

Do MPs talk about your priorities in Parliament? Turns out, they do

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Canadians don't think Parliament represents them. In polls, a large portion of Canadians say they feel disconnected from what goes on in Ottawa.

But new research says that's not true. With a few notable exceptions, Members of Parliament on the floor of the House of Commons do talk about the issues Canadians say they care about.

The results come from [an analysis by Samara](#), a non-profit organization focused on civic engagement. In a report to be released Monday, Samara analyzed half a year's worth of parliamentary transcripts and compared the topics discussed to a poll of issues Canadians said they cared about. It follows on a survey by Samara last year that found only 55 per cent of Canadians said they were satisfied with the state of democracy in the country, a drop of about 20 points from the last decade.

In a series of public opinion surveys, Samara found that Canadians' top-priority items were, in order: economy (including taxes), health care, social programs, labour (including jobs and unemployment), environment, education, crime and immigration. Other subjects, such as foreign policy, were picked by less than 1 per cent of respondents.

An analysis of one period of House of Commons transcripts found MPs talked about, in order: labour, economy, immigration, crime, the financial system, transportation and health care.

There's alignment, then, on fiscal matters, but a disconnect on health care, social programs and crime.

Alison Loat, the executive director of Samara, said tone was likely a big reason behind the disconnect. If a citizen tunes in to watch Question Period and they see an MP speaking with indignation, they may be turned off by the content of what they have to say.

It's also worth noting that this only means the subjects were raised in the House, and not whether Canadians agreed with their MPs' opinions. And in the case of health care, largely a provincial responsibility, there's little surprise it doesn't get as much attention in a federal governing body.

The time of day that parliamentarians talk matters. Certain times that spotlight individual MPs tend to be more closely aligned to Canadian priorities than parliamentary proceedings controlled by the party leadership. But it used to be better, as [an analysis by Éric Grenier](#) found that Statements by Members, a routine part of the day in Question Period set aside for constituents' issues, have become more partisan in recent years.

Still, there's a gap between what Canadians want and what parliamentarians deliver, even if that gap is smaller than expected.

"It's better than the dismal view many have," Ms. Loat said, "but there's still opportunity for it to be better."

<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/do-mps-talk-about-your-priorities-in-parliament-turns-out-they-do/article8123989/>