

Politicians hit bottom

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An Angus Reid poll has confirmed what most Canadians already know: We don't think much of politicians.

The online survey, conducted last month, found only 25 per cent of the 1,015 randomly selected respondents had a "great deal" or "fair amount" of respect for politicians. That put them at the bottom of the list of professions included in the survey, well behind highly respected doctors (94 per cent), and police officers and teachers (both 83 per cent). Even lawyers (44 per cent) fared better.

It is lamentable, if not surprising, that Canadians hold their elected representatives in such low esteem. Who can blame them when scandals and partisan barbs have elbowed out substantial policy discussions at all levels of government? It's not hard to see how voters might conclude that most politicians are motivated less by public interest than self-interest.

Unfortunately, the low regard in which politicians are held risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. The less respect politicians command, the fewer good candidates will want to stand for elected office, justifying ever-lower public opinion of politicians.

It is notable that journalists, who serve up the sound bytes on which ordinary citizens base their opinions of MPs, MPPs and city councillors, didn't score much better than the politicians they report on. Only 49 per cent of respondents thought highly of journalists, compared with 73 per cent in 1994, the biggest drop for any profession.

Perhaps this survey will serve as a wake-up call to both politicians and journalists that they need to raise the level of their game.