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Samara Canada holds panel on democracy at Isabel Bader Theatre

Group gives Canadian democracy a B- grade, up from C in 2015

By [Josie Kao](#) on April 3, 2017

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On March 28, Samara Canada, a non-partisan charity that researches the health of Canadian government and offers solutions to perceived problems, organized a panel at the Isabel Bader Theatre to discuss its recent report on the state of Canadian democracy.

The organization awarded Canada the letter grade of ‘B-,’ which is an increase from the ‘C’ grade it received in 2015.

The goal of the event was to examine what can and should be done to strengthen Canada’s democracy, especially in light of the release of the report card.

The higher grade is primarily attributed to the surge in voter turnout in the 2015 federal election, as well as an increase in communication between Canadians and their MPs. Samara recommended areas for improvement like increasing diversity in the House of Commons and raising citizen “participation in formal political activities, such as donating to a campaign.”

The panel featured Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, the MP for Beaches-East York; campaigner and consultant Amara Possian; co-founder of Anima Leadership Annahid Dashtgard; and Elamin Abdelmehmoud, a Social Media Editor for *BuzzFeed Canada* and an editor for *BuzzFeed News*. It was moderated by Dave Meslin, the Creative Director of Unlock Democracy Canada, a non-profit calling for electoral reform.

The panelists discussed various aspects of democracy, such as the development of fake news and why it spreads so quickly.

“If you post something on Facebook, it will look exactly the same as a *New York Times* [article] on my feed, which says to you this is equal,” said Abdelmehmoud. “We all sort of forget that we have a terrifying amount of power in terms of shaping what other people see, and that’s sort of given rise to fake news because fake news spreads way easier from person to person because you trust other people and you trust that they’ll give you news that you can actually believe.”

The speakers also discussed at length the role of activism in a democracy, debating the term itself and what it means. Possian suggested that it has almost become an empty word.

“It’s different from being a feminist or a socialist, there are assumptions that come along with that word,” said Possian. “An activist is someone who’s active. And by having a term that puts you in a box where there aren’t necessarily stakes, it kind of becomes a hobby.”

Dashtgard responded, “There’s [*sic*] so many people in this country that are activists because they don’t have a choice,” referring to members of marginalized communities.

Near the end of the discussion, Meslin noted that Erskine-Smith had the highest rate of disagreement with his party out of all the MPs and asked what could be done to encourage more people to act like him.

Erskine-Smith replied, “It’s a cultural question of how do you build up that culture where people are comfortable doing so, don’t fear reprisal, don’t fear their career will suffer, or accept that their career will suffer but that it’s the right thing to do anyway.”