

Why don't Canadians want to talk politics?

Canadians are becoming less likely to want to talk politics even as our politics is starting to look a lot more interesting.

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For the last several years, it's been a well-established fact that Canadians have lost interest in politics.

That voter turnout is way down is now taken for granted. Far more unsettling is the [report by Samara](#), an institute that promotes democracy and citizen engagement, that two in every five Canadians (39 per cent) had not had a single political discussion of any kind during the past year.

Paradoxically, some good reasons exist why this is so. Economically, we've done better during the hard times since 2008 than almost any other industrial democracy. True our pace is now slowing because of the collapse in oil prices. But this isn't a setback of our own making.

Further, a great deal of our slackened interest in politics derives from the healthiest of all circumstances: not for a long time have we been so confident about ourselves.

For the first time in nearly half a century we no longer need to worry that Quebec may separate. That issue will never vanish from our midst, anymore than it will in Scotland. But for perhaps a generation it will no longer be an existential threat.

To amplify our cockiness, something similar has happened in our relationship with the U.S. At one point last year, our average incomes were actually higher than those across the border. While we have to contend with difficulties, our next-door neighbour has to deal with decline. If our politics is boring, that served up to Americans is abysmal.

Further, relief is on its way to us. As the days pass, our politics is becoming, if not exciting, then at least interesting.

Three weeks back, Justin Trudeau actually [said something](#). He said, and did so with some genuine eloquence, that if some Muslim women chose to wear a niqab, so what?

At about the same time, New Democrat leader Thomas Mulcair launched a strong criticism of the government's expansion of Canada's military role in the Middle East to Syria despite the absence of approval of the United Nations in contrast to our role in Iraq where its government supports our intervention.

<http://www.thestar.com/opinion/commentary/2015/03/30/why-dont-canadians-want-to-talk-politics-gwyn.html>

True, our opponent, the Islamic State, is utterly evil. True, the niqab cuts off contact between those women who wear it (often unwillingly, surely) and the citizens of their new country. In exchange, Prime Minister Stephen Harper has made some sound responses to these attacks on him by his political opponents.

But these kinds of debates about these kinds of subjects are exactly what our politics needs if it's to play a real role in our lives.

The most important debates will of course be those about competing economic policies. Here, Harper, with a budget surplus in his hip pocket, has the advantage. Conversely, Trudeau has yet to show he has any economic policy ideas at all, and had better do so soon to be taken seriously as an aspirant prime minister.

But an important change has already taken place, or at least may have begun to — the most any real Canadian could ever concede. For the first time, the three leaders are, for the first time, treating voters with respect. Their objective is of course strictly self-serving. But they are putting out some genuine ideas and are defending these against their opponents.

Nothing yet said is brilliant, exceptional, inspirational. But it's a hell of a lot better than what's gone on for years. And it's better yet by a wide margin than what goes on in the politics of the next-door neighbour that we once looked up to in awe.

So, while not expecting too much, take a risk and get together with your neighbour to argue about politics.