

Poll: Only 55% believe democracy working well in Canada

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Fred Chartrons / Canadian Press File Photo

OTTAWA—Only 55 per cent of Canadians believe democracy is working well in the country, according to

a new poll.

That's a sharp decline from 2004, when 75 per cent of Canadians reported satisfaction in an identical poll question.

It could mean that Canadians are starting to see their democratic system in the same, dim light as their political system, said Alison Loat, executive director of the Samara organization, which commissioned the national citizens survey earlier this year

Where Canadians once said, "It's the democracy I love and the politics I hate, what is provocative to us about that 55-per-cent number is what a dip that is in such a short period of time," said Loat.

Michael MacMillan, co-founder and chair of Samara, called the results "troubling."

Politicians — and political parties in particular — are being blamed for the democratic dysfunction, the poll showed.

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In fact, when the poll asked people to give MPs marks for performance in five duties of Members of Parliament, the politicians got failing grades in "holding the government to

account,” “representing the views of constituents” and “managing constituents’ concerns.” MPs got a barely passing mark of 53 per cent for “debating important issues” and 61 per cent for “representing the views of their party.”

“There is a disconnect between the (significance of the) political party and what Canadians think MPs should be doing,” Loat says.

This finding echoes testimonials from former MPs who spoke to Samara in a series of “exit interviews” over the past few years. In previous reports, Samara has documented the way in which these former politicians felt hampered by partisanship in their old jobs.

“Samara’s survey research confirms that MPs are not the only ones who recognize the primacy of political parties,” the new report says. “Canadians sense it, too, and feel that their MPs’ work representing constituents is falling short when compared to MPs’ representation of their parties.”

Samara is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving public-policy discourse and political participation in Canada.

The survey was carried out in French and English among 2,287 online respondents last spring. The 2004 poll surveyed roughly the same number by telephone.