

# Limited gains for diverse candidates prompt calls for changes to nomination process

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Leah Gazan, one of eight Indigenous candidates elected Monday, ran for the NDP in Winnipeg Centre.

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More women, people of colour, Indigenous people and members of the LGBTQ community were on the ballot than in 2015, but the gains made on election day were marginal, if there were gains at all.

A total of 98 women were elected Monday, topping the previous record of 88 female members of Parliament set during the 2015 election. Female candidates won in just less than a third of federal ridings in this election – a statistic that just doesn't cut it for Eleanor Fast.

“Women make up 50 per cent of Canada,” said Ms. Fast, the executive director of Equal Voice, an organization seeking to elect more women in Canada. “That should be reflected in our Parliament.”

By the calculations of University of Toronto political scientist Erin Tolley – based on the sluggish rate at which women are being elected to Parliament – it will be another 83 years until there is gender parity among MPs.

Prof. Tolley said this election, as with previous ones, saw the “sacrificial-lamb theory” play out.

“For women's representation, it's really clear that parties are running women in ridings that are unwinnable,” she said.

Fae Johnstone, who uses they and she pronouns and the honorific Mx., attributed the low number of successful LGBTQ candidates to the same phenomenon. She is a contributor to Xtra, an LGBTQ magazine.

A record 74 openly LGBTQ candidates ran for office, but just four were elected – down from six in the previous election.

“It's using us as window dressing when we are counted as part of these numbers, but not in ridings where these parties know that they're going to have anywhere near a competitive chance at taking,” Mx. Johnstone said.

All four elected LGBTQ candidates are cisgender, white gay men, she pointed out.

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ridings, such as those in the Greater Toronto Area, and usually have to come through a highly competitive nomination process, too.

While a final tally on how many racialized candidates were elected Monday isn't yet available, Paul EJ Thomas, a senior research associate at the Samara Centre for Democracy, is currently analyzing that data. An early glance at results suggests people of colour continue to be underrepresented in Parliament, he said.

In a previous Samara study, Mr. Thomas found that in ridings where candidates were appointed by the party (rather than being selected through a nomination process), they tended to be members of overrepresented groups: straight, white and male. The same was true if nomination periods were relatively short.

“One of the main challenges is ‘the usual suspects,’” he said. “The less time there is, the more likely nominations are to go to those who can mobilize at the drop of a hat or are more connected.”

The battle to unseat the Liberal incumbent Robert-Falcon Ouellette in the riding of Winnipeg Centre was a long one for Leah Gazan, a member of the Wood Mountain Lakota Nation and one of eight Indigenous candidates elected Monday. She said she needed to recruit a strong team just to win the hotly contested NDP nomination, a process that got under way at the start of the year and was followed by 10 months of aggressive campaigning.

“One of the things I was most proud of at the nomination when I looked at the crowd was that our electorate, the people, were reflective of the community that I wanted to serve,” she said.

In Nunavut, where 85 per cent of the population are Inuit, the NDP, Conservatives and Liberals all had Inuk women on the ballot, including a former Conservative cabinet minister. The seat was won by a 25-year-old social activist and political rookie, Mumilaaq Qaqqaq of the NDP.

But in the Saskatchewan riding of Desnethé–Missinippi–Churchill River, where 70 per cent of the population is Indigenous, two female Indigenous candidates, Georgina Jolibois (the NDP incumbent) and Tammy Cook-Searson, lost to Gary Vidal, a white male Conservative

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Randall Garrison, an openly gay man and the NDP's critic for LGBTQ issues, was involved with two major parliamentary wins for the LGBTQ community: the passing of Bill C-16, which protects Canadians from discrimination based on gender, and a justice committee report on the continuing criminalization of HIV non-disclosure.

“Representative Parliament does make better public policy,” said Mr. Garrison, who kept his seat in the British Columbia riding of Esquimalt–Saanich–Sooke on Monday. “So the fewer diverse voices, the more disappointing it is for me.”

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