

EMBARGOED until 12:01 am, January 21, 2020

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

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Parliament must improve scrutiny and debate, and decrease partisanship 42nd Parliament experienced ever-larger bills, restricted and empty debates, and increasingly centralized party control, research shows

Toronto, January 21, 2020 — As the new minority Parliament gets set to return, new research into three facets of a healthy Parliament shows warning signs.

In “**House Inspection: A retrospective of the 42nd Parliament**,” the Samara Centre for Democracy produces the first in-depth, objective examination of the last Parliament (2015-2019), measuring how well it scrutinized the Government, the extent of partisanship within and between parties, and the level of civil and constructive debate, and compares it to previous Parliaments.

Using multiple data sources and surveys of sitting MPs, “**House Inspection**” paints a rich picture of the 42nd Parliament. For example, the data shows:

- **Omnibus bills:** Despite its campaign pledge to end the use of omnibus bills, the Government continued to introduce ever-larger bills, which can hinder serious scrutiny.
- **Time allocation:** The Government continued a much-criticized practice of frequently shutting down debate through time allocation.
- **Stronger Senate:** While Parliament spent more time studying Government bills, and amended more bills, this was in part due to the Senate’s new assertiveness in considering bills and challenging the Government and the House of Commons.
- **Whipped votes:** MPs voted with their parties at almost every opportunity, with the average MP voting along party lines 99.6% of the time and the most rebellious MP 96.6% of the time.
- **Committee work:** Although committees more often reached consensus across party lines, MPs also reported that cross-party collaboration declined during the Parliament as unhealthy partisanship increased.
- **Heckling:** MPs see debate as empty, repetitive, and a waste of valuable time. Despite efforts to promote civility in the House, heckling did not decrease in the 42nd Parliament.

“Following a bruising election campaign, this new minority Parliament could give rise to even worse polarization, even more suffocating party unity, and brinksmanship in the place of thoughtful scrutiny,” warns Samara Centre Research Director Michael Morden. “Or MPs can re-discover the discipline that comes with having to cooperate, to more effectively hold the Government to account.”

The report concludes with recommendations from MPs for the new Parliament to:

- **Exercise diligent scrutiny** by taking the time to research and use all the available resources.
- **Overcome toxic partisanship** by getting to know colleagues across the aisle, and demonstrating principled independence within the party.

- **Strive for better, more substantive and civil debate**, with less note-reading, less heckling, and more dynamic exchanges.

“This detailed study of Parliament shows that it’s not working as it should be—it’s not allowing voices from across the country to be heard, or carefully scrutinizing Government,” says Kendall Anderson, Executive Director of the Samara Centre. “With the new Parliament soon to begin in earnest, parliamentarians have the opportunity to do things differently and show Canadians a more collaborative and democratic way of doing politics.”

Please contact José Ramón Martí if you would like to receive an advance copy of “**House Inspection**” or request an interview with a spokesperson from the Samara Centre for Democracy.

The report will be available at 12:01 a.m. on January 21, 2020, at:
samaracanada.com/house-inspection

About the Methodology

The Samara Centre used a variety of sources to compile the information in this report. For example, we dug into Hansard (Parliament’s written record) to count heckling; scraped data from the LEGISinfo online parliamentary website to look at bills and how they progressed through Parliament; and used the Library of Parliament’s database to calculate the number of sitting days. Additionally, we used results from Samara Centre surveys of sitting MPs conducted throughout the 42nd Parliament.

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.

