

EMBARGOED until 12:01 am, July 17, 2019

To request an advance copy of the report or set up an interview, please contact:

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## Nomination contests a weak link in Canada's democracy

### New study points to political parties' uncompetitive, opaque, unpredictable, and centrally controlled candidate selection process

Toronto, July 17, 2019—With the federal election just 103 days away, political parties have been announcing how many candidates they have “nominated” or recruited so far. Yet very little is actually known—or shared—about how parties select candidates.

In the report “**Party Favours: How federal election candidates are chosen**,” the Samara Centre for Democracy pries open the “black box” of nomination contests in Canada, and asks whether parties are missing an opportunity to strengthen the democratic process.

Pulling together data from Elections Canada and other sources, we examine how the over 6,600 candidates who ran for Canada's major political parties over the last five federal elections (2004-2015) were actually selected.

#### Key findings:

- Of the more than 6,600 federal candidates captured in the study, only **17%** arrived there through a competitive nomination race.
  - Parties directly appointed more than **2,700 election candidates** with no nomination contest at all.
  - Over **70%** of the 3,900 nomination contests held had just a **single person** running.
- Women who ran in nomination contests were just as likely to win as their male competitors—but made up just **28%** of nomination contestants
- Candidates directly appointed by parties were no more reflective of Canada's gender, ethnic, or Indigenous diversity than those chosen through nomination contests.
- Contests were short, with half lasting just **three weeks or less**, and over 450 closing in **five days or less**.
- Contests were unpredictable, with no standardized start or end dates.
- The parties' rules for nomination contests allow the central parties to decide:
  - when contests open and close.
  - who can and can't run in a contest.
  - whether an incumbent MP can stand again as a candidate without facing a contest.
- Contests lacked transparency—parties have no requirement to release information on how many votes were cast or how many contestants were prevented from running.

Given these findings, there is little surprise that many see the nomination process as a weak point in our democratic infrastructure, with parties effectively controlling the pool of people who have a chance to serve in Parliament. In the words of one former Member of Parliament: “[Parties] try to interfere, get their person nominated, and then they wonder... why people don’t care.”

“Rather than using nomination contests as a chance to bring new people and ideas into parties and build local democracy, the contests are often seen as a hurdle or task to be managed,” says Dr. Paul EJ Thomas, lead author of the report. “The parties’ efforts to shape the outcome—whether real or perceived—can erode Canadians’ trust in our representative democracy.”

Kendall Anderson, Acting Executive Director of the Samara Centre, adds: “The choices made by parties have implications for the transparency of our political system, the diversity of our representatives, the accountability of MPs to their local communities, and the strength of grassroots democracy in Canada, so we need to make sure these choices are being made in the best way possible.”

To that end, the Samara Centre recommends changes that parties could adopt to improve the way candidates are chosen, such as setting standard opening and closing dates for nomination contests, reporting how many members cast ballots in each contest and how many votes each contestant received, and revealing the total number of people they “vet out” or prevent from running in each election cycle.

Please contact José Ramón Martí if you would like to receive an advance copy of “Party Favours” or request an interview with one of its authors.

The report will be available at 12:01 a.m. on July 17, 2019, at [samaracanada.com/party-favours](https://samaracanada.com/party-favours)

### About the Samara Centre for Democracy

The Samara Centre for Democracy (formerly Samara Canada) is a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada’s democracy, making it more accessible, responsive, and inclusive. The Samara Centre produces action-based research—as well as tools and resources for active citizens and public leaders—designed to engage Canadians in their democracy. To learn more about how our research and educational programming is building better politics and a better Canada, visit [samaracanada.com](https://samaracanada.com).

### Covering the Upcoming Federal Election?

We are always available to comment on our areas of research, which include citizen participation and voting behaviour, political leadership and Members of Parliament, and political parties. To arrange an interview, please contact José Ramón Martí at 647-822-1731 or [jose.marti@samaracanada.com](mailto:jose.marti@samaracanada.com).

