

Most MPs' websites don't connect with public, study finds

Samara study of federal MPs' websites shows politicians could do much better connecting with citizens online

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OTTAWA—People who are looking for work as political volunteers need not apply through the websites of their members of Parliament.

Only 4 per cent of MPs' websites contain information for would-be volunteers — the backbone of political organization in Canada, according to a newly released [study by the Samara organization](#).

Nor do MPs seem all that keen on using their websites for political discussion or debate with the public, the study found. Only 9 per cent of MPs' current websites include space for comments or feedback.

The problems with the websites point to a larger problem about how much the public is tuned out of politics and how many politicians are focused more on sending messages to the voters rather than receiving them.

“Politics, as we know, has a challenge trying to figure out how to engage with citizens in an ongoing way and not just around elections,” says Alison Loat, executive director of Samara, an organization dedicated to improving democracy and public debate in Canada.

“So the websites give us just another example of how politicians might want to think differently about how they connect with citizens in between elections.”

Almost all the websites have basic information about the MPs: their biographies, email addresses and office location. However, only 15 per cent of the websites listed office hours — concrete information that constituents presumably need if they want to connect with those offices.

Samara's study does, however, single out some MPs for voter-friendly features on their websites, especially the independent MPs. Former Conservative MP [Brent Rathgeber](#) is commended for his thorough blog posts and reading material he posts. Former NDP MP [Bruce Hyer](#) hosts nearly two dozen petitions at his website for constituents to sign.

As well, for reasons that aren't clear, British Columbia MPs appear to have an overall edge over others in website content, and women do slightly better than men in the scoring system that the study developed to compare the websites.

http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/12/02/most_mps_websites_dont_connect_with_public_study_finds.html

Websites were scored against a 14-point checklist of features, encompassing information that politicians could provide online, either in an effort to tell more or hear more in communication with citizens. Very few websites had any more than seven of the 14 items on the checklist.

“Members of Parliament are great at offering their constituents the basic information about themselves,” the study states in its overall findings, “but they perform poorly at offering ways for Canadians to engage with politics or have input on decisions and policy.”

Four members of Parliament don't have any websites at all: Conservatives Jacques Gourde and Richard Harris, Bloc Québécois MP Claude Patry, and Lise St-Denis, elected for the New Democrats but now sitting as a Liberal.

Andrew Scheer, the Commons speaker, was also cited in the study for not having a website, but his office was said to be working on technical issues to get it back up and running.

Loat said the heartening aspect to this study is that its findings are quickly reversed — MPs could get working tomorrow on improving their democratic presence online.

As part of the study, released on Monday, Samara is also distributing its checklist so that MPs have a handy guide on how to make their websites better.