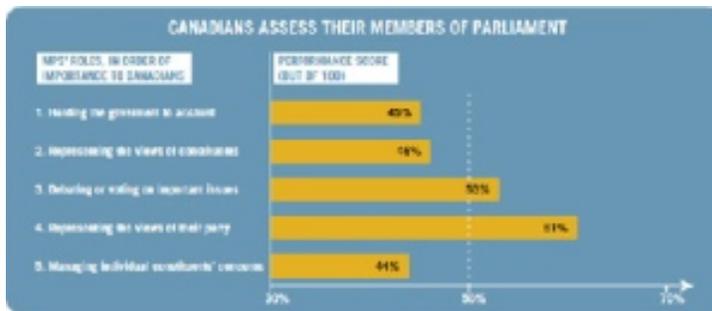


Canadians less content with way democracy works, poll says

Samara research compares poll question from 2012 with 2004 and finds satisfaction in decline

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The two most important activities of MPs identified in Samara's new poll both garnered performance scores below 50 per cent from respondents

Samara graphic

A new poll released by the charitable organization Samara suggests Canadians are

less satisfied with their democracy compared to eight years ago.

Last spring, researchers conducted a poll using a question identical to one used in 2004, asking respondents about their level of satisfaction "with the way democracy works in Canada."

Seventy-five per cent of Canadians expressed at least some degree of satisfaction in 2004. But when asked again in 2012, the number expressing satisfaction dropped 20 points to 55 per cent.

Five per cent said they were "very satisfied", while 50 per cent said they were "fairly satisfied." Twenty-eight per cent said they were "not very satisfied," while nine per cent said they were "not satisfied at all."

Seven per cent did not know and another one per cent did not respond.

Samara found these views consistent across different regions, with one exception: francophone Quebecers reported even greater levels of dissatisfaction than Canadians elsewhere.

Dissatisfaction with MPs



In the same 2012 survey, respondents were asked how satisfied they were with the way their Members of Parliament were doing their jobs. Only 36 per cent of those surveyed expressed satisfaction with their MPs.

To probe these results deeper, the survey asked respondents to rank seven activities of MPs — such as representing their constituents or debating or voting on important issues — in order of importance.

The survey then asked respondents to rate their elected representatives' performance for each of those activities.

Respondents gave MPs a performance score of less than 50 per cent for most of the activities listed in the questionnaire.

Respondents awarded the highest marks to "representing the views of their party," at 61 per cent, followed by "debating or voting on important issues," at 53 per cent.

But for the two activities the survey suggests are most important to Canadians — "holding the government to account" and "representing the views of constituents" — MPs were given lower performance scores, at 45 and 46 per cent respectively.

Nevertheless, when respondents were asked who was most likely to do something about an issue the respondent identified as being important to him or her, the number one answer was MPs, followed by elected leaders at other levels of government.

On this question, politicians outranked business organizations, interest groups, non-profit organizations, the media or religious leaders.

Consistent with exit interviews

Samara is a charitable organization focused on improving political participation in Canada through research and educational programs.

Samara conducted exit interviews with 65 former MPs and found many felt they had spent too much time working on behalf of their parties instead of their constituents. Some of these ex-politicians expressed discomfort when they felt obliged to vote against their constituents' wishes in favour of their party's demands.

Samara's latest report says the findings of this poll suggest many Canadians too are feeling like "MPs' work representing constituents is falling short when compared to MPs' representation of their parties."

Alison Loat, the co-founder and executive director of Samara, says in their news release that while "MPs are an important link between Canadians and their politics," that relationship "seems to be overshadowed by political party messaging."

Michael MacMillan, the co-founder and chair of Samara, calls the declining satisfaction suggested by the poll "troubling."



"It might go some way towards explaining the apathy and disengagement we see reflected in Canada's declining voter turnout," MacMillan says in the release.

In **last week's three federal byelections**, voter turnout ranged from a low of 29.4 in Calgary Centre to 43.9 per cent in Victoria.

Samara's poll surveyed a representative online sample of 2,287 respondents across Canada in English and French between March 19 and April 2, 2012. Responses were weighted to reflect the population.

The 2004 survey that provided the first question for comparison was a random telephone survey of 2,517 Canadians.