

# EDITORIAL: Even MPs are cynical about Parliament

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- Reuters



Most new Parliaments begin with solemn promises for civil, non-partisan debate and improved decorum in the House.

But there's always someone in the crowd willing to shoot the first spitball. Then, as an election approaches and MPs realize they need to make some noise for the folks back home, things get really raucous.

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So as Justin Trudeau's minority government begins its business in Parliament on Monday, a new study of how the old Parliament behaved arrives just in time.

The Samara Centre for Democracy reviewed the 42<sup>nd</sup> Parliament, which sat from 2015 to 2019, by interviewing MPs anonymously and checking Hansard to count heckling and for voting records. For the last three years, between 20 and 30 per cent of MPs answered questions on life in the House and how politics are practised in Ottawa.

Many of the results are what you'd expect: Parliament sits less than it used to, passes fewer bills and is more partisan than ever.

But some of what they found is actually encouraging: committees and the Senate are exercising more influence on bills, and MPs at least tried to reach across party lines for more consensus.

The coming Parliament is governed by a Liberal minority, which will need at least one more party's support for every vote. For a while, a certain level of co-operation will be required just to avoid an election.

It might be a bit much to expect decorum, though.

The study found that 53 per cent of MPs say heckling during debate is a problem, but 65 per cent admit doing it. They know the public doesn't like it, too: 75 per cent of them believe voters think badly of heckling. And 65 per cent of them think debates in the House are not thoughtful, civil or meaningful.

Just 10 per cent felt that question period had any real effect on governing or improving legislation, which suggests they share the view of many Canadians: QP is a reality show staged for television cameras that has little to do with actual governing.

And omnibus bills, which pack lots of unrelated legislation in one huge bill, often hundreds of pages long, only increased under the Liberals, despite the fact they decried the Harper government's overuse of them. These bills make it easier for governments to hide unpleasant bits by surrounding them with page after page of boring amendments that make it unlikely anyone will pay attention.

One point the centre makes is crucial. Hyper-partisanship and polarization damages democracy, and that concept is under too much pressure already these days. Inability to reach consensus and flinging childish insults at each other only increases public cynicism about politics.

These days, more than ever, we need voters to care about how they're governed, and to feel that their views are being represented.

Party leaders should insist that their members concentrate more on the people's business and less on scoring empty rhetorical points on opposing parties.

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