

# Voter dissatisfaction diminishes Canadian democracy

TIMES-HERLAD EDITORIAL STAFF, THE MOOSE JAW TIMES HERALD

Published on: December 03, 2012



Canadians feel MPs are becoming more adept at towing the party line, but less capable of representing the electorate's interests, a Samara study finds,

**Sean Kilpatrick / The Canadian Press**

According to a recent study by non-profit organization Samara, Canadians can't get no satisfaction when it comes to our democracy.

The survey, conducted online, asked more than 2,200 Canadians how satisfied they were with the way democracy works in their country. Only 55 per cent replied positively, as very or somewhat satisfied, a decline of 20 per cent from responses to the same question eight years ago.

The leading cause of the decline, the study found, is a growing dissatisfaction with the performance of individual MPs.

Canadians generally felt that their local MP should be prioritizing their interests and keeping the government accountable, the study found. But 46 per cent of those surveyed felt MPs were failing to represent their electorate, and 45 per cent felt they failed to keep the government accountable to their decisions.

Meanwhile, the study discovered, 61 per cent of those surveyed felt that MPs were doing a fantastic job at towing the party line, identified by most respondents as being of less importance.

While the numbers depicted in the survey are far from Orwellian, they do put the disturbing trend of inclining polarization and its negative impacts in sharp relief.

Any degree of decline in voter engagement diminishes Canada's political system considerably, and a 20 per cent drop in voter satisfaction has been heavily foreshadowed by a sharp decline in turnout.

The 2008 election featured the lowest recorded voter turnout, and the 2011 election the third lowest, in recent history — at 58.8 and 61.4 per cent, respectively.

The simple fact is, the less satisfied the electorate feels about their representatives in Parliament and the functioning of Canada's political system, the less engaged they will be in future elections.

An increasingly polarized and less representative political system benefits nobody.

Canada's MPs must look at their individual performances and remember their priorities as elected officials.

And the first priority should be to represent the interests of those who put them in Parliament.