

**CARP Democracy Report
September 1, 2012**

KEY FINDINGS

CARP members are not convinced the system is as democratic as it should be, and many feel shut out by the current government. They call for more openness and transparency in government, as well as more of a role for opposition parties and voters.

Relatively few members think Canada is a more democratic country than other western nations, and majorities call for our parliamentary rules and procedures to be codified in law.

Members agree the Canadian PM has too much power and influence and the average government (or opposition) MP has too little power and influence.

Members agree prorogation of parliament should be reserved for its intended purpose of ending a completed session of parliament. They agree imposing prorogation should require an unprecedented two thirds majority vote, or that the PM and the Governor General and government must agree to prorogation.

Three quarters agree Canada suffers from a democratic deficit, and most say this is because too much power is concentrated in the PMO.

Most agree our first-past-the-post electoral system disadvantages smaller parties, and half or more opt for Alternative Vote (AV) or Proportional Representation (PR) systems. Nonetheless, members are happy with the Queen as head of state.

Three quarters agree there should be more checks and balances on a majority government and, surprisingly, most think the Senate is the body, if reformed, to do this.

The vast majority agree patronage appointments and central party nominations should be eliminated, three quarters think Canada's "fixed" election dates should become truly fixed, a majority believe organized voter suppression exists in Canada and many want it punished by jail time, or by by-elections, which is now the case.

The Conservative party, while leading in voter preference, continues to lose points to the NDP, now in second place, but gaining steadily.

DETAILED FINDINGS

A substantial one quarter of members believe Canada is less democratic than other western nations (27%), and just one third think it is more democratic (33%).

How democratic is Canada compared with other leading western countries?

MORE DEMOCRATIC	33%
Much more democratic	10%
Somewhat more democratic	23%
Neither more nor less democratic	36%
LESS DEMOCRATIC	27%
Somewhat less democratic	21%
Much less democratic	7%
MARGIN IN FAVOUR OF “MORE DEMOCRATIC”	+6
DON'T KNOW	3%

The majority disagrees Canada's parliamentary system of unwritten rules serves the country well in the 21st century (58%).

Canada's parliamentary system relies on precedent, tradition and convention, rather than written rules. How much do you agree this is a good system for the 21st century?

AGREE	36%
Agree strongly	7%
Agree	30%
DISAGREE	58%
Disagree	45%
Disagree strongly	13%
DON'T KNOW	6%

There is strong agreement (82%) that Canada should emulate Australia and the UK in codifying our parliamentary protocols.

The UK and Australia have recently moved away from this model and updated written rules for their parliaments. How much do you agree Canada should codify its parliamentary rules into written procedures?

AGREE	82%
Agree strongly	31%
Agree	51%
DISAGREE	13%
Disagree	11%
Disagree strongly	2%
DON'T KNOW	6%

The wide majority think codifying parliamentary rules is a good thing (79%), mostly because it provides checks and balances (39%) and because it prevents anti-democratic tactics in parliament (24%). A more efficient parliament is also seen as an outcome (16%).

Which of the following best describes your attitude to codifying Canadian parliamentary procedure into written rules?

A GOOD THING	79%
Checks and balances on executive power	39%
Prevents anti-democratic tactics in parliament	24%
Parliament runs more efficiently	16%
Neither a good thing nor not such a good thing	6%
NOT SUCH A GOOD THING	11%
Can't foresee every eventuality	5%
Limits freedom of action	4%
Tradition has served well	2%
DON'T KNOW	4%

Two thirds of members agree Canada’s prime minister has more power than other western leaders (69%) and one third say he has “much more power” (36%).

How much power does the Canadian Prime Minister have compared to other western government leaders?

MORE POWER	69%
Much more power	36%
Somewhat more power	33%
Neither more nor less power	20%
LESS POWER	4%
Somewhat less power	4%
Much less power	*
MARGIN IN FAVOUR OF “MORE POWER”	+65
DON’T KNOW	6%

Most members think government backbenchers are expected to support their government (41%), while a quarter acknowledge they have little influence (27%). They are called backbenchers for a reason, say some (13%), while a few think they have some influence (10%).

How would you describe the power and influence of individual government MPs?

Expected to support government	41%
Little influence on government	27%
Called ‘backbenchers’ for a reason	13%
Can have influence on government	11%
“Nobodies 100 meters from Parliament Hill”	5%
Have a lot of power and influence	2%
Encouraged to speak their minds	1%
DON’T KNOW	1%

Two thirds disagree prorogation of parliament should be used for any other purpose than ending a completed legislative agenda (63%).

Prorogation of parliament is intended to allow the government to call a new session when all their previous legislative goals have been achieved. Do you agree prorogation should be used for any other purpose?

Agree	20%
Disagree	63%
DON’T KNOW	17%

The majority agree prorogation should not be allowed to stifle discussion (58%), but those who do (39%) think it should be permitted if the issue has been thoroughly debated (21%).

Should prorogation be allowed when a government wants to end debate on a controversial topic and move on to other business?

YES	39%
If issue is thoroughly discussed	21%
If opposition has clearly stated its position	9%
If government has a majority	8%
OTHER	2%
NO	58%
DON'T KNOW	3%

Two thirds agree the decision to prorogue parliament should require a two-thirds vote (69%).

How much do you agree the decision to prorogue parliament should require a “supermajority” of two thirds of the votes in parliament?

AGREE	69%
Agree strongly	32%
Agree	36%
DISAGREE	25%
Disagree	21%
Disagree strongly	4%
DON'T KNOW	7%

Two thirds vote in parliament is seen as an appropriate mechanism for proroguing (24%), while some don't want it allowed at all (19%). After this, the PM, the GG and the government are seen to be able to prorogue (15%), followed by the PM and the GG (12%), followed by a plurality vote in parliament (10%).

Who should be allowed to prorogue parliament?

Two thirds majority of parliament (67%)	24%
Prorogation not allowed except to end session	19%
PM, Governor General and the government	15%
PM and Governor General	12%
Plurality vote in parliament (largest percentage)	10%
Majority vote in parliament (50% plus 1)	7%
Governor General alone	6%
PM alone	3%
The speaker	1%
DON'T KNOW	4%

Three quarters of members agree with former Prime Minister Paul Martin that Canada suffers from a "democratic deficit" (74%).

How much do you agree Canada suffers from a 'democratic deficit'?

AGREE	74%
Agree strongly	30%
Agree	44%
DISAGREE	20%
Disagree	16%
Disagree strongly	4%
DON'T KNOW	7%

This democratic deficit is seen to be most evident in the power concentrated in the PMO (38%), followed by the perception voters do not have enough say in decisions which affect them (18%). Low turnout is seen as a problem (15%) as is the perception that public consultation is rare and ignored (10%).

What do you think a “democratic deficit” means in Canada?

Too much power concentrated in PMO	38%
Voters don’t have enough say in decisions	18%
Turnout down, not enough people vote	15%
Public consultation rare and ignored	10%
Majority governments have too much power	5%
Decorum has broken down in parliament	4%
Backbench government MPs have no influence	2%
Opposition MPs have no influence	1%
Cabinet Ministers have no influence	*
OTHER/DON’T KNOW	7%

People are more apt to agree the first-past-the-post electoral system marginalizes smaller parties (42%) than disagree (13%).

How much do you agree Canada’s “first past the post” electoral system is to blame for the lack of influence of smaller parties?

Agree strongly	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Disagree strongly	13%
MARGIN IN FAVOUR OF “AGREE STRONGLY”	+29
DON’T KNOW	21%

Members favour both an Alternative Vote system (47%) and a Proportional Representation system (51%) to the current system (40% and 35%, respectively).

One alternative to “first past the post” is the Alternate Vote or AV, where voters select their first, second, and third choices for a candidate. If no candidate wins a majority outright on first choices, second and third choices are counted until a majority is achieved. How much do you agree with this electoral system?/Another alternative to “first past the post” is Proportional Representation, or PR, where parties are given seats according to the share of the popular vote they received. How much do you agree with this electoral system?

	AV	PR
AGREE	47%	51%
Agree strongly	12%	21%
Agree	35%	36%
DISAGREE	40%	35%
Disagree	25%	21%
Disagree strongly	14%	14%
DON'T KNOW	14%	9%

Three quarters of Canadians support the Queen as Canada’s democratic head of state (72%)

Canada’s Head of State is the Queen. Would Canada be a more democratic country if the Head of State were an elected Canadian?

Yes	20%
No	72%
DON’T KNOW	8%

Three quarters agree there should be more checks and balances on a majority government (72%).

In Canada, a majority government can enact any legislation it chooses. Should there be more checks and balances on Canadian majority governments?

Yes	72%
No	24%
DON’T KNOW	4%

Close to half our members (45%) see the Senate as a possible check to unfettered majority government, if reformed, followed by a quarter who think Commons itself needs reform (27%).

Which of the following institutions do you think should be reformed as a way of putting more checks and balances on a majority federal government?

The Senate	45%
The House of Commons	27%
The role of the opposition parties	9%
The role of the provinces	7%
The Governor General	2%
The Head of State	1%
OTHER	3%
DON'T KNOW	6%

There is wide agreement at the elimination of both patronage appointments (91%) and central party nominations (80%), and in the case of patronage appointments, the majority take the strongest position (“agree strongly” - 61%).

How much do you agree government patronage appointments should be eliminated?/How much do you agree central party nominations should be eliminated, and the nominating process left up to individual riding associations?

	End Patronage Appointments	End Central Party Nominations
AGREE	91%	80%
Agree strongly	61%	35%
Agree	30%	45%
DISAGREE	7%	11%
Disagree	6%	9%
Disagree strongly	1%	1%
DON'T KNOW	2%	10%

About one half of members think restrictions to budget consultation aren't such a good thing, they say because it offers little input (29%), it's anti-democratic (26%) and limits information (16%).

Federal budget consultations no longer allow citizens to raise issues of concern to them. They are limited to discussing one of five topics decided by the government, and must limit comments to 350 words. Which of the following statements best describes your attitude towards this change?

GOOD THING	16%
Government runs more smoothly	9%
Government didn't listen anyway	3%
Majority can do what it wants	2%
OTHER	2%
Neither a good thing nor not such a good thing	7%
NOT SUCH A GOOD THING	53%
Limits input from Canadians	29%
Anti-democratic	26%
Suppresses valuable information	16%
OTHER	1%
DON'T KNOW	5%

Three quarters of members agree our "fixed" election dates should be truly fixed by law (74%).

Canada now has fixed federal election dates (May every 4 years) but they are not written into law and can be ignored. How much do you agree that federal, provincial and municipal elections in Canada should have fixed dates set by law as is the case in the US?

AGREE	74%
Agree strongly	40%
Agree	34%
DISAGREE	22%
Disagree	16%
Disagree strongly	6%
DON'T KNOW	4%

The three quarters who think fixed election dates are a good thing (73%) do so because it removes the advantage of timing from the government (45%) or because it makes elections easier to prepare for (19%). Among the one fifth who think fixed dates are not such a good idea (20%), most do so because it would lead to permanent campaigning (11%).

Which of the following best describes your attitude to legally binding fixed election dates?

GOOD THING	73%
Removes power of timing from government	45%
Elections more predictable, easier to prepare	19%
Increase voter turnout	6%
OTHER	2%
Neither a good thing nor not such a good thing	6%
NOT SUCH A GOOD THING	20%
Leads to permanent campaigns	11%
Less flexibility for government	6%
More expensive elections	1%
OTHER	2%
DON'T KNOW	2%

Six-in-ten members believe we have organized voter suppression in Canada (60%).

How much do you agree that organized voter suppression, such as misdirecting voters to polling stations, is a real problem in Canada?

AGREE	60%
Agree strongly	27%
Agree	21%
DISAGREE	28%
Disagree	21%
Disagree strongly	7%
DON'T KNOW	10%

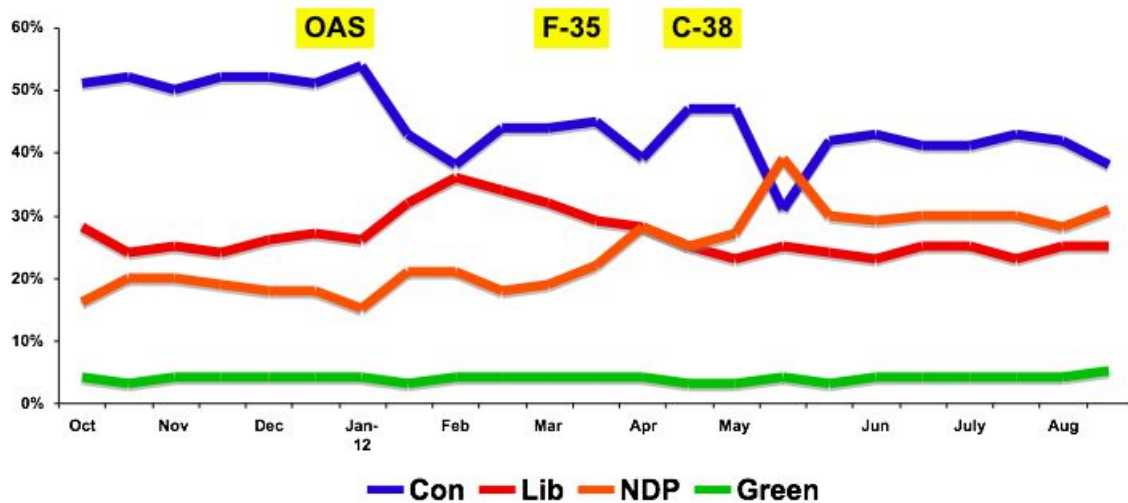
Criminal charges and jail time are seen to be an appropriate punishment for voter suppression by a third (34%), while just fewer think by-elections in the affected ridings (the current legal remedy) are appropriate (28%). Half this proportion think either the party or the candidate should be prevented from running in that riding (14% each).

If there is a proven case of voter suppression or vote rigging in an electoral division, how harsh do you think the penalty should be?

Criminal charges/jail time	34%
By-elections in affected ridings	28%
Disqualify party from running in that riding	14%
Disqualify candidate from running in that riding	14%
Civil charges/fine	7%
No penalty, everybody does it	1%
DON'T KNOW	1%
DON'T KNOW	1%

ELECTORAL PREFERENCE

The Conservative Party leads (38%), but at a diminished level since the OAS, F-35 and Bill C-38 issues made news, and they are declining steadily in favour. After leading the Conservatives for one polling cycle immediately after the debate around the Omnibus Budget Bill C-38, the NDP (31%) are ahead of the Liberals (25%) in second place and gaining ground.



More than 2400 CARP Poll™ panel members responded to this poll between August 24 and 27, 2012. The margin of error for a probability sample this size is plus or minus 2%, 19 times out of 20