



Release

Canadians Want a Direct Say in Their Democracy: Poll

September 6, 2005 - Three in five Canadians want more opportunities to influence government decisions directly, according to a poll released today by SES Research, the Crossing Boundaries National Council and the Public Policy Forum.

At the same time as it shows people want to play a bigger role in policymaking however, the poll also finds that many Canadians are not attracted to traditional forms of political participation, such as signing a petition or attending a town hall.

The poll's results clearly suggest that reforming parliamentary institutions, a plan the federal government favours in order to make political participation more attractive, is likely not enough to reverse trends that show a decline in the public's interest in politics, says the head of one of the organizations that commissioned the poll.

“Overcoming the democratic deficit is about more than Parliamentary reform. It is about engaging citizens more directly in the political process”, says Don Lenihan, President of the Crossing Boundaries National Council, a forum of elected officials and senior public servants from federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, as well as representatives of aboriginal groups.

The poll asks whether citizens should have a direct say in influencing public policy and government decisions or leave such matters to elected officials, and 61 per cent of respondents say they would prefer to be active in policymaking.

By comparison, 30.5 per cent of respondents say such work is the responsibility of politicians. The rest of the people surveyed express uncertainty or say neither choice accurately expresses their view.

While the poll paints a picture of a country looking for greater involvement in political decisions, it also shows that citizens aren't using traditional methods of political participation to achieve their goals.

The poll considers five forms of political activism and examines how often people have engaged in them. Just over half of poll respondents say they have signed a petition in the past. A little more than a third of them say they have attended a town hall meeting. Fewer still report having written a letter to an elected official. In fact, two activities most often



associated with political awareness, taking part in a demonstration and registering with a political party, draw the fewest participants. Among poll respondents, 21.8 per cent say they have joined a demonstration and 20.5 per cent say they have become members of a party.

Research also indicates that that one in four Canadians (24%) have never engaged in any of the five political activities identified in the poll.

The level of non-participation was the most startling finding, according to pollster Nik Nanos. “The fact that one out of four Canadians is fully disengaged from traditional forms of participation means that there is definitely room for new innovative ideas,” Nanos said. “Democratic renewal could be a huge political opportunity for our leaders and parties.”

The polling company SES Research conducted a random telephone survey of 1,000 adult Canadians between Aug. 4 and Aug. 8, 2005. The research was registered with the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association of which SES Research is a member. The results were produced for Crossing Boundaries and the Public Policy Forum, an independent, non-profit organization aimed at improving the quality of government through dialogue between public, private and volunteer sectors.

The poll is considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

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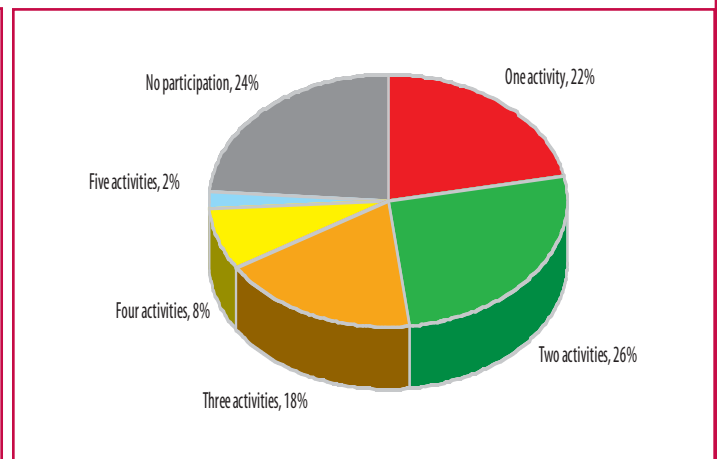
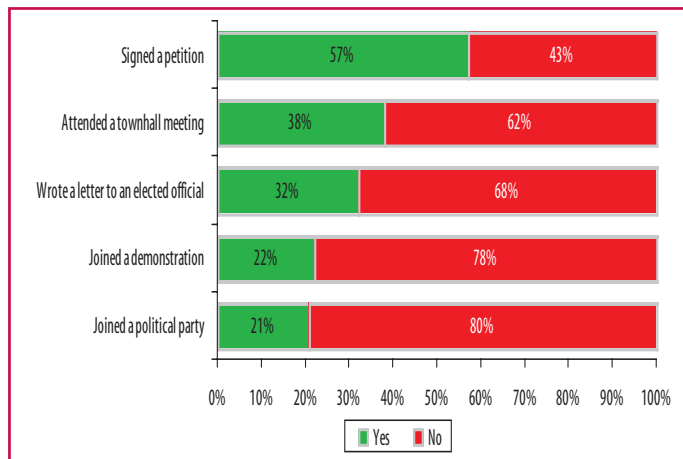
September 6, 2005

Canadians and Democracy

SES/Crossing Boundaries/Public Policy Forum Poll

Outside of elections, have you ever taken part in any of the following activities: signed a petition, wrote a letter to an elected official, attended a townhall meeting, joined a demonstration, joined a political party?

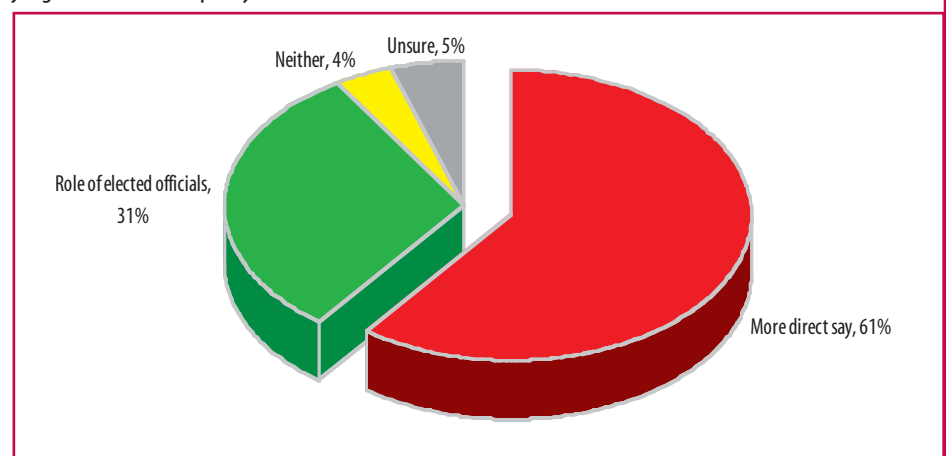
Political Participation of Canadians: Number of activities Canadians participate in.



The SES national random telephone survey of 1,000 Canadians completed between August 4th and August 8th, 2005. The survey is accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, plus or minus, 19 times out of 20. The margin of accuracy will be wider for sub samples. Percentages may exceed 100 due to rounding.

The research was registered with the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association of which SES is a member.

I am going to read you two statements regarding how much citizens should get involved in public policy debates and I would like you to tell me which statement comes closer to your view.
Statement One: Citizens should have a more direct say in influencing public policy and should have more opportunity to shape government decisions, or;
Statement Two: Between elections, it is the responsibility of the elected official to use their best judgment and make policy decisions on behalf of citizens.



About SES

Established in 1987, SES Canada Research Inc. is a full service public opinion research and management consulting firm. SES is regularly called upon by corporate, government and para-public clients in Canada and the United States to conduct research and provide strategic advice.

For more information on our full range of services please visit our website www.sesresearch.com or contact: Mr. Nikita Nanos at (613) 234-4666 ext.237 or nnanos@sesresearch.com





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About the Partners

SES Research

Canada's leading corporate, government and political decision-makers trust SES to conduct research and provide strategic advice on a full range of market challenges and public opinion issues. In addition to media polling and public opinion research, SES also specializes in public policy polling and measuring retail behaviour and customer satisfaction. SES draws on a number of research tools to ensure relevant and comprehensive results, from telephone surveys through to online research. The firm proved itself to be a national leader in opinion and market research during Canada's recent federal election when it was recognized by the national media for providing the most accurate polling results.

(Contact: Nikita Nanos 613.234.4666 :: www.sesresearch.com)

The Crossing Boundaries National Council

The Crossing Boundaries National Council (CBNC) is a not-for-profit national forum whose mission is to foster the development of Canada as an information society through the transformation of government and governance.

The Council helps Canadians and their governments understand and prepare for the Information Age by fostering debate and action on the special challenges and opportunities it poses for them.

CBNC is co-chaired by the Hon. Tony Valeri, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, and Dan Bader, Deputy Minister, Municipal Affairs, Government of Alberta. It is made up of about 40 members, including senior public servants and elected representatives from each of the 10 provinces and the federal government, as well as representatives from territorial and municipal governments and the Aboriginal community. The initiative is sponsored in part through a partnership with the Social Science and Humanities Research Council under its Initiative on the New Economy program. (Contact: Don Lenihan 613.795.6828 :: www.crossingboundaries.ca)

The Public Policy Forum

The Public Policy Forum is an independent, non-profit organisation aimed at improving the quality of government in Canada through better dialogue between the public, private and voluntary sectors. The Forum's members, drawn from businesses, federal and provincial governments, the voluntary sector and the labour movement, share a common belief that an efficient and effective public service is a key element in ensuring our quality of life and global competitive position.

Established in 1987, the Public Policy Forum has gained a reputation as a trusted, neutral facilitator, capable of bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in productive dialogue. Its research program provides a neutral base to inform collective decision-making. By promoting more information sharing and greater linkages between governments and other sectors, the Public Policy Forum ensures that Canada's future directions become more dynamic, co-ordinated and responsive to the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. (Contact : Graham Fox 613.238.7160 :: www.ppforum.ca)



Public Policy Forum
Forum des politiques publiques

About the Crossing Boundaries Democratic Renewal Project

Crossing Boundaries, in partnership with the Public Policy Forum and SES Research, will be using this year to lead discussions with experts and citizens about the prospects and challenges for renewing Canadian democracy.

The project will have three parts:

- **Citizen Engagement**-The Crossing Boundaries National Council is organizing small deliberative discussions with citizens across Canada, focusing on how to improve the relationship between elected officials and citizens. Universities and community organizations will also be engaged in the discussion, as the Council seeks to connect with venues and people to present its learning and get feedback from a wider audience. Combining the views of experts and citizens gathered over the past several years, the report will then be published in Spring 2006.
- **Project on Political Parties**-In the last 30 years political parties have shifted away from being generators of ideas and brokers of national policies to being electoral machines. This has left a void in Canadian public policy development. The Public Policy Forum, in partnership with the Crossing Boundaries National Council, will engage Canadians and experts across the country in a discussion of how the transition to the Information Age creates an opportunity for political parties to regain some of their traditional role as brokers of ideas and forums for public debate and discussion. The consultation will be followed by Forum on National Political Parties in May 2006.
- **Public Opinion Research**-In partnership with SES Research, this work is gauging the views of Canadians about democratic renewal as well as political parties, informing and shaping the work of CBNC and the Public Policy Forum.

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