



Politics ‘a dirty word’ for Canadians, finds new study of engagement between elections

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If the rules of polite conversation forbid talking politics, it’s no wonder Canadians are known for their manners.

Sixty per cent of Canadians say they haven’t discussed a political or societal issue face-to-face or over the phone even once in the past 12 months, according to a striking new study by [Samara](#). And it’s not that those conversations have simply moved online, either.

Just 17 per cent of Canadians say they have shared political content via social media in the last year; 15 per cent blogged about a political issue; 30 per cent used email or instant messaging to talk politics; and 25 per cent participated in an online discussion group for such purposes.

“Politics is viewed as a dirty word – something that isn’t appropriate or that should be celebrated,” said Alison Loat, Samara’s [executive director](#). “But it’s through politics that we decide how we’re going to live together, how we shape laws, how we allocate billions of dollars of tax money. . . . It’s the process by which we build our country every day.”

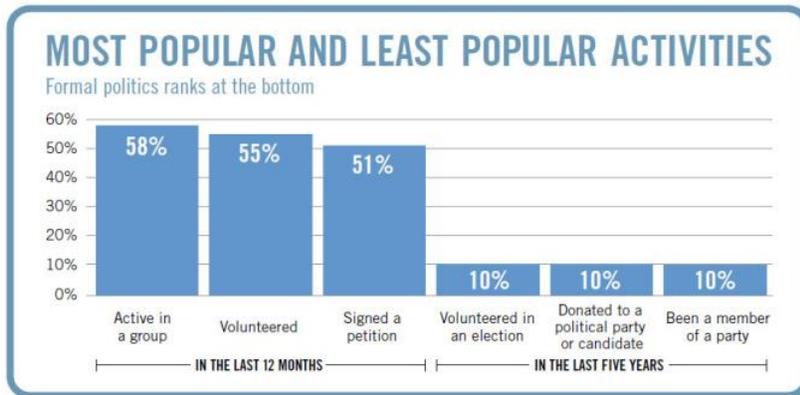
Samara, a charitable organization, commissioned the research last year in order to tilt the conversation about low voter turnout toward the underlying issue of poor political engagement between elections.

Nearly 2,300 adults nationwide, with an oversample of young Canadians (18 to 34), participated in the online survey. In it, people were asked whether they had recently been involved in 20 activities Samara considered vital to measuring political engagement.

In just three of those 20 pursuits did more than half of Canadians participate during the past year: joining a group (not necessarily a political one), volunteering, and signing a petition (58, 55 and 51 per cent, respectively). The least popular activities involved “formal” engagement: volunteering in an election, donating to a party or candidate, or joining a political party in the last five years (each drew a positive response of 10 per cent).

<http://o.canada.com/news/national/politics-a-dirty-word-for-canadians-finds-new-study-of-engagement-between-elections>

On average, Canadians pursued just one-quarter of the possible 20 activities. Only about 20 per cent of Canadians were considered partisans or “party people” (those who’ve been formally involved with a party or campaign).



Samara concludes that “if a healthy democracy requires active participation, then Canada is on pretty shaky ground.”

“There isn’t a culture of ongoing discussion and debate around

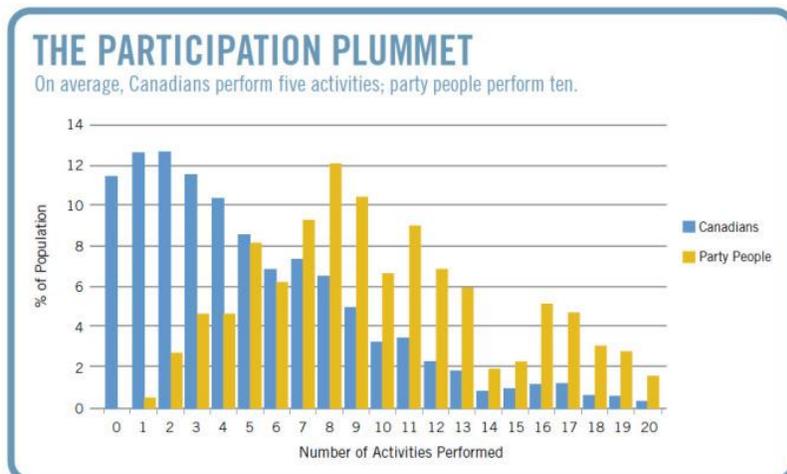
the political issues that shape our country,” said Loat, hastening to add that apathy – so often fingered as the culprit for low voter turnout – isn’t the problem.

“There’s lots of evidence that people care about the issues around them. What they don’t do is connect that to politics.”

To wit, 49 per cent of Canadians said they had boycotted a product in the last year, and 51 per cent signed a petition, but just 31 per cent contacted an elected official about an issue of concern.

Young people, whom Loat dubs the “canaries in the coal mine,” were a good news-bad news story: Although they participated in most activities at the same rate or higher than those 35 and older, their

formal engagement was lower by 11 to 34 per cent, depending on the activity.



Loat said people too often connect political involvement with pushing an agenda when, in fact, Samara’s polling suggests “party

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people” do much of democracy’s heavy lifting: volunteering with community groups, connecting with policymakers, talking to friends and family about issues that matter, and so on.

Starting Monday, Canadians will be asked to recognize such role models at everydaypoliticalcitizen.tumblr.com, an initiative designed to change the way people think about political participation.

“We celebrate volunteering and giving to charities . . . but we don’t equally emphasize how important it is to be an active participant in our democracy,” said Loat. “If (engagement) numbers were higher between elections, we’d see a higher voter turnout as well.”