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# 83% Of Federal Election Candidates Since 2004 Faced No Competition To Run: Samara Report

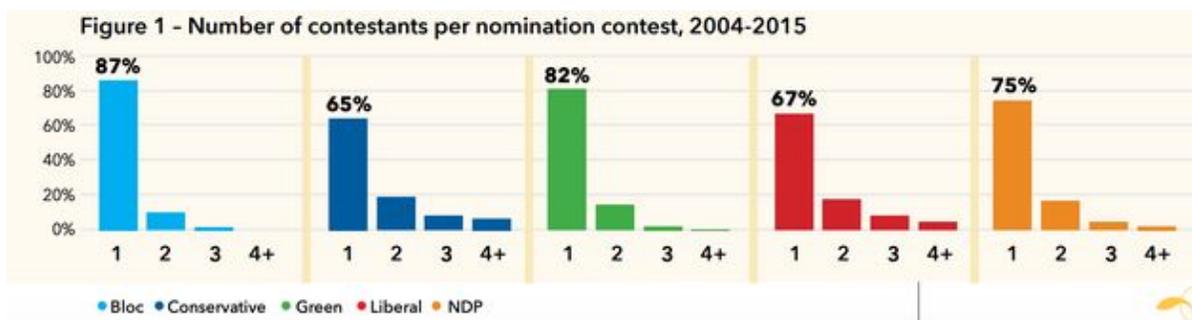
The party nomination process is notoriously secretive. But should it be?

By Sima Shakeri

A new report suggests 83 per cent of federal election candidates since 2004 did not need to compete to land on a ballot for their riding.

The study from the [Samara Centre for Democracy](#), a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy group for civic engagement, looked at more than 6,600 federal candidates over the last five elections.

It found that parties directly appointed more than 2,700 candidates, and held nomination contests where only one person ran in 70 percent of the 3,900 other cases.



The major parties are notoriously private about how candidates are chosen, but the nomination process is vital for strengthening engagement, accountability, legitimacy, and diversity in Canada's democratic system, the report states.

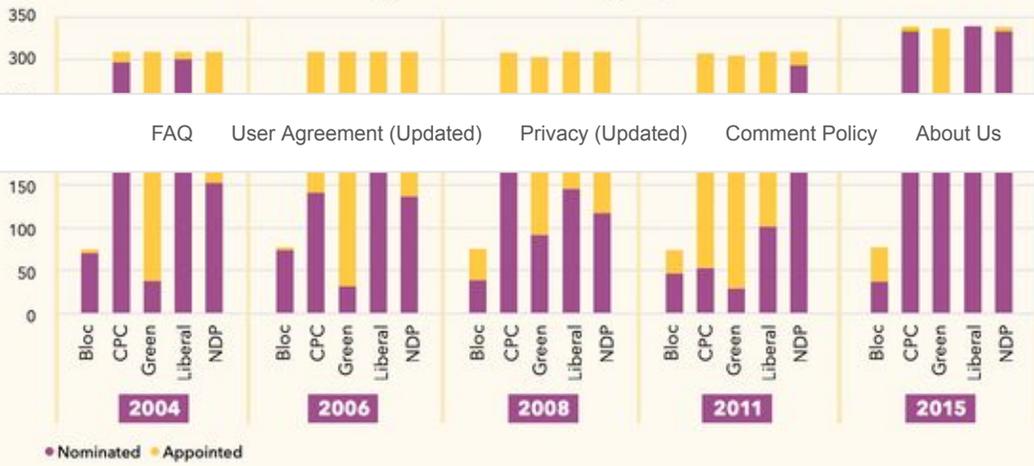
If a contest is biased, it may lead to the winning candidate working on behalf of party elites or community groups to which it owes favours, rather than representing the entire community as a whole. Biased nomination contests also exclude newcomers from joining the political class and bringing in new ideas.

### ***The nomination contest process:***

- 1. Opening of nominations:** the formal declaration that people interested in running can submit their nomination paperwork. Some parties also require a **call for nominations** to be sent to every local member informing them of the chance to run.
- 2. Candidate search:** to improve diversity, some parties require EDAs to identify and invite women and individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to run in the nomination contest.
- 3. Candidate vetting:** each national party screens would-be contestants before they can take part in a nomination contest. Individuals must disclose information on their professional and personal lives, their finances, their social media activities, and consent to a criminal record check. The screening is to ensure that parties do not select candidates with controversial pasts or those who are not committed to the party.
- 4. Closing of nominations:** if more than one contestant was approved by the vetting process, a date is set for the nomination vote.
- 5. Membership cut off:** only party members can vote in the nomination, and so a date is set after which new members will be unable to vote in the nomination.
- 6. Nomination meeting:** the big day itself, where party members finally cast their ballots and pick a candidate.

In situations where candidates are appointed, the reasons include filling up ridings where there are no interested contestants, rushing to get candidates in place during a snap election, ensuring candidates reflect Canada's diversity, and protecting incumbent MPs.

Figure 6 - Number of nominated and appointed candidates by party



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Anonymous former MPs didn't have many positive things to say about the nomination process, according to the report.

"They try to interfere, get their person nominated, and then they wonder... why people don't care," one former MP said.

"It was terrible during the nomination though... I wouldn't even want to go there. I think I could start a lawsuit probably—I mean, it was incredible... It was because they wanted [a different candidate]," another said.

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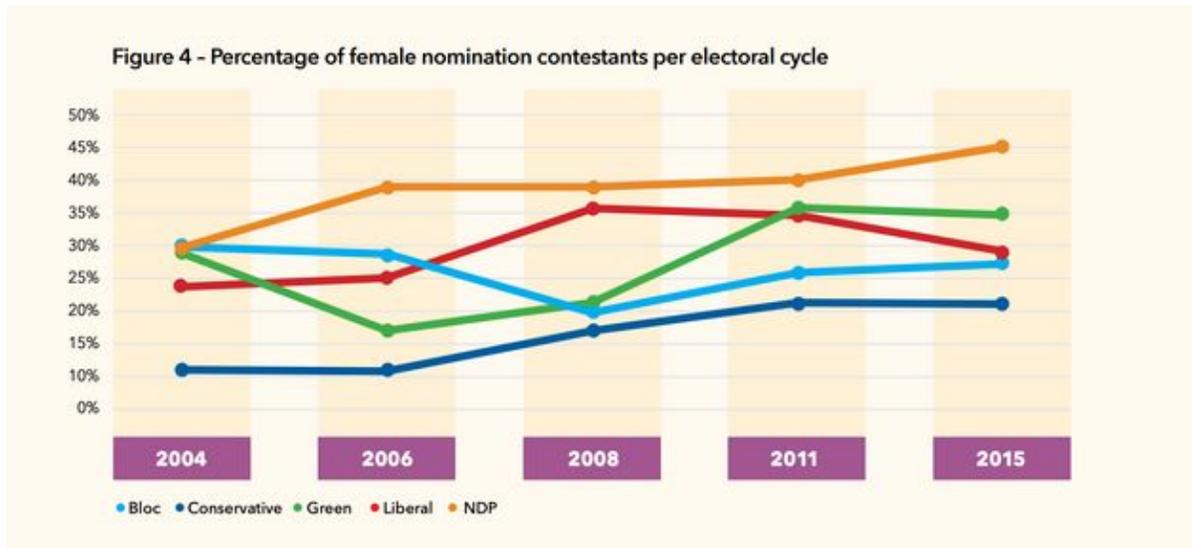
—Anonymous ex- MP, Samara report

The study also looked at how gender, ethnic and Indigenous diversity was reflected in the nomination process. Women were just as likely to win nomination contests as men when they ran, but only 28 per cent of nomination contestants were women. The lack of women entering nomination races leads to the continued gender imbalance in Parliament.

"Lots of things happened during that campaign that made it very frustrating and very hard for me to encourage any women to go into politics.... It's those men that seem to make you think that there's no place for women," one former MP said.

“That shifts the focus right back to recruiting, to the general openness of the process, to the intangible factors that cause some people to find their way in and others to self-select out or to never have the option,” said Michael Morden, the director of research at Samara.

The study found that longer nomination races and those that didn't require monetary investment correlated with higher female participation.



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And appointing candidates doesn't actually seem to help reflect Canada's diversity either. Appointed candidates were less likely to be from a visible minority or Indigenous background than nominated ones, though appointed candidates were slightly more likely to be women than nominated ones.

**Table 4 - Candidate diversity by method of selection by party, 2004-2015**

Party	Female		Visible minority		Indigenous	
	Nominated	Appointed	Nominated	Appointed	Nominated	Appointed
<b>Bloc</b>	27.0%	31.5%	8.1%	6.5%	0%	0%
<b>Conservative</b>	15.6%	20.7%	12.2%	7.5%	0.5%	0.2%
<b>Green</b>	33.2%	29.2%	7.0%	5.4%	1.6%	0.8%
<b>Liberal</b>	28.5%	31.7%	11.6%	10.1%	1.9%	0.9%
<b>NDP</b>	38.9%	32.8%	10.2%	11.2%	2.9%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.2%</b>	<b>28.9%</b>	<b>10.6%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>0.5%</b>

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“If you see the nomination as a moment in a chain of democratic moments” leading to the election of a member of Parliament, Morden said, “it’s notable that, in an overwhelming majority of cases, there’s no real decision being made by local people.”

Morden said through exit interviews with voters, Samara has found there is “broad, quiet understanding” in political circles of the deficiencies of the nomination process.

But he said most Canadians have little access to or ability to scrutinize the “black box” of party nominations, despite the stake they have in how parties run their internal elections.



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Opening up the nomination process and letting the public in on how candidates are chosen can increase confidence in the democratic process and also encourage more people to join political parties, the groups says. It also keeps successful candidates more accountable to their local constituents rather than the central party.

Samara’s suggestions for making the nomination period more transparent and more competitive include:

- Nomination contests should be longer so all prospective contestants have time to hear about them and get organized

- They should all have standard start and end dates so contestants have time to gather support and aren't caught off guard by the nomination contest's timing
- Opening up the floor for competition against incumbent MPs

- Releasing information about candidates who were vetted out of running
- Making sure the slate of candidates reflects Canada's diversity

Samara noted that if parties don't make these changes themselves, Parliament should step in to make them happen.

*With a file from the Canadian Press*

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