

EMBARGOED until 12:01 am, September 19, 2019

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

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Canadians say political conversations online are angrier and less civil, feel less safe sharing their views

New report offers tips for more constructive online conversations during an election that party leaders have warned will be “nasty”

Toronto, September 19, 2019—There’s been a lot of talk about what [governments](#) and [social media platforms](#) should do to improve civility and dialogue online. But with a federal election underway, a new report from the Samara Centre for Democracy turns the attention to citizens themselves.

The Samara Centre’s Field Guide to Online Political Conversations brings together survey data as well as insights from the study of difficult conversations and the study of social media to examine what’s going wrong, why it matters, what government action we should expect, and how citizens can change the nature of online political conversations.

Decades of research in political science, psychology, and economics has uncovered why it’s hard to disagree civilly and constructively in person, but social media exchanges make it that much harder by:

- Amplifying both positive and negative emotions
- Allowing anonymity, enabling users to behave in ways they otherwise wouldn’t
- Removing social cues, leading to greater misunderstanding and less empathy
- Rushing responses, resulting in messages that are poorly considered and communicated
- Causing users to compartmentalize their online and offline selves, skewing behaviour further

In a recent survey of Canadians who are frequent social media users, the Samara Centre found that:

- Roughly half of Canadians say political conversations online are angrier and less civil than offline political discussion
- Nearly half (**47%**) of Canadian social media users say they stay out of political discussions out of fear of being criticized
- More Canadian social media users say they do not feel safe sharing political views online (**41%**) than do (**31%**)

Drawing from research on social psychology and social media behaviour, the report outlines seven techniques for having healthier and more constructive discussions online, such as policing members of the same political team, practicing slow politics, reframing one’s language, considering the identities that unite rather than divide, and learning how to spot bots.

“Online incivility has negative consequences for our democracy. It causes people to disengage. It hurts equity in politics. It exacerbates polarization. It makes us more vulnerable to malicious actors trying to sow division and confusion,” says Dr. Michael Morden, Research Director at the Samara Centre. “We hope that this report will give Canadians tools to improve how they and others engage online.”

“With an election only a few weeks away, Canadians should be talking about policy issues, and considering what concerns them and which parties will best represent their issues,” adds Kendall Anderson, Acting Executive Director. “Social media has tremendous potential to allow us to engage beyond those who we see in our day-to-day life—but if online conversations are seen to be toxic, Canadians will have a harder time hearing from those who have different opinions.”

Please contact José Ramón Martí if you would like to receive an advance copy of **The Samara Centre’s Field Guide to Online Political Conversations** or request an interview with a Samara Centre spokesperson.

The report will be available at 12:01 a.m. on September 19, 2019, at:
samaracanada.com/field-guide

About the Data

Unless otherwise noted, data in the Field Guide come from the Samara Centre Politics and Social Media Survey, conducted by Doctors Daniel Rubenson and Peter Loewen of 1,010 Canadian frequent social media users between July 17 and 19, 2019. The online survey sample was drawn with regional, gender, and language quotas, and weighted against census values for age, gender, language, region, and immigration status.

About the Samara Centre for Democracy

The Samara Centre for Democracy 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.

Covering the Federal Election?

We are always available to comment on our areas of research, which include:

- citizen participation
- voting behaviour and influences
- candidates for election
- Members of Parliament
- political parties
- Parliament
- democratic reform
- political culture

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For more information about the Samara Centre’s spokespeople and non-partisan, research-based commentary, visit our [Media Inquiries page](#).

