



# Political parties failing Canadians: survey

DON BUTLER, OTTAWA CITIZEN  
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OTTAWA — Canadians believe political parties are failing to adequately perform their most crucial roles — including that of reaching out to citizens to make sure their views are represented, a new national survey suggests.

In its survey, Samara — a non-partisan charity dedicated to improving political participation — asked Canadians to rate the importance of six political party roles and to evaluate how well the parties are performing them.

Just over half said the most important role parties play is to reach out to Canadians so their views can be represented. That role received the lowest evaluation — a failing grade of 43 per cent.

Those surveyed also awarded an F to political parties for what participants judged as the parties' second most important role, coming up with new policy ideas and solutions, and for hearing ideas from party members.

They gave Ds — a bare pass — to three other roles: encouraging people to vote, explaining what their party stands for, and recruiting candidates and competing in elections. The latter was seen by those surveyed as the least important party role. That suggests that Canadians believe parties' focus on winning elections is coming at the expense of hearing their views, Samara said in a report analyzing the survey results.

The report noted that 69 per cent of respondents in the same survey agreed or strongly agreed that candidates and political parties “are interested only in people’s votes, not their opinions.”

The new findings are consistent with earlier research by Samara that found that Canadians think a member of Parliament’s most important job is to represent the views of constituents, but gave MPs failing marks for their performance in that area.

<http://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/political-parties-failing-canadians-survey>



“Together, these two findings send Canada’s political leadership — regardless of party — a dire message: Canadians want to be heard and represented by parties, and they firmly believe this is not happening,” the Samara report says.

“Canadians instinctively know there’s a party going on and they’re not invited,” says the report. That leads them to conclude that parties and their leaders are interested only in themselves, it says.

“This reinforces the branding problem that too often characterizes politicians and turns Canadians away from politics.”

Samara said the survey results show that Canadians value engagement, which suggests that parties that “genuinely try to hear, involve and represent them will be rewarded in the form of votes, fundraising dollars and party members.”

Nevertheless, there are “simple first steps” parties could take, the report suggests, such as releasing their membership numbers, making the dates and locations of riding association meetings widely known and showing how they allocate their money.

“If parties fail, so will our politics. We all have a stake in asking them to do more, rather than washing our hands of them.”

The Samara survey solicited the opinions of 1,807 people last August. The margin of error is 2.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.