

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • JOBS • CLASSIFIEDS • DRIVING • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO

Andrew Coyne: Reforming Canadian democracy starts by reforming candidate nomination process

Of the more than 6,600 major party candidates in the last five federal elections, just 17% were chosen to represent their parties in competitive nomination races



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau with some members of his caucus on Parliament Hill. More than 40 per cent of candidates who ran for the five major parties in the last five federal elections were simply appointed, without a nomination vote of any kind. *Adrian Wyld/The Canadian Press/File*

FEATURED ARTICLES



The Apollo 11 moon landing was so boring it must be



ANDREW COYNE

One of the paradoxes of Canada's pantomime democracy — the meaninglessness of Parliament, the impotence of its members, the wildly unrepresentative process that puts them there — is the impossibility of fixing it.

July 17, 2019
8:46 PM EDT

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • JOBS • CLASSIFIEDS • DRIVING • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO



RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

Ontario judges reject two Charter challenges of Liberal government's sex assault reforms, passed after Ghomeshi case

Andrew Coyne: Even before first bailout dollar arrives, newspaper industry holds out its hand for more

Faced with racism charges, Trump tells Democrats women to 'apologize to America'

Conrad Black: Canada needs to compete – here's how we can win

it unlikely.

And yet in theory MPs could take back the power they have lost at any time. They just choose not to. This is the other paradox of reform: the people who stand to benefit most from it show the least interest in it. This came up repeatedly during debate on Michael Chong's ill-fated Reform Act, which aimed (before it was watered down) to redress the imbalance of power between leaders and caucus members by legislative means. What is the point, critics scoffed, of asking MPs to do by Act of Parliament what they are plainly unwilling to do within their own caucuses: defy their leaders?

This was not so insoluble a paradox, however, as the critics pretended. If members of caucus are subservient to the leader, it is in part because they are themselves the product of the same system; they are the beneficiaries of it, in their own way, just as much as he is. They depend on the leader's favour for any chance of advancement in Parliament. They depend on the leader's performance in the campaign for their election. And, as an extraordinary new study by the Samara Centre for Democracy ("Party Favours: How Federal Election Candidates are Chosen") makes clear, they depend on the leader for their very nominations.

SEE ALSO

Uncompetitive nomination races weaken parties, democracy, study says

Liberals unveil new rules to protect incumbents from nomination challenges

Flurry of Liberal nominations signals start of marathon 2019 election race

This was always apparent with respect to one specific stage of the nomination process: the requirement, added to the election laws in 1972, that a candidate's nomination papers bear the signature of the party leader. But the Samara study documents show how thoroughly the leadership controls the process at every stage before then. Of the more than 6,600 candidates who ran for the five major parties in the last five federal elections, Samara found, just 17 per cent were chosen to represent their parties in competitive nomination races.

More than 40 per cent were simply appointed, without a nomination vote of any kind. (Necessary, parties will say, to ensure racial and other forms of "diversity." Bunk, Samara finds: candidates chosen by appointment turn out to be no more diverse than those chosen by a vote of the members.) While the leader's hand in appointments is obvious, what is more striking, and insidious, is the further 40 per

LATEST COMMENT

Watch **Kelly McParland: Boris Johnson will get his way (while waving a smoked fish)**

The hard truth for Canadians imprisoned abroad: we can only do so much for you

Vivian Bercovici: Riots leave Israelis asking themselves hard questions about racism

Robert Fulford: The technology of space exploration is helping us explore our own ancient past

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • JOBS • CLASSIFIEDS • DRIVING • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO

opaque, so arbitrary and so wholly at the discretion of the party executive as to make it likely in many cases that the absence of competition for a particular candidate was at the behest of the leader.

An unknown number of candidates, for example, are ruled out from the start by the parties' highly secretive vetting procedures. Again, in most cases this is probably by virtue of some genuinely disqualifying bit of information from their past. But given the lack of transparency surrounding the process — the Greens were the only party to even say how many of their candidates were vetted out — there is corresponding potential for abuse.

Still more opportunity for mischief lies in the timing of nomination races. The dates on which the votes are held varies, but is typically long (as much as two years) before the actual election — indeed long before, as Samara notes, "ordinary citizens are thinking about the next election." Their duration, likewise, is various, shifting and uncertain — but typically short. Half last less than three weeks; five days is not unusual. In 253 races, Samara found, nominations opened and closed the same day. The candidate with inside knowledge of when a particular nomination race starts, and when it ends, will be at a decided advantage.

*The 'fairly' contested races —
perhaps especially those — are often
the scenes of the worst excesses*



Of course, it is still possible for the blessing of the leader to be decisive, even in those races where the other potential candidates did not take the hint and take a hike. For that matter, the "fairly" contested races — perhaps especially those — are often the scenes of the worst excesses, thanks to the tendency of the parties to treat nomination races, not as an opportunity for the party's loyal members to choose who should represent them in the election, but as a chance to sell memberships en bloc. The cut-off dates for new members is often indecently close to voting day, leaving races to be decided by "instant members," stacked nomination meetings, and worse.

This is not only a matter of the legitimacy of the candidates themselves. So long as members of caucus are nominated in this

23°C

Partly cloudy
Feels like 26 °C



Tuesday	26 °C
Wednesday	25 °C
Thursday	27 °C
Friday	29 °C

[Complete Forecast →](#)

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • JOBS • CLASSIFIEDS • DRIVING • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO

holding their leaders to account, rather than, as now, the reverse — they will have to be more accountable to the members of their party riding associations. Reform of Canadian democracy starts there.

Comments

[Join the conversation →](#)

FEATURED STORIES

The Apollo 11 moon landing was so boring it must be real

If Americans were going to fake the moon landing, you'd better believe there...

[← Previous](#) 1

TOP STORIES



Watch Relive the Apollo 11 moon landing in NASA footage and photos

To date, only 12 people have ever set foot on the moon

Watch Why the Apollo 11 moon landing conspiracy endures 50 years later

As one of the first major events on TV, when people were transfixed by made-up stories on sets, the moon landing theory was made to convince susceptible viewers



The Apollo mission photos you haven't seen: Space selfies, pee bags and too many moon close-ups

If NASA has a dark secret about the Apollo mission, it's that its astronauts weren't particularly good at photography. Thousands of these photos are now publicly accessible



The man behind 'Storm Area 51' reveals his identity, says viral Facebook page was just a joke

The Facebook event organizer didn't realize his comical call to invade one of the most secretive and mysterious locations on Earth would become a rally cry

THIS WEEK'S FLYERS