



# Think-tank Samara gives Canadian democracy a higher grade in 2017

Its latest democracy report notes Canadians are more satisfied with MPs, parties



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The civic engagement think-tank Samara has given Canada's democracy a B- grade in the second edition of its Democracy 360 report card — an improvement on the 2015 edition's C grade that's based in part on higher voter turnout, an increase in reported political discussions and higher constituent satisfaction rates.

Using data from Elections Canada and the House of Commons, along with an independent social media analysis and its own public opinion survey, the report card measured 19 indicators and 38 sub-indicators between September 23 and October 6, 2016, in order to "provide a comprehensive picture of how Canadians feel about their democracy".

The headline finding is that 71 per cent of Canadians are "very" or "fairly" satisfied with their democracy — an increase from the 65 per cent result in the 2015 report.

Developments since then — the Liberals' abandonment of electoral reform, for example — may have dragged that number down. of course.



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Samara's result comes from an English and French online survey of 4,000 Canadian residents 18 and over, living in ten provinces.

The survey also found an increase in the number of Canadians who've reported having a discussion about politics in the last year (61 per cent to 67) and in the percentage of Canadians who say they follow a politician on social media (23 per cent to 34).

"In a significant change from two years ago, MPs have fully embraced social media as a way to connect with constituents. All but one MP (99.7%) is present on Facebook, 99% of MPs are on Twitter, 88% are on YouTube, and 56% are on Instagram. A handful of MPs are even experimenting with Snapchat," the report says, without identifying the holdouts.

"This report card saw fewer MPs sending 'householders,' the paper pamphlets delivered to all households in a riding and paid for through the House of Commons. While 98% of MPs sent householders in the 2015 report card, this report card sees only 90% of MPs doing so. It is possible that MPs see social media as a better way to connect with Canadians, yet householders can be a way for MPs to reach all constituents' homes, particularly those who are not very active online."

At the same time, there's been little change in the number of Canadians who've taken their engagement a step further and done things like join a political party, donate to a candidate or party, or attend a political meeting.

Only nine per cent of Canadians said they were a member of a political party in the 2015 report; now only eight per cent do.

In the 2015 report, 19 per cent said they donated to a party or candidate; that figure is the same in the 2017 report.

And once again, fewer than one in three say they attended a political meeting (29 per cent in the 2015 report and 30 per cent in 2017).

There's also been an uptick in Canadians' reported trust of MPs and parties, and their satisfaction with their members of Parliament.

"In this report card, 47% of Canadians trust both MPs and political parties 'to do what's right,' a 7 percentage point increase for MPs and a 5 percentage point increase for parties," the report says.

"While this is positive, as it demonstrates trust need not track downwards forever, more than half of Canadians do not trust political actors, which is an important place for improvement."

So how might the 2017 report's B grade get turned into an A?

Samara offers five main recommendations, which it collectively describes as a "reinvestment in Canada's democratic infrastructure": continued civic education (after high school), improved public consultations by MPs, more civil public discourse, a decrease in centralized decision-making to empower MPs, and a more diverse House of Commons.

"Renewing our democratic infrastructure will be a messy, collaborative process involving both citizens and political leaders," the report concludes.

"It will take citizens to demand change and responsive leaders to make it happen."

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