

EMBARGOED until September 9, 2015

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Young Canadians aren't apathetic, they're ignored

Samara Canada's new report debunks the myth of apathetic youth and stresses the importance of contact from political leaders in increasing voter turnout

Toronto, September 9, 2015—In the lead-up to the election on October 19, pundits and experts are discussing the modern problem of how to get youth to vote. Samara's new report "Message Not Delivered: The Myth of Apathetic Youth and the Importance of Contact in Political Participation," challenges the misconception that youth are more politically apathetic than other generations: across 18 forms of civic and political participation, beyond voting, Canadians under 30 participate at a rate 11 percentage points higher than those 30 and above (on average).

Yet, young people's political participation doesn't translate into votes. With more than five million Canadians under 30, their low turnout presents a problem for the future of Canada.

"Message Not Delivered" explores one catalyst for voter turnout: contact from political leaders (including federal political parties, candidates and MPs). Despite their national reach and influence, Canada's political leaders are not reaching out to all Canadians equally. In a 12 month period leading into an election year, only 55% of Canadians ages 18 to 29 reported being contacted, compared to 75% of Canadians ages 56 and older.

"This news is troubling" says Samara's Executive Director Jane Hilderman. "Contact from political leaders is powerful: it encourages people to vote—increasing turnout—and strengthens their awareness of politics."

In fact, among Canadians who reported contact via all five methods (email, phone, mail, social network and in person), 55% said that they are affected by the decisions made by elected officials "every day." In comparison, of the Canadians who reported no contact only 23% agreed with the statement. Among Canadians under 30, the decline was even starker.

"It's vital that everyone participates in our democracy. This federal election, political parties and candidates are best positioned to issue an invitation to all Canadians to vote. They should lead the way and make youth outreach and inclusion part of their election campaigns" says Hilderman.

Key Findings

- Across 18 forms of participation (outside of voting), Canadians under 30 participate at a rate 11 percentage points higher, on average, than citizens over 30.
- Almost half of people under 30 have not been contacted by federal political parties, candidates or MPs, compared to only one-quarter of Canadians 56 and older.
- Contact from political leaders is important: contact is linked to voting and an awareness that political decisions matter. Political parties are well positioned to increase voter turnout.

- Contact matters: among young Canadians who reported contact, 61% agreed that they are affected by the decisions made by elected officials “every day.” Of the young Canadians who reported no contact, 22% agreed.

The link to the full report will be available here September 9th, 2015:

<http://www.samaracanada.com/research/active-citizenship/message-not-delivered>

About Samara’s “Democracy 360”

Samara’s newly released report “Message Not Delivered” revisits the data on young Canadians from the “Democracy 360,” the first made-in-Canada report card that grades key areas of Canada’s democracy.

The “Democracy 360” gives citizens greater insight into the health of their democracy, encourages debate and provokes change where evidence suggests it’s most needed. More specifically, the report measures the relationship between citizens and their political leadership by looking at three areas:

- **Communication:** Do MPs and political parties reach out to Canadians? Are Canadians contacting their political leaders?
- **Participation:** How do Canadians participate beyond voting?
- **Leadership:** How do Canadians evaluate MPs and political parties on their core roles as leaders? How well do our leaders represent Canadians?

Samara’s “Democracy 360” focuses primarily on federal politics, political parties and MPs, as well as citizens’ engagement and perceptions of politics more generally. How citizens and leaders can improve the three areas of focus—that is, to *talk*, to *act* and to *lead* better—is also part of the report card.

In 2017, just in time for Canada’s 150th birthday, Samara will revisit the baseline captured by the inaugural “Democracy 360” so Canadians will see, in a quantifiable way, if our democracy has improved or declined.

Read more at <http://www.samaracanada.com/research/samara-democracy-360>

About Samara

Samara Canada is dedicated to reconnecting citizens to politics. Established as a charity in 2009, we have become Canada’s most trusted, non-partisan champion of increased civic engagement and a more positive public life.

Samara Canada’s research and educational programming shines new light on Canada’s democratic system and encourages greater political participation across the country to build better politics, and a better Canada, for everyone.

A samara is the winged “helicopter” seed that falls from the maple tree. A symbol of Canada, the samara is also a reminder that from small seeds, big ideas can grow.