

EMBARGOED until 12:01 am, May 7, 2019

To request an advance copy of the report or set up an interview, please contact:

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Survey finds Canadians are not as populist as feared

Populism in Canada may be more about what elites say than what regular people think

Toronto, May 7, 2019—Senior political leaders from Foreign Affairs Minister [Chrystia Freeland](#) and [Ed Broadbent](#) to [Preston Manning](#) and [Stephen Harper](#) have recently suggested that there's a movement towards populism in Canada.

In the report “**Don’t Blame ‘The People’: The Rise of Elite-led Populism in Canada**,” the Samara Centre for Democracy uses new data to help answer the question: is populism on the rise in Canada?

Earlier this year, the Samara Centre surveyed over 4,000 Canadians on various measures of political populism, like political discontent and a preference for decision-making by ordinary citizens.

Key findings from the report include:

- **59%** of Canadians agree with the statement “I don’t think the government cares much what people like me think.” This is down significantly from the mid-1990s, when the Canadian Election Study (CES) found that 75% of Canadians agreed with the same statement.
- **63%** of Canadian agree that “those elected to Parliament soon lose touch with the people.” This is also down from the recent past: when surveyed for the Canadian Election Study, 77% of Canadians agreed with the same statement in 2004, and 85% agreed in 1993.
- **40%** of Canadians agree that “the will of the majority should always prevail, even over the rights of minorities.” CES surveys from 2011 and 2001 found similar majoritarian sentiments were much more widely held (around 60% and 70%, respectively).
- **42%** of Canadians agree that “ordinary people would do a better job of solving the country’s problems than elected officials.”
- During the 42nd Parliament, MPs have complained about “elites” in **13%** of sitting days, up from only 3% during the first session of the 41st Parliament.

Taken together, these results suggest that populism is not on the rise in Canada.

“As dissatisfied as Canadians are,” says Dr. Michael Morden, Research Director at the Samara Centre, “based on our findings it is very hard to conclude that Canadians have turned radically against institutions and elites.”

However, political leaders may be using the rhetoric of populism to advance their own interests. An analysis of the written record of Parliament shows that politicians are complaining much more about “elites” than ever.

Acting Executive Director Kendall Anderson added, “With a federal election on the horizon, politicians and media alike should avoid using the blunt tool of ‘populism’ and instead try to listen carefully to what Canadians are actually concerned about. On the flip side, citizens should be wary of politicians serving up self-serving populist rhetoric instead of real democratic improvements.”

Please contact José Ramón Martí or Christine Latimer if you would like to receive an embargoed copy of **“Don’t Blame ‘The People.’”**

The full report will be available at
12:01 a.m. on May 7, 2019, at:
samaracanada.com/don't-blame-the-people

About the 360+ Series

In March, the Samara Centre for Democracy released the 2019 Democracy 360, our biennial report card on how Canadians communicate, participate, and lead in politics. The Democracy 360 is partly based on data from the Samara Citizens’ Survey, conducted in English and French between January 16 and February 6, 2019, using an online sample of 4,054 Canadian residents over 18 years of age. Drawing from that survey, **“Don’t Blame ‘The People’”** is one of several short data stories on particular issues and themes in Canadian politics. The 2019 Democracy 360 can be found at samaracanada.com/2019-democracy-360.

About the Samara Centre for Democracy

The Samara Centre for Democracy (formerly Samara Canada) is a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada’s democracy, making it more accessible, responsive, and inclusive. The Samara Centre produces action-based research—as well as tools and resources for active citizens and public leaders—designed to engage Canadians in their democracy.

To learn more about how our research and educational programming is building better politics and a better Canada, visit samaracanada.com.