

Elected Officials

Overview of Research

Representation among political leaders sends a message about the accessibility of power in our political system and has significant implications for social inclusion as well as the development of policies that meet the needs of diverse citizens. Electoral representation is an important indicator of a democracy's health (Siemiatycki, 2008).

Diversity among political leaders is important because it:

- Signals that all citizens have equal opportunities and access to power;
- Ensures a broader range of perspectives to help shape priorities and impact policy-making on issues of importance to visible minorities and ethno-cultural communities;
- Offers greater potential for increased access to government, power and policy-making for traditionally under-represented groups and organizations;
- Assists in promoting commitment to diversity at all levels and mainstreaming diversity through policy-making processes; and
- Promotes social inclusion and participation of visible minorities in electoral processes by signalling inclusiveness and opportunities.

A recent and dramatic example is Barack Obama, the first African American President of the United States. His candidacy had a significant impact on voter turnout among visible minority communities: African American voter participation increased from 11% to 13% (Lopez, 2009). There is little doubt that his election has already had a significant effect on the hopes and aspirations of people around the world and, in particular, on African Americans:

Obama's victory marked a deeply emotional moment for African Americans [...] His rise was a tribute to generations of struggles, African Americans' unshakeable faith in their humanity, those eternal hopes that they could shift the trajectory of their nation's cruel history [...] This is the day for which so many prayed, so many marched and so many more sacrificed. This is a day of jubilation and celebration. This is the day to rejoice and recommit ourselves to restoring the American dream for us all (Zezeza, 2009).

While it remains to be seen how this will translate into concrete change, the impact of visible minorities in political leadership roles cannot be underestimated. While representation does not always translate into policies which advance the interests of ethnic minorities (Siemiatycki & Saloojee, 2002), there is general agreement that increasing representation will increase the likelihood that relevant issues will be addressed. Political representation remains "an issue of the utmost importance for the future of democracy" (Simard, 2000) and part of the commitment to a multicultural society (Paul, 2005).

In spite of notable success stories, studies of elected officials have demonstrated that there is under-representation of visible minorities in elected offices. For example, in 2005, when visible minorities accounted for 43% of the City of Toronto's population, they held only 14% of Provincial Parliament seats, 11% of Municipal Council seats, and 9% of the Federal Parliament seats elected in the city (Siemiatycki, 2008). Even where they are present in higher numbers, they are less likely to be in the most powerful positions in government—for example, to hold key cabinet posts. Earlier studies have shown that across the GTA, visible minorities are best represented in the "905" suburbs that are located beyond the City of Toronto (Siemiatycki & Matheson, 2005).

At the same time, it is worth noting that visible minorities are not homogeneous and some communities have achieved dramatic results. Canada's South Asian community has made the transition from being

completely under-represented to achieving a level of representation in the House of Commons proportional to their numbers in the general population, that is, 3.3% of the seats in the House of Commons compared to 3.1% of Canada's population. In contrast, Canada's Chinese community comprises 3.7% of the general population but only 1.6% of the seats in the House of Commons (Matheson, 2006). More research is needed to understand these differences.

Methodology

The five municipalities with the largest population of visible minorities (Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, Markham and Richmond Hill) were selected for inclusion in our study. As the most diverse municipalities in the region, one would expect that the leadership would also be the most diverse. We considered the following groups:

- Catholic District School Board Trustees (Toronto, York, Peel) (n=27)
- Public School Board Trustees (Toronto, York, Peel) (n=40)
- Municipal Councillors (n= 87)
- Members of Provincial Parliament (n=35)
- Members of Parliament (n= 35).

All elected officials, which totalled 224 as of January 2009, were included in the study.

Findings

A breakdown of visible minority representation among School Board Trustees in relation to the visible minority population of the region is presented in Table 3. It shows a number of school boards have reached 25% representation among elected trustees—Toronto District School Board, York Catholic School Board, and Peel Region Public School Board.

Table 3: Visible Minorities in School Board Trustees

School Board Trustees	Population % Visible Minorities	Total Number	Total Analyzed	# Visible Minority	% Visible Minority
Toronto District School Board	47%	22	22	6	27%
Toronto Catholic District School Board		12	12	1	8%
York Region District School Board	37%	6	6	1	17%
York Catholic District School Board		4	4	1	25%
Peel District School Board	50%	12	12	3	25%
Peel Catholic District School Board		11	11	2	18%
Public School Total	45.8%	40	40	10	25%
Catholic District School Total		27	27	4	15%
Total for All Schools		67	67	14	21%

Table 4 shows the visible minority representation among elected members of municipal councils of the five municipalities with the highest visible minority population in the Greater Toronto Area. Overall, Markham has the highest percentage of visible minority members in municipal council, at 25%.

Table 4: Visible Minorities in Elected Office – Municipal Councillors

Municipal Councillors	Population % Visible Minority	Total Number	Total Analyzed	# Visible Minority	% Visible Minority
City of Toronto	47%	45	45	4	9%
City of Mississauga	49%	10	10	0	0%
City of Brampton	57%	11	11	1	9%
Town of Richmond Hill	45.7%	9	9	1	11%
Town of Markham	65.4%	12	12	3	25%
Total	49.5%	87	87	9	10%

Overall, almost one quarter of Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) for the five municipalities studied are visible minorities (See Table 5).

Table 5: Visible Minorities in Elected Office – Members of Provincial Parliament (MPPs)

Members of Provincial Parliament	Population % Visible Minority	Total Number	Total Analyzed	# Visible Minority	% Visible Minority
City of Toronto	47%	23	23	3	13%
City of Mississauga	49%	5	5	2	40%
City of Brampton	57%	3	3	2	67%
Town of Richmond Hill	45.7%	1	1	0	0%
Town of Markham	65.4%	3	3	1	33%
Total	49.5%	35	35	8	23%

Table 6 is a breakdown of elected federal Members of Parliament (MPs) from five municipalities and the visible minority representation among them as compared to the visible minority population they represent. Overall, 14% of Members of Parliament from the targeted municipalities are visible minorities, with Brampton the highest, representing two of three MPs.

Table 6: Visible Minorities in Elected Office – Federal Members of Parliament (MPs)

Federal Members of Parliament	Population % Visible Minority	Total Number	Total Analyzed	# Visible Minority	% Visible Minority
City of Toronto	47%	23	23	2	9%
City of Mississauga	49%	5	5	1	20%
City of Brampton	57%	3	3	2	67%
Town of Richmond Hill	45.7%	1	1	0	0%
Town of Markham	65.4%	3	3	0	0%
Total	49.5%	35	35	5	14%

The table below (Table 7) is an overall analysis of the different elected members and the degree of visible minority representation among them. Overall, 16% of elected officials for the targeted municipalities are visible minorities, compared to 49.5% of the population.

Table 7: Visible Minorities in Elected Office

Elected Officials	Total Number	Total Analyzed	# Visible Minority	% Visible Minority
School Board Trustees	67	67	14	21%
Municipal Councillors	87	87	9	10%
Members of Provincial Parliament	35	35	8	23%
Members of Parliament	35	35	5	14%
Total	224	224	36	16%

In this sector we were able to collect data for 100% of the elected officials—224 of 224. Our analysis shows that, in the five municipalities in the GTA, visible minorities are under-represented, relative to the population, in elected offices in the Catholic and Public School Boards, and the municipal, provincial, and federal levels of government. They make up only 21% of School Board Trustees, 23% of MPPs, 14% of MPs and a mere 10% of Municipal Councillors, although they represent 49.5% of the population.

Put another way, in order to achieve proportional representation, together, these five municipalities would need to elect two times more visible minority MPPs, over three times more visible minority MPs, and five times more visible minority Municipal Councillors. Presently the highest rate of visible minority electoral representation at each level of government is found not in the City of Toronto, but in the “905” suburban municipality of the City of Brampton (29%).

Overall, the highest levels of visible minority representation were at the provincial level (23%), while only 10% of Municipal Councillors in the 5 municipalities studied were visible minorities. Among the jurisdictions considered, the City of Brampton had the highest percentage of visible minority MPs (67%) and MPPs (67%), while the Town of Markham Council had the highest proportion at the municipal level (25%).

School boards, which are often a starting point for individuals entering politics, had 21% visible minority representation overall. The Toronto District School Board Trustees had the greatest representation with 27% visible minorities, while the Toronto Catholic School Board Trustees was only comprised of 8% visible minorities (Table 3).

We also considered the combined representation of women in these jurisdictions (n=224) and found that only 36.1% (n=81) were female, despite comprising 50% of the population. However, females have achieved parity in Catholic District and Public School Boards representing 55% and 48% respectively. It is perhaps worth noting that Canada’s first female Prime Minister, Kim Campbell, initially ran as a School Board Trustee and that these offices may serve as an initial entry to politics.

Leading Practices

Considerable research has been devoted to better understanding the barriers to participation of immigrants and visible minorities in electoral politics and approaches to increasing their engagement (Black, 2001). Recent research challenges earlier studies, by demonstrating that immigrant and visible minorities are actively participating in electoral politics, although there are significant differences between ethnic groups and generations. In addition, ethno-cultural organizations and ethnic media influence involvement and socio-economic status is an important variable affecting participation (Black, 2001).

While limited research has been conducted on the paths to elected office, there is evidence that assuming leadership positions in ethno-cultural or other identity-based organizations creates opportunities (Jedwab, 2001). Gill (2000) notes that “it is widely accepted that service on high-profile non-profit boards is often used as a ‘stepping stone’ to local, provincial, or federal political office.” He calls this “...an integral dimension of the development of civic leadership in a democratic society.” Anecdotal evidence suggests that some members of cultural and visible minorities have used their experience in immigrant and minority community organizations to build a constituency for future involvement in the political arena (Jedwab, 2006). In addition, there is evidence that many candidates and elected politicians began in volunteer and staff positions. Encouraging participation of visible minorities in elected office requires careful attention to the “pipeline” used to attract, train and mentor candidates.

For example, a recent study of South Asian politicians in Mississauga and Brampton who achieved some of the highest rates of visible-minority political representation in the country after the 2006 election concluded that contributing factors included dense residential concentrations, strong socio-economic status, acculturation variables, and lower incumbency rates (Matheson, 2006).

Leading practices for increasing diversity among political leaders include:

- Increasing the interest and participation of immigrants and visible minorities in electoral politics generally through engagement with ethno-cultural organizations and the media;
- Ensuring that a pipeline exists for candidates, for example that staff positions with politicians are accessible;
- Analyzing the diversity of riding associations, candidates, elected officials and party leadership;
- Engaging ethno-cultural communities in policy development and campaigns;
- Engaging ethno-cultural communities in riding associations, recruitment, and the identification of potential candidates;
- Providing resources to candidates from diverse backgrounds so that they can be successful (campaign resources, volunteers);
- Running visible minority candidates in ridings in which they are more likely to be successful; and
- Providing coaching, training, and mentoring for candidates.

Leadership in Action

Olivia Chow, Member of Parliament (Trinity-Spadina)

Born in Hong Kong, Olivia Chow has a strong legacy of public service in Canada. As a 13-year-old immigrant teenager in the City of Toronto, Chow tackled the many challenges of adapting to a new country, including everything from its pastimes to its language.

She has been involved in many initiatives aimed at creating a more liveable and dynamic city focusing on economic opportunity, child poverty eradication, environmental enhancement, sound social services, immigrant services and childcare. In addition, she has been committed to making housing and public transit both affordable and accessible. Chow was also an early advocate of the arts, culture and rich diversity which, today, so famously sets Toronto apart.

She has been the recipient of numerous recognitions including the Consumers' Choice "Woman of the Year" award, along with an honorary degree from the Ontario College of Art and Design.

After learning English as a teenager, she studied fine arts at the Ontario College of Art and Design, and later Philosophy and Religion at the University of Toronto. Chow later earned an Honours BA in fine art from the University of Guelph in 1979.

Chow's advice to aspiring leaders: "It is important to get involved and take action. Talking about issues and creating a space for discussion are important parts of working for change, but without action, talk is meaningless. Join a political party [...] or join a movement group. Find something you are passionate about and from there you can begin to work for change. Volunteering for your local Member of Parliament's office is also a great way to get involved. Learn what MPs do and get connected."

**Margarett Best, Member of Provincial Parliament (Scarborough-Guildwood);
Minister of Health Promotion**

The Honourable Margarett Best was elected MPP in the riding of Scarborough-Guildwood in 2007, and appointed to Cabinet, as Minister of Health Promotion. A lawyer, advocate, mentor and community volunteer, she has been recognized with numerous awards for her community service, including the African Canadian Achievement Award in 2006.

The Minister is responsible for a Ministry that supports a wide range of programs and services that include chronic disease prevention, physical activity, sport participation, injury prevention and mental wellness.

She is a graduate of the University of Toronto at Scarborough and Osgoode Hall Law School, and she holds a Mutual Funds Certificate from the Investment Funds Institute of Canada.

Before joining government, the Minister ran a general a law practice. She has served in many volunteer roles including serving on the Black Business and Professional Association, the College Compensations and Appointments Council, the Shouters National Evangelical Spiritual Baptist Ministries, Sheena's Place Breakfast Committee, and the Ontario Provincial Police Advisory Committee.

In August 2008, the Minister was awarded an Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree by the Northern Caribbean University in Jamaica for empowering people of colour through humanitarian gestures.

The Minister's advice to aspiring leaders: "Work hard, persevere, give back to the community, be true to yourself and keep your integrity intact. True success is measured not by your accomplishments but rather by the obstacles one overcomes in getting there."