

# Accidental Deliberations

## The unengaged majority

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Published on: July 8, 2013

Samara has released a [study](#) on the sadly limited level of public participation in Canadian politics and community activities. And [Susan Delacourt](#) and [Misty Harris](#) both follow up - with Harris catching what looks to me like the most important point:

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."

Now, it's particularly striking that the poll question about political or societal issues wasn't limited to the partisan politics which are so often seen as the problem. Instead, the problem extends to a lack of discussion of any issues at all - whether or not they reflect the priorities of political parties.

And I'd think that finding leads to an obvious need for change: to the extent there is a taboo against talking about political issues in a wide variety of settings, that restriction on the scope of expected discussion has gone too far.

Samara's poll actually found more people actually involved in participating within civil society groups, signing petitions or boycotting products than talking about issues. Which means that a substantial number of respondents with enough interest to *act* on political issues couldn't think of a single time when those same issues were *discussed*.

That set of respondents raises one challenge: a political culture which to a great extent treats the majority of citizens as passive rather than active participants seems to be reflected in their actions. But it's hard to believe that people signing petitions or engaging in boycotts don't have at least some interest in talking about why they engage in those actions. Which means that the main issue may be a lack of opportunity to get involved - a problem which any political party or activist group should be eager to remedy.

Meanwhile, the survey also includes a substantial number of respondents who aren't involved in any way. But there too, some public affirmation that there's value in discussing political and social issues (along with a greater number of opportunities to participate) would have the potential to make a significant difference - and hopefully create an expectation that everybody will at least think and talk about the issues that affect their lives.

<http://accidentaldeliberations.blogspot.ca/2013/07/the-unengaged-majority.html>