.

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juliathr@gmail.com

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Introduction

According to data from Brazil's Superior Electoral Court (TSE), nearly half a million candidates vied for 57,710 city council seats across the country's 5,570 municipalities in 2020. These figures also show an increase in women's participation in municipal legislative races, from 32.5% in 2016 to 34.6% in 2020. The share of self-identified Black candidates similarly increased, from 48.4% to 50.9%¹. Despite this growth, however, the electoral success rate of Black candidates – defined according to the Brazilian classification that aggregates those who identify as 'pardo' (Brown) or 'preto' (Black) – has remained substantially lower, even at the most localized tier of legislative competition in Brazil (GARCIA et al., 2022; SOUZA et al., 2022).

It is striking that although self-identified white candidates comprised 49.9% of all those running for office, they accounted for 53.7% of the city councilors elected in 2020. By contrast, self-identified Black and Brown candidates, who represented 10.9% and 40% of all candidacies, respectively, made up only 6.2% and 38.4% of those elected. A study by the Multidisciplinary Group for Affirmative Action Studies (Gemaal-esp) further complicates this picture. Using a hetero-classification procedure for candidates seeking seats in the national legislature in 2022, the researchers found a substantial discrepancy between the racial identities candidates reported (Black, Brown, and Indigenous) and how they were perceived by others². In other words, many individuals who self-identified as non-white, may in fact, be socially perceived as white. These findings call into question the optimism surrounding the apparent rise in non-white candidacies in the 2020 and 2022 elections.

The persistent disparities in electoral success by gender and race – extensively documented in the literature (BUENO et al., 2020; CAMPOS and MACHADO, 2015; KERBAUY, 2005; MIGUEL and QUEIROZ, 2006) – also underscore that local political officeholders remain disproportionately white, male, politically experienced, affluent, and highly educated. Scholarship on gender and racial dynamics in Brazilian politics consistently shows the enduring underrepresentation of women and Black people across federal, state, and municipal elected offices. Although the participation of women and Black candidates has increased in recent elections, this growth has not been sufficient to meaningfully narrow political inequalities, as the structural

¹According to an investigation by the newspaper 'Folha de São Paulo' (FSP, 24/09/2020), which compared data on candidates' self-declared ethnicity/color in 2016 and 2020, "at least 21,000 candidates changed their racial self-identification for the 2020 elections." See: <<https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/poder/2020/09/ao-menos-21-mil-candidatos-mudaram-declaracao-de-cor-para-eleicao-de-2020.shtml>>.

²The data indicate the share of candidates who self-identified as Black, Brown, or Indigenous but were perceived as white or Asian by three randomly selected coders on a commission convened for the study. The research was conducted by the Group for Multidisciplinary Studies on Affirmative Action (GEMAA) and the Flora Tristán Group at the University of Brasília (UnB). Although this classification does not suggest that these candidacies are nationally regarded as 'fraudulent', it does point to possible discrepancies between hetero-identification and self-identification. See: <<https://gemaal.iesp.uerj.br/projeto/eleicao2022/> or <https://www.nexojournal.com.br/ensaio/2022/10/04/a-nova-camara-e-ainda-mais-branca-do-que-parece>>.

conditions that sustain their underrepresentation have largely remained intact (SOUZA et al., 2022).

Although the literature does not reach a consensus, existing studies indicate that racial bias cannot be identified as the predominant factor guiding voters' choices (CAMPOS and MACHADO, 2022, 2015). Nor can we assert that there is a shortage of women or non-white candidates (CAMPOS and MACHADO, 2022; SOUZA, OLIVEIRA and MARTINS, 2022). These findings suggest that factors beyond candidate supply and voter demand merit closer attention – particularly the role of political parties, a topic that has become increasingly prominent in recent scholarship. By recruiting prospective candidates and determining which campaigns will receive greater or lesser financial resources (BUENO et al., 2020; CAMPOS and MACHADO, 2022; SACCHET, 2020), parties make choices that shape the dynamics of electoral competition, especially given the well-documented association between campaign funding and electoral success.

The literature also shows that women and non-white candidates are considerably more likely to face diminished prospects of electoral success due to obstacles in accessing campaign resources (CAMPOS et al., 2020; COSTA et al., 2013). A recent study by Pereira (2024) adds that there are no formal mechanisms or institutional barriers, which limit nonwhite participation in the electoral process; formally registering a candidacy is relatively straightforward. The decisive distinctions instead arise from parties' recruitment practices and internal politics, which create hierarchically differentiated groups of candidates. Competitive candidacies are those that receive the largest share of campaign resources and enjoy a greater capacity to coordinate with sitting legislators and party leadership. It is within this group that Black candidates face the greatest barriers to inclusion.

Since 2014³, when the TSE first required candidates and voters to report their self-identified ethnicity/color for inclusion in both candidacy filings and voter records, scholarship on electoral behavior and political representation has largely leaned toward quantitative analyses. Researchers have examined sociodemographic and econometric data on candidacy numbers, candidate profiles, campaign and electoral resources, vote totals, and related indicators. As noted earlier, a substantial body of work has thoroughly investigated political and institutional dynamics to understand how they sustain the persistent underrepresentation of women and Black people in Brazilian politics. These studies have yielded valuable insights into the barriers that impede progress toward achieving greater political equity.

Even so, studies that foreground the experiences and perspectives of Black women who have run in recent Brazilian legislative elections remain scarce. Likewise, research addressing the underrepresentation of non-white individuals in politics is still relatively

³Until 2013, the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) did not collect or compile any statistics on the ethnic or racial characteristics of electoral candidates.

limited, in part because debates in the field have tended to focus primarily on gender inequalities (HIRSCHLE and CAMPOS, 2025). This gap underscores the need for expanded research on race and elections, as many of the factors shaping the underrepresentation of Black people in political institutions remain either insufficiently analyzed or entirely underexplored.

For this reason, our goal is to use interviews to capture how women candidates themselves view their electoral campaigns. The qualitative orientation of this study is not centered on identifying patterns – and much less on quantifying phenomena – but rather on understanding the interests, viewpoints, and subjectivities of the women we interviewed (FLICK, 2009). We believe their narratives allow us to grasp the challenges they confronted along the way, whether personal in nature or rooted in organizational, procedural, or institutional dynamics. Accordingly, we seek to examine how these women perceive the occasional or recurring obstacles they face in their interactions with political parties and their leaders, the electoral justice system, the electorate, and other organizations involved in the electoral process. Our goal is to bring their perspectives and varied experiences of political engagement into view, enabling them to recount their intraparty trajectories, relationships with voters, campaign strategies, and modes of participation in elections.

This study draws on interviews we conducted with eight Black women to examine their trajectories as electoral contenders. Our central question is: based on their own accounts and perceptions, which factors exert the greatest influence on the performance of Black women running for elected office, given the challenges they encounter throughout their political and electoral journeys? The overarching aim is to identify the factors that influence the electoral performance of Black women candidates in legislative races in Brazil⁴. To this end, we conducted in-depth interviews with Black women candidates, including both individual and collective candidacies. These women ran for seats in municipal councils in the 2020 elections across three states in Brazil's Northeast region: Bahia, Ceará, and Pernambuco. Our approach centers on an incursion into the life histories of these women. The sample includes three Black women who ran individually for council seats in Bahia; two Black women who participated in two separate collective candidacies that won seats in municipal councils in Bahia and Ceará; and three Black women who were part of a single collective candidacy that secured a council seat in Pernambuco.

⁴It is important to note that the data used in this study derive from a research consultancy project conducted by the author, which received authorization for the use of this material in an academic publication. Consequently, the interviews are limited to a set of respondents from the Northeast region of Brazil, in line with the scope of the consultancy. Even so, data compiled by Campos and Machado (2022) show a higher concentration of non-white candidacies in the Northeast, a pattern that underscores the prominent role played by Black candidates in the region. For this reason, examining these candidacies is essential for deepening our understanding of Brazilian politics and regional dynamics, particularly in a country as heterogeneous and diverse as Brazil.

Methodological note: on the use of in-depth interviews

As noted earlier, this study is based on six in-depth interviews⁵ with Black women who ran for legislative office in Brazil's Northeast region in 2020. All of the interviewees were affiliated with center-left political parties. And advanced broadly progressive political agendas. The participants were recruited through a snowball sampling strategy: initial contacts with a few candidates allowed us to reach additional women willing to participate. We acknowledge this as a limitation of the study, yet we maintain that the findings still offer meaningful contributions to research on parties and elections, particularly from a qualitative standpoint.

It is also important to note that our group of interviewees is relatively small; however, sampling logic in qualitative research does not follow the same standards as quantitative designs. Our primary goal is to examine the women's accounts in depth and, in doing so, to inspire further research on race and politics. Nonetheless, we recognize that future studies should seek a broader and more diverse range of perspectives when selecting participants⁶.

We used a semi-structured interview guide to explore five key dimensions in our conversations with the participants: their profiles, political trajectories, campaign organization, challenges encountered, and relationships with political parties. Figure 01 presents the interview guide and its main thematic axes.

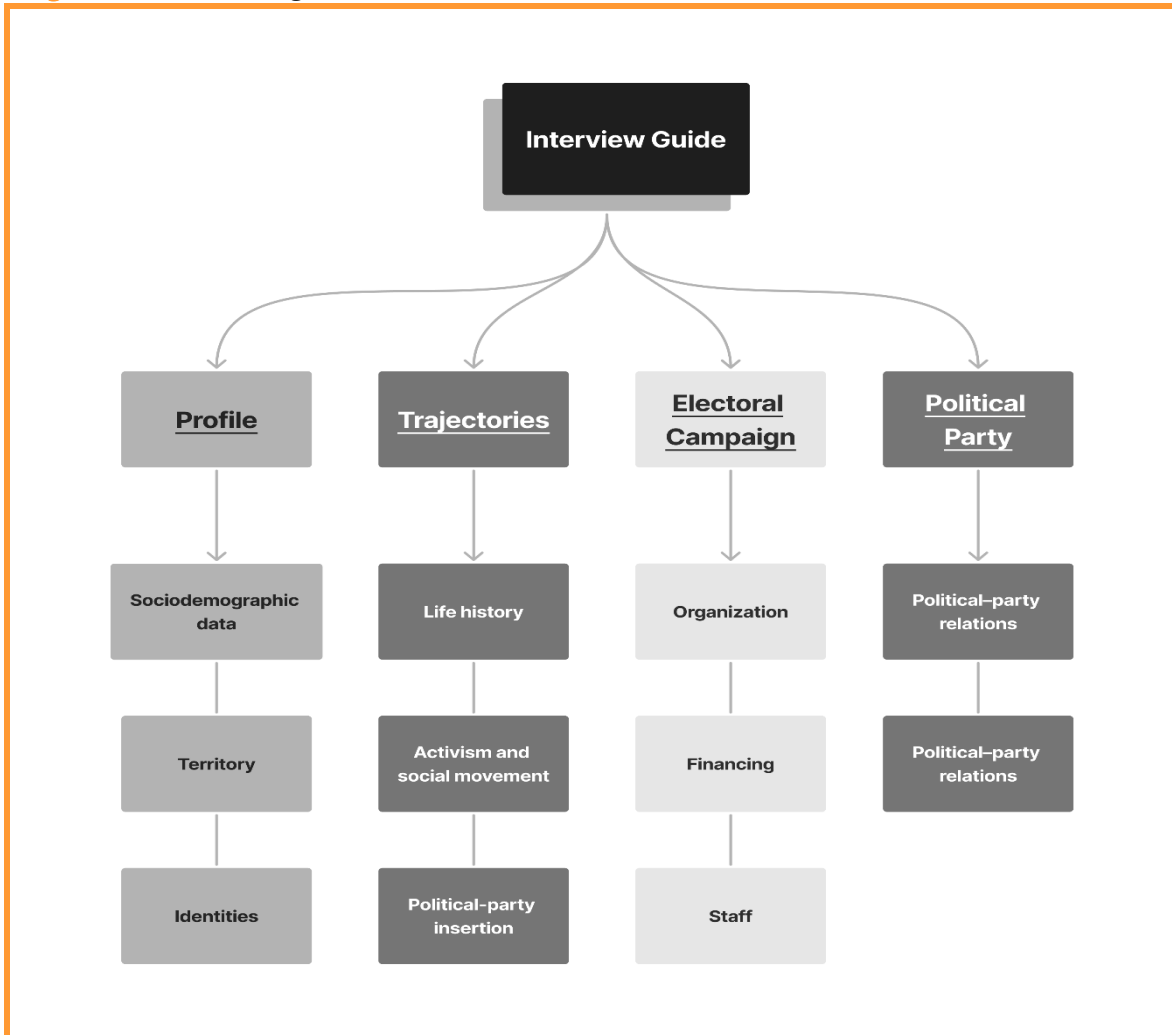
In the first dimension, we collected general sociodemographic information about the interviewees: racial self-identification, age, marital status, and other background characteristics, as well as elements pertaining to territorial belonging and identity. The second dimension focuses on the women's personal and political trajectories. Here, we seek to understand their everyday experiences and life histories, their engagement in activism and social movements, and how these spheres intersect and ultimately contribute to shaping their partisan and institutional careers.

In the third dimension, we investigate how their campaigns were organized and the degree of professionalization involved: from the manufacture of campaign materials and the hiring of staff, to the size of the campaign team and the coordination of fundraising efforts. Finally, we examine political-party relations to understand how these women navigate this aspect of political life, whether in their interactions with their own party organizations and leaders, 'or in' their pathways toward becoming, or seeking to become, elected officials.

⁵We conducted five individual interviews and one group interview with three members of a collective mandate. In total, eight women participated across six interview sessions. All participants signed the Free and Informed Consent Form (TCLE in the Portuguese acronym).

⁶A notable example of large-scale qualitative data collection is the study by Débora Thomé and Malu Gatto (2024), which draws on more than 188 interviews. Nonetheless, the book's analysis focuses exclusively on gender.

Figure 01. Interview guide



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The interviews were conducted remotely via Google Meet and were fully recorded. Beyond the practicality of the platform, the interviews took place during the Covid-19 pandemic, when in-person meetings were still discouraged. After this stage, all interviews were transcribed and imported into Atlas.ti, a software program used for qualitative data analysis.

For the data analysis, we employed thematic content analysis, following Bardin's classic framework (1977). We began with a pre-analysis phase, which involved an initial, open reading of the material and the organization of preliminary impressions. We then undertook a comprehensive review of the dataset, coding contextual units (segments of the interviewees' accounts) into analytical units (key themes). These key themes were constructed by identifying the topics that appeared most frequently and prominently across the interviews. At the conclusion of this exploratory phase, we

reviewed the results and engaged in a systematic process of synthesizing and selecting the key themes.

Finally, we organized our findings into three analytical dimensions that guide the discussion presented in this article: 01. personal and political trajectories; 02. general characteristics of the electoral campaigns; and 03. major challenges reported by the interviewees.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate and map the challenges these women encountered in their campaigns – the obstacles and impasses they identify as potentially affecting their prospects of electoral success. This theme cuts across all the topics addressed in our interviews, spanning both their personal lives and their political-institutional experiences.

We argue that individual action cannot be divorced from political phenomena. In-depth interviews, therefore, serve as an important tool for examining the political-institutional sphere, enabling us to understand the meanings individuals assign to political arenas and events through their lived experience. As Seidman (2006) notes, in-depth interviewing provides access to the context in which individuals act and helps us make sense of their actions, thereby offering valuable insights into social and political issues by examining how individual experiences and personal lives both reflect and mediate broader dynamics.

Who are the candidates? Personal and political trajectories

Table 01 presents a general overview of our interviewees. In this study, we chose to withhold their names to protect their privacy, as the interviews address sensitive and deeply personal issues – including experiences of violence, domestic life, and other intimate matters. As an anonymization strategy, we identify them numerically. While this approach may create some initial confusion for readers and make it less straightforward to distinguish among the women, it is a deliberate choice intended to safeguard their anonymity.

All of the interviewees were affiliated with – and launched their candidacies through – center-left parties (PSB, PSOL, and PT). Half of them were elected, while the other half were not, with three of the women participating in a collective candidacy (the Brazilian model of a collective shared seat). Most of the interviewees also underscored territorial belonging as a central component of their personal and political identities. Although they are all Black women, they use different racial self-descriptions, including ‘Parda’, ‘Negra’, and ‘Preta’⁷. It is also worth noting that the majority are single. Five of

⁷Translator’s note: The IBGE (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics) officially classifies race/color using the categories ‘Preto’ (Black), ‘Pardo’ (Brown/Mixed Race), ‘Branco’, ‘Amarelo’, and ‘Indígena’. In everyday social contexts, however, Brazilians use ‘Preta’, ‘Parda’, and ‘Negra’ in nuanced and overlapping ways to

the women have children, while the remaining three do not. Their professional backgrounds, generational groups, religious affiliations, and sexual orientations are diverse. Finally, we report the interviewees’ ages as of 2020, the year of their electoral campaigns

Table 01. Who are our interviewees?

Interviewee	Party affiliation	Elected?	State where the candidate ran	Racial self-identification	Marital status	Children	Occupation	Age
01	PSOL	No	Bahia	Negra	Single	Yes	Fisherwoman	41
02	PSB	No	Bahia	Negra	Single	No	Educator	48
03	PT	Yes	Pernambuco	Negra	Married	Yes	Teacher and lawyer	36
04	PT	Yes	Pernambuco	Parda	Single	Yes	Teacher and artist	35
05	PT	Yes	Pernambuco	Parda	Single	No	Student	21
06	PSOL	Yes	Ceará	Negra	Divorced	Yes	Social worker	30
07	PSOL	No	Bahia	Negra	Single	No	Teacher	41
08	PSOL	Yes	Bahia	Preta	Cohabiting	Yes	Lawyer	33

Elaborated by the authors.

Personal life and social networks are central to understanding the political trajectories of our interviewees. Scholars have long noted that women’s private individual lives are shaped by public and political forces (PATEMAN, 1993, 1989), encapsulated in the canonical feminist slogan ‘the personal is political’. All of the women we interviewed drew explicit connections between their personal lives and the everyday difficulties that spill over into – and often motivate – their political engagement, which they view as a site of power struggles and potential transformation. Across their accounts, they emphasize how personal experiences steered them toward political life; their lives, they suggest, became politicized. As one interviewee observed, “politics has been part of my life since birth” (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

In our analysis, we seek to understand the meanings that these women assign to their personal experiences and how those experiences shape their political engagement. All of the women trace the beginnings of their political trajectories to their involvement in social movements. Moreover, as they narrate their biographies, they often situate themselves at a threshold where it becomes difficult to differentiate the personal from the political.

describe racial identity. While ‘Preta’ and ‘Parda’ refer to distinct census categories, many people understand ‘Negra’ as a broader, politically grounded term that encompasses both. This helps explain why interviewees may use different expressions (Parda, Preta, or Negra) while all identifying themselves, and being recognized in this study, as Black women.

Interviewee 01 is a fisherwoman and shellfish harvester. She explained that her involvement in her professional association led her to reflect on environmental racism. Her activism began early in life and she was always rooted in social movements and in her home territory, Ilha de Maré. Known as a 'waters territory' and home to a predominantly Black population, the region played a crucial role in shaping her understanding of the relationship between racism and the environment. She often referred to her campaign as a 'campaign of the waters', grounded in quilombola, environmentalist, and antiracist narratives. Her interview was permeated by a strong sense of territorial belonging, which she identifies as fundamental to the formation of her Black identity. Her political trajectory, in turn, is deeply intertwined with this identity, which she understands as both personal and collective:

(...) the first Black woman, fisherwoman, and quilombola who set out to represent the Islands. I was the first person to step forward and contribute something more to the Islands and to run in the city of Salvador. (...) It's not someone from the outside bringing things in, right? We are the ones bringing things in from the outside, because we are the ones who live this reality, who understand what environmental racism is. (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 01, 2021).

Interviewee 02 also emphasized the importance of territorial belonging for her political agency, noting that it was through everyday life in her neighborhood that she first became involved in politics. She stated that she often used the sports court in Cosme de Farias to play soccer. Over time, the sport became the foundation for her community leisure activities and, later, for her political activism with women and girls in her neighborhood and nearby areas. She recounted that women's soccer created a space of sociability among local residents. This environment fostered her early entry into political life, at just fourteen years old, when she organized young people in her community to discuss issues such as teenage pregnancy, drug use, sports, and women's soccer.

She noted that her work eventually attracted the attention of a city councilor, who invited her to serve as an aide because of her strong ties to the community. She explained that she was able to organize and secure votes by acting as a campaign worker in the neighborhood. Even so, she emphasized that her political development was shaped primarily social movements, especially the Black movement and Black women's activism.

Interviewee 06 also anchors her political trajectory in the territory where she grew up. She began her political life in local community movements and in struggles for housing. She explained that her mother's house flooded every year, leaving her family dependent on public authorities – an experience that brought her into contact with state institutions at an early age. The Public Prosecutor's Office and state social assistance services were the main institutions she interacted with. She grew up in Lagamar, a community in downtown Fortaleza (within the neighborhood of São João do Tauape) that has long faced pressure from real estate speculation. Lagamar is

designated as a ZEIS (Special Zone of Social Interest), a classification applied to public or private land where the priority is to regularize consolidated low-income settlements and to develop social housing and affordable housing programs.

Given the particular conditions of the territory where she was born and still lives, housing struggles and urban policy issues have been a part of her life since an early age. As she put it, “I was basically drawn into the struggle out of necessity” (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021). It is the territory – and the conditions of that territory – that first propelled her toward politics. Yet it is a form of politics grounded in community life, in which belonging and family connections assume a central role.

Interviewees 03, 04, 05, 07, and 08 also underscored how their trajectories braid together the personal. And the political, and how their involvement in social movements shaped the early stages of their political engagement. In contrast to the accounts discussed above, however, territorial identity does not appear as prominently in their narratives. Another important element is the influence of Marielle Franco on many of these women: her assassination and her legacy inspired several interviewees to run for office in institutional politics. Most of them emphasized how initiatives associated with the former councilwoman – such as the Fórum Nacional Marielles⁸ – played a meaningful role in their decision to begin building a candidacy. This development is also key to understanding their initial entry into party politics.

The interviewees’ accounts reveal a clear convergence between personal and political trajectories: the challenges of everyday life, the territories they inhabit, and their social networks all played a role in drawing them toward political engagement. In this regard, all of them began their political involvement through participation in social movements – whether housing movements, student organizations, Black movements, or women’s movements.

What ultimately led these women to build a political career within a party and to run as candidates, however, unfolded along two distinct pathways. In the first, some interviewees decided to run for office after their experience with the Fórum Nacional Marielles, and only then opted to join a political party. In the second, their candidacies emerged more organically from their sustained activism in grassroots social movements and within political parties.

In the first group, comprising Interviewees 06 and 07, the turn toward party politics occurred through the Fórum Nacional Marielles and the need to join a party in order to build a viable candidacy. They recount that this moment was decisive both for their

⁸The Fórum Nacional Marielles is a permanent organization focused on political capacity-building and empowerment, created through the collaboration of multiple institutions within Black women’s movements. The Fórum was founded on March 14, 2019, following a gathering held both to honor and to protest the assassination of Marielle Franco, which had taken place on the same date in 2018. It operates as a network of Black feminist organizations committed to providing support for the political education and political accompaniment of Black women.

decision to run for office and for becoming formally affiliated with a political party. For these interviewees, party activism occupies only a marginal place in their political lives. The party operates primarily as a means – or a tool – for constructing a candidacy. Some had no prior contact with any political party before encountering the Fórum. They also express a degree of aversion to party structures, which they describe as rigid and hostile environments.

I was never affiliated with a political party. I only joined in 2019 because of the election, but I had never been interested in party politics, especially because, living in a neighborhood on the urban periphery, we have many... many criticisms of that kind of party model. At the same time, my own community felt the need for someone who could speak for the territory. So, when I joined the PSOL here in Ceará, I did so collectively with other Black women, making it clear that we were there to build a collective process, and not to simply obey, you know?
(ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

In the second group, Interviewees 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, and 08 began their journeys into political life through social movements before moving into party politics. Interviewee 02 explained that she worked as an aide to a city councilor because of her strong ties to the neighborhood where she lived, an experience that sparked her interest in institutional politics. Through her work, she came into contact with Sindoméstico⁹ and with Black leftist politicians, which led her to join the Workers' Party (PT), although she ultimately ran as a candidate for the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB).

Interviewees 03, 04, and 05 likewise began their political trajectories in social movements before affiliating with the PT. These women, specifically, placed much greater emphasis on the party and were actively involved in party activism as well as in navigating and contesting its internal structures. Interviewee 08 noted that her involvement in student movements brought her closer to the PT, where she began her party activism, although she later left the party and joined the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL).

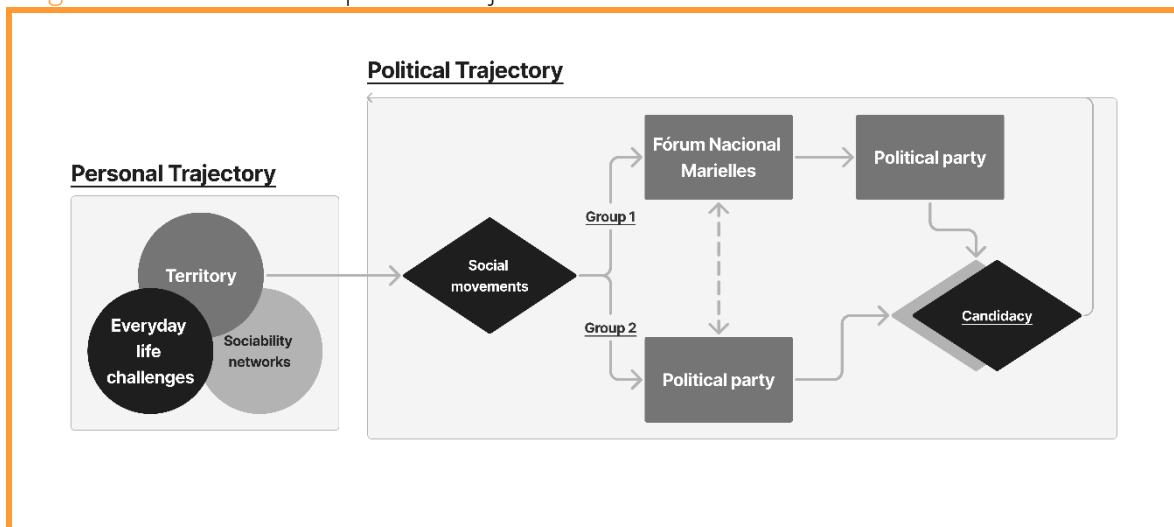
For several of the interviewees, the legacy of Marielle Franco and the Fórum Nacional Marielles played a decisive role in prompting them to run for office. Interviewees 01, 02, and 08 chose to enter the electoral arena only after participating in activities organized by the Fórum.

Figure 02 presents an overview of the processes discussed above. Broadly speaking, the interviewees' personal trajectories play a defining role in how they explain their political trajectories. They identify the challenges of daily life, the territories they inhabit, and their social networks as the initial points of connection to the political sphere – elements that, in their accounts, first led them to become involved in social movements.

⁹Domestic Workers' Union of the State of Bahia.

At that stage, some went on to join political parties and chose to pursue their careers as candidates. Others came into contact with the Fórum Nacional Marielles, where they took part in a process of political training and subsequently decided to run as candidates. For those for whom the Fórum served as the entry point into a political career, party affiliation came later: the decision to launch a candidacy preceded the choice of party.

Figure 02. Personal and political trajectories of the interviewees



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The electoral campaign process: general characteristics

Across the interviewees' accounts, several recurring patterns emerge – particularly in how their electoral campaigns were organized. First of all, limited financial resources meant that their campaigns operated with a low degree of professionalization. In addition, the majority of these women did not hold influential positions within their parties and, in some cases, were not even integrated into the party apparatus at all, a significant limitation given that access to internal party structures and positions plays a decisive role in shaping one's ability to obtain campaign resources.

The interviewees reported having few – and in many cases none at all – paid staff responsible for specialized tasks such as advising, marketing, media production, or distributing campaign materials. Even so, they emphasized that this did not compromise the overall quality of their campaigns. Their support networks – family members, friends, activists, social movements, and the Fórum Nacional Marielles – were instrumental in mobilizing people with the expertise needed to handle different aspects of campaign planning and execution. Still, this labor was predominantly voluntary and often sustained by strong political and ideological commitment.

In this regard, support networks run through every stage of these women's political trajectories and assume a particularly significant role once they enter party politics. All of the interviewees emphasized that without these networks – and without the backing of organizations and social movements – their electoral campaigns would not have been feasible. Interviewee 01, for example, described her campaign as fundamentally collaborative: the limited funds available covered only basic expenses such as transportation and meals, while a large share of the campaign work was carried out by volunteers. Interviewee 02 reported a similar experience, compounded by the fact that her party provided no financial support at all. She likewise depended on volunteer labor to initiate and sustain her campaign. It is important to highlight that ideological alignment was central in both cases: the interviewees were committed to a broader transformative political project, one that resonated with activists and social movements, which enabled them to assemble and mobilize their support networks.

Our interviewees fit the profile of emerging political leaders whose backgrounds lie in social movements – whether neighborhood-based, women's, feminist, LGBTQIA+, religious, among others – where ties to political parties are typically loose. Although some are engaged in efforts to navigate and influence party structures, their political efforts remain primarily rooted in social movements and other civil society organizations. Most of the women underscored that parties make limited investments in Black women's candidacies, as reflected in the minimal – or, at times, entirely absent – transfer of financial resources, the lack of backing from party factions and prominent party figures, and the often-hostile dynamics of intra-party competition, all of which further distance them from party life.

Even so, three of the candidacies – particularly the collective-candidacy candidates who ultimately won their races – demonstrated notable skill and know-how in mobilizing support through social media and online platforms. The candidates also stressed that, despite these barriers, they succeeded in mobilizing voters:

Oh! I honestly didn't expect to get that many votes, or even the campaign itself. It was... really, such a beautiful campaign. People wanted to make it shine. The campaign brought attention to an issue that was pressing in the city of Salvador, an issue many people had never heard about, and it was led by a Black woman – the first Black woman, a quilombola fisherwoman representing the Islands. I was the first person to step forward and try to bring more visibility to the Islands and to run in a city as large as Salvador. I took that chance, and when I saw the number of votes – me, a woman – winning across the whole Suburbana and all the polling stations in Salvador (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 01, 2021).

Another notable feature of these campaigns is the high level of associational engagement: most of these women are active across multiple political arenas and maintain strong ties to social movements. As the interviewees emphasized, the work of activists and social movement organizations was essential to advancing their

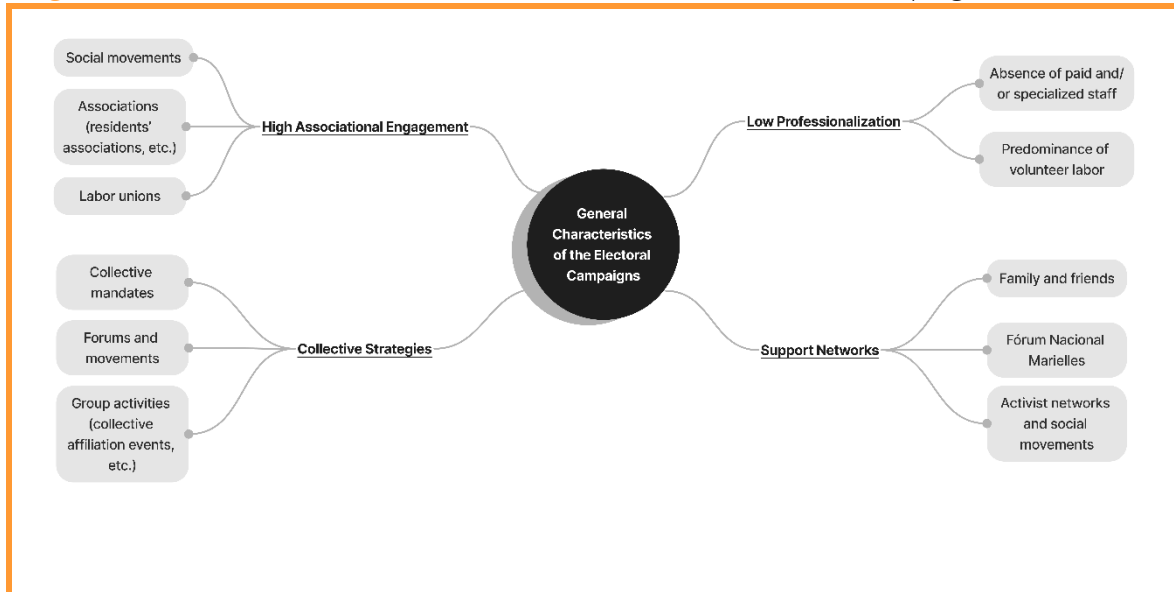
candidacies, often providing the volunteer labor needed to carry out campaign activities. Closely related to this is a strong preference for collective action strategies. Many of these women chose to launch their political careers in collaboration with other Black women. A clear example is the collective affiliation events – such as those attended by Interviewees 01 and 07 – in which groups of Black women joined the PSOL together.

Furthermore, five of the eight interviewees participated in collective mandates. Their preference for this model reflects not only a strategy for pooling votes and resources, but also a way to share the financial and emotional burdens involved.

And then we realized, “This is the model that makes the most sense for us, because we won’t be there alone – we’ll be there as a collective, and that will strengthen us if we’re elected.” After all, it’s an environment that is extremely challenging and often hostile, so having just one of us in there wouldn’t be enough; we needed more than one of us (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

This particular dimension of the candidacies reflects not only the personal and political trajectories of these women but also the influence of the Fórum Nacional Marielles. Bringing together a collective of Black women proved essential to their processes of empowerment and political organization. In addition to providing political training and education, the Fórum helped cultivate a shared understanding of collective action among Black women committed to transforming politics. All of the interviewees reported that the Fórum both encouraged them to consider running for office and sparked their interest in developing collective campaigns and collective mandates led by Black women. Figure 03 presents a map of these dynamics.

Figure 03. General characteristics of the interviewees' electoral campaigns



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The challenges faced: accounts and perceptions

The interviewees' narratives also enabled us to map the challenges they confronted in their bids for elected office, as presented in Figure 04. Six challenges stood out as especially recurrent and consequential: difficulties securing campaign funds and the resulting strains on their personal lives; fraught relationships with political parties; mental health concerns; racial and gender-based violence; limited familiarity with legal and electoral rules; and, finally, the added burden of balancing paid work with campaign demands.

Some of these difficulties are, to some extent, expected – limited campaign funding among them (CAMPOS and MACHADO, 2022; CAMPOS et al., 2020; COSTA et al., 2013; SACCHET, 2020; SACCHET and SPECK, 2012a, 2012b). Other issues, however, point to areas that merit closer scholarly attention, such as the friction between personal life demands and the demands of pursuing a career in party politics, experiences of psychological distress, and related forms of strain. Examining the challenges identified by these women is therefore crucial for opening new lines of inquiry and for advancing our understanding of the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women – and, more specifically, Black women – in politics.

Figure 04. Map of the identified challenges



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The first – and most consequential – challenge centers on financial resources: all of the interviewees reported receiving little to no funding from their parties, partly because some of their candidacies were not considered priorities¹⁰.

So today, after having gone through all of that, after what was a remarkable campaign, despite having no support from the party (...) when I didn't have a single

¹⁰To illustrate this issue with data from the Superior Electoral Court (TSE) – while preserving the anonymity of the interviewees – in 2020, in the same municipality where one of the candidates we interviewed ran for office, a male candidate for city council received roughly twenty-two times more party-fund resources than she did, even though both were members of the same party. He went on to win his election, while the interviewee did not.

banner to hang on my own door, I couldn't get one to hang up in Engenho Velho da Federação, couldn't get one in Cosme de Farias. Even so, we received nearly 1,300 votes, and I believe those were votes of conscience. We received votes across all 19 electoral zones in Salvador. Every single one – 235, 20, 30, 50. We had votes everywhere. And that tells me we have a place out there, right? What we lack is visibility. What we lack is political support from the party, which doesn't back us, doesn't treat us as a priority, and only sees us as useful for doing their get-out-the-vote work (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 02, 2021).

Interviewees 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, and 07 reported that the lack of financial resources was one of the main challenges they confronted in mounting their campaigns. All of them pointed to insufficient funds for basic expenses such as hiring staff, transportation, food, and even campaign materials. As discussed earlier, many relied on volunteer work from activists and supporters who made up their broader support networks. Interviewee 02 explained that she received no financial support from the party – only small donations – and therefore relied heavily on her support networks¹¹: “My campaign was financed by my friends (...) I didn't have a single banner to put on my door” (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 02, 2021).

Interviewees 03, 04, and 05 reported receiving financial support only from internal party committees¹² dedicated to advancing the political participation of minoritized groups. Interviewee 03 also noted that she relied on her own resources to cover most of her campaign expenses. Taken together, these accounts highlight a challenge extensively documented in the literature: the persistent underfunding of women's candidacies, particularly those of Black women, as reflected in the difficulties the interviewees described.

Interviewee 06, in turn, reported that she initially received only limited financial support from the party. However, disputes involving collective candidacies and the Regional Electoral Court (TRE) in several states drew media attention, and this visibility – together with the Supreme Federal Court ruling encouraging increased funding for Black candidates – led to a marked rise in her campaign resources¹³. This boost proved decisive in the final 15 days of the campaign, allowing the candidacy to reach every part of the city and ultimately contributing to its electoral victory.

¹¹We note that although most legislative candidacies are sub-competitive and receive limited resources or votes, the study by Campos et al. (2020) on the 2018 legislative elections shows that women's candidacies were overrepresented among sub-competitive campaigns – a pattern that underscores the gendered inequalities shaping electoral competition.

¹²Currently, the Workers' Party (PT) allocates resources to its sectoral secretariats, which then decide which candidacies will be prioritized for funding. In the case of the collective mandate included in our study, for example, the candidates received resources from three different secretariats: LGBTQIA+, Women, and Black Women.

¹³In 2020, the Regional Electoral Court of Ceará (TRE-CE) objected to the collective candidacy because of the name it used; the slate was ultimately approved once the lead candidate's first name was incorporated into the collective name. The councilwoman also references the 2020 decision of the Supreme Federal Court (STF), which upheld an injunction issued by Justice Ricardo Lewandowski in ADPF 738, requiring the application of incentives for Black candidates in that year's municipal elections.

Our campaign was especially challenging because, on the very day we launched it, we immediately received a notice from the TRE seeking to disqualify our candidacy. We went public with the campaign, and almost immediately there was an attempt to invalidate it. (...) Our name quickly began appearing in every newspaper because of this effort to block the collective candidacy, which was part of a broader push against the collective model of political organizing. We began the campaign with extremely limited resources (...) the amount available was insufficient for a collective candidacy – insufficient for any candidacy, really. So, we started out aware that we might not be able to accomplish much. (...) In the final stretch of the campaign, the Supreme Federal Court ruled requiring parity in funding between white and Black candidates, which led to a substantial increase in our campaign resources. (...) The final 15 days of the campaign were decisive. With the sudden influx of funds, we were able to reach the entire city. (...) The last 15 days were decisive for our victory, and I genuinely doubt that, without the Supreme Court's decision, we would have been elected, because we would not have been able to reach voters across the city with the same strength. Another important boost came when our candidacy was officially approved just 10 days before the election. Once again, we appeared in newspapers throughout the city, which gave the campaign positive momentum. What we could not achieve through TV airtime, we achieved through media coverage announcing – across local and even national outlets – that our candidacy had been approved. So, it was really, really positive for us... that kind of visibility (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

Lastly, Interviewee 08, by contrast, reported that financing was not an obstacle for her candidacy. She attributed this to a national resolution issued by the PSOL prioritizing the candidacies of Black women, which she viewed as essential to the level of funding her collective candidacy received and to their subsequent election to the Municipal Council. In this regard, the candidates who were able to overcome the challenge of securing campaign resources were those who ultimately benefited from last-minute changes in party rules, particularly measures designed to strengthen the candidacies of minoritized groups.

(...) There was also a national resolution issued by the PSOL, in which the party laid out which kinds of candidacies would be prioritized for directing campaign resources – not only through the electoral fund, but also through TV airtime and so on. The priority categories were women, Black candidates, LGBTQ+ people, and people with disabilities, and it wasn't "either you get funding as a woman or you get funding as a Black person." They were cumulative. I said, "People, we're going to be rich! This is the first time I've ever felt any kind of historical reparation from this party." And the funding we received ended up being really significant in that process (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 08, 2021).

Most of the interviewees reported receiving very little in the way of financial support from their parties, with the exception of the two collective candidacies from the PSOL, which were also elected. The literature has long established a strong association between campaign financing and electoral success (CARAZZA, 2018; CERVI, 2010;

DESCHAMPS et al., 2021; SAMUELS, 2001, among others), as well as a persistent gap between the resources allocated to male and female candidates (ARAÚJO and BORGES, 2012; SACCHET and SPECK, 2012a, 2012b). The interviewees themselves emphasized this disparity: “Just so you have an idea, there were councilors here who spent half a million reais. What we spent to get elected, people said it was a surprise, that no one had ever been elected spending so little” (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 03, 2021).

Overall, the interviewees perceived that their parties did not make their campaigns a financial priority, which created setbacks not only for their electoral performance but also for their personal lives, as they needed to draw on their own resources or seek donations and support from their personal networks¹⁴.

Another significant challenge, also tied to the scarcity of resources, is the difficulty these women face in dedicating themselves fully to their political careers. The need to take leave from work in order to run for office – and, in some cases, the requirement to resign entirely for those employed in the public sector (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 02 and 07, 2021) – left them in situations of uncertainty and material strain.

(...) I had to resign from my job so I could run, and for three months I had no income at all while I tried to negotiate with the party. I told them, “I’m going to drop out,” and only then did they say, “No, no,” that they were interested, that they needed the numbers. “We’re going to support you, here’s your share,” and that’s when they finally started helping me. After that, I received some money to cover my rent and take care of the child I’m raising, my niece, whom I’ve taken care of since she was little; she’s ten now. They started giving me an amount that didn’t match my salary, but it was something, and I could pay my rent. But it was really tough (...) (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 02, 2021).

In this context, indebtedness emerges as a problem directly tied to the scarcity or absence of resources – both for sustaining a campaign and for maintaining full-time engagement in political work. Sacchet and Speck (2012b), in their study of the 2010 Brazilian general elections, showed that women were overrepresented among candidates with no declared assets and underrepresented among those who reported owning assets. Campos and Machado (2015), examining Black candidates for city council in the 2012 elections in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, similarly found that these candidates possessed fewer assets than their white counterparts. Moreover, the gap between white and nonwhite candidates widens at the upper levels of wealth

¹⁴Concentrating resources on a small number of competitive campaigns – rather than distributing them more broadly, especially among first-time candidates – is a defensible strategy from a rational electoral perspective, as it seeks to maximize electoral gains. However, the racial and gender inequalities at the ‘top of the pyramid’ of electoral competition reveal how multiple mechanisms create barriers for women and Black candidates as they attempt to build viable political careers. Symbolic, economic, material, cultural, and other forms of resources can play a critical role in shaping a candidate’s political visibility. For this reason, our study highlights additional dimensions that – beyond campaign financing – can be decisive in the success or failure of these candidacies, underscoring the need for more in-depth research grounded in fieldwork.

and education, where inequality becomes most visible ‘at the top of the pyramid’. These socioeconomic inequalities constrain women’s entry into electoral competition because, beyond campaign financing, candidates require some level of financial and material support to sustain their livelihoods outside of politics, including ensuring their own subsistence in the event they are not elected.

This issue also ties to another major challenge raised by the interviewees: mental health. Although discussion of this topic within political science remains incipient, Gomes Neto et al. (2024), drawing on interviews with women active in political arenas, likewise emphasize that mental health is a recurring concern for many of them – one that can ultimately affect their ability to run for office.

(...) I saw friends who, in the middle of the campaign, ended up developing psychological disorders. And there are women who are still struggling, because a campaign is extremely demanding, right? If you don’t have proper support, if you can’t keep yourself grounded until the end, it’s hard to get through it. So what happens to these women? What do we think about when it comes to what comes after the campaign? For example, finding work becomes harder for people who ran. That’s a real burden for the women who took the risk, left their jobs, and sometimes didn’t win. How do they go back? How do they support themselves? There are all these repercussions that throw things off balance and create all kinds of anxiety (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 01, 2021).

The interviews point to the possibility of adverse psychological effects in these women’s lives after the campaign – affecting not only their financial situation but also their personal lives. Beyond the uncertainty that comes with the substantial investment required to mount a campaign – with no clear prospect of return – psychological distress also stems from experiences of violence during the campaign itself. Interviewees 03, 04, and 05 described the insults and attacks they were subjected to on social media. Interviewee 01 likewise noted that the public exposure involved in becoming a political figure brought her additional strain:

How can I put this... I’m going through a very difficult moment in my life, and these past few days have been especially tough because of the political persecution and attacks I’ve been dealing with. So, this really has a lot to do with what we’re talking about. You end up feeling a bit disoriented, you know? You realize how much all of this affects your everyday life. (...) And then you hear people say, “Why did you even get involved in party politics if you’re living like this now? Your life is at risk, your family’s life is at risk.” (...) (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 01, 2021).

Gender-based violence in politics has also been extensively examined in the literature (BARDALL, BJARNEGÅRD, and PISCOPO, 2020; KROOK and SANÍN, 2020, 2016). That said, intersectional perspectives that incorporate race alongside gender remain underdeveloped in the field. In this regard, Ruth Kuperberg (2018) underscores that women may experience violence in political arenas rooted not only in gender, but also in racial identity, sexuality, religion, and other factors.

The forms of violence described by the interviewees are likewise deeply intertwined with racism, which affects not only their mental health but also their prospects in electoral competition. All of them, without exception, recounted episodes of racial and/or gender-based violence during their campaigns:

You have no idea what it was like to be out on the street handing out flyers and being called “monkey,” or seeing people take our campaign materials, toss them in the trash, crumple them, and throw them back at us, or being threatened with assault in the street. And there were men confronting us, and white people who were helping distribute our materials being asked, “Why are white people working for three monkeys?” There was lesbophobia – so much of it. So much... We went through a lot of gender-based violence, including death threats, during the campaign and even right after we were elected. It was incredibly hard to run that campaign (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

On top of the challenges experienced during the campaign, this issue also manifests in the interviewees’ interactions with their political parties and with institutional structures, where many perceived a strong sense of hostility. One of the clearest expressions of this tension is the multiple workloads these women must shoulder: combining motherhood and domestic responsibilities with political work is extremely taxing and often burdensome. Interviewees 03, 04, and 05, for example, underscored that party and institutional environments are poorly equipped to accommodate the needs and demands that motherhood places on women.

My son was there at 11:30 at night. Garanhuns gets pretty cold, and that night there had been a real cold snap – it was raining, foggy, damp. So I said, “Let’s try to wrap this up; it’s already really late. I’m here with my son and my partner, and we go to bed early because of the baby.” And then one of the party colleagues said, “Well, you can’t make an omelet without breaking a few eggs” – something like that. And I replied, “Easy for you to say. You don’t have children, you’re not a woman, you’re not the one carrying all this pressure.” Easy for him to say that. A six-month-old baby waiting there, and another child, about nine years old, waiting for her mother at home, and he acted like that was completely normal. And that was just one of the sexist things he said. And on top of it all, it’s cruel to say something like that with a six-month-old baby right there, or with children involved at all. And one was at home and one was there, and, you know, some people are going to have to suffer more, let’s put it that way. And who suffers? The mother and the child. The mothers and the children, right? They’re the ones who end up suffering the most. That was one of the examples (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 04, 2021).

The burden a woman carries when she tries to enter politics is enormous. That was my reality: I could spend the entire day out campaigning, but when I got home I still had two daughters to care for, and a household to manage, because I never stopped being the one responsible for everything at home. Even when you’re not

in elected office, you still have your responsibilities as a mother and as the person who keeps the household going, right? (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

For this reason, the relationship with the political party is also a fraught one. Experiences of invisibility, perceptions of hostility, and, in some cases, limited familiarity with party structures all contribute to the difficulty of establishing oneself within this environment. For interviewees 03, 04, and 05, even though they were more embedded in their parties, holding positions and serving in internal committees, their accounts describe persistent tensions with fellow party members. Interviewee 08 similarly noted the difficulty of finding meaningful opportunities to play a prominent role within the party. Interviewee 02 also reported a sense of hostility in her intraparty interactions, along with feelings of isolation in her attempts to engage in party activities. This perception of a hostile environment also emerges in interviews conducted by Gomes Neto et al. (2024) with women active in politics – often tied to the idea that this is still “a space built by men for men” (GOMES NETO et al., 2024, p. 10).

“The [political parties] don’t see us as people who can be part of the conversation or help shape public policies for our communities. We’re not treated as a priority; we don’t have the opportunities inside the parties that would give us real visibility (...)” (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 02, 2021).

“(...) That’s one of the challenges, when the party doesn’t acknowledge you, when they show up at the last minute, offering minimal support and say, “Look, this is all I can do”, and then cancel a meeting you already had scheduled! That’s what political invisibility looks like for Black women, right?” (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 07, 2021).

In addition, Interviewees 06 and 07 discussed the difficulty of securing resources within the party. They noted that their candidacies, and those of other Black women, are not treated as priorities and receive only minimal financial backing, preventing their campaigns from becoming fully competitive. This dynamic pushes them further away from the possibility of sustaining an active political career within their parties and intensifies their perceptions of hostility:

The truth is that our candidacy was never a priority for the party. We heard more than once, even from the party’s own executive committee, that we would never be elected, that we would simply help elect the white candidates in the party. But there was never a direct confrontation, nothing like, “Listen, you’re not going to run with the PSOL.” That never happened. In fact, the PSOL thanked us for joining the party and choosing it as the place to carry out our political project. There was a lot of support, but behind the scenes we still had to fight to secure the funding we were legally entitled to (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 06, 2021).

Despite their political and ideological alignment with the party, the most significant challenges arose in the day-to-day work of campaigning and in navigating – and

competing within – the party's internal structures, including its factions¹⁵ and leadership networks. As Interviewee 01 exclaimed to her team of volunteer assistants, "You all managed to get blood from a stone". Making a political candidacy genuinely competitive is difficult for women, who are often positioned at the base of the electoral pyramid and tend to receive few, if any, votes (CAMPOS et al., 2020). In this context, the racial dimension further intensifies these barriers. As Campos and Machado (2022) show, inequality between white and non-white candidates becomes even more pronounced at the upper tiers of electoral competition: between 70% and 80% of candidates for federal and municipal legislatures have virtually no chance of being elected.

Another important issue, raised by Interviewee 01, concerns the challenges that stemmed from her limited experience with electoral campaigns and her unfamiliarity with election law. She noted that complying with the legal requirements throughout the campaign proved particularly difficult. The lack of legal and accounting expertise – or access to professionals who could provide such support – can complicate campaign finance reporting and create other problems that lead to concrete setbacks for these women. This underscores the need for further research on genuinely 'first-time' candidates.

Existing studies, such as Araújo and Borges (2013), indicate that women typically enter electoral politics with less prior experience in public office than men. Moreover, they also tend to have shorter periods of party affiliation (ARAÚJO and BORGES, 2013). In a similar vein, other interviewees described feeling out of place within party structures and internal dynamics. Their limited exposure to party organizations and to electoral processes – both because they had not held party positions or worked on previous campaigns – functions as an additional barrier to their integration into parties and political institutions. This dynamic is further shaped by the fact that many of these women have built their political trajectories primarily through social movements and other civil society organizations, rather than through traditional party channels.

We were really fumbling at the beginning. There were things we were allowed to do but didn't realize we could, and when something wasn't allowed, we would just stall. I did receive a lot of support, but everything felt so new. I genuinely didn't know how most of it worked. (...) There were also moments when we avoided using certain campaign funds because we were afraid it might look improper. For example, we were told we couldn't post flyers on utility poles, so we didn't. But whenever we came back, the poles were covered with other candidates' posters. There were so many small things we assumed were prohibited... like wearing the campaign T-shirt. I remember being told we couldn't wear it. Then, on election day, people showed up in the shirt, and suddenly a message went out saying it wasn't allowed. Everyone started shouting, "Take off the shirt, take off the shirt!"

¹⁵'Tendências' and 'correntes' – the original Portuguese expressions commonly used to describe the ideological factions within the Workers' Party (PT) and the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) – refer to internal party groups that maintain a degree of political and ideological autonomy and compete for leadership within the party.

because it could jeopardize the campaign. So there were these funny things we did that ended up being learning experiences, and the T-shirt one was especially funny: suddenly everyone was scrambling around because “you can’t, you can’t!” It was actually really funny. It’s all been part of the learning process for future campaigns (ANONYMOUS INTERVIEW 01, 2021).

To conclude, our findings point to a series of obstacles these women confront over the course of their political trajectories and in their efforts to mount a viable, competitive candidacy. Some were successful; others were not. Their relationship with the political party stands out as a central factor in understanding many of the challenges they described. At the same time, other dimensions – largely overlooked in the existing literature – also matter, including multiple work shifts, mental health, employment conditions, and indebtedness.

Although our pool of interviewees is limited, which may be viewed as a limitation of the study, it nonetheless allowed us to examine these women’s trajectories and experiences in considerable depth. We believe, therefore, that our analysis can help open up new and important conversations about the underrepresentation of historically marginalized groups in political institutions, underscoring the value of qualitative approaches for understanding the dynamics that shape this phenomenon.

Concluding remarks

Scholarship in the Social Sciences identifies a range of factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women and non-white candidates in electoral politics in Brazil and other contemporary democracies (ARAÚJO, 2010; CAMPOS and MACHADO, 2022, 2015; COSTA et al., 2013; HARDY-FANTA et al., 2016; SACCHET, 2020, 2012). A combination of behavioral, institutional, and contextual variables plays a role in shaping both the participation of women and non-white individuals and their chances of electoral success. Our study is positioned within this broader literature and seeks to advance it by offering a qualitative analysis of the factors that influence the electoral prospects of Black women in Brazilian municipal politics.

Through in-depth interviews, we sought to capture the narratives and perceptions of our interlocutors in order to examine their political trajectories and the challenges they encountered during the electoral process. The interviews were organized around four central themes: 01. the interviewees’ profiles; 02. their trajectories; 03. their campaign experiences; and 04. their relationships with political parties. The interviewees were Black women affiliated with center-left parties – Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB), Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL), Workers’ Party (PT) – all of whom were single and mothers. Their political trajectories are shaped by the everyday difficulties they navigate, the social networks they rely on, and the territories they inhabit. They also draw inspiration from Marielle Franco and from movements rooted in Black women’s political organizing, which serve as important points of reference. Finally,

social movements serve as the entry point for all the interviewees' activism and political engagement.

Regarding these women's engagement with party organizations, the first group – five of the interviewees – began their political trajectories in social movements. Only later became affiliated with political parties. Their candidacies developed as a natural extension of their existing activism within those movements and, eventually, within party structures. The second group – three interviewees – also started out in social movements, but in their case, party affiliation functioned more explicitly as a strategic tool for building a viable electoral candidacy.

Across both groups, the experience of building their campaigns reveals several shared patterns. All of the interviewees described precarious working conditions, substantial hurdles, and episodes of hostility throughout the campaign – an effort they themselves likened to 'getting blood out of a stone'. Four themes consistently recur across their accounts: 01. high levels of associational engagement, reflected in sustained involvement in social movements, unions, and other organizations; 02. low levels of campaign professionalization, characterized by the absence of paid or specialized staff and a heavy dependence on volunteer labor; 03. a strong preference for collective strategies – opting for collective mandates, participation in forums and social movements, and group-based activities such as coordinated party affiliations; 04. the central role of support networks in campaign development, encompassing family members, friends, social movements, forums, and activist networks.

Finally, their accounts underscore a range of challenges they faced in their efforts to run for elected office. These include: 01. limited financial resources – insufficient party funding, post-campaign debt, and the need to take leave from paid employment; 02. pressures on mental health – difficulties stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and threats or insults received during the electoral period; 03. strained relationships within party organizations – lack of support from party leadership and barriers to their integration into party dynamics; 04. multiple and overlapping work responsibilities – the challenge of balancing political and electoral commitments with motherhood and domestic labor; 05. racial and gender-based violence across different spheres of political activity – within parties, during the campaign, and in interpersonal interactions; and 06. limited familiarity with legal and electoral regulations, which are essential to building and managing a campaign effectively.

In this study, we set out to examine these women's perspectives and to understand how they situate themselves within, observe, and navigate the political–electoral arena, as well as how they make sense of it. Their accounts allow us to see how personal and political life are intertwined in ways that both propel their political trajectories and reveal the difficulties embedded in their everyday experiences. While their narratives resonate with existing research on the political underrepresentation of women and Black Brazilians, our qualitative approach enables us to identify

additional layers of the challenges they face – particularly those related to mental health, motherhood, and experiences of violence.

With this study, we sought not only to contribute to scholarship on the candidacies of Black women, but also to advance the use of qualitative methods in Political Science research on parties and elections. In this regard, in-depth interviews prove to be a valuable tool for capturing, ‘in situ’, the dynamics of electoral politics and the ways these women navigate and position themselves within that world.

Translated by Paulo Scarpa

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Appendix

Following the guidelines proposed by Aguinis and Solarino (2019)¹⁶, this document aims to increase the transparency of the present study and thereby contribute to the replicability of scientific research that employs qualitative methods. Below, we provide detailed information on the data collection and analysis procedures, in accordance with the criteria outlined by the authors (Chart 01).

Chart 01. Guidelines proposed by Aguinis and Solarino

Qualitative method employed	The study employed qualitative methods to collect and analyze primary data obtained through semi-structured interviews.
Sampling procedures	Participants were selected through convenience sampling using a snowball recruitment strategy in Brazil's Northeast region. The data used in this study originate from a research consulting project conducted by the author, who obtained authorization to use the material for the publication of a scientific article on this topic. As a result, the scope of the interviews is limited to a small number of participants from the Northeast region, consistent with the objectives of the consulting project.
Participants (interviewed cases)	All participants are women who self-identify as Black (<i>pretas</i> or <i>pardas</i>) and who ran for legislative office in the 2020 elections in Brazil's Northeast region. The candidates are from the states of Bahia, Pernambuco, and Ceará. In addition, all of them ran as candidates for center-left parties (PT, PSOL, and PSB).
Researcher's position in relation to the interviews (or position on the insider–outsider continuum)	The researcher responsible for data collection and analysis, as well as the other members of the consulting project, maintained a high degree of independence from the interviewees. There were no prior personal or political relationships between the researcher and the participants involved in the study.
Interactions and power relations	The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' prior consent and subsequently transcribed in full. These materials were supplemented with notes taken during and immediately after each interview. To address the power asymmetries inherent in the researcher–interviewee relationship, we adopted several strategies, including establishing rapport at the outset of the interview, ensuring participants' anonymity, and adopting an active listening approach that encouraged the candidates to share their narratives, life histories, and experiences.

¹⁶AGUINIS, H. and SOLARINO, A. M. (2019). Transparency and replicability in qualitative research: The case of interviews with elite informants. *Strategic Management Journal*. Vol. 40, N° 08, pp. 1291-1315.

Analysis of results	<p>The interviews were analyzed using thematic content analysis, following these steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pre-analysis, involving an initial exploratory reading and the systematization of preliminary impressions (during and after the interviews);2. Coding contextual units (interview excerpts) into recording units (key thematic categories);3. Analysis of the main recording units;4. Final synthesis of the recording units to identify the key thematic categories;5. Final analysis of the results based on these key thematic categories.
Data availability	<p>The full interview transcripts cannot be made publicly available for the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Some elements in the interview content could compromise participants' anonymity and expose the interviewees;2. The participants did not authorize the publication of the transcripts, consenting only to the analytical use of the data within the context of this research.