

Candidate Selections Using Open Primaries

New research (November 2009) shows only 15% of candidates selected through open primaries for seats where the sitting MP is retiring are women.

Initial work by the Centre for Women & Democracy (CFWD) has found that just 15% of Conservative candidates known to have been selected through open primaries in seats where the sitting Conservative MP is retiring are female, compared to 39% of candidates selected for 'safe' seats through traditional methods.

The research also shows that:

- 27% of all Conservative candidates selected through open primaries are women
- 25% of all candidates selected through traditional selection procedures are women
- 27% of all new Conservative candidates in seats where the Conservative MP is retiring are women
- 22% of all Conservative candidates are women

Neither the Labour nor the Liberal Democrat parties have used open primaries so far, although Labour do use all-women shortlists. To date:

- 47% of Labour candidates in seats where the Labour MP is retiring are women
- 30% of Labour candidates overall are women
- 22% of Liberal Democrat candidates overall are women, and 4 out of the 5 candidates selected in seats where the Liberal Democrat MP is retiring

Open primaries are regarded by their supporters as a more inclusive method of choosing candidates than traditional selection processes which are restricted to party members. Open primary selections were first used by the Conservative Party in 2003 in Warrington South and Reading East. To date, 73 Conservative Associations are known to have used the method to select candidates for the 2010 general election.

