

EMBARGOED UNTIL DECEMBER 7TH, 2011

For more information and interview requests contact:
Kendall Anderson, Samara, 416-960-7931, kendall.anderson@samaracanada.com
Or Alison Loat, Samara, 416.960.7925, alison.loat@samaracanada.com

New Report: Politically disengaged Canadians explain their declining participation

Toronto, December 7th, 2011 -- Following dismal voter turnout in elections across the country this year, a new report suggests that the politically disengaged are not as apathetic, uninterested, or ignorant of politics as previously thought. The new report, which was generated by the nonpartisan research organization Samara and is entitled *The Real Outsiders: Politically Disengaged Views on Politics and Democracy*, highlights important new findings about the underpinnings of political disengagement in Canada.

These findings emerged from a series of focus groups with Canadians across the country who described themselves as non-voters and less interested in politics. For a comparison, there was one group of engaged Canadians.

Traditionally, those less engaged are been portrayed as apathetic, uninterested, or ignorant of the political system, however participants in the focus groups tell a very different story. Instead less engaged Canadians demonstrated an awareness of politics and an intuitive understanding of how the political system works. Through their conversations about politics and democracy in Canada, Samara made three observations:

1. Less engaged Canadians' overwhelmingly describe themselves as outsiders. They do not feel they have a voice or any ownership stake in the political system. They also feel it serves others' interests. In contrast, politically engaged Canadians felt, in spite of frustrations, the system does work for them, and they believe they can influence it when it doesn't.
2. Canadians' dislike for politics seems closely related to a perceived gap between the ideals of democracy and the reality of how they are represented politically.
3. Disengagement is, in part, a response to people's personal interaction with politics and government. People describe becoming outsiders as a result of their interactions with elected representatives or public servants. Whether they were trying to find daycare, getting a school bus route extended, or simply getting a speed bump installed on their street, people constantly ran into obstacles that taught them engagement is futile.

"A common theme across the focus groups was that the political system has failed many Canadians in clear and tangible ways," said Alison Loat, Samara's Co-founder and Executive Director.

"Consequently, political disengagement is a learned response—this is a far cry from the conventional wisdom that assumes the disengaged simply do not care," she added.

Reflecting on what these findings mean, Heather Bastedo, Samara's Research and Project Director, notes, "There is a silver lining to our research—disengagement is reversible given the right conditions, and Canadians told us they are not asking for much. They simply want to feel heard, they want their problems to matter and they want promises kept—they want to feel represented."

The Real Outsiders is the first study in a larger project. In association with over twenty academics from across Canada, Samara is developing an annual index to measure the health of Canadian democracy. The results will be released annually to encourage discussion and focus attention on strengthening Canada's democracy. You can visit our website to weigh in on *The Real Outsiders* and offer your experiences with Canada's political system. www.samaracanada.com

About Samara

Samara is charitable research organization that encourages citizen engagement with Canadian democracy. Founded in 2009, Samara was created out of a belief that public service and public leadership matter to Canada's future. Our work focuses on three areas: political leadership, public affairs journalism and citizen participation in public life.

Samara's initial research project was the first-ever exit interviews for former Members of Parliament, which resulted in [four research papers](#). We are currently interviewing MPs who retired from political life before the May 2011 election.

There are many ways to get involved with Samara's work. Please visit www.samaracanada.com for more information.

You can also follow Samara on [Twitter](#) or [Google+](#), or join the [Facebook](#) group.