

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • DRIVING • CLASSIFIEDS • JOBS • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO

Appetite for populism on the decline in Canada — except among politicians: report

Samara's survey found only 42% support for the idea that 'ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials'

"Elite-led populism," which sees elected officials undermining trust in their own jobs as a political tool, is what's on the rise, according to a Samara Canada poll. *Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press/File*

 **MARIE-DANIELLE SMITH**
MARIE-DANIELLE SMITH

May 7, 2019
12:01 AM EDT

Last Updated
May 7, 2019
11:26 AM EDT

Filed under
[Canadian Politics](#)

 Comment

 Facebook

 Twitter

 Reddit

 Email

 More

OTTAWA — Canadians are feeling better about their institutions than they did a few years ago, [according to a new report](#), putting into question whether voter-driven “down with the elites”-style populism will be much of a factor in this year’s federal election.

As part of its biennial survey on democracy, the Samara Centre for Democracy surveyed just over 4,000 people to determine whether Canada, like some of its allies, is having a “populist moment.” However, although discontent is relatively high, appetite for a populist movement actually appears lower than it did a few years ago — except among politicians themselves, says the report released Tuesday.

“Elite-led populism,” which sees elected officials undermining trust in their own jobs as a political tool, is what’s on the rise, according to the non-profit organization, which conducts research and runs programs intended to strengthen Canadian democracy.

“Canadians have been alienated from our politics for a long time. But cynicism and frustration peaked in the early 1990s, and have actually receded since,” the report says. “In other words, as dissatisfied as Canadians are, it is very hard to conclude that Canadians have, in recent years, turned radically against institutions and elites.”

SEE ALSO

The future is populist in this age of disruption, Stephen Harper says in new book

Rex Murphy: Thank the Liberals for the ‘populist’ mood out West

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • DRIVING • CLASSIFIEDS • JOBS • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO

and the success of the pro-Brexit movement are routinely attributed to anti-elite populism. Samara concluded that inside Canada, attitudes have stayed the same or improved in the past five years.

Whereas about 75 per cent of Canadians agreed with the statement “I don’t think the government cares what people like me think” around 1993, according to previous studies, only 59 per cent said so this year. From a high of 85 per cent in the early ‘90s, now only 63 per cent agree that “those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with the people.”

Samara found only 42 per cent support for the idea that “ordinary people would do a better job solving the country’s problems than elected officials,” and 75 per cent of Canadians call themselves satisfied with how democracy works. Only 40 per cent would agree that “the will of the majority should always prevail, even over the rights of minorities,” a percentage considerably lower than the 70 per cent who would prioritize the majority in the early aughts.

If the public appetite for citizen-driven populism seems comparatively low in Canada, the likelihood that foreign authoritarian governments will try to stir up populism to create discord in Western countries has increased, as has the likelihood that political actors will use populist language in pursuit of power.

If politicians keep insisting that politicians can't be trusted and institutions are crooked, what reason do citizens have to trust or participate?



Some MPs are already doing this. In 2008 none of Parliament’s sitting days featured any well-to-do elected officials criticizing the elite. In the current Parliament, which began in late 2015 and will wrap up in the fall, an MP has complained about “elites” on 13 per cent of sitting days.

“If politicians keep insisting that politicians can’t be trusted and institutions are crooked, what reason do citizens have to trust or participate?” the report’s authors ask. “Politicians in Canada may not

Watch John Ivison:
Tough talk from a man
with nothing to lose

Watch Jody Wilson-Raybould’s short
Commons speech gets
standing applause from
opposition parties

Watch Actor Jussie
Smollett arrested to face
felony charge for false
police report: authorities

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

We want to improve your reading experience

Take our 60-second survey

DAILY HEADLINE NEWS

Email

By clicking "Submit", I consent to receiving the above communication from Postmedia Network Inc. I understand that I may unsubscribe from these communications at any time.

Submit

NATIONAL POST

NEWS • FULL COMMENT • SPORTS • CULTURE • LIFE • MORE • DRIVING • CLASSIFIEDS • JOBS • SUBSCRIBE • FINANCIAL POST • VIDEO

other countries.” Stop undermining your own role, it tells politicians. Reward politicians for their nuanced and realistic policies rather than for disingenuous us-versus-them rhetoric, it tells the public.

The data came from an online survey of 4,054 Canadian adults in 10 provinces, between Jan. 16 and Feb. 6. The margin of error was plus or minus 1.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, and results were weighted to create a representative sample based on gender, region, age group, language and whether respondents were born inside or outside of Canada.

• Email: mdsmith@postmedia.com | Twitter: [mariedanielles](https://twitter.com/mariedanielles)

Watch John Ivison: Investigation into Norman affair is doomed, but Trudeau still likely to take damage

Watch One week after losing B.C. seat to Green Party, NDP leader Singh now opposes fracking

Environmentalists cry foul over industry-inspired changes to Bill C-69

'It's part of how this town works': Mark Norman was charged over a leak, but in Ottawa leaks happen every day

59 Comments
[Join the conversation →](#)

TORONTO WEATHER

9°C

Partly cloudy
Feels like 8 °C



Wednesday	18 °C
Thursday	14 °C
Friday	16 °C
Saturday	16 °C