



# 2019 DEMOCRACY360

The Third Report Card on How Canadians Communicate, Participate, and Lead in Politics



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# Executive summary

This is the Samara Centre for Democracy's third edition of the Democracy 360, a made-in-Canada report card on the state of Canada's democracy. Built on the understanding that democracy is about more than casting a ballot every four years, this biennial report card examines the complex relationship between Canadians and their political leadership—especially between elections. Based on 19 indicators and 37 sub-indicators, it measures three areas essential to a healthy democracy: communication, participation, and political leadership.

Amid global uncertainty with the fate of long-standing democracies, our democracy earned a B-, the same as its 2017 grade.

This unchanged letter grade masks some positive trends. Since the Samara Centre began measuring five years ago, Canadians' satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada has never been higher. Three-quarters of us are "very" or "fairly" satisfied with the state of affairs (and only 6% report that we're "not satisfied at all"). Other findings—including that 95% of Canadians find it "very" or "rather" important to live in a democratic country—point to a strong foundation of

democratic values.

The letter grade doesn't reflect these nuances, and it also conceals a darker angle—that Canadians are concerned with where our democracy is headed. Nearly half (46%) describe our democracy as getting weaker (while 23% don't know and 30% said that it's getting stronger).

As each area of the Democracy 360 reveals, there is a tremendous opportunity for Canadians—with support and greater effort from elected representatives—to channel their underlying democratic spirit into the workings of a resilient democracy.

## **Communication**

A significantly greater number of Canadians are discussing politics and reaching out to their elected representatives. On the other hand, they report that Members of Parliament (MPs) are not contacting them as much as they have in the past.

## **Participation**

Canadians haven't given up on our formal political system. They're participating slightly more in formal politics, and engaging in activism at rates similar to previous years. Troublingly, rates of broader civic and community engagement have dropped significantly.

## **Political leadership**

Since 2017, there has been little change in the public's opinion of how well federal MPs and political parties are doing their jobs, although there is growing trust in MPs and in the belief that their work can influence our country's direction. However, since the first Democracy 360 in 2015, MPs and political parties are viewed much more favourably. In terms of how well our elected representatives reflect society, the House of Commons is not keeping up with the changing Canadian population.

The Samara Centre's Democracy 360 report cards provide a broad and ongoing assessment of the state of Canada's democratic culture. Instead of asking Canadians their opinions on current events, policy issues, or political personalities, the public opinion surveys underpinning this research focus on enduring indicators of democratic health and vitality: whether Canadians get involved in political decisions that affect them, whether communication channels between elected leaders and those they represent are open and being used effectively, and whether the electorate believes that MPs and political parties are capable of looking out for their interests.

The information collected in this year's report suggests enormous potential. All the ingredients for a major democratic moment are present. But if Canadians and their elected representatives miss this chance, the deep-seated concern that Canadians have—that our democracy is getting weaker—could truly materialize.



# Introduction

Citizens of some of the world's oldest and most established democracies are contemplating a startling question: is representative democracy slipping away?

When today's democracies fail, it's not usually brought about by some big cataclysmic event, like a coup or a revolution. Their health is more likely to decline gradually, as democratic norms and values slowly erode, opportunities for participation are reined in, and leaders move to consolidate power.<sup>1</sup> This is why the Samara Centre launched the Democracy 360 in 2015: as an early warning system, a tool for tracking the health of Canadian democracy in its finer gradients, and to sound the alarm when needed.

But with alarm bells ringing across the democratic world, the 2019 Democracy 360 offers some good news: Canadians stand strong behind our democracy.

In fact, when it comes to our views on democracy and politics, Canadians are a largely

contented bunch. Over the past five years—and three Democracy 360 report cards—the Samara Centre has observed a steady climb in rates of satisfaction with Canada's democracy.



Three in four (**75%**) of Canadians are “fairly” or “very” satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada

Canadians are more tuned in than in previous years. This year's communication indicators show that they are more frequently discussing politics and political issues and are more likely to have participated in formal politics during the last year. Canadians are also reaching out and contacting their elected representatives more than ever.

Canadians' interest in politics has grown, too.

This growth cannot solely be attributed to a 'Trump effect,' where shocking international political developments overshadow what's happening in our own backyard. When Canadians are asked about their interest in politics at different levels, national and provincial/regional politics come out on top.

Canadians think politics matters in their lives, and they think that other Canadians believe this too. (They've even become slightly more comfortable with the idea of their children going into politics, though they still don't love it).

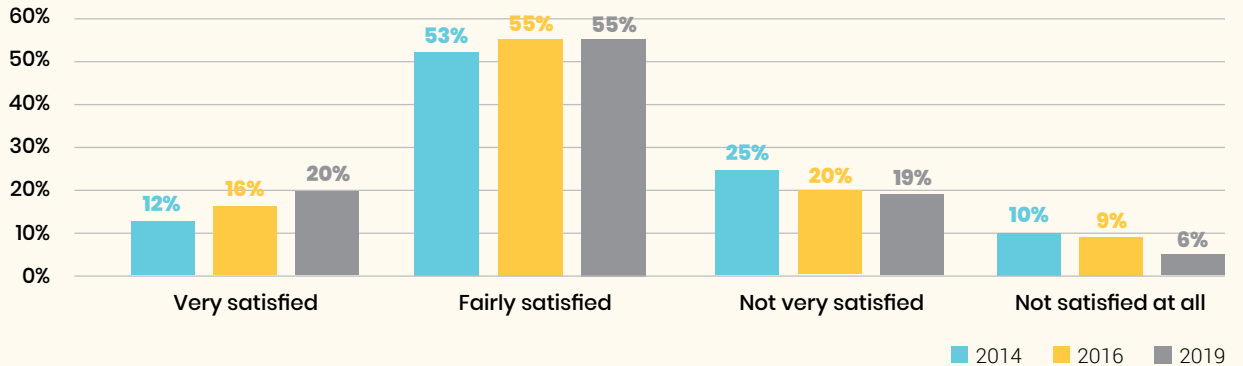
And just in case there were any doubts, Canadians are firmly rooted to the ideal of democracy—a small minority of 5% do not think it's important to live in a country governed democratically.

There is much that suggests that Canada's democracy is doing reasonably well.

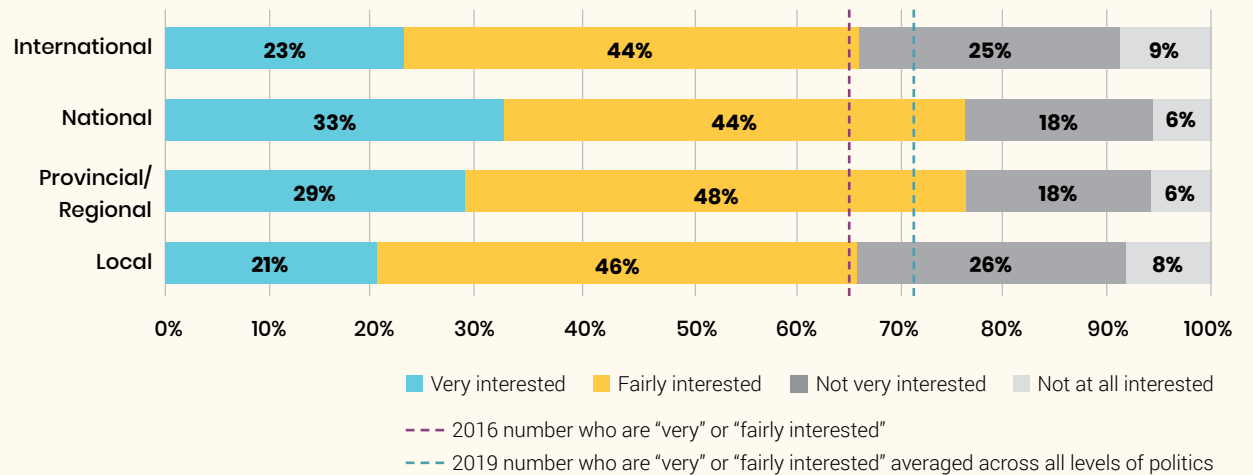
So why didn't the report card grade go up?

This report answers this question by first examining the communicative elements in our democracy: whether Canadians discuss politics, whether they reach out to their elected representatives, and whether those representatives, in turn, inform and engage their constituents. Next, it reviews indicators which measure participation: voter turnout, certainly, but also the voting gap between

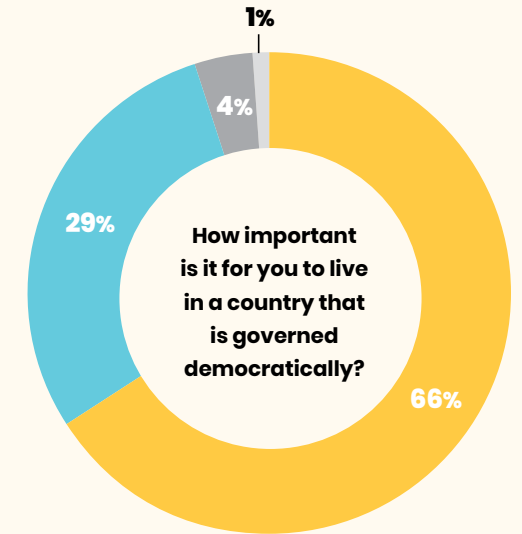
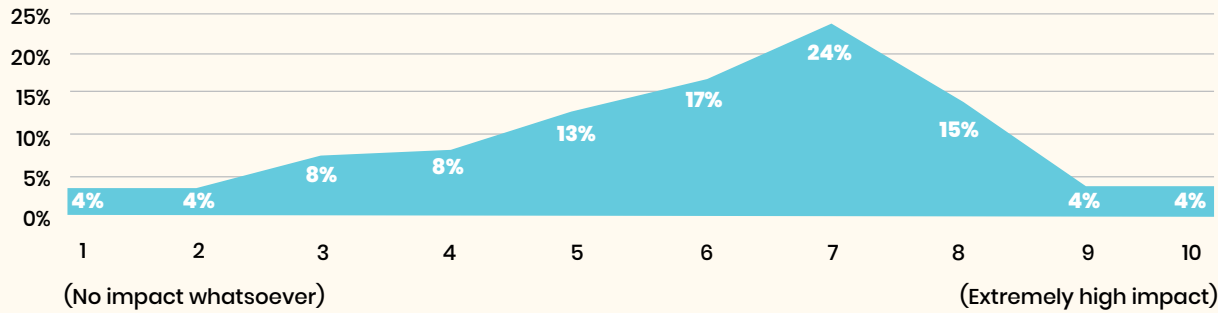
## On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Canada?



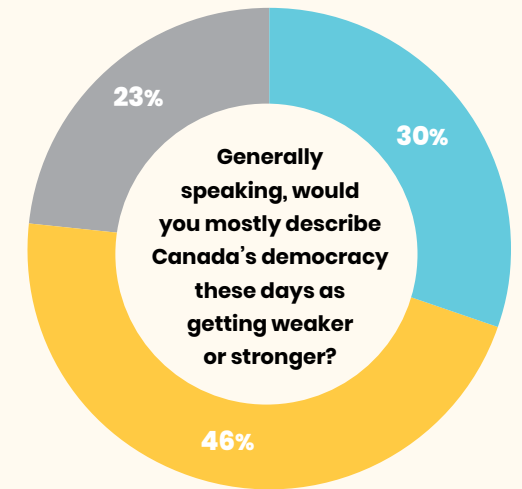
## How interested would you say you are in politics?



### How much of an impact does politics have on your daily life?

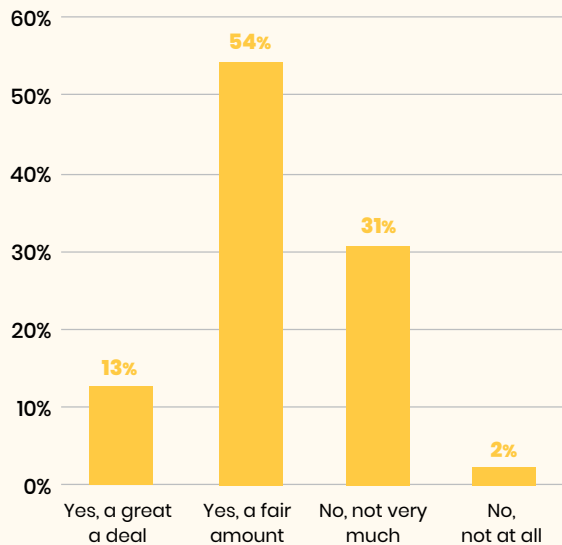


■ Very important    ■ Rather important  
■ Not very important    ■ Not at all important

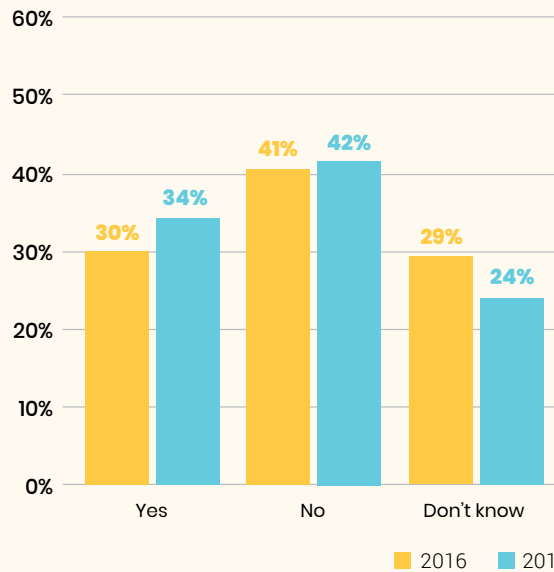


■ Weaker    ■ Stronger    ■ Don't know

### Do you think Canadians care about politics?



### If you have a child, or were to have one, would you be happy to see them spend a part of their career as a politician?



oldest and youngest voters and rates of formal political engagement, activism, and civic participation. In the final section, our elected representatives are placed under a microscope, with the public's assessment of MPs' and federal political parties' job performances and a review of whether the House of Commons reflects the diverse makeup of the people they represent. The report ends with a set of recommendations for moving forward, especially in this federal election year.

Our survey found that Canadians are doing their part in our formal political system. Compared to our recent past, they're more ready to show up and reach out. We have the *demos* (the people) in our representative democracy. But what of the *representation*?

MPs and the federal political parties that organize them have some work to do. The reported rates of all forms of contact between MPs and Canadians have decreased substantially since our last Democracy 360, even as Canadians are reaching out to their elected representatives more often.

Public opinion of MPs and federal political parties has changed little since 2016, with one exception: Canadians have a higher level of trust in

MPs generally, and stronger confidence in their ability to influence the direction of the country. Compared to 2014, MPs are viewed much more positively, but there are also signs of disaffection with the state of our political leadership. For example, of the 90% of Canadians who do not belong to a political party, only 15% would even *consider* joining a major federal or provincial party in the future.

This underscores the need for elected representatives and political parties to seize opportunities to communicate more—and in more effective ways—with their constituents. (At the very least, MPs should commit to regularly updating their personal websites—see page 17 for more on that).

The *demos* is poised for action. The 2019 general election holds tremendous potential for candidates, elected representatives, and parties to tap into the interest that Canadians already have in politics and political issues, convey the importance of participating in our democracy to those who are tuned out, and use this momentum to sustain a healthy democracy well past the next election cycle. More importantly, once the next Parliament is chosen, the work cannot stop there.

## The Economist Intelligence Unit's 2018 Democracy Index

Canada has always scored high in international democratic rankings. It has never fallen from the list of top 10 countries in the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, which began measuring the state of democracy worldwide in 2006.<sup>2</sup> This past year was no exception. Canada was ranked sixth out of 167 countries overall, and was named one of only 19 "full democracies." Top marks were awarded for civil liberties, while the lowest mark was for political participation (poor voter turnout, low political party membership, and lack of political engagement). According to the Index, Canada's political participation score is higher than the US, on par with Spain, Switzerland, and Australia, but lower than many Western European countries.



Our representatives must find new and more effective ways to connect with their communities (especially those that are hardest to reach or traditionally excluded), illustrate the relevance of political decision-making to the everyday, and act with greater transparency and integrity.

This is vital, not only because it will lead to more accessible, responsive, and inclusive politics, but because our democracy—and democracy in general—remains vulnerable. No need to look far for evidence; doubts about the future of our democracy are front and centre in the minds of Canadians. Almost half of Canadians think our democracy is getting weaker.

This is the strongest argument yet for political parties and elected representatives to make a greater effort at establishing a healthy, two-way relationship with citizens, and to put our representative democracy on a firm footing that lives up to, feeds, and deepens our democratic spirit.

At the beginning of this election year, Canada has the raw materials for a big civic moment. Canadians believe in democracy. They're talking about politics and looking for opportunities to participate. But we need our political leadership to acknowledge, pursue, and realize that

## Changes to the political landscape

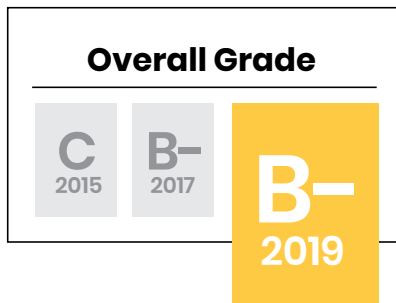
Since the last time the Samara Centre surveyed Canadians, much has changed. January 2017 saw the swearing in of US President Donald Trump, whose first two years in government have fueled concern throughout the democratic world about political polarization, populism, and corruption. The Cambridge Analytica scandal brought attention to the illegal collection of personal data used for political gains, and underlined voters' vulnerability to online manipulation. We've witnessed the unprecedented Parliamentary volatility following the Brexit referendum in the UK, and the extraordinary levels of discontent showcased by the Yellow Vest protests in France. The threat of foreign actors interfering in domestic elections has become a routine concern.

In Canada, the federal Conservative, NDP and Bloc Québécois parties each elected new leaders. A brand new federal party was formed. At the provincial level, some major parties experienced their worst electoral defeats since Confederation, and other parties which had never been near power achieved official party status or even formed Government for the first time.

In the two years since the last report card was published, these changes have influenced Canadians' perceptions and experiences of our democratic system. The Democracy 360 sets out to find out how.

potential. If not, the effects could be severe. Given how much Canadians care about—and are concerned with—the state of our politics, poor voter turnout in the 2019 federal election would be a true indictment of our parties and leaders.

We must not let ourselves become satisfied with the status quo, no matter how rosy it seems compared to other democracies or to the Canada of five years ago. The alarmingly high number of Canadians who believe our democratic system is becoming weaker is a timely reminder that our representative democracy must not simply be upheld; it must be continually renewed and improved.



## How did the Samara Centre build the Democracy 360?

The inaugural Democracy 360 report card, released in 2015, captured public opinion near the end of almost a decade of Conservative federal governments (the Citizens' Survey was conducted in the fall of 2014).<sup>3</sup> The second report card, released in 2017, examined public opinion in the first year of the new federal Liberal government (the survey collected data during the fall of 2016).<sup>4</sup>

Like the previous editions, this third report card covers Canadians' political experiences and activities in a 12-month period. Since the data was collected at the beginning of 2019, this essentially covers political activities and experiences for all of 2018.

The Democracy 360 brings together several data sources, including:

1. Public opinion data drawn from the Samara Citizens' Survey, conducted in English and French using an online sample of 4,054 Canadian residents over 18 years of age living in 10 provinces.<sup>5</sup> Data was collected for the third report between January 16 and February 6, 2019.<sup>6</sup>
2. Elections Canada and other electoral agencies
3. The House of Commons<sup>7</sup> and Library of Parliament records<sup>8</sup>
4. Individual websites and social media accounts of MPs
5. Independent research on the demographic makeup of legislatures in Canada from Andrew Griffith, author of "Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and Anecdote"<sup>9</sup>

For the complete methodology, visit [samaracanada.com](http://samaracanada.com).

## Communication Grade

B  
2015

B+  
2017

A  
2019

### Report card:

# Communication

**The Aspiration:** Canadians who talk about politics and policy with greater understanding and elected representatives who serve as reliable, vibrant, two-way links between citizens and government.

When it came to discussing politics in 2018, Canadians had a lot to share! Three of the five indicators measuring political discussion rates increased since the last report card, including the reported numbers for having had a political conversation in-person or over the phone in the last year (60%). Email and instant messaging were as popular for chatting about politics as they were in 2016 (34%). There was also a slight increase in the number of people who chose to recirculate,

share, or comment on political information (up five percentage points to 38%). Although social media platforms were used less for #CdnPoli talk in 2018, there was a rise in the number of people who followed politicians' accounts (up from 34% to 41%).

The biggest jump of any indicator in the 2019 Citizens' Survey was the 10-percentage point increase in Canadians reporting that they had contacted their elected representatives in the

last year. One in three Canadians reached out to municipal representatives (33%), slightly fewer contacted federal MPs (29%), and one in four contacted provincial elected officials (26%).

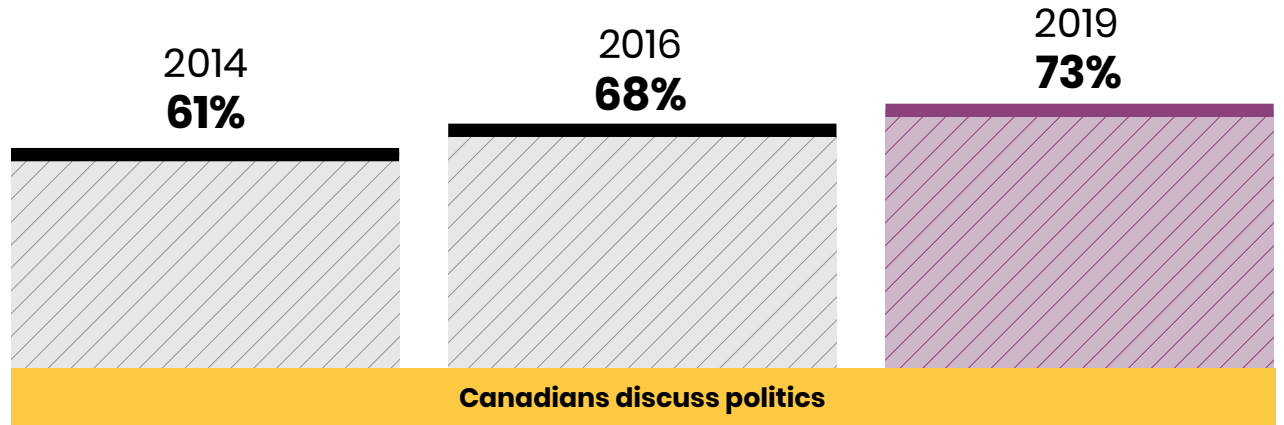
On the other hand, one of the largest drops measured was the level of contact by federal representatives to their constituents. Every single channel of communication that was measured—email, phone, social media, snail mail, and in-person contact—decreased from 2016.

This perceived decline in communication from representatives to constituents comes despite the fact that MPs have widely adopted the use of social media platforms. As in 2016, nearly all MPs are using Twitter and Facebook. The drop in MPs' YouTube accounts is countered by an equivalent increase in Instagram use, resulting in no significant change in the overall score. But a simple analysis of MPs' online presence, based on their recent Twitter use and the type of information they provide on their websites, provides evidence that there is room for improvement in the quality of online communication from MPs, particularly if they have any interest in fostering meaningful engagement with constituents.

# Canadians discuss politics

# 73%

The percentage of Canadians who reported having a discussion about politics in the last year.



	2014	2016	2019
Discussed via email or text message	31%	34%	34%
Discussed face to face or over the phone	52%	54%	60% ↑
Discussed on social media	-	39%	37% ↓
Followed a politician on social media	23%	34%	41% ↑
Circulated, reposted or commented on political info	35%	33%	38% ↑

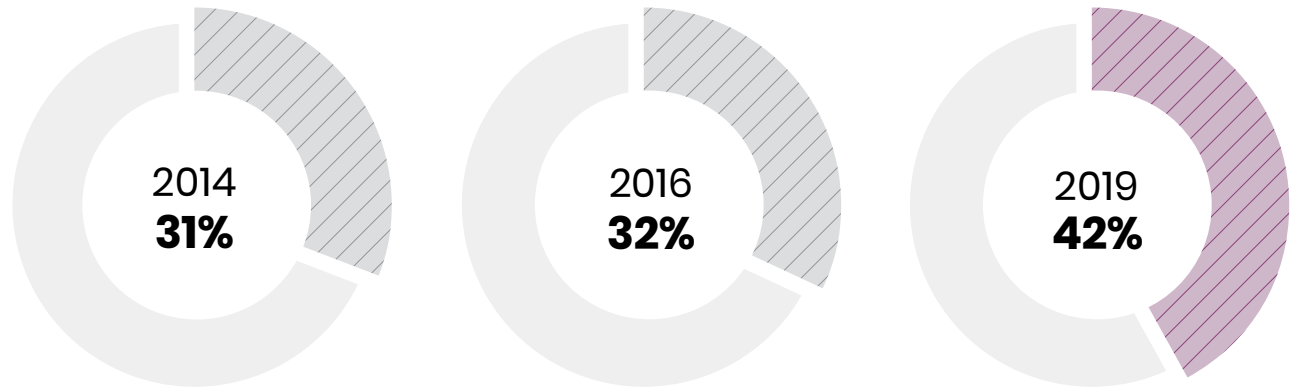
### Why this indicator matters

How much Canadians discuss politics tells us how engaged they are with issues, policies and the democratic system. Discussion is often the first step towards action.

## Canadians contact political leadership

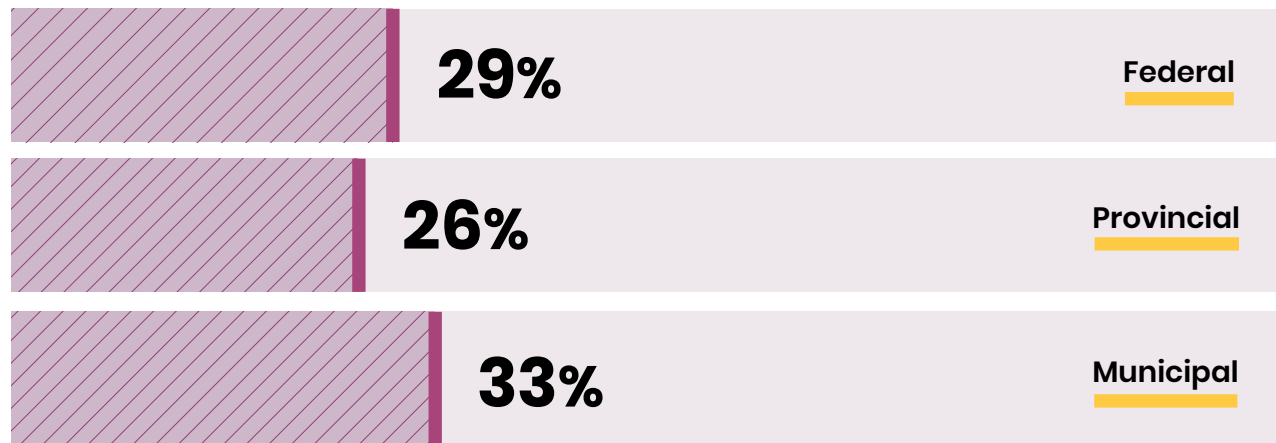
# 42%

The percentage of Canadians who reported having contacted an elected representative in the last year.



Canadians contact elected representatives

### Which level of government did Canadians reach out to in 2018?



#### Why this indicator matters

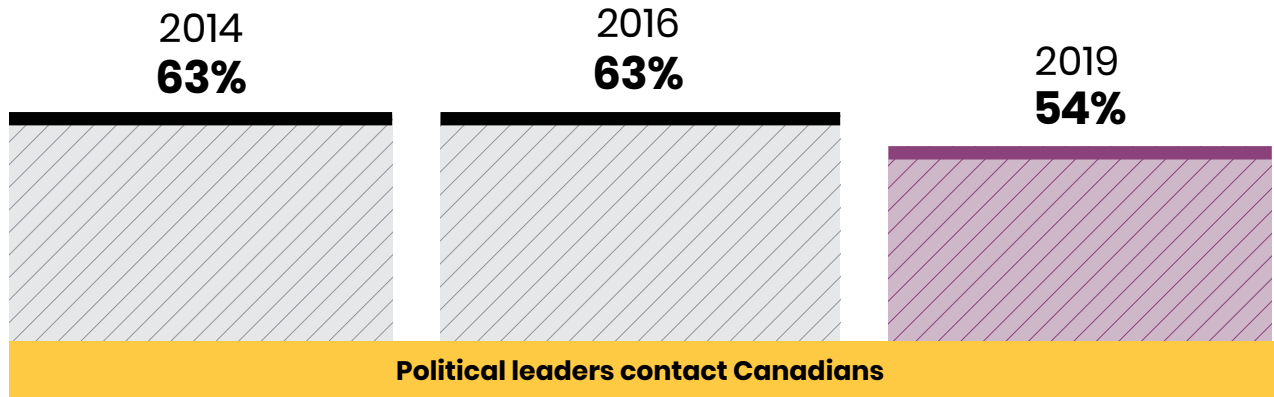
All Canadians are served by elected representatives. For representatives to understand the views of their constituents, Canadians are required to ask questions or share concerns directly with their representatives.

# Political leaders contact Canadians

# 54%

The percentage of Canadians who reported having been contacted by a party, candidate or MP—via email, phone, mail, in person or social networking—in the last year.

Just under half of all respondents (**46%**) indicated that they were not contacted at all in 2018!



	2014	2016	2019
Email	17%	24%	<b>21%</b> ↓
Phone	23%	23%	<b>22%</b> ↓
Mail	54%	51%	<b>41%</b> ↓
In-person	12%	14%	<b>11%</b> ↓
Social Media	12%	13%	<b>10%</b> ↓

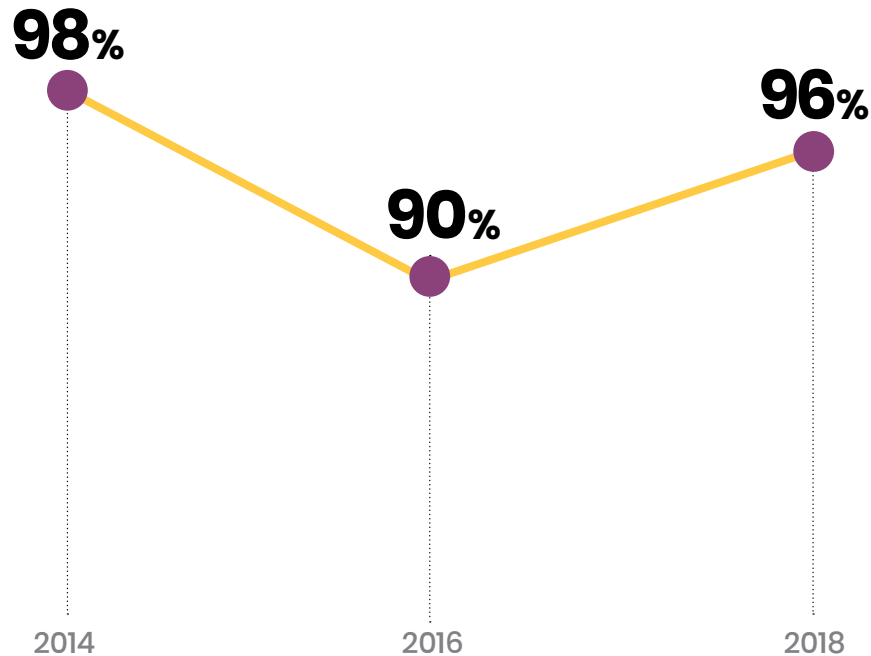
### Why this indicator matters

Constituent representation is an important aspect of any MP’s job. Doing it well requires elected representatives to invite Canadians’ participation, report on their own actions, and work to understand their constituents’ concerns and ideas. It’s also important that Canadians, even if they don’t engage, are aware that efforts have been made to reach them and understand their perspectives.

## Members of Parliament send “Householders”

# 96%

The percentage of MPs who reported having spent money on at least one “householder” pamphlet between January and September 2018.



### Why this indicator matters

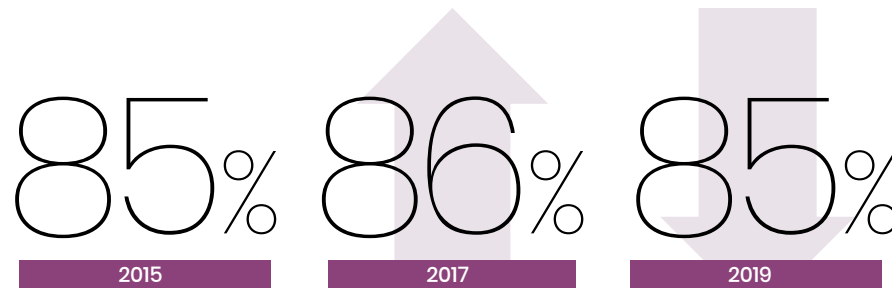
“Householder” paper pamphlets are delivered up to four times a year to all households in a riding and are paid for by the House of Commons. MPs use them to report on their activities in Ottawa and in the local constituency.

Source: House of Commons Records<sup>10</sup>

## Members of Parliament on Social Media

# 85%

The average percentage of MPs using a given popular social media platform.



	2015	2017	2019
Twitter	84%	99%	99%
Facebook	89%	99.7%	100% ↑
YouTube	83%	88%	61% ↓
Instagram	-	56%	82% ↑

### Why this indicator matters

The adoption and effective use of social media suggests willingness of MPs to engage with Canadians on interactive platforms.

Source of 2015 and 2017 figures: Full Duplex, Source of 2019 figures: The Samara Centre for Democracy



# Members of Parliament's websites

Many MPs use a template provided by their party to structure the design and content of their individual websites. However, a content review of MPs' web pages during the last month of 2018 and the first of 2019 demonstrated enough variation to show that some individual MPs still decide what information to present to their constituents.


One promising practice for elected representatives to connect with younger members of their communities is to organize a youth council or advisory board and meet regularly with them to discuss issues of community and national importance.<sup>11</sup> Of current MPs, **45%** have organized a youth council at some point or currently have one.


## Website contents at a glance:


 **95%** provide links to the MP's social media platform(s)


 **86%** have the option to sign up for a newsletter or mailing list

 **26%** do not offer information on services offered at the constituency office

 **30%** do not provide information on how to volunteer or get involved with the MP's work

 **39%** had not published a blog post or news update within the previous month

 **10%** provide information about a future consultation event hosted by the MP

 **2%** of MPs have no website altogether (and an additional **3%** rely on their party's main web page)

## MPs used their websites in innovative ways, such as to:

- Announce regular coffee hours/meet and greet opportunities beyond constituency hours
- Offer online petitions and surveys
- Provide the opportunity to comment on current legislation
- Share links to education resources about Parliament and government
- Host contests to stimulate community engagement
- Post links to MP expenses and voting records
- Advertise online Q&A sessions
- Post all public communications (newsletters, householders, media releases)
- Share contact information for other levels of government in constituency
- Provide a multilingual platform (in both official languages, at least)

## Why this indicator matters

An MP's website is a digital office, offering an opportunity for MPs to share substantive, relevant, and timely information and for constituents to connect with their elected leaders.

## The Member of Parliament Twittersphere

In February 2019, the Samara Centre for Democracy conducted a scan of the last 300 tweets from every MP account (including all original, reply, and quoted tweets). We found that:

**5 MPs**

did not have Twitter accounts

**13 MPs**

had not tweeted within the previous six months, despite having an account

**11 MPs**

had tweeted fewer than 300 times altogether

### Of the MPs with active Twitter accounts:

	LOWEST	HIGHEST	AVERAGE
<b>Tweets per day</b>	<b>0.09</b> <small>(approximately one every 10 days)</small>	<b>33</b>	<b>3.2</b>
<b>Original content</b> <small>Proportion of original, reply, or quoted tweets (not retweets)</small>	<b>1%</b>	<b>99.7%</b> <small>(all but one tweet)</small>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Interactive rating</b> <small>Proportion of replies or quoted tweets</small>	<b>0%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>13%</b>
<b>Followers</b> <small>Excluding the Prime Minister's account</small>	<b>1,004</b>	<b>308,000</b>	<b>11,400</b>

## Participation Grade

C-  
2015

C+  
2017

C+  
2019

### Report card:

# Participation

**The Aspiration:** A population that is more politically engaged—at the ballot box and between elections—and that feels invited and compelled to put its time and energy into politics.

In an age of increasing democratic anxiety, it comes as a relief to find that indicators of formal political participation are up. The percentage of Canadians who participated in at least one formal political activity rose from 38% to 42%. Compared to 2016, slightly more Canadians reported that they had attended a political meeting or speech (31%), donated to a candidate or party (21%), or volunteered for a candidate or campaign (19%).

But political parties still have a lot of work to do to convince most Canadians they're worth their

time and energy. Rates for membership in a federal political party have remained the same since 2016 (8%, down from 9% in 2014). And just 15% of Canadians who are not currently members of parties would consider joining one of the major federal or provincial parties in the future, compared with 64% who say they would not consider joining a party (21% don't know).

While the increase in formal political participation is modest, there is no indication that we have reached a tipping point where disillusion-

ment with the political system has led citizens to opt out. Coupled with the observations that rates of activism were largely unchanged, and rates of both activism and formal engagement were evenly distributed among supporters from every major federal political party (not solely opposition parties), it appears that our traditional system of doing politics has not wholly lost legitimacy in the eyes of Canadians.

However, the rates at which Canadians participate in broader civic activities, such as donating to or volunteering for a charity, or working with others in the community to solve a problem, have experienced a surprising downturn. This kind of civic involvement outside of politics is an essential building block of a healthy democracy. It helps build trust and social cohesion, counters polarization by bringing together Canadians from different backgrounds, and provides opportunities to practice democratic governance and decision-making. These curiously opposite trends—a decline in broader civic involvement as formal political participation increases—are something to watch. If it continues, it could have political implications that are hard to predict.

A large portion of what accounted for the rising grade in the last Democracy 360 report card was an increase in the voter turnout rate and a narrowing age gap among voters in the last federal election. Since a federal election hasn't taken place since the last report card, the letter grade for Participation is based exclusively on participation rates beyond voter turnout – including formal political engagement, activism, and civic engagement. Even though the grade turned out to be the same, participation rates have changed.

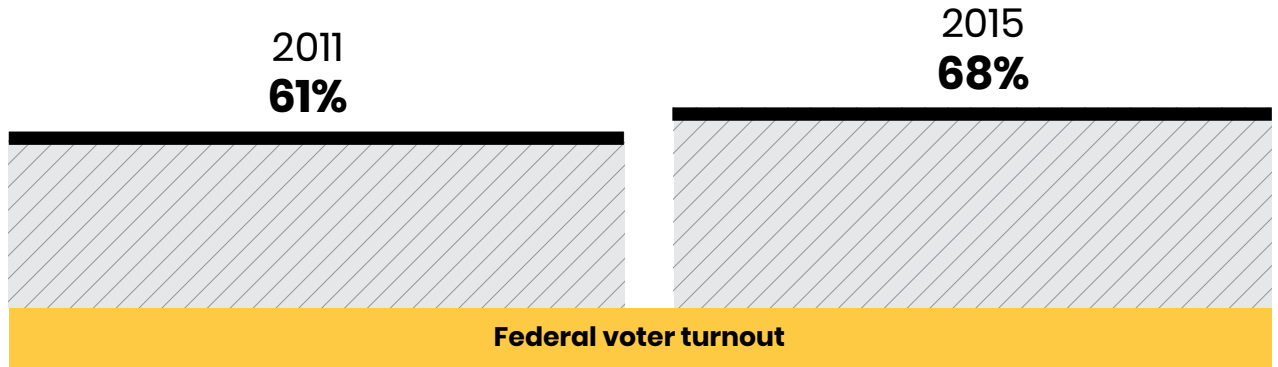
# Federal voter turnout

# 68%

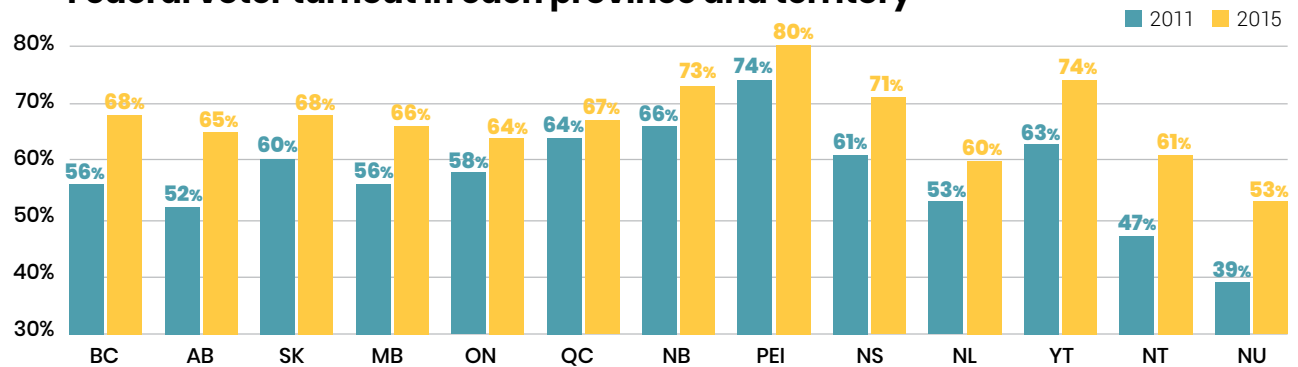
The percentage of Canadians who voted in the last federal election\*

### Why this indicator matters

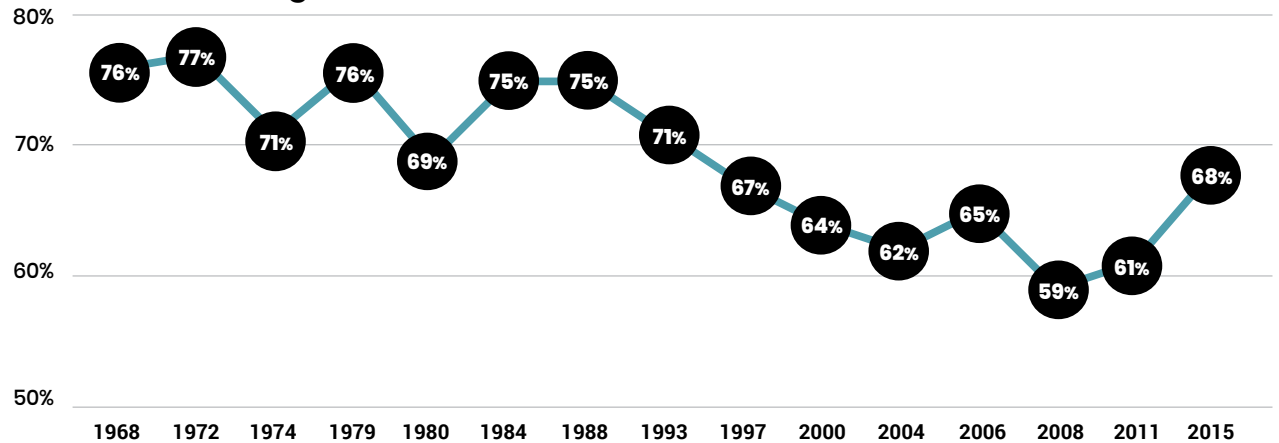
Voting is one of the easiest ways for citizens to express their preferences, and higher turnout will likely bring about more complete and accurate representation.



Federal voter turnout in each province and territory<sup>12</sup>

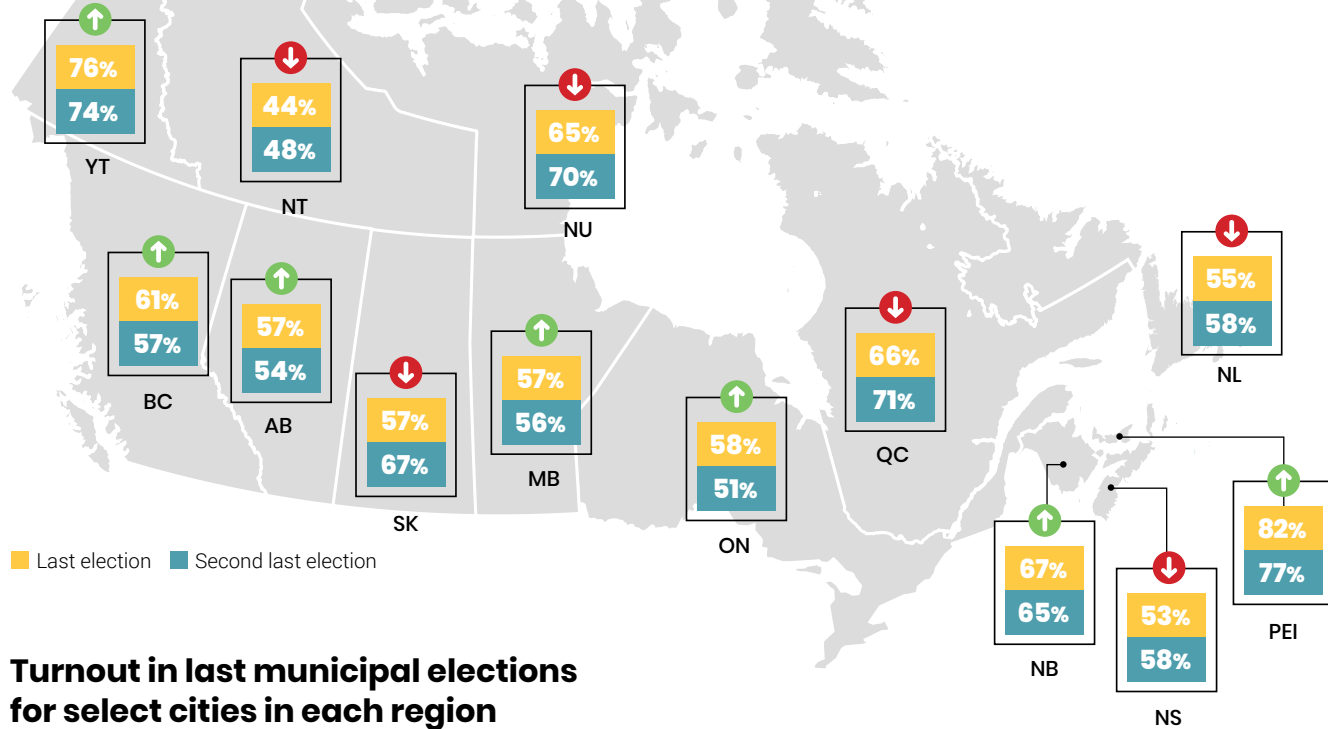


Federal voting rates over time



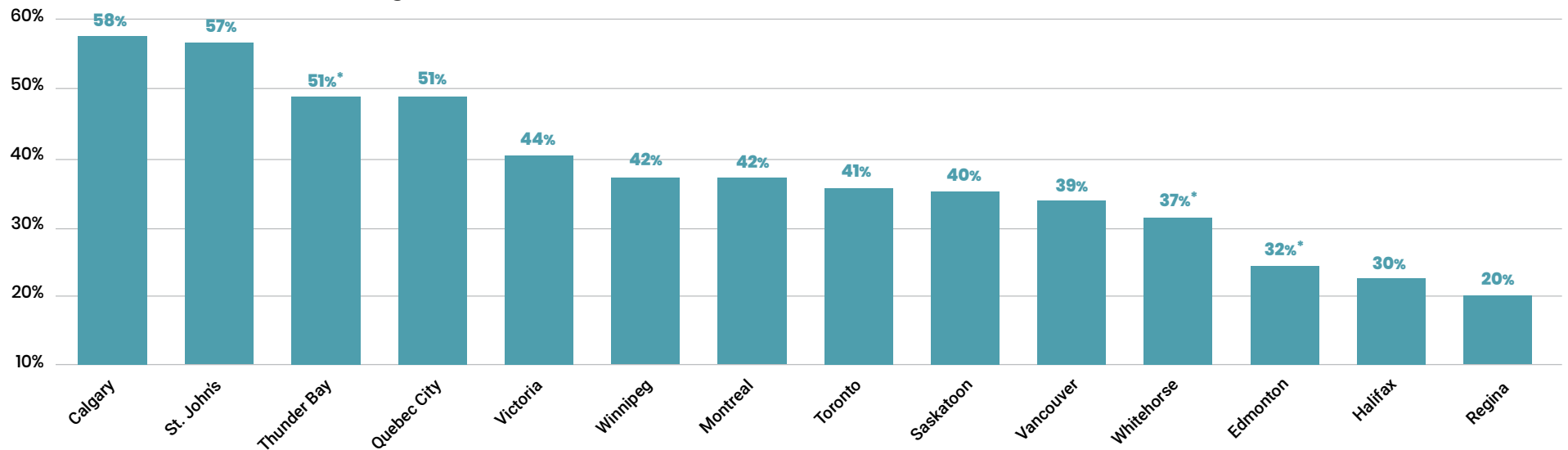
\*Unless otherwise indicated, turnout is the number of registered voters who voted<sup>13</sup>

## Turnout in last two provincial and territorial elections



# Provincial and municipal voter turnout

## Turnout in last municipal elections for select cities in each region



\*Turnout based on the number of eligible voters

# Old and young voters' gap

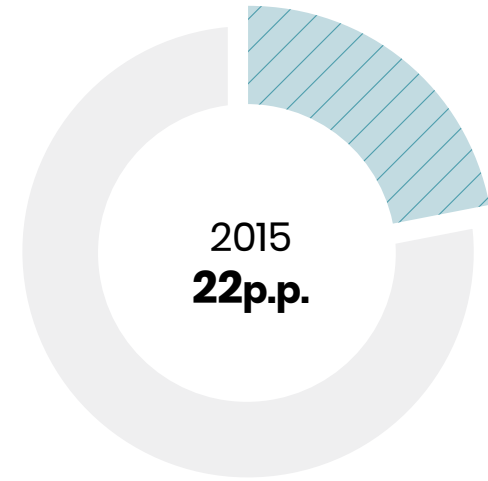
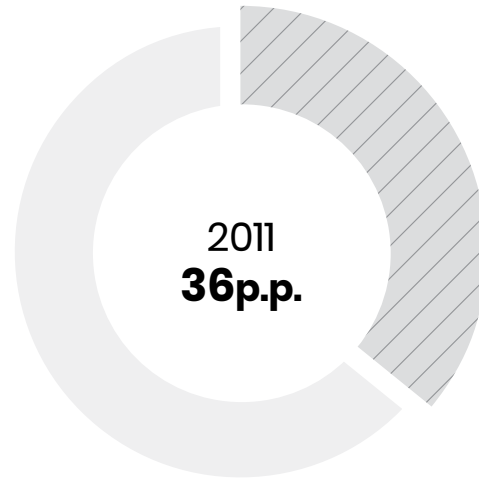
# 22

percentage points

The gap between the cohort with the highest turnout in the 2015 federal election (ages 65-74) and the lowest (18-24).

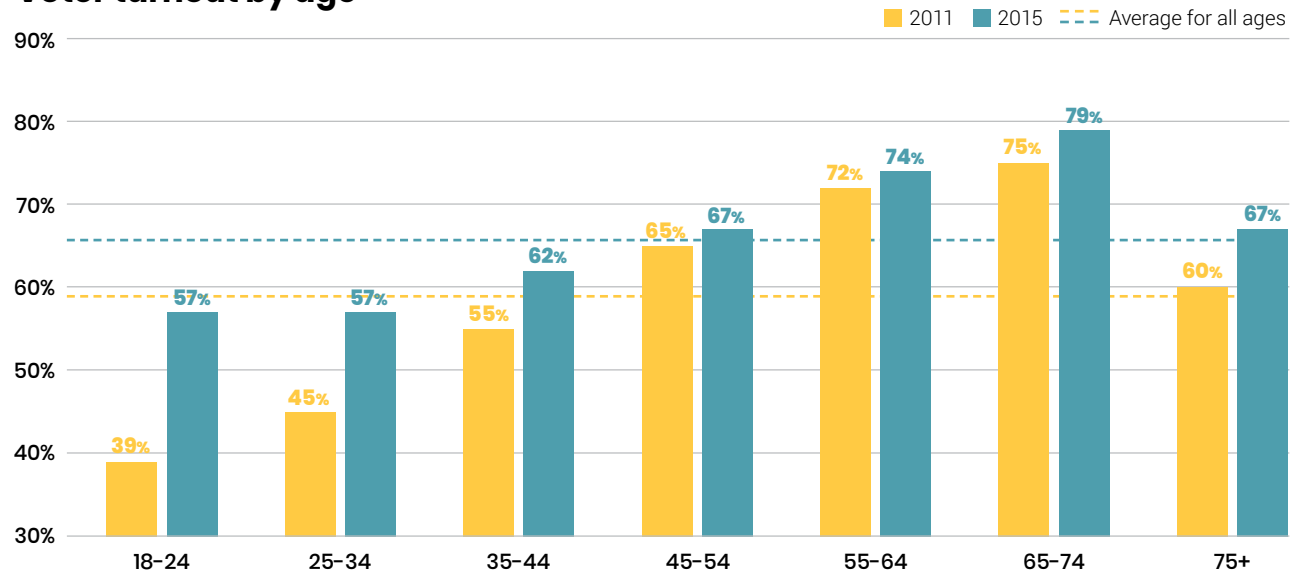
### Why this indicator matters

If voter turnout varies significantly by age, politicians are less likely to fully represent the entire population and its diverse needs.



### Old and young voters' gap

### Voter turnout by age

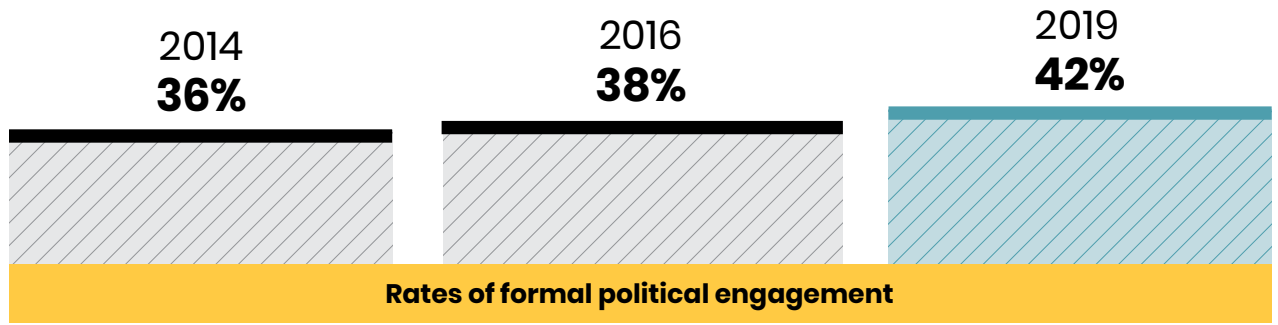


\*Turnout rates are based on the number of eligible voter<sup>14</sup>

# Rates of formal political engagement

# 42%

The percentage of Canadians who participated in at least one formal political activity in the last year.



	2014	2016	2019
Member of a federal political party	9%	8%	8%
Attended a political meeting or speech	29%	30%	31% ↑
Donated money to a candidate or party	19%	19%	21% ↑
Volunteered for candidate or campaign	17%	15%	19% ↑
Gave a political speech in public	9%	9%	9%

One-quarter (24%) of survey respondents said they had taken part in a town hall or public consultation

Only 15% of Canadians who are not currently members of parties would consider joining one of the major federal or provincial parties in the future

**Why this indicator matters**

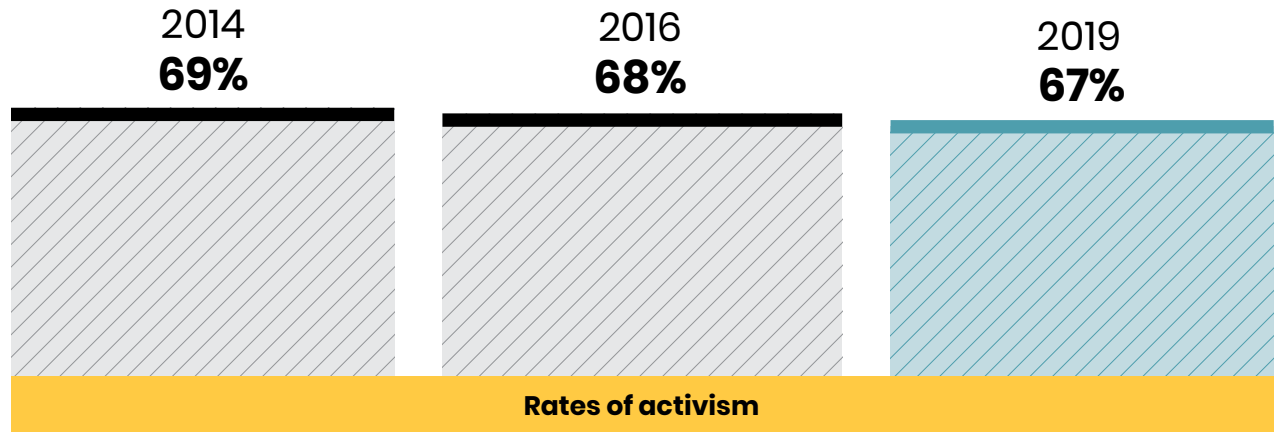
Formal political activities get citizens closer to political decision makers and decision-making.



# Rates of activism

# 67%

The percentage of Canadians who participated in at least one form of activism in the last year.



	2014	2016	2019
Signed a petition in person or online	64%	59%	57% ↓
Boycotted or bought products for ethical, environmental, or political reasons	37%	40%	47% ↑
Protested or demonstrated	22%	21%	16% ↓

Of those surveyed, **6%** said they had spray-painted slogans, blocked traffic, or occupied a building

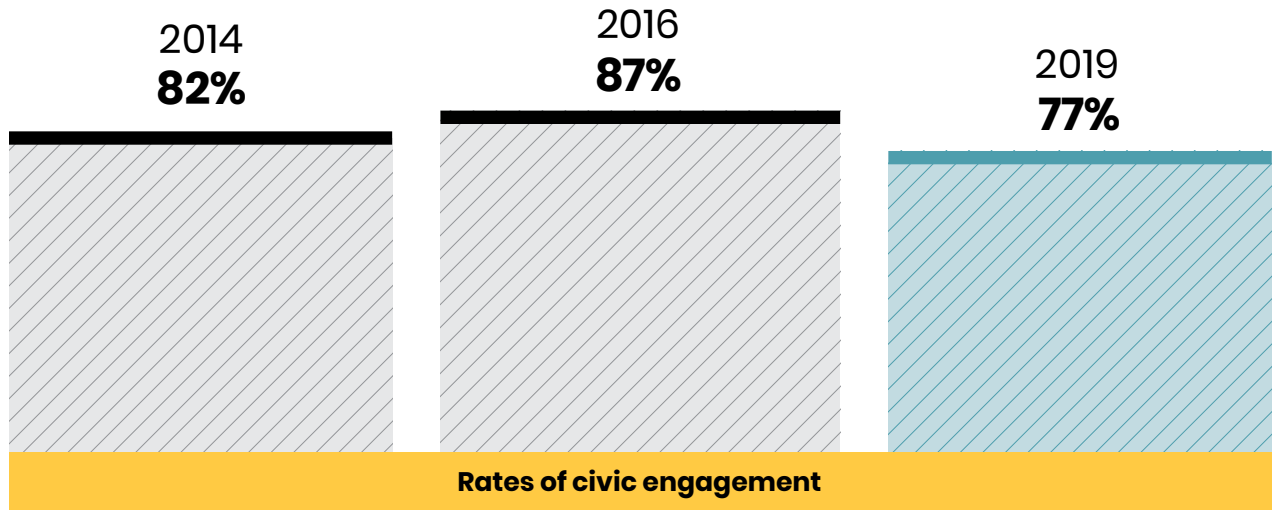
**Why this indicator matters**

These activities are a way for citizens to immediately express their political support or opposition in between elections, without direct contact with their Member of Parliament.

# Rates of civic engagement

# 77%

The percentage of Canadians who participated in at least one civic engagement activity in the last year.



	2014	2016	2019
Donated money to a charitable cause	78%	84%	<b>70%</b> ↓
Volunteered for a charitable cause	53%	59%	<b>45%</b> ↓
Active in a group or organization	38%	41%	<b>25%*</b> ↓
Worked with others to solve a problem in the community	40%	46%	<b>37%</b> ↓

*\*Small changes to question wording have made it inadvisable to compare this sub-indicator over time. It has been removed from the main indicator tallies, but is shown here for reference*

Of those surveyed, **13%** said they belonged to a group that is involved in political or social issues (such as an environmental group, a women's rights organization, or an anti-poverty group)

**Why this indicator matters**

Democratic life and community vitality are closely linked. Tracking civic engagement reveals ways that Canadians contribute to their communities beyond formal politics.

## Leadership Grade

D  
2015

C  
2017

C  
2019

### Report card:

# Leadership

**The Aspiration:** Political leadership that operates in ways that are more responsive, transparent and inclusive, with Members of Parliament and political parties that are less focused on winning and more collaborative in their decision-making.

The Canadian public's opinion of federal elected representatives and political parties has changed little since the last Democracy 360 report card. However, Canadians view MPs slightly more favourably than they did before, with the number of people reporting that they trust MPs "a great deal" or "a fair amount" to do what's right up four percentage points (to 51%). The percentage of Canadians who "agree" or "strongly agree" that the work and decisions of MPs can influence the

direction of the country also rose substantially (from 54% to 62%).

On average, Canadians awarded MPs and political parties a just-passing score of between 50-60% when evaluating their performance on different aspects of their job. As before, MPs received their highest grade (63%) for representing the views of their political party. In comparison, they were given a score of 54% for representing the views of people in their riding. Their

lowest grade was for holding the government to account and watching how the government spends money (51%).

Federal political parties didn't fare as well as MPs this time around. They received lower marks for engaging Canadians, doing a worse job reaching out to Canadians so they could represent the views of their constituents (52%), and hearing ideas from party members (54%).

Overall, however, Canadians' opinions of their political leadership have improved over the past five years. In fact, since the Samara Centre began asking Canadians to review the work of MPs and federal political parties, every single indicator has increased.

Although there have been some changes in the makeup of the House of Commons, with some seats becoming vacant from resignations (or sadly, deaths), the fact that there has not been a federal election since the last Democracy 360 report card means that the number of MPs who are a member of a visible minority group, women, Indigenous or immigrants did not change much, if at all. However, in some cases, the number that indicates how well these groups are represented in Parliament compared to their proportion in

Canadian society—the proportionality index—has changed significantly. This is because the baseline used to calculate the index has been updated. The 2017 Democracy 360 used population data from the 2011 census to examine the extent to which MPs reflect the diversity of Canadian society. This edition uses population data from the 2016 census, which found that Indigenous people and visible minorities make up a higher proportion of Canada's population. Therefore, the proportionality score for visible minorities and Indigenous people in Parliament dropped for the simple reason that Canada has become more diverse.

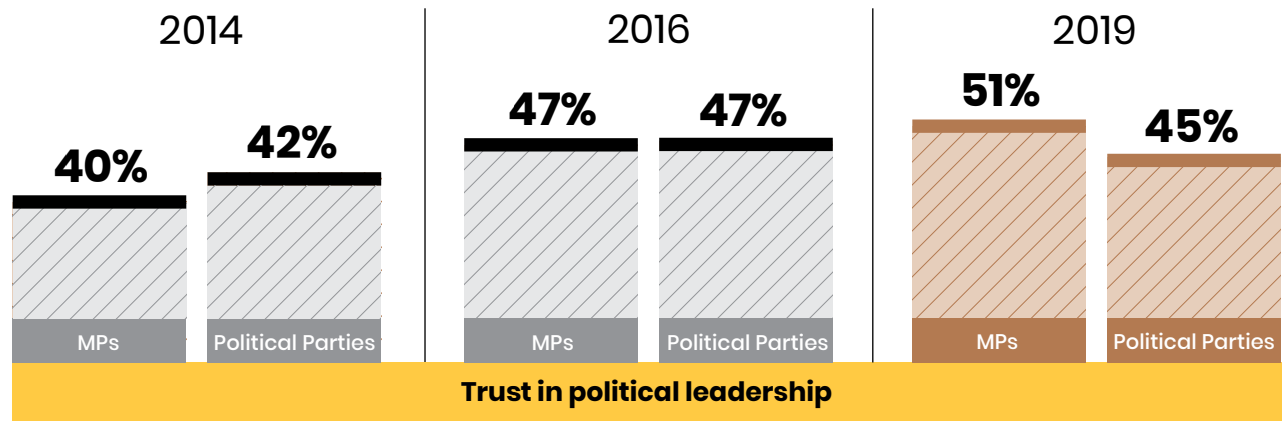
Yet the immense change to the proportionality score of young MPs doesn't follow the same logic. In the two years since the last report card, a number of younger MPs simply aged out of the under-30 category.

The result of these changes is that the House of Commons is less representative of the diversity of the Canadian public than it appeared two years ago—but the 2019 general election provides a chance to catch up.

## Trust in political leadership

MPs **51%** Political Parties **45%**

The percentage of Canadians who trust MPs and parties “a great deal” or “a fair amount” to do what’s right.



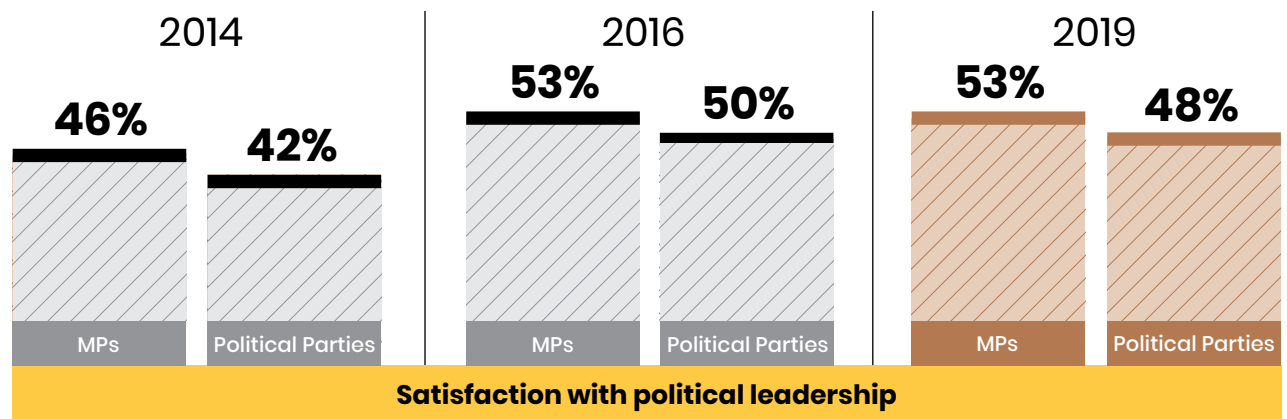
### Why these indicators matter

If public levels of trust in MPs and their organizing bodies—parties—remains low, the legitimacy of government is undermined. Decisions taken by government will become difficult to implement and possibly even ignored. One measure of how well parties and MPs are doing their jobs is the satisfaction and trust of the Canadian public.

## Satisfaction with political leadership

MPs **53%** Political Parties **48%**

The percentage of Canadians who are “very” or “fairly” satisfied with how MPs and parties are doing their jobs.



More than three in five (**62%**) of survey respondents are “very” or “fairly” satisfied with *their own* MP

## Members of Parliament are influential

# 62%

The percentage of Canadians who “agree” or “strongly agree” that the work and decisions of MPs can influence the direction of the country.

54%

2014

54%

2016

62%

2019

### Why this indicator matters

Politics is how we make decisions together. In a representative democracy, we elect MPs to consider those decisions on behalf of citizens to set the direction of the country.

## Parties only want votes

# 59%

The percentage of Canadians who “agree” or “strongly agree” that candidates and parties only want their vote.

62%

2014

59%

2016

59%

2019

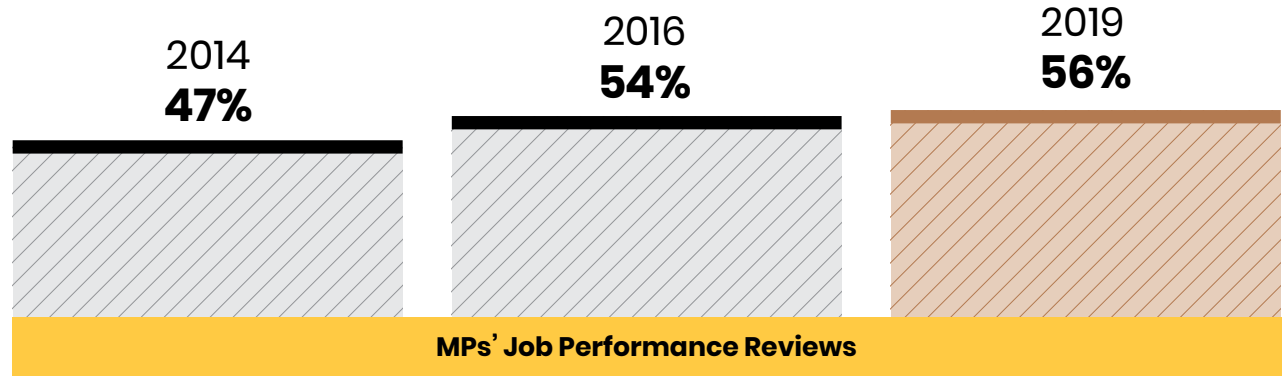
### Why this indicator matters

This measurement assesses whether people feel political parties genuinely seek to involve Canadians in politics, and promote a fuller and deeper conversation about political issues in this country.

# MPs' job performance reviews

# 56%

The average percentage grade Canadians gave MPs on six core jobs that focus on representation, accountability, and legislation.



	2014	2016	2019
<b>REPRESENTATION</b>			
Representing the views of people in their riding	45%	53%	54% ↑
Representing the views of their political party	57%	63%	63%
Helping people in their ridings	46%	53%	55% ↑
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>			
Holding government to account	42%	50%	51% ↑
<b>LEGISLATION</b>			
Debating and voting on issues in the House of Commons	48%	56%	57% ↑
Explaining decisions made in Parliament	43%	50%	52% ↑

### Why this indicator matters

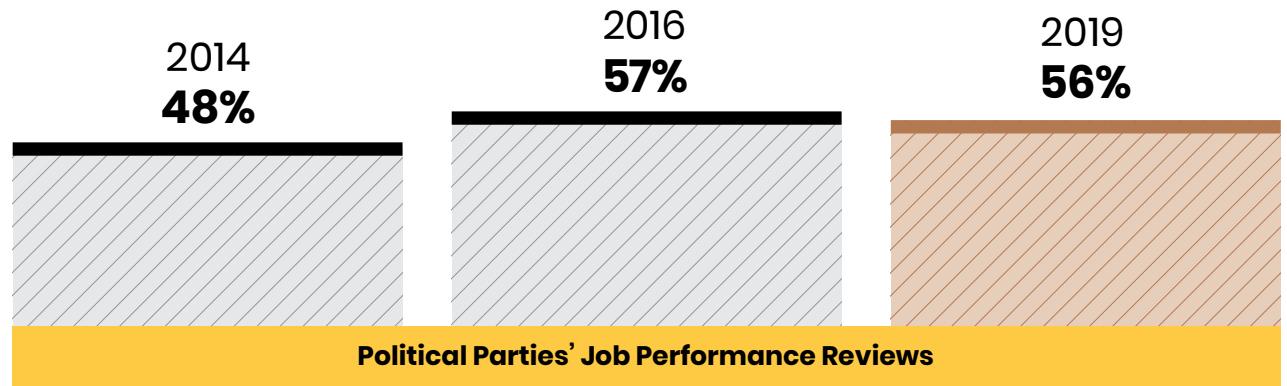
Through elections, Canadians hire and fire MPs as their representatives in Ottawa. This indicator gives Canadians a chance to weigh in on MPs' job performance between elections by awarding them grades on each of their jobs.

# Political parties' job performance reviews

# 56%

The average percentage grade Canadians gave political parties on six core jobs that focus on elections, engagement, and policy development.

When asked how they rated political parties on their ability to strengthen Canadians' trust in their democracy, Canadians awarded them **52%**, tied for the lowest score



	2014	2016	2019
<b>ELECTIONS</b>			
Recruiting candidates and competing in elections	50%	57%	<b>59%</b> ↑
Encouraging people to vote	55%	66%	<b>64%</b> ↓
<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>			
Hearing ideas from party members	47%	55%	<b>54%</b> ↓
Reaching out to Canadians so their views can be represented	42%	53%	<b>52%</b> ↓
<b>POLICY</b>			
Coming up with new policy ideas and solutions	44%	53%	<b>53%</b>
Explaining what the party stands for	48%	57%	<b>57%</b>

### Why this indicator matters

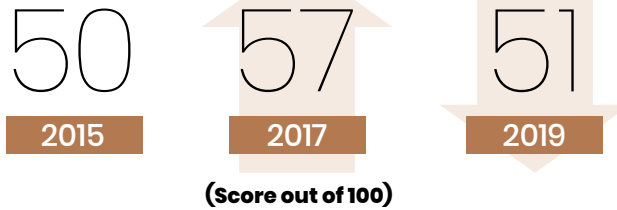
Political parties dominate Canadians' understanding of politics. Partisan debate often frames the news coverage out of Ottawa, and most Canadians consider party and leader preferences when casting a ballot. After the election is over, parties affect and direct how governments form and legislatures function.



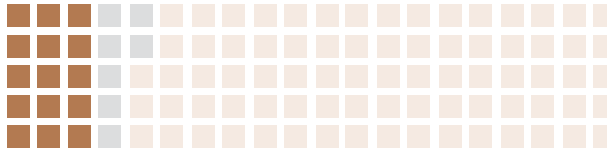
# Diversity in the House of Commons

# 51

A score out of 100 that reflects the average of how well five different Canadian demographic groups are reflected in the makeup of the House of Commons.

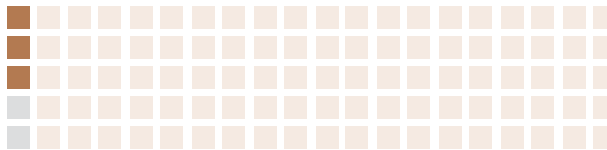


## Visible minorities



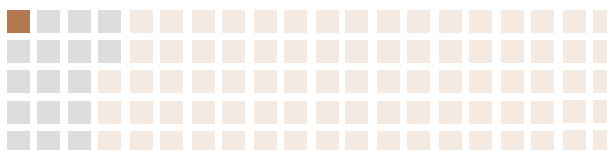
**Proportionality score** (percentage of the way to parity)  
 2015 **50%** 2017 **75%** ↑ 2019 **65%** ↓

## Indigenous people



**Proportionality score** (percentage of the way to parity)  
 2015 **54%** 2017 **78%** ↑ 2019 **67%** ↓

## Youth (under 30)

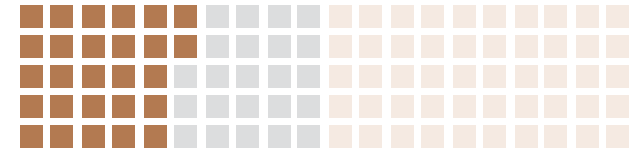


**Proportionality score** (percentage of the way to parity)  
 2015 **29%** 2017 **24%** ↓ 2019 **5%** ↓

## Why this indicator matters

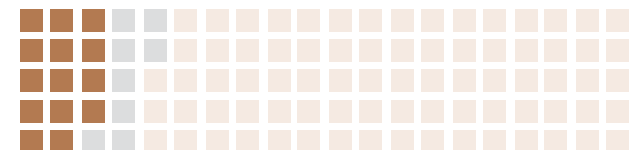
For Canadians to believe politics matters, they need to see themselves represented in the make-up of the House of Commons. It is possible that a parliament made up of MPs of diverse backgrounds will be better suited to understanding the specific needs and concerns of Canada's diverse population. Perhaps if Canadians see themselves in the system, they might be more likely to participate.

## Women



**Proportionality score** (percentage of the way to parity)  
 2015 **50%** 2017 **52%** ↑ 2019 **54%** ↑

## Foreign-born



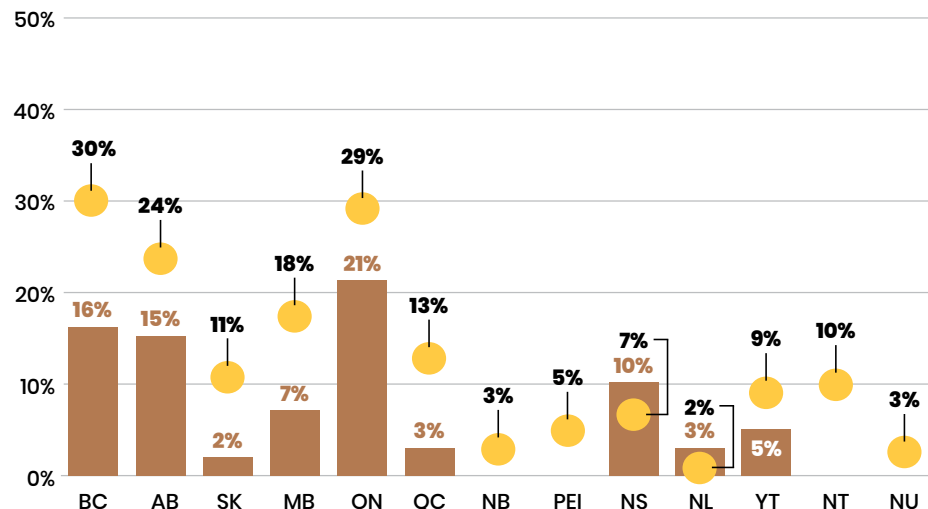
**Proportionality score** (percentage of the way to parity)  
 2015 **68%** 2017 **62%** ↓ 2019 **63%** ↑

# Diversity in provincial and territorial legislatures

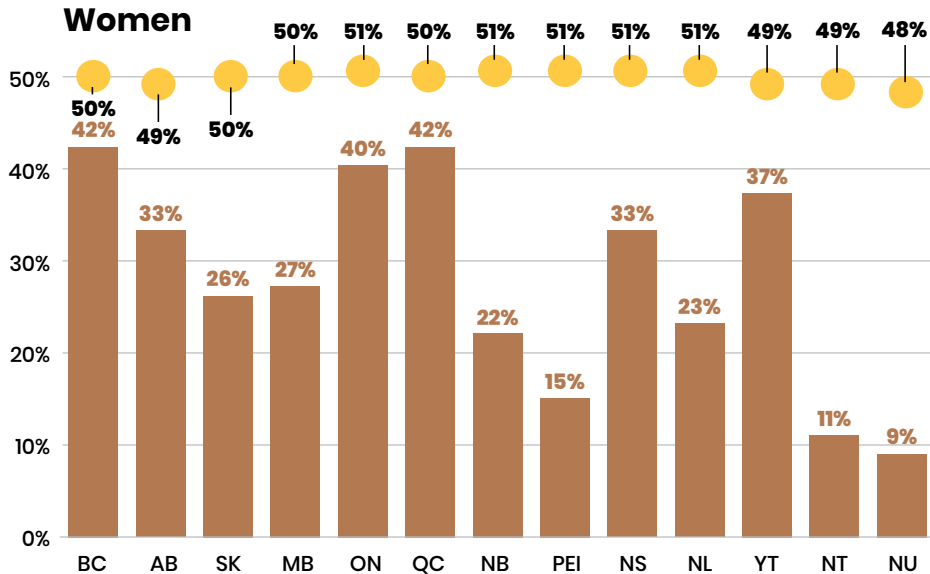
The proportion of visible minorities, women, and Indigenous people elected to each provincial and territorial legislature is represented below, both as a percentage of the legislature and as a percentage of the general population of the province or territory.

■ Percentage of legislature ● Percentage of provincial/territorial population

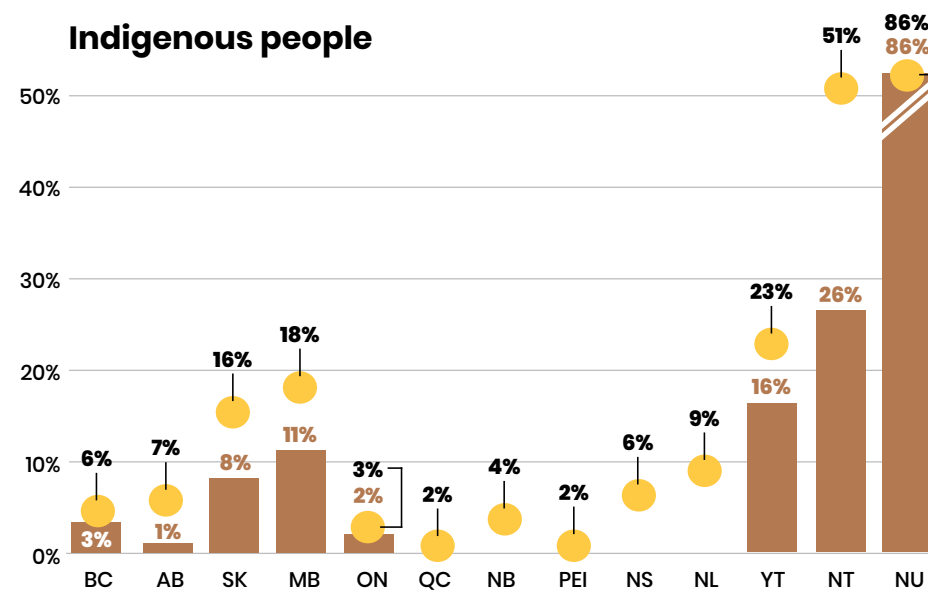
## Visible Minorities



## Women



## Indigenous people





# Conclusion

Canada's democracy received an overall letter grade of B- in 2019—the same grade it was awarded in the Democracy 360 report card in 2017. This passing grade represents an increasingly satisfied, interested, and engaged public. Canadians are committed to democratic values. With a federal election around the corner, there is tremendous potential for leaders and citizens to join together in building a vibrant representative democracy in which Canadians of all walks of life can participate and see themselves reflected, well beyond election day.

Given Canadians' concern about the future, it's imperative that our system delivers on this promise—that citizens and elected representatives, supported by civil society and other public-minded actors, show that they're committed to this common democratic project. This com-

mitment is essential if we're to withstand future political crises and avoid succumbing to the fear and pessimism of the 46% of Canadians who believe our democracy is getting weaker. It wouldn't take much to significantly dampen the democratic spirit and confidence of Canadians. A drop in voter turnout. A major public scandal. A compromised election.

That is why it's important to not become complacent by solely measuring Canada against other democracies around the world, or even against Canada's own standard of participation and satisfaction. After all, an improvement from five years ago isn't an A+. One in four of us (25%) is unsatisfied with the way our democracy is working. Canadians must continue to push for a democracy that is more resilient, founded on meaningful citizen engagement and responsive governance.

Our country can begin to fulfill this democratic vision by pursuing the following interconnected objectives:

**1. Strengthen individual and collective democratic skills and habits** by supporting civic literacy for all ages, particularly between elections, and by fostering opportunities both online and offline for respectful and constructive dialogue between people with differing viewpoints. Canadians need to understand how and why their participation, and the participation of others, matters.

**2. Equip governing institutions for better decision-making** by empowering elected representatives to exert greater individual influence over the legislative process, making policy decisions more transparent and accountable, and allowing for substantive deliberation on policy issues, rather than scripted and polarizing debate. Elected representatives need to have the independence, capacity, and tools to contribute meaningfully to the work of governing.

**3. Make elections a moment for genuine deliberation and reflection on the best way forward for our country** by demanding transparency, civility, and openness from our political parties and candidates and guarding against disinformation campaigns aimed at manipulating and distorting public discussion. Long after the results are announced, public elections must inspire Canadians to engage constructively with one another and participate fully in public life.

We cannot afford to lower our guard. We must show the 46% of Canadians who fear for our democratic future that our system of government can withstand threats both old and new, and flourish over time.

## Explore further

Want to explore more of the research and rationale behind these recommendations? These Samara Centre publications examine these ideas in greater detail and show what these changes could look like in practice:

- [\*Investing in Canadians' civic literacy: An answer to fake news and disinformation\*](#)
- [\*The Real House Lives: Strengthening the role of MPs in an age of partisanship\*](#)
- [\*Beyond the Barbecue: Reimagining constituency work for local democratic engagement\*](#)
- [\*Flip the Script: Reclaiming the legislature to reinvigorate representative democracy\*](#)
- [\*The 2018 Member of Parliament Survey: Evaluating the House of Commons and options for reform\*](#)
- [\*No One Is Listening: Incivility in the 42nd Parliament, and how to fix it\*](#)

The Samara Centre will publish additional work on civic literacy, political parties, and the role of our elected representatives throughout the 2019 federal election year.

# Methodology

## What is the Democracy 360?

The Democracy 360 is the Samara Centre's made-in-Canada report card on the state of Canada's democracy, which focuses on the relationship between citizens and political leadership.

The Democracy 360 combines quantifiable indicators, focused on three areas: communication, participation, and political leadership. The Democracy 360 will allow Canadians to compare and assess their democracy over time. First published in 2015, the Democracy 360 is published every two years to measure improvement or decline. This is the third edition, published March 26, 2019.

## How were the indicators in the Democracy 360 selected?

With a long list of potential indicators, five criteria were used to select the indicators which measure communication, participation and leadership in Canada:

- 1. Accuracy:** Is the measure precise?
- 2. Reliability:** Is the measure an accurate and consistent capture of the activity?
- 3. Feasibility:** With respect to finite time and resources, can the data be collected and analyzed?
- 4. Replicable:** Can the measure be captured again in a similar fashion?
- 5. Dynamic:** Is the indicator's change (improvement or decline) measurable?

## What makes up the Democracy 360 data?

There are five main sources of data in report card:

- 1.** Public opinion survey data using an online sample of 4,054 Canadian residents over 18 years of age living in 10 provinces
- 2.** House of Commons record
- 3.** Elections Canada and other electoral agencies' voter turnout records
- 4.** Independent analysis performed by Samara Centre volunteers (based on MPs' individual social media accounts and websites)
- 5.** Information on the diversity of elected officials in legislatures in Canada provided by Andrew Griffith.

Please see the Appendix for an overview of the data in the report, including regional variations. The Appendix, full methodological note, and survey questionnaire can all be found at [samaracanada.com/democracy-360](http://samaracanada.com/democracy-360).

If you have any additional questions about the methodology, or if you'd like to request the 2019 Samara Citizens' Survey for precise data manipulation, survey question wording, and unweighted frequencies, please contact [info@samaracanada.com](mailto:info@samaracanada.com).

# Endnotes

1. See for instance Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (2018), New York: Penguin Random House.
2. The Economist Intelligence Unit (2018), *Democracy Index 2018: Me too? Political participation, protest and democracy*, available online from: <http://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>.
3. The Samara Centre for Democracy's 2014 Citizens' Survey was conducted in English and French using an online sample of 2406 Canadian residents over 18 years of age living in 10 provinces. Data was collected between December 12 and December 31, 2014. The survey has a credibility interval of 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Available online from: <https://www.samaracanada.com/research/resourcesanddata/2014-citizens-survey>.
4. The Samara Centre for Democracy's 2016 Citizens' Survey was conducted in English and French using an online sample of 4,003 Canadian residents over 18 years of age living in 10 provinces. Data was collected between September 23 and October 6, 2016. The survey has a credibility interval of 2.7 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Available online from: <https://www.samaracanada.com/research/resourcesanddata/2016-citizens-survey>.
5. Residents of Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut were not included in the Citizens' Survey, as smaller populations made a representative sample unattainable.
6. The Samara Centre for Democracy's 2019 Citizens' Survey was conducted in English and French using an

- online sample of 4,054 Canadian residents over 18 years of age living in 10 provinces. Data was collected between January 16 and February 6, 2019. The survey has a credibility interval of 1.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Available online from: <https://www.samaracanada.com/research/resourcesanddata/2019-citizens-survey/>
7. House of Commons, *Members' Expenditures Report*, 42nd Parl, third and fourth quarters of 2017-2018 and first and second quarters of 2018-2019. Available from: <http://www.ourcommons.ca/boie/en/reports-and-disclosure>. Accessed February 3, 2019.
  8. "Parliamentarians," Library of Parliament, ParlInfo, available from: [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en\\_CA/People/parliamentarians](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/ParlInfo/default/en_CA/People/parliamentarians). Accessed February 26, 2019.
  9. Andrew Griffith (2015), *Multiculturalism in Canada: Evidence and Anecdote*, Anar Press.
  10. House of Commons, *Members' Expenditures Report*, 42nd Parl, third and fourth quarters of 2017-2018 and first and second quarters of 2018-2019.
  11. See the Samara Centre for Democracy's Constituency Youth Council Report and Guide for more information. Adelina Petit-Vouriot (2018), *Engaging Youth between Elections: A Report on Local Youth Councils*, Toronto: The Samara Centre for Democracy, available online from: <https://www.samaracanada.com/research/political-leadership/local-youth-councils>
  12. Federal turnout rates for each province use the population of eligible electors, as opposed to the population

of registered electors, to calculate turnout. According to Elections Canada, this makes it possible to more accurately compare voter turnout across different population groups.

13. There are differences in how voter turnout can be measured. It is usually measured as the number of ballots cast compared to the number of registered voters, but an alternative is to compare the number of ballots cast to the estimated number of eligible voters. When the voter list or registry is accurate, the difference between the two is minimal. However, in jurisdictions with limited resources or transient populations, the voter list may be more difficult to update.
14. The difference between official federal voter turnout scores cited earlier compared to the average voter turnout for all ages is due to the fact that voter turnout by age has been measured according to the number of eligible voters (and not according to the number of registered voters).
15. The Samara Centre uses the population of Canadian residents, rather than citizens, as the general population baseline for comparison with the makeup of the House of Commons and provincial and territorial legislatures. We do this to remain consistent with the bulk of the information presented in the report, which is based on a public opinion survey of Canadian residents.

# Acknowledgements

The Samara Centre for Democracy would like to thank all of our individual donors as well as BMO, Bennett Jones LLP, and Your Canada Your Constitution for their continued support of this project.

Special thanks to Jane Hilderman and Paul E.J. Thomas for their help in designing the 2019 Samara Citizens' Survey, and to Laura Anthony for reviewing the grade calculations.

As a charity, the Samara Centre relies on the generous support of donors and is proud to have a broad base of support. We are so grateful to all the individuals and groups who have contributed to the Samara Centre's research and education efforts, and made our success possible.

If you're interested in supporting our work, please visit [samaracanada.com](https://samaracanada.com) or contact us at 416-960-7926.

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OTHER DATA COLLECTION: Andrew Griffith for diversity in legislatures and Parliament, Paul E.J. Thomas for Twitter data, and Samara Centre for Democracy volunteers for information on MPs' websites and social media accounts

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The Samara Centre for Democracy is a non-partisan charity dedicated to strengthening Canada's democracy, making it more accessible, responsive, and inclusive. The Samara Centre produces action-based research—as well as tools and resources for active citizens and public leaders—designed to engage Canadians in their democracy.

To learn more about the Samara Centre's work or to make a charitable donation to support our research, please visit [samaracanada.com](http://samaracanada.com) or contact us at 416-960-7926.



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