

THE ACCIDENTAL CITIZEN?

**What we know about paths to
Parliament from exit interviews
with former MPs**

By Alison Loat



OVERVIEW OF THIS PRESENTATION

- Introduce you to Samara and describe our MP exit interview project
- Share the findings from our first report, *The Accidental Citizen?*
- Outline our next steps

WHAT IS SAMARA?

STRENGTHENING THE CANADIAN DEMOCRACY

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

PUBLIC AFFAIRS JOURNALISM

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

**WHAT IS THE MP EXIT
INTERVIEW PROJECT?**

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

- A series of “exit interviews” with MPs who left public life during or after the 38th and 39th Parliaments (2004-2008)
- An opportunity for MPs to reflect on their time in public life and provide advice, in hindsight
- The Canadian Association of Former Parliamentarians are partners; the interviews were done in person by Samara
- The first time this has ever been done in our country

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

- 65 of the 139 living former MPs from the two Parliaments (57% retired, 43% were defeated)
- MPs from all regions of the country and from all four political parties represented in the House
- 22% female; 11% immigrants; 18% French speaking
- Very educated: 86% had at least one university degree, and half had more than one
- Overall, an experienced group:
 - Average tenure was 10.3 years (median 12.3 years)
 - 31% served as Ministers, 35% as Parliamentary Secretaries
 - 58% chaired at least one committee

OUR FIRST REPORT



WHAT WERE THE REPORT'S MAJOR FINDINGS?

1. MPs come from a wide variety of backgrounds, and most said they did not plan for a political life
2. Nearly all said they were asked to run
3. Their described motivations were extremely varied
4. Most MPs described themselves as “outsiders”
5. The nomination process was confusing and among the less engaging elements of politics

1. MOST MPs SAID THEY DID NOT PLAN FOR A POLITICAL LIFE

- Their backgrounds were varied
- Contrary to stereotypes, MPs are not just lawyers and political scientists

“I saw an ad in a local magazine on why you might consider supporting the Reform Party. I submitted my application and became a member, not intending to run.”

“I was looking for a career change, and a mentor told me politics would suit my personality.”

2. NEARLY ALL SAID THEY WERE ASKED TO RUN

- By a friend or colleague, often someone involved in the party
- When they failed to find a candidate
- By the party's leader

“I would not have run for political office if this woman had not shown up at my door and said, ‘We’d like you to try to do this.’”

“One of my friends said, ‘We want you to run as our candidate.’ I laughed. ‘You’ve got to be kidding. That’s really not in the cards.’”

3. THEY SAID YES FOR ALL KINDS OF REASONS

- Politics considered a way to solve complex problems, or a way to learn and grow
- Some felt the system was moving in the wrong direction: link between government and citizens was broken or PMs acted like dictators
- Others had specific reform ideas in mind (e.g., electoral system, separatism)
- Some were more obvious contenders, liked the challenge or felt a sense of service
- Others were intrigued, or light-hearted

4. MOST DESCRIBED THEMSELVES (PARADOXICALLY) AS “OUTSIDERS”

- Personal identity
- Part of the immigrant experience
- Geography, particularly for those from Reform
- Matter of political philosophy or policy perspective
- Education, socio-economic background or career choice

“I remember walking up to Centre Block and thinking, ‘Okay Daddy, what’s the daughter of a lousy immigrant tailor doing here?’”

“The system isn’t working for Western Canada. We’re going to opt in and change the system itself.”

“Since when is the busboy supposed to become an MP?”

“I was motivated to be a voice for the small guy. I always put my riding and my province first, sometimes to my own peril.”

5. AND VIEWED THE NOMINATION AS A 'BLACK BOX'

- Not a transparent process
- Unclear who was in charge, if anyone – some set up their own association, others saw party leaders intervene
- Rules were pliable and differently applied, timing varied
- Identity and category politics often exploited

“There’s too much power in the central committees. They interfere, get their person nominated, and wonder why people don’t care.”

“I sold enough memberships to scare people off. I didn’t ask permission. I just did it.”

“My nomination was confirmed four days before the general election. It was a very messy situation.”

“It was terrible. Just horrendous. The worst political experience of my life.”

**“ALL OF A SUDDEN I SAID, ‘I’M
GOING TO OTTAWA.’ I HAD
NEVER PLANNED TO DO THAT.
IT WAS JUST ONE OF THOSE
THINGS THAT HAPPENED.”**

The Accidental Citizen?

The first of a series exploring political leadership in Canada

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Life Before Parliament
- 3 Deciding to Run
- 4 The Nomination: A Black Box
- 5 Conclusion
- 6 Acknowledgements
- Participating MPs
- Research Methodology

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

HOW WE HOPE IT WILL HELP

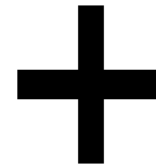
EDUCATION

- Report #2, plus 3 more reports through June 2011
- Educational materials for schools and more generally



RECCO-MENDATIONS

- Creation of democracy report card
- Advance discussion on other recommendations where appropriate



RESEARCH

Contribute to our collective knowledge of political leadership (e.g., Archives, academic research)

THANK YOU

For more information, visit
www.samaracanada.com or
contact Alison Loat
(alison.loat@samaracanada.com;
Twitter @alisonloat)