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Sep. 7, 2005. 01:00 AM

Few polled are into politicking

SEAN GORDON
OTTAWA BUREAU

OTTAWA—Canadians are frustrated at not having more influence over the country's politics, yet one in four voters surveyed in a recent poll admitted to never undertaking grassroots activities like signing a petition, joining a party or marching in a demonstration.

SES Research conducted the poll for the Crossing Boundaries National Council and the Public Policy Forum, a pair of Ottawa-based think-tanks, to assess Canadians' attitudes toward political activism and governance.

Pollster Nik Nanos said the findings demonstrate voters are keen to play a greater role in government decision-making, but are frustrated with traditional ways of becoming involved.

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"People want more input, but not based on the political paradigm that exists right now," said Nanos, who is president of SES.

The study suggests traditional parties are faced with a tantalizing political opportunity, provided they can tap into the restlessness many voters expressed.

The poll found 61 per cent of respondents would like a direct say on policy or government decisions but 31 per cent said it should be left to politicians.

Nanos was struck by the fact 24 per cent of respondents said they had undertaken none of five aspects of activism studied.

Of the politically active, only 21 per cent took out membership in a political party, 22 per cent marched in a demonstration, 32 per cent wrote to an elected official, and 38 per cent attended a town hall meeting. Most popular, with 57 per cent, was signing a petition.

The Aug. 4-8 national telephone poll of 1,000 is considered accurate to within 3.1 percentage points 19 times in 20.

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