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Green Party has lost 55 local riding associations since 2011 election

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ANDREA HILL, POSTMEDIA NEWS | December 27, 2013 5:31 PM ET

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THE CANADIAN PRESS/Patrick Doyle Green Party leader Elizabeth May reacts to the federal budget in the foyer of the House of Commons on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Thursday March 21, 2013.

The Green Party may have more representation in the House of Commons than ever before, but the party is witnessing a decline in electoral district associations unprecedented for national parties.

Since the 2011 election, 55 of the Green Party's local electoral district associations have been decertified, according to Elections Canada's online database. Four Conservative and 11 Liberal associations have been decertified over the same period. The Greens have only 149 certified associations in the country's 308 ridings. The Conservatives have 307, the NDP 308 and the Liberals 306.

"All parties have a small number of deregistrations — and they're usually temporary — but nothing like what we've seen with the Green Party. This is quite unusual," said party financing expert Harold Jansen from the University of Lethbridge in Alberta.

The Green Party, though, is not worried — or at least not to prepared to admit it.

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Deputy national campaign manager Craig Cantin said the Greens have “every intention” of having 338 certified electoral district associations (EDAs) in time for the 2015 election, when redistribution of federal electoral boundaries will add 30 federal ridings in Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec.

The party ran 304 candidates in 2011, 303 in 2008 and 308 in both 2004 and 2006, according to Elections Canada.

Mr. Cantin said the pending redistribution explains why so many Green riding associations are disappearing.

“A number of EDAs are deregistering voluntarily so they can reform as the new EDAs,” he said.

But Mr. Jansen doesn't buy the argument, pointing out that Green associations started vanishing before the redistribution process started in 2012.

Mr. Jansen blames the rise and fall of Green EDAs on how the party distributes its federal funding, which it secured for the first time in 2004 after winning more than 2% of the vote in that year's election. The party received about \$1.75 per vote per year under federal financing laws at the time — a financial windfall of more than \$1-million annually.

The Green Party adopted a revenue-sharing agreement that saw a third of funds go to the national party, a third to provincial party organizers and a third to electoral district associations.

This meant money was available to prop up small riding associations across the country, but Mr. Jansen argues the funds were spread too thin across 308 riding associations and

most were not sustainable. He's said the number of Green EDAs has been dropping since 2008, but noted this could actually work in the party's favour.

"They really need to elect MPs and the way you of that is you concentrate your efforts, you don't prop up 308 small and ineffective riding associations," Mr. Hansen said. "It's probably a smart move to concentrate your resources where you can be effective."



KIER GILMOUR / Postmedia News file Elizabeth May at the Green Party of Canada 2006 Annual General Meeting at the Ottawa Congress Centre, Aug. 26, 2006.

This is especially true in an era of new federal funding laws, said Mr. Jansen. The subsidy was reduced to \$1.53 per vote in April, 2012, and is being reduced every April until it is eliminated in 2015.

Alberta resident Lisa Lambert, who did her master's thesis on how federal funding shaped the Green Party, said she anticipates things will be "very difficult" for the Green Party without that money.

The party received \$1,352,600 in federal subsidies from April 2011 to 2012, \$875,304 from April 2012 to 2013 and will bring in just \$583,536 for April 2013 to 2014, according to Elections Canada.

"I think they can proceed ... but it will be pretty tenuous for the party itself without that consistent income," Ms. Lambert said.

The party elected its first MP – leader Elizabeth May – in the 2011 election and saw its caucus double in mid-December when independent Ontario MP Bruce Hyer crossed the floor.

Parties don't need registered EDAs to run candidates in ridings, but they are helpful in organizing local campaigns and can act as fundraising arms for their national parties. They can be decertified voluntarily if the national party decides they are no longer useful or involuntarily if they fail to submit financial reports to Elections Canada.