DEMOCRACY MATTERS, DEBATES COUNT

A report on the 2019 Leaders' Debates Commission and the future of debates in Canada

Leaders' Debates Commission

Commission des débats des chefs

debates-debats.ca

Également disponible en français sous le titre :

LES DÉBATS, ESSENTIELS À LA DÉMOCRATIE Rapport sur la Commission des débats des chefs de 2019 et l'avenir des débats au Canada

To obtain additional information, please contact:

Leaders' Debates Commission

301-155 Queen Street

Ottawa ON K1A 0A3

Email: **info@debates-debats.ca**

This publication can be made available in alternative formats upon request.

PDF: Cat.: CP22-187/2020E-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-34066-1

Contents

Message from the Debates Commissioner

Democracy matters. But there are worrying currents in societies around the world, including Canada. In 2018, Canada became a 'distruster nation' for the first time in the history of the two-decade-old Edelman Trust Survey, meaning a majority of the population did not trust government or media for public policy and news.[1] While Canada did modestly better in the 2019 survey, we are still not what Edelman would call a 'truster nation.' To combat this, we must assert that democracy and trusted democratic institutions matter: we must also make sure that they are robust. In doing so, we build trust. Complacency is our greatest enemy.

Debates count. Leaders' debates play an important role in Canada's democracy. They foster conversation, encourage engagement, and inform the electorate. They offer a rare chance to learn about each other, the people who want to lead our country, and the policies they intend to implement.

Debates are a chance to see leaders together on one stage, challenging each other's ideas and opinions, and inviting us to do the same.

Debates are a window into the world of others. As the way we communicate and consume information changes, we can become isolated from opinions outside our own. We believe debates allow us to break this bubble and learn about a variety of issues, from a variety of perspectives.

Debates are something we can participate in together, an opportunity for citizens to come together: to watch or listen to the same thing, at the same time and to gain an understanding about the issues at hand, what they mean to Canadians, and the changes our potential leaders propose. We believe that this collective experience leads to engagement and further conversation.

The Leaders' Debates Commission was created in the lead up to the 2019 election.

Our mandate was two-fold:

1. Ensure that two high quality and informative debates were made accessible to Canadians from coast to coast to coast; and
2. Assess whether Canadians are well served by a Commission responsible for their delivery and advise on how debates can be more effective.

The following sections report on what we accomplished, what we learned, and provide a roadmap for future debates.

[1] https://www.edelman.com/sites/g/files/aatuss191/files/2019-03/2019_Edelman_Trust_Barometer_Global_Report.pdf?utm_source=website&utm_medium=global_report&utm_campaign=downloads

I have been privileged to serve as the Commissioner for the 2019 Leaders' Debates Commission and pay tribute to an extraordinary staff and advisory board as well as a wide range of operating partners and stakeholders for carrying out this pilot project. We delivered two debates that reached and engaged Canadians like never before. **More than half of the electorate tuned in to watch one of the two leaders' debates in the 2019 federal election**. These debates counted: they were key moments that helped Canadians cast informed votes. Not only do debates count, they are a pivotal moment in an election campaign. They need to happen in every election, and they need to ensure that the public interest is paramount. They help us understand that democracy matters.

David Johnston
Debates Commissioner

Section 1 – Implementing the Commission's mandate

The Leaders' Debates Commission ("the Commission") was created to ensure debates serve the public interest and are predictable, reliable, and stable. The Commission's mandate was to organize two leaders' debates, one in each official language, and to submit a report to the Minister of Democratic Institutions who will table it in Parliament. This report is to analyze the Commission's 2019 experience and make recommendations about how debates should be organized in the future.

Traditionally, leaders' debates were organized by a consortium of the country's main television networks. Debates were considered journalistic exercises: the media determined the format, themes, questions, moderators, participation criteria, promotion, and distribution of the debates. Prominent and trusted political journalists usually moderated the debates, although this role was occasionally entrusted to respected public officials such as university presidents or judges.

The creation of a public body changed this model. By mandating a Commission to organize two leaders' debates, the Government indicated it wanted to reduce the possibility that negotiations between the political parties and the television networks would fail to produce debates, or produce debates with limited public reach. It also stated it wanted to bring more predictability and permanence to the debates as a forum for unfiltered information. Debates thus became a public trust delegated to an independent Commission. The Commission, and by extension, the producer it selected to organize the debates, became custodians of this public trust. Debates became an integral part of the democratic process, a public institution with a public trust to be protected.

The creation of the Commission also responded to a number of recurring criticisms of leaders' debates in Canada: first, that the criteria used to decide which party leaders could participate were not always publicly known nor transparently applied; second, that party leaders would sometimes use their participation as a bargaining chip in negotiations, in some cases preventing debates from being organized.

After the 2015 election, which did not have a national English-language debate with broad reach, the Minister of Democratic Institutions received a mandate to "bring forward options to create an independent commissioner to organize political party leaders' debates during future federal election campaigns."[2] The Minister, supported by the Institution for Research on Public Policy, launched a consultation process that included roundtable meetings in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg, and Vancouver.[3] The House of Commons' Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs ("PROC") heard from 33 witnesses in late 2017 and early 2018 and reported in March 2018.[4] Both of these processes recommended the creation of a commission to ensure that debates served the public interest.[5]

[2] https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/archived-minister-democratic-institutions-mandate-letter-0
[3] http://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Creating-an-Independent-Commission-for-Federal-Leaders-Debates.pdf
[4] https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/PROC/Reports/RP9703561/procrp55/procrp55-e.pdf
[5] "The Creation of an Independent Commissioner Responsible for Leaders' Debates" contained a dissenting opinion indicating that the Official Opposition did not support the report's recommendations.

The Commission was created through Order in Council P.C. 2018-1322 ("OIC") and mandated to organize "effective, informative, and compelling" debates that are accessible to as many Canadians as possible.[6] David Johnston was appointed Debates Commissioner in November 2018. In accordance with the OIC, the Commissioner appointed a seven-person Advisory Board in early 2019 to reflect, as the OIC stipulated, "gender balance and Canadian diversity" and "a range of political affiliations and expertise."[7]

The Advisory Board met in person or by teleconference 12 times over a 13-month period. The Commission's work was supported by a secretariat of six full- and part-time staff. The debates themselves were produced by the Canadian Debates Production Partnership ("CDPP"), following a Request for Proposals ("RFP") issued in May 2019.

A budget of $5.5 million was provided by the Government for the 2019 election cycle. As a public entity established under the *Financial Administration Act*, the Commission's management practices followed core public sector standards related to personnel, finance, procurement, accommodation, and reporting. While fully independent in its decision-making, the Commission received administrative support from the Privy Council Office. The Commission also received website and media expertise from Global Affairs Canada's Summit Management Office. We are grateful to both for their valued support.

The Commission's work covered nine phases:

- appearing before PROC and consulting with political parties and over 40 stakeholders with backgrounds in democratic participation, debates, and the media
- establishing a seven-person advisory board, whose involvement covered the full range of the Commission's mandate
- developing a statement of work and the design of a two-stage RFP process to select the debates producer
- launching the Commission's website and creating over 50 communications products (videos, infographics, press releases etc.)
- developing an outreach program to:
    - share information and toolkits about the debates
    - undertake debates participation programs with non-governmental organizations involved in democratic development
    - facilitate the hosting of debate viewing experiences with 25 Cineplex theatres across the country, the WE Global Learning Centre in Toronto, the Halifax Public Library, and the McNally-Robinson Bookstore in Saskatoon

[6] See Appendix 1 for the full text of the OIC.
[7] See Appendix 2 for the Advisory Board's terms of reference.

- interpreting the debate participation criteria provided in the OIC
- supporting the debates producer as required to produce the debates, including media accreditation
- consulting with stakeholders, conducting research, and hosting a January 2020 workshop on the future of debates in Canada
- producing a final report, drawing on survey responses, interviews, and research on international debates organization, carried out in consultation with academic partners

The Government specified that the Commission's report would inform whether and how a publicly-funded entity would continue to organize leaders' debates. This phased approach recognized that, in looking around the world, Canada's Commission is a rare experiment. Few democracies have election debates that are organized by a public entity solely dedicated to this purpose. Countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia have been attentive to our 2019 experience for potential application in their jurisdictions.[8]

The following section reviews whether we have fulfilled our mandate and whether a publicly-funded entity should continue to organize leaders' debates in Canada.

[8] https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/politics/election-debates-case-for-independent-commission-johnson-corbyn
https://www.electoral-reform.org.uk/what-can-we-learn-from-canadas-leaders-debate-commission/
https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2019/11/05/the-backroom-deal-between-the-conservatives-labour-and-itv-proves-it-the-uk-needs-an-independent-debate-commission/
https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-election-silences-show-need-for-mandatory-debates/

Section 2 – Principal findings & recommendation

The OIC provided several objectives for the Commission:

1. Debates should be "effective, informative, and compelling"
2. Debates should be accessible to as many Canadians as possible
3. Debate invitations should be made on the basis of "clear, open, and transparent participation criteria"
4. Debates should be organized to serve the public interest

Additionally, in its **2019-2020 Departmental Plan**, the Commission indicated it would measure the degree to which Canadians are aware of, and have access to, debates that it organized.

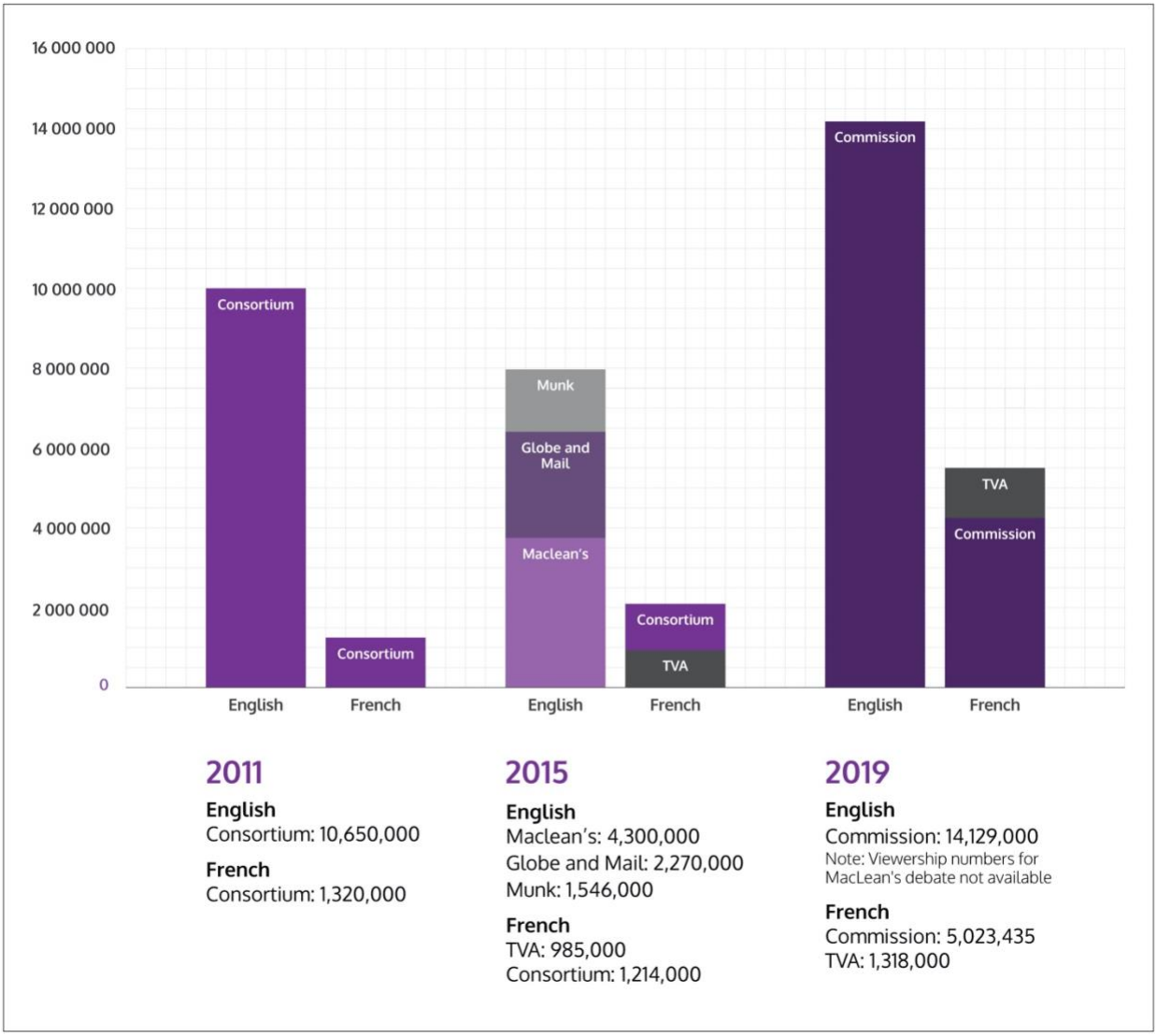
To review whether the Commission and its debates succeeded in achieving these objectives, we studied the 2019 leaders' debates. This included contracting independent research institutes at the Universities of Toronto and British Columbia. One of the primary resources available to these research teams was an analysis of survey responses conducted through the Canadian Election Study ("CES"). The survey included a range of questions to assess the success of the Commission's debates with the purpose of determining what citizens expected and got out of the debates.[9] We also sought feedback on alternative debate formats, and conducted research on the history of election debates in Canada and around the world.[10] After the election, the Commission consulted 28 stakeholders[11] and hosted a workshop with 18 participants to solicit feedback from academics, civil society members, and think tanks with expertise on the topic of debates.

2.1 Were the debates effective, informative, and compelling?

Evidence indicates the Commission's debates served as a focal point for the 2019 election campaign, drawing substantially more viewers than debates in previous campaigns. Over 14 million Canadians tuned in to the English-language debate and over 5 million watched the French-language debate. These numbers are large, both in comparison to international and previous Canadian election debates.

[9] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates
[10] See Appendix 7 – Literature Review – Canada's Leaders' Debates in Comparative Perspective.
[11] See Appendix 3 – Stakeholders Consulted.

2019 Debate viewership



The total of 14,129,000 for the English debate includes radio listeners (849,000), digital viewers (3,640,031) and television viewers (9,640,000). As such, it is possible that the 14,129,000 could include some people who watched on more than one device at the same time. For television, 9,640,000 is the total number of viewers over the 120-minute duration. The average minute audience was 3,900,000.

The total of 5,023,435 for the French debate includes radio listeners (72,900) digital viewers (650,535) and television viewers (4,300,000). As such, it is possible that the 5,023,435 could include some people who watched on more than one device at the same time. For television, 4,300,000 is the total number of viewers over the 120-minute duration. The average minute audience was 1,630,000.

2019 Digital Debate viewership

ENGLISH DIGITAL

- YouTube: 1,698,008
- Twitter: 700,198
- Facebook: 658,423
- CDPP Owned and Operated: 583,402

TOTAL: 3,640,031

FRENCH DIGITAL

- YouTube: 254,904
- Facebook: 169,118
- CDPP Owned and Operated: 119,999
- Twitter: 106,514

TOTAL: 650,535

TOTAL DIGITAL: 4,290,566

Stakeholders noted the debates acted as a collective experience. This feedback is especially noteworthy given the general declines in television viewership and increasingly fragmented media audiences. Not only did more people tune in to the debates, they watched for longer. The average retention rate for the English-language debate was 52 minutes over its 120-minute duration. This is a 6% increase from the last English-language consortium debate (2011). The average retention rate for the French-language debate was 50 minutes, a 14% increase from the last French-language consortium debate (2015).

Moreover, not only did more people watch, the debates impacted their behaviour: nearly 60% of English-language viewers and nearly half of French-language viewers reported discussing the debates with other people. Polling done for the Commission also indicated watching the debates caused viewers to pay more attention to news about the federal election, to talk more about the federal election, and to learn more about party promises.[12]

Viewership is one way to measure success, but there are other ways to measure if debates are effective, informative, and compelling. First, we can see the debates had an impact on social media; Twitter activity related to Canadian politics reached its peak for the entire campaign the day following the English-language debate.[13] Second, citizens said the debates made a difference; an IPSOS poll indicated that 56% of Canadians said the leaders' debates were important for their vote.[14] Third, before the debates, voting intentions were largely static. They began to change around the same time as the debates. Although it is impossible to determine what role the debates played in these shifts, this evidence is consistent with other indicators of the impact of the debates.

Initial feedback on the English-language debate was positive; the CES social media analysis found sentiment in the first 36 hours was favourable. However, there was an abrupt change about 36 hours after the debate that coincided with negative media coverage.[15] The most oft-repeated criticism concerned the format of the English-language debate and specifically the producer's choice of, and number of, moderators.

The French-language debate, by comparison, was considered more efficient and effective. It was hosted by one veteran television anchor and had a simpler format.

2.2 Were the debates accessible?

The English-language and French-language debates were available live on 15 television networks, three national radio networks, and 24 digital platforms. This is unprecedented. The debates were provided in four accessible formats and 12 languages, including Indigenous languages. Fewer than 10% of non-viewers indicated that their main reason for not watching the debates was because they were not able to access them.[16]

[12] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates
[13] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates
[14] https://www.ipsos.com/en-ca/news-polls/One-Week-from-E-Day-Canadians-Hearing-More-Negativity-About-Candidates-Leaders-than-Policy
[15] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates
[16] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates

2.3 Were debate invitations issued on the basis of clear, open, and transparent participation criteria?

In 2019, the criteria were made public in advance of the election campaign, as they were included within the OIC. Invitations to party leaders were made public, as were the leaders' responses.

The Commission also made public its interpretation of the participation criteria and how they were applied.[17]

Stakeholders generally thought the criteria were applied fairly by the Commission. There was, however, considerable stakeholder consensus that the criteria should not be determined by the government of the day and should be revised to be clearer.

2.4 Were the debates organized to serve the public interest?

In 2019, the overall responsibility of delivering the debates shifted from the television networks to the Commission. The Commission became responsible for their success or failure.

Mindful of the importance of high journalistic standards and independence, the debates producer was chosen through an RFP.

The RFP reflected the values permeated in the Commission's mandate: inclusiveness, democratic education, high journalistic standards, cost effectiveness, organizational experience, and accessibility especially for people with disabilities, people living in official language minority communities, and residents of remote regions.

The debates producer was responsible for the promotion, production, and distribution of the debates including: format, moderating, themes, and questions. The Commission was not present during negotiations with the political parties. The debates producer briefed the Commission regularly on the progress of negotiations and preparations for the debates.

Post-debate consultations showed there is widespread agreement that an independent and impartial Commission should play an important role in ensuring the public interest is given full consideration in debate organization.

[17] See Appendix 5 for the Interpretation of Participation Criteria for Leaders' Debates.

2.5 Principal recommendation: the establishment of a permanent Commission

We believe the above findings indicate the Commission fulfilled its mandate. By the standards set out in the OIC, the English-language debate held on October 7, 2019 and the French-language debate held on October 10, 2019 achieved their objectives.

There is also broad support for the continued existence of a Commission, provided that measures are maintained to ensure its independence, impartiality, and transparency. A range of stakeholders also concluded that a future Commission should have a more active role in some aspects of debate format.

Entrusting the Commission with the mandate to hold two debates in 2019 may well have changed the nature and scope of debate organization in the future. While debates must meet high journalistic standards, they are more than journalistic exercises; they are democratic exercises. This change in perspective, which was repeated throughout the Commission's consultations, goes beyond semantics. It speaks to the fact that the Commission is mandated with a public trust, and that its accountability is to the people of Canada. It also makes the Commission responsible for the success of the debates in their entirety. Given this was a first for Canada, the fact that a range of voices argued a Commission should be more involved in the future supports the rationale for its continued existence.

The financial uncertainty of media organizations is another reason to consider a permanent Commission. In 2019, the Commission financed elements of the debates including the public venue, some distribution costs, interpretation, and outreach programs. Producers provided significant in-kind contributions related to debates promotion and production.

We conclude leaders' debates are important to the democratic process and should be a predictable feature of our election campaigns.

With the rest of this report, we make recommendations based on our 2019 experience, to inform both the makeup and mandate of a future debate authority and the debates themselves.

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION:

We recommend the establishment of a permanent, publicly-funded entity to organize leaders' debates.

Section 3 – Beyond 2019: improving the next leaders' debates

This section provides recommendations that seek to improve the legitimacy, role, mandate, structure, efficiency, and cost-effectiveness of a future Commission. This permanent, publicly-funded entity could either take the form of the current Commission, or it could be another publicly-funded debate authority. For the purpose of readability, we use the term Commission.

3.1 Appointment of a future Debates Commissioner

In 2019, the Commission was headed by a Debates Commissioner, who was a part-time OIC appointee. The Government selected the 2019 Debates Commissioner, but the process did not include consultation with opposition parties. The Government nominated the Debates Commissioner, who then appeared before the House of Commons' Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to allow political parties to study the nominee's credentials. Following this appearance, the Debates Commissioner was appointed to the office.

Consultations following the debates revealed that this approach was unsatisfactory not only to opposition parties, but to a broad range of stakeholders.[18] The lack of support for the appointment process was a significant potential constraint on the Commission's legitimacy. Despite this, most stakeholders acknowledged the Debates Commissioner carried out his work in an impartial and independent manner and appreciated the transparency of the Commission's decisions.

We believe the role of the Commissioner is an important one and should be maintained. We conclude the appointment should be validated through consultation with opposition parties. This gives the Commission visibility and profile as well as credibility for decisions on things such as the participation criteria. The specific rationale for those decisions would rest with the Commissioner, rather than the government of the day, in order to increase transparency and minimize any perceptions of political bias. The role of the Commissioner should be subject to a term whose end date is separate from the end date of a particular election cycle.

RECOMMENDATION #1:

The Commission should be headed by a Debates Commissioner whose appointment process involves consultation with the registered political parties represented in the House of Commons.

[18] The IRPP also emphasized that the Commission "should have, and be seen to have, broad support from political parties" and the PROC committee report included a dissenting opinion calling for consultation. http://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Creating-an-Independent-Commission-for-Federal-Leaders-Debates.pdf

3.2 Number of debates

Many of the features of debates such as the format, venue, timing, and participation of leaders will be influenced by the number of debates organized by a future Commission. In 2019, the Commission had a mandate to organize two debates: one in each official language. These debates, in the words of the OIC's preamble, were supposed to "benefit from the participation of the leaders who have the greatest likelihood of becoming Prime Minister or whose political parties have the greatest likelihood of winning seats in Parliament."

Some stakeholders and commentators suggested the two debates in 2019, particularly with six participants, did not provide enough speaking time for each participant and did not allow for sufficient interaction between the candidates who were considered most likely to become Prime Minister. As a result, we gave some consideration to the possibility of organizing four debates in the future: two in each official language. The first two in English and in French would bring together a smaller group, up to four leaders, with a reasonable chance of becoming Prime Minister. The second two debates would include the party leaders, perhaps five or six, who meet a lower threshold of participation criteria, as in the 2019 debates.

However, most stakeholders advised that adding more debates could create new problems. For instance, it could necessitate the development and application of two different sets of participation criteria. More debates might also dilute the viewing audience and detract from the shared experience of debates. Political parties have also voiced concerns about scheduling additional debates, with more than two debates historically only being held during longer campaign periods (such as 2005 to 2006 and 2015.) This compounds the potential that increasing the number of debates organized by a future Commission might make it even more difficult for other organizations to secure the participation of party leaders in their debates.

While there may be future demand for additional debates related to specific issues (in our view a very desirable outcome), these could be hosted by other organizations. In 2019, the Commission was instructed to "conduct its activities in a manner that does not preclude other organizations from producing or organizing leaders' debates or other political debates." Maclean's and Citytv organized an English-language debate on September 12, 2019 involving Elizabeth May of the Green Party of Canada, Jagmeet Singh of the New Democratic Party, and Andrew Scheer of the Conservative Party of Canada. Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party of Canada did not participate. On October 2, 2019, TVA hosted a French-language debate involving Yves-François Blanchet of the Bloc Québécois, Jagmeet Singh of the New Democratic Party, Andrew Scheer of the Conservative Party of Canada, and Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Several stakeholders noted the Commission's existence may have created the semblance of 'official' debates that party leaders could use in order to decline invitations to non-Commission debates. In particular, a separate debate on foreign policy was cancelled. The Munk Centre stated that this was due to Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party of Canada's decision not to participate. However, other stakeholders observed that some of these conflicts are the result of overemphasizing the role of party leaders in Canadian democracy, noting that other organizations might effectively produce debates featuring cabinet members.

In 2019, the two debates organized by the Commission were held in the same location for cost effectiveness, and because neither the political parties nor the debates producer were enthusiastic about the idea of travelling between debate days. Future Commissions may want to consider hosting the English-language and French-language debates in different locations and perhaps outside of Ontario and Quebec.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

The Commission should organize two publicly-funded debates, one in each official language.

3.3 Participation criteria

In 2019 the Commission did not set the participation criteria for the debates that it organized. Instead, the task was to interpret and apply the mandated criteria laid out in the OIC. Political parties had to meet two of the following criteria in order to participate:

> Criterion (i): the party is represented in the House of Commons by a Member of Parliament who was elected as a member of that party;
>
> Criterion (ii): the Commissioner considers that the party intends to endorse candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts in the general election in question;
>
> Criterion (iii):
>
> > a. the party's candidates for the most recent general election received at that election at least 4% of the number of valid votes cast; or,
> >
> > b. based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question.

After consulting the political parties, the Commission published its interpretation of the criteria. We stated that criteria (i) and (iii)(a) did not require an extensive assessment because they are based on the review of objective evidence. Criteria (ii) and especially (iii)(b), on the other hand, did require assessment.[19] In the case of five political parties, the application of the criteria was straightforward. We issued invitations to these parties' leaders on August 12, 2019, almost two months before the debates.[20] None of these five invitations required the interpretation and application of criterion (iii)(b).

However, determining whether to invite a sixth political party, the People's Party of Canada ("PPC"), required further assessment. Rather than inviting the leader of the PPC in August alongside the other five leaders, the Commission sought additional and more current information, including from the PPC and from polling conducted on our behalf, before making a determination of whether more than one

[19] See Appendix 5 for the Interpretation of Participation Criteria for Leaders' Debates.
[20] Invitations were sent on August 12, 2019 to the Bloc Québécois, the Conservative Party of Canada, the Green Party of Canada, the Liberal Party of Canada, and the New Democratic Party. See https://debates-debats.ca/en/interpretation-participation-criteria-leaders-debates/

candidate endorsed by the PPC had a legitimate chance of being elected. We issued an invitation to the leader of the PPC on September 16, 2019.[21]

This decision to invite the leader of the PPC created some controversy,[22] although, in post-debate consultations, most people generally agreed the criteria as set out in the OIC were fairly and transparently applied by the Commission.

Nevertheless, two consistent concerns were expressed:

1. The Government of the day is ill-placed to set participation criteria for leaders' debates, given the perception of a conflict of interest caused by the Prime Minister's future participation in the debates; and
2. The criteria as written introduced a high degree of ambiguity, which detracted from the certainty that a Commission was intended to provide to debate organization.

We conclude both of these concerns are valid. The fact that debate participation criteria were laid out in advance of the election was intended to make the process transparent, impartial, and predictable as well as to ensure public accountability. These objectives are sound and important. The use of public participation criteria in 2019 represented a step forward for debate organization in Canada, especially as it relates to transparency.

Improvements could be made to the process to further realize these objectives.

First, to ensure impartiality, the determination of debate participation criteria should not rest with the government of the day. No level of transparency and fairness on the part of a Commission will ensure that the overall debate organization process is viewed as non-partisan if the participation criteria are perceived as being set by one interested party.

Second, to ensure predictability, efforts must be made to remove undue ambiguity from the interpretation of the participation criteria. Criterion (iii)(b) required an interpretation of a number of components, including what number of "candidates" were needed to meet the threshold and what was meant by "legitimate chance." More fundamentally, it also required an overall assessment of the electability of candidates, essentially in all 338 electoral districts.

Each of these items provided a possibility for observers to arrive at different conclusions as to whether a party did or did not meet the stated criterion. The Commission considered a range of evidence to support the conclusions it reached in interpreting the criteria as provided. Nevertheless, this level of interpretation, coupled with the need to collect evidence on electability, did not lead to a process that was completely satisfactory.

[21] See https://debates-debats.ca/en/interpretation-participation-criteria-leaders-debates/peoples-party-canada/. For polling undertaken by the Commission, see https://debates-debats.ca/en/transparency/public-opinion-research-provide-evidence-interpretation-participation-criteria-leaders-debates/

[22] See Appendix 4 – Leaders' Debates Commission – Media Coverage.

We conclude that setting the criteria should be a responsibility of the Commissioner, but we include some analysis from our 2019 experience here for potential future Commissioners to consider.

No consensus emerged from consultations on specific participation criteria. We heard differing opinions about whether the debates should:

- feature candidates who are more likely to be Prime Minister or those who reflect a broad range of public opinion
- emphasize only national concerns or make space for party leaders representing regional considerations
- feature participation criteria that look backwards or explicitly avoid privileging incumbency
- feature participation criteria that reflect the principles of Canada's parliamentary system of electing individuals from local constituencies to Parliament and not directly electing a Prime Minister

While there was little support for either the existing criteria or the total absence of criteria, we heard often that there is likely no perfect set of criteria.

Responses to the CES survey reveal that the three types of participation criteria with the most support are, in order from most popular to least popular:

- number of candidates running for a party
- poll results
- number of MPs that a party has in the House of Commons

However, using the number of candidates running for a party alone to determine participation could disadvantage regional parties, some of which have historically achieved success and parliamentary influence. Put differently, the number of candidates a party is able to field may not be an indicator of future success or popular support for a party. Looking at the number of elected MPs alone, on the other hand, risks hindering the success of emerging parties and reinforcing the influence of historically successful parties. In sum, who should be in the debates and how they should be chosen is a matter that remains without a clear answer.

As we approached this task in 2019, we carefully considered the language of the OIC. In particular, one clause in the preamble stated that debates should "benefit from the participation of the leaders who have the greatest likelihood of becoming Prime Minister," yet also, of leaders "whose political parties have the greatest likelihood of winning seats in Parliament." Then, in the body of the OIC, the specific criterion declared that a leader whose party's candidates "have a legitimate chance to be elected" be allowed to participate, thus further tilting towards more participants reflecting a wider range of political parties and interest. These two objectives, one narrowly aimed at the most likely Prime Minister and the other reflecting broader inclusiveness and a range of views, are somewhat at odds. A focus on the former would suggest a smaller slate of debate participants, perhaps as small as two or three in the Canadian context. A focus on the latter would broaden the stage to include as many as five or six leaders.

While our decision focused on the interpretation of the specific criteria provided in the OIC, we believe debates organized by a future Commission should, through its choice of invited leaders, focus on potential representation in Parliament and not on potential Prime Ministers. Canada does not have a presidential system, and leaders' debates should therefore feature leaders of political parties that are likely to be an important part of public policy making in the House of Commons.

In 2019 one criterion in the OIC required focusing on electability to assess the legitimate chance of candidates being elected. It was concluded that if more than one in four voters in a riding considers voting for a party, that party has a reasonable chance to elect its candidate. In our postmortem review, we commissioned further research in the area of electability from Nanos Research.[23] That analysis suggests that a standard of 40% "willing to consider" may be a more robust indicator of electoral success. However, rather than assess the potential electability of individual candidates, we suggest future Commissioners move towards objective criteria.

The goal of reducing ambiguity, coupled with our view that debate participation focus on potential representation in Parliament, suggests the possibility of using a combination of two measures: party leaders would be invited if their party's candidates received at least 4% of votes cast in the previous election, or, if the party has at least 5% national support in an aggregate of current public opinion polls. The timing of the public opinion polls should balance the need for the Commissioner to make decisions based on the best data available to make an assessment, with the need for debate producers to have sufficient time to produce high-quality debates. The asymmetry of 4% of actual votes versus 5% in polls is accounted for by the fact that not all support indicated in a poll translates into actual votes.

We recognize that a future Debates Commissioner would likely need to do further analysis on the precise thresholds and methods, including whether a level of regional support as opposed to, or in addition to, national support may supplement the above two potential criteria. It is our belief that the use of these or similar criteria would achieve the objective of ensuring the participation of those leaders that are likely to play a role in Parliament. Additionally, the use of such criteria recognizes there is value in including party leaders with either a sizable historical or potential support within the Canadian public, as opposed to requiring a future Commission to focus on riding-level results.

The use of criteria such as these seem to be consistent with public opinion on debate participation. For instance, polls in 2008, 2011, and 2015 indicated a majority of Canadians (often more than 70%) wanted to see the Green Party's Elizabeth May in the leaders' debates. The party consistently polled around the 5 percent mark before the election.[24]

RECOMMENDATION #3:

The Debates Commissioner should set the participation criteria for the debates; these criteria should be as objective as possible and made public before the election campaign begins.

[23] See Appendix 6 NANOS Research – Examination of the standard for debate inclusion

[24] 2008: https://www.ctvnews.ca/greens-threaten-legal-action-to-join-election-debate-1.321232
2011: https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/ottawa-notebook/most-canadians-want-elizabeth-may-at-leaders-debate-poll-shows/article613119/
2015: https://ottawacitizen.com/news/politics/canadians-want-greens-elizabeth-may-at-future-debates-poll

3.4 Measures to encourage participation

The Commission's capacity to ensure the participation of leaders may be proportional to its ability to organize debates that draw audiences too large for political parties to ignore. In the past, leaders haven't always participated and this can lead to debates being cancelled (2019 Munk Debate, leaders' debates in 1972, 1974, 1980, and 2015.) Additionally, party leaders may strategically use their participation as a bargaining chip in format negotiations, or to request concessions, such as the exclusion of other leaders.

The requirement that the Commission "ensure that the leaders' responses to the invitations to participate in the leaders' debates are made publicly available before and during the debates" was designed to encourage party leaders to participate. Yet, the debate examples noted above demonstrate that publicity may not be sufficient to motivate participation.

However, there was little support for the notion of compelling party leaders to participate. Our 2019 experience leads us to believe the best ways to encourage participation are:

- deliver a large audience for the debates
- engage with leaders and political parties in advance of the election
- create a climate of expectancy and stability
- make debates invitations and responses from parties transparent

RECOMMENDATION #4:

The Commission recommends that the government encourage rather than compel leaders to participate.

3.5 Debates production

The Commission's relationship with the CDPP was productive and positive. Effective debates require the right combination of players, including broadcasters, digital platforms, and high-quality journalists. The CDPP provided leading capability and significant in-kind contributions valued at more than $3 million. The CDPP brought together an unprecedented number of partners, with excellent results in the areas of audience reach, retention rate, and accessibility.

We also believe it is important that smaller entities with innovative ideas are able to come forward. The RFP was weighted towards innovation rather than simply size. The CDPP emerged as the clear winner for the 2019 exercise for a variety of reasons, the principal ones being experience, technical capability, and reach; the CDPP offered promotion and distribution to ensure the debates reached the greatest number of Canadians.

As for the RFP process, while it was of high quality it was often cumbersome and prone to delays. This is problematic because the time frame for organizing debates is limited, particularly in a minority government scenario.

Once contracted, the CDPP took full responsibility for the promotion, production, and distribution of debates while maintaining regular communications with the Commission.

As described above, the Commission was not involved in the format, moderating, themes, or questions of the debates. That responsibility was delegated to the CDPP. A future Commission could take a more hands-on approach to producing debates, closer to the model used in the U.S. However, there are some disadvantages to this model that should be considered:

1. The extensive expertise and experience that is required to produce debates would be difficult to build "in-house" in a short time period.
2. It would require a large staff and infrastructure, which would be less cost-effective than the existing model.
3. Having a future debate authority produce the debates from end-to-end would mean being fully responsible for the journalistic exercise.

While we do not recommend future debates be produced "in-house," we do believe a future Commission should be better able to represent the public interest. To do that, it should be more involved in decisions about the debates.

High journalistic standards and journalistic independence are essential to the credibility of debates. However, the Commission believes these concepts should be reinterpreted to allow the Commission a greater involvement in format and moderating.

Traditionally, the journalistic exercise encompassed the choice of format and moderating as well as themes and questions. The Commission believes it can have a greater say in format and moderating without encroaching on the journalistic independence of the producer. The producer would continue to have authority over the themes discussed during the debates and the questions posed by moderators. The Commission also believes the way to achieve best practice in terms of format and moderating is to maintain a constructive and productive relationship with potential producers, experts, and political parties between elections.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

The Commission should select the debates producer through a competitive process, emphasizing the need for high journalistic standards, creativity, innovation, experience, technical expertise, wide distribution, and accessibility.

3.6 Format and moderating

There is widespread agreement that the Commission's French-language debate fared better than the English-language debate. The existence of two distinct Commission-organized debates serve as a kind of natural experiment, making it possible to gain insight about format and moderating choices.

There was considerable negative media coverage of the English-language debate format.[25] Critics said:

- there were too many participants, including both moderators and party leaders
- the format itself was too complicated
- the rigid time limits reduced spontaneity
- the format of the debate allowed leaders to avoid answering questions
- the format of the debate allowed leaders to talk over and interrupt one another

The reaction to the French-language debate was more positive, with many praising the performance of the moderator.

The choice of moderator is an important one, and future Commissions should pay considerable attention to how this decision is made. In addition, the Commission should ensure a format that allows moderators to challenge leaders on the accuracy and relevance of their answers.

Citizens appear to have been less critical of the debate format than media. A majority of surveyed citizens agreed both debates were informative, helped them better understand the issues, and helped them better differentiate between the parties. Responses were generally more positive for the French-language than the English-language debate. For both debates, clear majorities observed that the moderators treated leaders fairly and asked good questions, but that the moderators could have done more to correct factual inaccuracies and intervened with more penetrating follow-up questions to stop leaders from avoiding questions.

It is also not clear that citizens are opposed to debates with more participants. While survey results suggest a majority (63%) agreed the English-language debate had too many leaders participating, the results for the French-language debate indicate only 41% of respondents thought there were too many participants on stage. This suggests six participants is not too many in the eyes of viewers, depending on the approach taken to format and moderating.

[25] See Appendix 4 – Leaders' Debates Commission – Media Coverage.

Debate format should avoid unnecessary complexity. The moderator, and the format they are working within, must have the capability to:

- maintain proper time allocation
- ask follow-up questions that ensure leaders answer the questions posed
- avoid undue interruptions between leaders
- avoid cross-talk (leaders talking over one another)
- ensure civil discourse

Neither the Commission nor political parties should be involved in choosing the themes or the questions.

RECOMMENDATION #6: The Commission should reserve the right of final approval of the format and production of the debates, while respecting journalistic independence.

3.7 Venue and timing

Both debates took place at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Québec. The venue provided a sense of place, but some stakeholders noted this came at the cost of the logistical simplicity that would be provided by a dedicated television studio. A number of regional segments were included to reflect Canada's diversity, but these needed to be produced more carefully to achieve a feeling of national importance while showcasing regional diversity and local identity.

The Commission agreed with those consulted that there was value to having a live audience. However, some stakeholders said it was awkward to have the audience seated behind the participants, and others wanted to see more questions from audience members.

The English-language debate took place October 7, 2019 at 7 pm ET and the French-language debate was held on October 10, 2019 at 8 pm ET. There is consensus that having the debates take place roughly two weeks prior to election day, in this case, October 21, was appropriate, as it was before the advance polls and many voters do not begin to follow the campaign until relatively late. Political parties generally supported having at least a day between debates, although this increased the cost of production.

More controversial was the choice of timeslot for the English-language debate, which began at 4 pm PT. The existence of six time zones across Canada makes scheduling difficult. We believe an 8 pm ET start time, as used in the French-language debate, or a consideration of holding the debate on a weekend is preferable.

English-language broadcasters appear reluctant to carry debates during prime time in Ontario and Québec, citing concerns about lost revenue. The Commission should work with the debates producer to see if there are better ways to serve people in different time zones.

The Commission could also examine other ways to take account of Canada's six time zones, such as hosting the two debates in different locations, encouraging ways for citizens to interact with the debates outside of the live broadcast, and ensuring regional locations are represented in the themes and remote locations.

Finally, the Commission should make public the dates and times of the debates as early as possible, to allow other organizations to plan around them.

3.8 Media accreditation

One element of debate organization that remained in the purview of the Commission was media accreditation. The 2019 debates created interest from journalists and media organizations interested in covering the events. The Commission received more than 200 requests for accreditation.

In its desire to provide an environment conducive to professionally responsible coverage, the Commission consulted with the Parliamentary Press Gallery, and ultimately decided to limit accreditations to professional journalistic organizations.

Four organizations were turned down because the Commission concluded they were involved in political activism. Two of the four organizations challenged the decision in Federal Court. They obtained an injunction requiring the Commission to allow them to cover the debates and press availabilities of the leaders immediately following the debates. The Court ruled on an interim basis that, among other things, the Commission did not follow the rules of procedural fairness in respect of its denial of accreditation and ordered the accreditation of the two organizations. As at the date of this report, the application for judicial review remains before the Federal Court.

3.9 Accessibility

For leaders' debates to be a democratic exercise, citizens must be able to access and experience the debates in a way that is accessible.

The English-language and French-language debates were available on 15 television networks, three national radio networks, and 24 digital platforms. Together, these networks are accessible to nearly all Canadians. As of 2017, 84% of Canadians have access to high-speed internet capable of streaming videos, but rural households and Indigenous communities are less likely to have such access.

As mentioned above, fewer than 10% of the people who did not watch the debates indicated that the main reason for not doing so was because they were not able to access them. However, there is some evidence that rural Canadians were more likely to report being unable to access the French-language debate.[26] Analysis of data from CES found no evidence that disability, official language minority status, or age made the debates inaccessible to non-viewers.[27]

[26] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates
[27] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates

Digital viewership

The vast majority of viewers reported they watched the debate on television. Online streams on Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter accounted for 83% of digital views, with the distributor's own video platforms accounting for approximately 16% of views.

Platforms	English-language debate	French-language debate
TV	85%	93%
Radio	5%	2%
Online	10%	5%

Language viewership

The debates were available in 10 languages (in addition to French and English), including Indigenous languages Dene, Ojibwe, Plains Cree, East Cree, and Inuktitut.

Language	English-language debate	French-language debate
Arabic	11,000	no data available
Cantonese	80,000	27,000
Dene	not offered	485
East Cree	not offered	224
Inuktitut	7,853	not offered
Italian	23,000	125,000
Mandarin	70,000	no data available
Ojibway	1,087	not offered
Plains Cree	8,613	not offered
Punjabi	15,000	48,000

Accessible formats

The debates were also available in four accessible formats (Closed Captioning[28], Described Video, ASL, LSQ).

Accessible Formats	English-language debate	French-language debate
ASL	1,713	257
Described Video	4,056	523
LSQ	1,087	901

Viewership of the various languages was variable, but the Commission believes this is an important initiative. Stakeholders indicated the Commission's efforts to make debates accessible demonstrated respect for Canada's diverse communities and also served as an inspiration for organizers of local debates across the country to make their own debates more accessible. In particular, interpretation into several Indigenous languages is consistent with the Government of Canada's broader interest in preserving, protecting, and revitalizing Indigenous languages.[29] However, several groups indicated the Commission could have done more targeted outreach or advertising, for instance, in ethnic media outlets, to ensure Canadians who might benefit from these accessibility initiatives were aware of their existence. A future Commission should continue to look for ways to work with networks that offer programming in languages other than English and French, in an effort to reach minority language communities, as was done in 2019 with OMNI television. A future Commission could encourage Indigenous radio stations to carry the debates, either in an official language, or in one of the Indigenous languages being offered.

We believe that interpretation is an important investment in the future of debates in Canada, particularly to reach communities who have traditionally faced barriers to inclusion in the democratic process. There was also widespread agreement that many of the Commission's accessibility initiatives would not have happened without public funding.

RECOMMENDATION #7:

The Commission should ensure the debates are available in languages other than French and English, paying special attention to Canada's Indigenous languages.

[28] Closed captioning was embedded on the broadcast signal, so anyone watching had the option of watching with captions
[29] For example: https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/minister-canadian-heritage-mandate-letter

3.10 Debates promotion and citizen engagement

The Commission managed its outreach to work in tandem with the CDPP's promotion. We provided more than 40 pieces of original content to various organizations representing a wide scope of interests, challenges, and barriers. The goal was to raise awareness about the debates, promote new features (such as languages and accessibility), and promote why debates matter.

We contracted several organizations to produce original educational and promotional content, and also worked with libraries, bookstores, and movie theatres to broadcast the debates in cities across the country.

The Commission engaged with a large number of organizations, but this had less impact than the role of the CDPP on promotion, as the organizations we worked with had limited capacity and resources. Only about 38% of Canadians reported an awareness of the debate prior and even fewer could accurately recall the dates of the debates.[30] This suggests many people still find the debates, by flipping through television channels or hearing about it on the same day. It is therefore it is important that the debate be available on as many channels and digital platforms as possible.

Approximately 10% of those who watched the English debate with others and 13% of those who watched the French debate with others, did so as part of an organized event.[31] It is difficult to assess how much of this viewing activity is related to the Commission's outreach efforts, as the survey respondents didn't specify if the event they attended was one of the Commission's outreach events. The survey data are also unlikely to fully capture students under 18 who may have watched part or all of a debate as part of the Student Vote program run by CIVIX, which operated in 9,500 schools across Canada. These experimental, scalable, and innovative approaches merit further development and resourcing.

3.11 Future mandate, authority, and resources

The success of a future Commission is dependent on a number of factors. Some of these have been discussed previously, but we refer to these here again to guide further analysis. A future Commission should ensure:

- that its head, the Debates Commissioner, is selected in a manner that provides for consultation with opposition parties
- that it operate and be understood to operate in a manner that ensures its decision-making is recognized as impartial and free from any political influence
- that it be responsible for submitting a final report after each election cycle and present the report directly to Parliament without delay upon its completion
- that it be entrusted with enough responsibility and influence to be an effective guardian of the public trust by playing an active role in the production of the debates

[30] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates
[31] See Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study – Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates

- that it maintain a constant and constructive relationship with political parties, potential debate producers, and other stakeholders
- that the journalistic independence of the media participants be ensured
- that the debates be considered credible, informative, effective, and compelling
- that it operate transparently and seek to involve the public in its decisions
- that it be cost-effective
- that it build a recognized expertise in evolving debate formats and practices, here and abroad, to guarantee the best debate experience for Canadians

The 2019 Commission was well-served by the mandate provided in its OIC. Stakeholders commented that the core of the Commission's mandate, which was to impartially and transparently promote, organize, and review two debates in the public interest, was well calibrated. There was little appetite for expanding the Commission's mandate, with some stakeholders noting that it is still a new entity.

The initial OIC captures the scope of a future entity's task, should one be established.[32] The language stating the Commission was to be guided "by the pursuit of the public interest and by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, democratic citizenship, civic education, inclusion and cost-effectiveness" was particularly helpful in guiding the Commission's task in 2019. Provisions for research, assessment, and awareness-raising also equipped the Commission with the tools needed to support the delivery of its core functions, and similar provisions would be central to its continued operations.

Below are some areas that could be adapted, should our recommendations be adopted.

Participation criteria: section 2(b)

This section might be adapted, should our recommendation that a future Commissioner set the participation criteria be adopted. Specifically, it could lay out the principles and values that should guide a future Debates Commissioner's approach to debate participation, rather than specific metrics to interpret. The Commissioner would then determine well in advance of the election debates the specific participation criteria. Provisions might also be drafted to ensure a future Debates Commissioner provides for timely and transparent decisions and that reasons are publicly provided.

Other debates: section 2(i)

In 2019, the Commission did receive inquiries from a number of groups and organizations that were seeking to organize debates of their own. They included requests for the Commission to liaise with political parties on the organizer's behalf, or to offer approval of their debates as well as requests for monetary assistance. We adopted a policy that no financial support would be provided for the actual organizational cost of other debates. This policy was adopted to focus Commission expenditures on the delivery of the other elements of its core mandate including its own debates. It was also due to the inherent difficulty in establishing criteria that would be applied to determine which debate organizers

[32] See Appendix 1 for the full text of the OIC.

would be eligible and which would not. While the Commission should encourage other debates, it should not be a grant-making body.

Calls for proposals: section 5(2)

This section provided a helpful frame to guide the 2019 RFP, but might be examined to ensure they align with our earlier recommendations that the Commission be entrusted to actively assert its role to ensure debates fulfil their function as a democratic exercise, rather than principally a journalistic one.

Governance: sections 6 to 9

We have provided reasons why a future entity should continue to be headed by a Debates Commissioner. The provisions describing the Debates Commissioner should consider the potential to add language outlining consultations with political parties. Provisions in the *Canada Elections Act* with regard to the appointment of the Broadcasting Arbitrator may be a useful starting point.[33]

The Commission established the Board in accordance with the OIC's provision mandating the Advisory Board's "composition is to be reflective of gender balance and Canadian diversity and is to represent a range of political affiliations." Our Board proved essential to the successful fulfillment of the Commission's mandate, and provisions should be made for a future Commission to ensure it continues to rely upon such thoughtful external viewpoints and the ability to test potential decisions. The inclusion of Board members with political experience was a key contributor to the value provided to the Commission.

In terms of institutional makeup, a future Commission needs to be designed to achieve the outcomes listed at the start of this section, with a particular focus on operational independence, both real and perceived, cost effectiveness, and administrative agility.

The 2019 Commission enjoyed complete operational freedom. The only interactions to occur with the Minister of Democratic Institutions (the Minister responsible for the Commission) involved discussion with regards to the application of, and potential need for, exemptions to Treasury Board policies.[34] No direction was received nor sought with regards to Commission decision-making. Nevertheless, the Commission's independence was questioned by some observers, owing in part to the selection process of the Debates Commissioner.

---

[33] Section 333 of the *Canada Elections Act* mandates a meeting, convened in the case of the Broadcasting Arbitrator by the Chief Electoral Officer, for the purposes of holding consultations amongst political parties on the selection of the person to occupy the position.

[34] As a new entity with a novel mandate, the Commission encountered situations where, in its view, exemptions to certain Treasury Board policies (such as those related to communications, federal identity, and public opinion research) may have been appropriate to allow for the full completion of its mandate. Exemptions to some provisions of these policies have been sought and received by other entities such as Elections Canada and others. A future entity, should it be created and depending on its status, should undertake a review of potentially applicable policies and consider seeking exemptions where it believes they are warranted.

Cost effectiveness and administrative agility

The current institutional model of the Commission (i.e. a government departmental agency under I.1 of the *Financial Administration Act*) may not be optimal for a future entity. In particular, the need to advance a procurement process for debate production under tight timelines as well as contracts to fulfil its mandate to raise awareness, proved challenging in the Commission's current operating environment. Nevertheless, owing to lessons learned and increased familiarity on the part of Commission personnel and other government departments of the Commission's mandate, there are opportunities to streamline and improve the RFP process in the future.

Summary of expenditures

A budget of $5.5 million was provided by the Government for the 2019 election cycle. Of this amount, approximately $4.1 million was spent in five categories:

1. **Research, evaluation, and outreach initiatives:** this included research undertaken by the Canadian Election Study consortium and UBC's Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions and limited partnerships related to the preparation and dissemination of debates promotion materials and debate-viewing events in major centres across the country.
2. **Professional services**: this included polling in relation to debates participation criteria, legal advice, web coding, and report editing and layout.
3. **Contract for incremental costs for debate production**: certain production costs related to elements such as increased accessibility, language interpretation, and venue organization were reimbursed by the Commission.
4. **Commission salaries and administrative expenses**: these expenses related primarily to employee services (six full- and part-time staff) and support to the seven-person Advisory Board.
5. **Privy Council administrative expenses**: this included the provision of back-office support in relation to procurement, finance, information technology, personnel, and accommodations.

Activity	Preliminary estimate ($ millions)
Research, evaluation and outreach initiatives	0.3
Professional services	0.5
Contract for incremental costs for debate production	1.7
Commission salaries and administrative expenses	1.2
Privy Council Office administrative expenses	0.5
Total[35]	**4.1**

[35] Figures may not add up to totals due to rounding

In addition, the Commission benefitted from significant in-kind contributions from the debates producer and partner organizations. These additional contributions, valued at over $3 million, involved extensive debates promotion by the CDPP, special measures to ensure greater reach and accessibility, design and hosting of the Commission's digital presence by Global Affairs Canada's Summit Management Office, hosting of debate-viewing events, and partner outreach.

There was broad agreement that the Commission's continued capacity to organize accessible, inclusive debates with broad reach will need to rely on sufficient funding. In particular, members of the CDPP noted that interpretation services, accessibility, and high production values might not have been achievable without the Commission's direct financial support. The ability to draw on stable funding will also be necessary for the Commission to fulfil its contracting and staffing requirements prior to the organization of debates.

Future mandate

Most stakeholders believe the Commission should continue to some extent between elections, increasing staffing some months prior to the debates. This would allow the Commission to preserve institutional memory, determine or interpret participation criteria outside of election periods, and consult with citizens and stakeholders to prepare for future debates (e.g. preparing RFPs). These functions are particularly important in the case of a minority government situation where the Commission may be required to organize debates on short notice and increase staff urgently. Consideration should be given to the Commission regarding the *Public Service Employment Act* and its status related to the "core public service" to potentially benefit from the possibility of secondments or assignments in the lead-up to the debates.

As the custodian of the debates, a future Commission should also monitor and keep abreast of evolving best practices in debates in Canada and elsewhere. This would ensure that debates are organized with the best expertise and most current understanding of debate formats, distribution, and the changing media environment. Sharing this information widely and regularly with producers and political parties would encourage a commitment to best practice and to the most useful democratic experience possible for the viewing public.

As further recognition that debates are a public trust, several stakeholders emphasized the critical task of a future Commission to determine ways to consult Canadians periodically on their views about debates, whether through surveys, focus groups, or other types of consultation.

There are a range of models that enable a future Commission to be mandated with these responsibilities and that would achieve the stated goals of independence, cost effectiveness, and administrative agility. Several stakeholders raised the possibility that the Commission might be organized as an Agent of Parliament due to its greater perceived independence. Others referred to entities such as the Broadcasting Arbitrator, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Pan-Canadian Expert Initiative, and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation as examples of entities whose governance contributes to both real and perceived independence from the government of the day.

Finally, a future Commission should prepare a report after each election cycle and this report should be delivered directly to Parliament.

RECOMMENDATION #8:

The Commission should ultimately be established through legislation (or similar mechanism) in order to prioritize greater continuity, transparency, and access to resources. Its institutional makeup should prioritize real and perceived operational independence, cost effectiveness, and administrative agility.

RECOMMENDATION #9:

The Commission should maintain some permanent capacity with a reduced form between elections, and a one-year ramp-up in majority government situations and sufficient permanent infrastructure to organize debates in minority government situations.

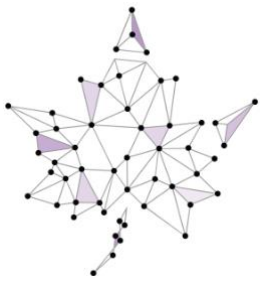
RECOMMENDATION #10:

The Commission should maintain a relationship with interested parties between elections to foster discussion about best practices in debate formats and production, both in Canada and other countries.

Conclusion

We warmly thank our Advisory Board as well as our partners in the Canadian Debates Production Partnership, the University of British Columbia, the University of Toronto, the Privy Council Office, and Global Affairs Canada's Summit Management Office. We delivered two debates that reached and engaged Canadians like never before. We also hope future Commissions will continue to measure and study debates in Canada and internationally: we need to learn so we can continue to improve.

These debates counted. They were key moments that helped Canadians cast informed votes. In an era of concern about our institutions and the health of democracy itself, that is a harbinger of hope.



Recommendations

Principal recommendation

We recommend the establishment of a permanent, publicly-funded entity to organize leaders' debates.

Recommendations for the next leaders' debates in Canada

RECOMMENDATION #1:

The Commission should be headed by a Debates Commissioner whose appointment process involves consultation with the registered political parties represented in the House of Commons.

RECOMMENDATION #2:

The Commission should organize two publicly-funded debates, one in each official language.

RECOMMENDATION #3:

The Debates Commissioner should set the participation criteria for the debates; these criteria should be as objective as possible and made public before the election campaign begins.

RECOMMENDATION #4:

The Commission recommends that the government encourage rather than compel leaders to participate.

RECOMMENDATION #5:

The Commission should select the debates producer through a competitive process, emphasizing the need for high journalistic standards, creativity, innovation, experience, technical expertise, wide distribution, and accessibility.

RECOMMENDATION #6:

The Commission should reserve the right of final approval of the format and production of the debates, while respecting journalistic independence.

RECOMMENDATION #7:

The Commission should ensure the debates are available in languages other than French and English, paying special attention to Canada's Indigenous languages.

RECOMMENDATION #8:

The Commission should ultimately be established through legislation (or similar mechanism) in order to prioritize greater continuity, transparency, and access to resources. Its institutional makeup should prioritize real and perceived operational independence, cost effectiveness, and administrative agility.

RECOMMENDATION #9:

The Commission should maintain some permanent capacity with a reduced form between elections, and a one-year ramp-up in majority government situations and sufficient permanent infrastructure to organize debates in minority government situations.

RECOMMENDATION #10:

The Commission should maintain a relationship with interested parties between elections to foster discussion about best practices in debate formats and production, both in Canada and other countries.

Appendix 1 – Leaders' Debates Commission Order in Council P.C. 2018-1322

PROTECTED B
Confidence of the Queen's Privy Council

SCHEDULE

LEADERS' DEBATES COMMISSION

Commission

1 There is established a commission, to be known as the Leaders' Debates Commission, consisting of the Debates Commissioner, the Advisory Board and the Secretariat.

2 The mandate of the Leaders' Debates Commission is to

(a) organize one leaders' debate in each official language during each general election period;

(b) ensure that the leader of each political party that meets two of the following criteria is invited to participate in the leaders' debates:

(i) at the time the general election in question is called, the party is represented in the House of Commons by a Member of Parliament who was elected as a member of that party,

(ii) the Debates Commissioner considers that the party intends to endorse candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts in the general election in question,

(iii) the party's candidates for the most recent general election received at that election at least 4% of the number of valid votes cast or, based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Debates Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question;

(c) ensure that the leaders' debates are broadcast and otherwise made available in an accessible way to persons with disabilities;

(d) ensure that the leaders' debates reach as many Canadians as possible, including those living in remote areas and those living in official language minority communities, through a variety of media and other fora;

(e) ensure that the leaders' debates are broadcast free of charge, whether or not the broadcast is live;

(f) ensure that any reproduction of the leaders' debates is subject to only the terms and conditions that are necessary to preserve the integrity of the debates;

(g) ensure that high journalistic standards are maintained for the leaders' debates;

(h) undertake an awareness raising campaign and outreach activities to ensure that Canadians know when, where and how to access the leaders' debates; and

PROTÉGÉ B
Document confidentiel du Conseil privé de la Reine

ANNEXE

COMMISSION DES DÉBATS DES CHEFS

Commission

1 Est constituée la Commission des débats des chefs, composée du commissaire aux débats, du comité consultatif et du secrétariat.

2 Le mandat de la Commission est :

a) d'organiser un débat des chefs dans chaque langue officielle au cours de chaque période électorale d'une élection générale;

b) de veiller à ce que le chef de chaque parti politique qui répond à deux des critères ci-après soit invité à participer aux débats des chefs :

(i) au moment où l'élection générale en cause est déclenchée, le parti est représenté à la Chambre des communes par un député ayant été élu à titre de membre de ce parti,

(ii) il a l'intention, de l'avis du commissaire aux débats, de soutenir des candidats dans au moins quatre-vingt-dix pour cent des circonscriptions en vue de l'élection générale en cause,

(iii) ses candidats ont obtenu, lors de l'élection générale précédente, au moins quatre pour cent du nombre de votes validement exprimés ou les candidats qu'il soutient ont une véritable possibilité d'être élus lors de l'élection générale en cause, de l'avis du commissaire aux débats, compte tenu du contexte politique récent, des sondages d'opinion publique et des résultats obtenus aux élections générales précédentes;

c) de veiller à ce que les débats des chefs soient diffusés et autrement rendus disponibles, de manière accessible, aux personnes handicapées;

d) de veiller à ce que les débats des chefs rejoignent le plus grand nombre possible de Canadiens, y compris ceux qui vivent dans des régions éloignées et ceux qui font partie de communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire, au moyen d'un éventail de médias et d'autres tribunes;

e) de veiller à ce que les débats des chefs soient diffusés gratuitement, que la diffusion soit en direct ou non;

f) de veiller à ce que la reproduction des débats des chefs soit uniquement assujettie aux conditions qui sont nécessaires pour en préserver l'intégrité;

g) de veiller à ce que des normes journalistiques élevées soient appliquées lors des débats des chefs;

h) de mener une campagne et des activités de sensibilisation pour que les Canadiens sachent quand, où et comment avoir accès aux débats des chefs;

(i) provide advice and support in respect of other political debates related to the general election, including candidates' debates, as the Debates Commissioner considers appropriate.

3 The Leaders' Debates Commission is to

(a) conduct any necessary research or rely on any applicable research to ensure that the leaders' debates are of high quality;

(b) develop and manage constructive relationships with key opinion leaders and stakeholders;

(c) conduct its activities in a manner that does not preclude other organizations from producing or organizing leaders' debates or other political debates;

(d) ensure that the decisions regarding the organization of the leaders' debates, including those respecting participation criteria, are made publicly available in a timely manner;

(e) ensure that the leaders' responses to the invitations to participate in the leaders' debates are made publicly available before and during the debates; and

(f) conduct an evidence-based assessment of the leaders' debates that it has organized, including with respect to the number of persons to whom the debates were accessible, the number of persons who actually accessed them and the knowledge of Canadians of political parties, their leaders and their positions.

4 In fulfilling its mandate, the Leaders' Debates Commission is to be guided by the pursuit of the public interest and by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, democratic citizenship, civic education, inclusion and cost-effectiveness.

5 (1) The Leaders' Debates Commission is an agent of Her Majesty and, in that capacity, may enter into contracts or agreements with third parties in fulfilling its mandate.

(2) The Leaders' Debates Commission is to ensure that calls for proposals regarding the production of the leaders' debates identify clear criteria by which proposals will be evaluated, including the presentation of strategies to

(a) maximize the reach of the leaders' debates and engagement with Canadians, including those who may face barriers to voting;

(b) create momentum for and awareness of the leaders' debates before the debates take place and to sustain engagement of Canadians after the debates take place;

(c) make the leaders' debates more accessible to Canadians with disabilities, those living in remote areas and those living in official language minority communities; and

(d) ensure that the leaders' debates are reflective of high production and journalistic standards, while ensuring brand neutrality.

i) d'offrir des conseils et du soutien dans le cadre d'autres débats politiques liés à l'élection générale, notamment les débats de candidats, lorsque le commissaire aux débats le juge indiqué.

3 La Commission :

a) effectue les recherches nécessaires ou s'appuie sur des recherches existantes, le cas échéant, pour que les débats des chefs soient de qualité élevée;

b) établit et maintient des relations constructives avec des leaders d'opinion et des intervenants clés;

c) exerce ses activités de manière à ne pas empêcher d'autres organismes de produire ou d'organiser des débats des chefs ou d'autres débats politiques;

d) veille à ce que les décisions concernant l'organisation des débats des chefs, y compris celles portant sur les critères de participation, soient rendues publiques rapidement;

e) veille à ce que les réponses des chefs aux invitations de participer aux débats soient rendues publiques avant et pendant les débats;

f) évalue les débats qu'elle a organisés, en se fondant sur des données probantes, notamment le nombre de personnes à qui les débats étaient accessibles et le nombre de personnes qui y ont effectivement eu accès, ainsi que les connaissances des Canadiens au sujet des partis politiques, de leurs chefs et de leurs positions.

4 Dans l'accomplissement de son mandat, la Commission est guidée par la poursuite de l'intérêt public et par les principes de l'indépendance, de l'impartialité, de la crédibilité, de la citoyenneté démocratique, de l'éducation civique, de l'inclusion et de l'efficacité financière.

5 (1) La Commission est mandataire de Sa Majesté et, à ce titre, elle peut conclure des marchés ou des ententes avec des tiers pour l'accomplissement de son mandat.

(2) La Commission veille à ce que les demandes de propositions pour la production des débats des chefs fassent état des critères précis selon lesquels les propositions seront évaluées, notamment la présentation de stratégies visant à :

a) augmenter autant que possible la portée des débats et la mobilisation des Canadiens, y compris ceux qui pourraient devoir composer avec des obstacles pour voter;

b) générer un effet d'entraînement en vue des débats des chefs, sensibiliser les Canadiens aux débats avant leur tenue et maintenir leur mobilisation par la suite;

c) améliorer l'accessibilité des débats des chefs aux Canadiens qui vivent avec un handicap, ceux qui vivent dans des régions éloignées et ceux qui font partie de communautés de langue officielle en situation minoritaire;

d) veiller à ce que les débats des chefs répondent à des normes élevées en matière de production et de journalisme et à ce que la neutralité quant à l'utilisation des marques soit respectée.

Debates Commissioner

6 (1) The Debates Commissioner is the director of the Leaders' Debates Commission and, in that capacity, conducts the ordinary business of the Commission and is responsible for the appointment of the members of the Secretariat.

(2) The Debates Commissioner is appointed to hold office during good behaviour, on a part-time basis, subject to removal for cause.

(3) The Debates Commissioner is to consider and apply as far as possible the advice provided by the Advisory Board, to ensure that the organization of the leaders' debates benefits from the expertise and experience of the members of the Advisory Board and that the leaders' debates reflect the public interest.

Advisory Board

7 The mandate of the Advisory Board is to advise the Debates Commissioner to allow the Debates Commissioner to fulfil his or her mandate.

8 (1) The members of the Advisory Board are appointed by the Debates Commissioner to hold office on a part-time basis.

(2) The Advisory Board is to be composed of seven members, and its composition is to be reflective of gender balance and Canadian diversity and is to represent a range of political affiliations and expertise.

9 (1) The Advisory Board is to meet at least four times in the period of one year before a general election and at least two times in the period of five months after a general election.

(2) The meetings of the Advisory Board are to be chaired by the Debates Commissioner.

Report

10 (1) The Leaders' Debates Commission is to provide to the Minister of Democratic Institutions, no later than five months after the day on which a general election is held, a report in both official languages that

(a) presents an in-depth analysis of the Leaders' Debates Commission's experience in organizing leaders' debates for the general election in question; and

(b) provides thorough advice with regard to the future of the Leaders' Debates Commission, recommendations regarding the scope of the Commission's mandate and a detailed rationale for those recommendations, as well as a discussion of key considerations, including operation in the full range of electoral contexts such as minority governments, and ways to encourage leaders' participation in the leaders' debates.

(2) The Minister of Democratic Institutions is to table the report in Parliament.

Commissaire aux débats

6 (1) Le commissaire aux débats est le directeur de la Commission et, à ce titre, il en dirige les affaires courantes et est responsable de l'embauche du personnel du secrétariat.

(2) Le commissaire aux débats est nommé à titre inamovible, sauf révocation motivée, et il exerce sa charge à temps partiel.

(3) Le commissaire aux débats tient compte des conseils fournis par le comité consultatif et, autant que faire se peut, les applique de telle sorte que l'organisation des débats des chefs bénéficie de l'expertise et de l'expérience des membres du comité et que les débats reflètent l'intérêt public.

Comité consultatif

7 Le mandat du comité consultatif est de conseiller le commissaire aux débats dans l'accomplissement de son mandat.

8 (1) Les membres du comité consultatif sont nommés par le commissaire aux débats et ils exercent leur charge à temps partiel.

(2) Le comité consultatif est composé de sept membres et sa composition reflète la parité entre les sexes et la diversité de la population canadienne et représente un éventail d'allégeances politiques et d'expertises.

9 (1) Le comité consultatif se réunit au moins quatre fois durant la période d'un an précédant l'élection générale et au moins deux fois durant la période de cinq mois suivant celle-ci.

(2) Les réunions du comité consultatif sont présidées par le commissaire aux débats.

Rapport

10 (1) La Commission présente au ministre des Institutions démocratiques, au plus tard cinq mois après la date à laquelle l'élection générale a eu lieu, un rapport dans les deux langues officielles, qui comprend :

a) une analyse approfondie de l'expérience de la Commission sur l'organisation des débats dans le cadre de l'élection générale en cause;

b) des conseils détaillés sur l'avenir de la Commission, des recommandations sur la portée du mandat de la Commission — lesquelles sont accompagnées d'une justification détaillée — ainsi qu'une discussion sur les principaux facteurs à prendre en considération, notamment ses activités dans le cadre de tous les contextes électoraux, par exemple en présence d'un gouvernement minoritaire, et sur les moyens à utiliser pour encourager la participation des chefs aux débats.

(2) Le ministre des Institutions démocratiques dépose le rapport devant le Parlement.

Appendix 2 – Leaders' Debates Commission – Advisory Board terms of reference

Mandate

The Leaders' Debates Commission advisory board is established to provide advice to the Debates Commissioner on matters relating to the organisation of debates in Canada's two official languages during the 2019 federal election campaign. Considering that leaders' debates are an essential contribution to the health of Canadian democracy, board members will be guided by the pursuit of the public interest and by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, democratic citizenship, civic education, inclusion and cost-effectiveness.

Membership

The Advisory Board is to be composed of seven members, and its composition is to be reflective of gender balance and Canadian diversity and is to represent a range of political affiliations and expertise. Members are appointed by the Debates Commissioner to hold office on a part-time basis. The Advisory Board will meet at least four times in the period of one year before a general election and at least two times in the period of five months after a general election. The meetings will be chaired by the Debates Commissioner.

Role of Board members

The Board members will advise the Commission on how to carry out its mandate, including issues such as:

- ensuring that the debates are broadcast and distributed widely and free of charge.
- ensuring that the debates reach as many Canadians as possible, including those living in remote areas, those living in official language minority communities and those living with disabilities.
- ensuring that the debates are conducted under high journalistic standards.
- ensuring that calls for proposals for the production and distribution of the debates identify clear criteria by which the proposals will be evaluated.
- ensuring that the Commission undertake an awareness raising campaign and outreach activities to foster interest in and awareness of the debates.

- ensuring that the Commission provide advice and support for other debates relative to the general election.
- ensuring that the criteria for participation of political parties in the debates be applied fairly and in full transparency.
- providing advice on evidence-based assessment of the leaders' debates and recommendations for the Commission's report to government.

Compensation of Board members

Members of the Board shall be eligible for reimbursement of reasonable travel expenses from their residence to Ottawa and shall be compensated for their participation in meetings of the Board at a rate of $450.00 per diem.

Operating principles

Regardless of their backgrounds and affiliations, members shall serve in an individual capacity, having regard to the public interest, and not as the delegates or representatives of particular organizations, sectors or groups. While knowledge of political context and processes is needed, particular care must be taken to avoid political partisanship.

Members of the Board should declare any actual or potential conflicts of interest at the start of all meetings, including meetings of committees or working groups. A determination of whether recusal is appropriate shall be made in consultation with the Commissioner.

Deliberations by the Board and its committees and working groups shall be open, frank and confidential, in conformity with Chatham House Rules. Different perspectives should be presented with candour and accorded respect. In communicating with stakeholders and media about the Board and its work, Board members should respect the confidentiality of their colleagues and shall not attribute statements or views to individual fellow members.

Appendix 3 – Leaders' Debates Commission – Stakeholders consulted

Academic

- Gerald Baier, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of British Columbia
- Karim Bardeesy, Distinguished Visiting Professor and Special Advisor, Ryerson University
- Frederic Bastien,
- André Blais, University Research Chair in Electoral Studies, University of Montreal
- Aengus Bridgman, PhD Candidate, McGill University
- Mark Bulgutch, Journalism Lecturer, Ryerson University
- Maxwell Cameron, Professor of Comparative Politics, University of British Columbia
- Megan Dias, PhD Student, Department of Government, University of Texas at Austin
- Elizabeth Dubois, Assistant Professor, University of Ottawa
- Joanna Everitt, Professor, Department of Political Science and the Director of the UNB Urban and Community Studies Institute, University of New Brunswick in Saint John
- Peter Loewen, Professor, Department of Political Science and the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto
- John McAndrews, Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Political Science and the Munk School of Global Affairs & Public Policy, University of Toronto
- Spencer McKay, Postdoctoral Fellow, Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, University of British Columbia
- Tamara A. Small, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Guelph
- Shannon Sampert, Retired Professor, Political Science, University of Winnipeg; Regular Columnist, Winnipeg Free Press
- Paul Tomas, Adjunct Research Professor and Senior Research Associate, Carleton University
- Christopher Waddell, Professor, School of Journalism and Communication, Carleton University

Government

- Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission
- Communications Security Establishment
- Elections Canada
- Public Services and Procurement Canada

Indigenous

- Assembly of First Nations
- Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami
- Métis National Council

Media and Social Media - organizations

- Accessible Media Inc
- Canadian Journalism Foundation
- Corus Entertainment
- CBC
- CTV
- Facebook Canada, Public Policy
- Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ)
- Google Canada, Public Affairs
- La Presse
- Le Devoir
- TVA
- Twitter Canada

Media and Social Media - individuals

- Tom Clark, former host, The West Block with Tom Clark, Global Television
- Marc Mayrand, former CEO, Elections Canada
- Don Newman, former Senior Parliamentary Editor, CBC
- Steve Paikin, Anchor, The Agenda, TVO
- Anna Maria Tremonti, Host of podcast "More", CBC
- Collette Watson, Senior Vice President, TV and Broadcast Operation, Rogers Television
- Paul Wells, Senior Writer, MacLean's Magazine
- Peter Van Dusen, host of PrimeTime Politics, CPAC

Organizations

- 4H
- ABC Life Literacy Canada
- Apathy is Boring
- Canadian Ethnocultural Council
- Canadian Federation of Independent Business
- Canadian Teachers' Federation
- Canadian Urban Transit Association
- Chamber of Commerce Canada
- CIVIX
- Colleges and Institutes Canada
- Commission on Presidential Debates
- Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD)
- Ekos Research Associates
- Federal Accessibility Legislation Alliance
- Fédération des communautés francophone et acadienne du Canada
- Institut du Nouveau Monde
- Institute for Research and Public Policy
- National Democratic Institute, USA
- Nanos Research

- Public Policy Forum
- Samara Centre for Democracy
- Universities Canada
- WE Org

Political Parties

- Bloc Québécois
- Conservative Party of Canada
- Green Party of Canada
- Liberal Party of Canada
- New Democratic Party
- People's Party of Canada

Appendix 4 – Leaders' Debates Commission Media coverage

Overview:

In general, both French- and English-language media attention and coverage the debates and the Commission itself received was factual, balanced and included all of the relevant key messages associated with the Order in Council Mandate. As anticipated, there was a range of views expressed amongst opinion columnists and editorials. Aside from opinion pieces, "straight news" content was broad, factual, and generally neutral. Criticisms tended to focus on who was invited to participate (i.e. Maxime Bernier's preliminary exclusion and subsequent inclusion), the number of debates (news organizations wanted more) and the degree to which participants behaved strategically/politically with regard to their participation in debates other than the two "official" debates.

Methodology:

The following analysis is based on a broad (though not comprehensive) sample of media coverage, beginning with the announcement of the Commission's creation. We have attempted to provide a reasonable sense of both the neutral/positive and negative coverage. We have not quantified the overall volume of readership. Nor have we attempted to quantify how coverage may have influenced opinions related to the Commission's activities or to the debates themselves.

Establishment of the Commission/Appointment of the Commissioner:

Media coverage of the creation of the Commission and appointment of the Commissioner was generally neutral/positive and factual in tone and content, although it clearly included the partisan elements associated with the initiative.

The Canadian Press featured a story on October 30, 2019 titled "Ottawa creating independent commission to organize leaders' debates," focusing on the announcement from Democratic Institutions Minister Katrina Gould. The story explained the rationale behind the decision, outlined the process and criteria for participation and other salient points. It also noted, in the second sentence of the story, immediate elements of partisanship:

"The plan went over like a lead balloon with the Official Opposition, who say the plan is evidence of election rigging."

In addition, Executive Director Michel Cormier outlined the process and formulation of the Commission, its advisory board and the request for proposals for the producers in a lengthy CBC News Network interview on March 26, 2019:

https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/powerandpolitics/leaders-debates-commission-advisers-meet-1.5072195

On May 3, 2019, Canadian Press published "Federal commission urged to make leaders' debates more civil, accessible and educational," which focused on the advisory board consulted by Commissioner Johnston and the RFP process to select the debate producers:

"Televised leaders' debates during the fall federal-election campaign ought to be more accessible, more civil and more educational for voters trying to make an informed choice. That was the advice of some 45 individuals and groups consulted by David Johnston, the former governor-general who heads up Canada's first commission on leaders' debates. Michel Cormier, executive director of the commission, says those consulted included academics, cultural communities, journalists, experts in civic education, debate organizers in other countries, as well as representatives of the six Canadian political parties most likely to meet the criteria required for their leaders to take part in two debates – one French, one English – prior to the Oct. 21 election. The commission is preparing a request for proposals to produce the debates. It's to be issued shortly, with the winner to be announced in mid-June."

This story successfully captured the Commission's key points about impartiality, accessibility, transparency, and journalistic integrity in the course of the interview with Michel Cormier:

"Since 2015, Mr. Cormier said the need for widely accessible debates has increased – with the rise of fake news promulgated by bad domestic and foreign actors trying to manipulate the outcome of elections, sow dissension and undermine voters' trust in democratic institutions. With such disinformation and misinformation and manipulation, we believe the debate is one of the few places where people can actually have the same information, unmediated, at the same time, to help them make a choice," he said. So we think these debates are even more important now because we live in filter bubbles, everybody, and it's harder to get verified information or information that hasn't been manipulated."

Relationships with journalists at La Presse (Melanie Marquis, Fanny Levesque), Le Devoir (Leila Jolin-Dahel), and Radio-Canada (Daniel Thibault) were developed over multiple interviews and were productive, direct, process-focused, and thorough.

Announcement of the Canadian Debates Production Partnership (CDPP):

Despite some minor stories about delays surrounding the request for proposals for production of the debates, the announcement of the CDPP received excellent coverage about the partnership, its distribution platforms, and accessibility, as captured by the July 31,2019 Canadian Press story "Federal election leadership debates will be more accessible than ever, commission says":

"Canadian political junkies will be able to access this fall's federal election debates with unprecedented ease thanks in large part to strong media partnerships, the commission responsible for organizing the events said Wednesday as it lifted the veil on plans for the televised campaign confrontations. Both events will be held in the Ottawa area and are tentatively scheduled for Oct. 7 in English and Oct. 10 in French, said Michel Cormier, the executive director of the Leaders' Debates Commission. The production group includes broadcasters CBC News/Radio-Canada, Global, and CTV; newspapers Toronto Star, Le Devoir and the magazine L'Actualite; and digital outlets La Presse, HuffPost Canada and HuffPost Quebec. The large, diverse group of media partners means the debate should have strong reach across Canada, Cormier said: "Canadians will be able to watch the debates on the platform of their choice, at the time of their choosing." Perhaps the biggest change over debates in the past is that the events will be free to stream and distribute for anyone, meaning any Canadian can set up an event or gathering in order to watch the show, he added. The debates will also be translated into several different languages, including some Indigenous languages, as well as Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi and Italian, though Cormier said that list is not finalized. Canadians with disabilities should also have easier access, he noted,

as the debates will have sign language interpretation, closed captioning and described video. The ease-of-access is important, Cormier said, because leaders' debates could serve as points in the campaign where "all people have access to the same information in real time, that's unmediated and undistorted."

Participation Criteria/Maxime Bernier:

Coverage from French-language media were focused on the mechanical details of the decision-making process of the Commission, and especially true regarding the decision to include the People's Party of Canada. La Presse and Le Devoir closely scrutinized each of the criteria and sought precise information during interviews with Michel Cormier.

The announcement in August 2019 that five party leaders had been invited to participate in the debates (and the preliminary exclusion of Maxime Bernier) received wide coverage, as captured in the Globe and Mail's "Five political parties invited to televised leaders' debates, Bernier left out for now":

"Calling Monday's decision a "preliminary assessment," the commission said it would give the party until Sept. 9 to further make its case. The commission will make a final decision by Sept. 16. "As we moved forward, we didn't believe we had enough evidence to make a decision, that it would have been unfair to Mr. Bernier to call the shot in early August," Michel Cormier, executive director of the commission, said Monday in an interview. Giving the party more time will allow a snapshot of the party's prospects as close to the election as possible, while still allowing time to organize the debate properly, Cormier said. In determining whether the candidates had a "legitimate chance," the commission considered a variety of sources of information, including evidence from the parties, national and riding-level polls, past candidate performance, membership, fundraising and media visibility, he added. There is no specific threshold for poll numbers, for example, that would have constituted a legitimate chance of election, Cormier acknowledged, calling the determination a "difficult question."

Bernier's exclusion resulted in extensive debate in the media on both sides, but in general there was significant support for his inclusion:

"Maxime Bernier's ideas should not disqualify him from debating other leaders" (Chantal Hebert, The Toronto Star, August 19, 2019):

"The positions Bernier is embracing will not go away just because he is kept off the leaders' debate podium."

https://www.thestar.com/politics/political-opinion/2019/08/18/maxime-berniers-ideas-should-not-disqualify-him-from-debating-other-leaders.html

"What's a debate if you don't hear from the opposite side?" (John Ivison, The National Post, August 17, 2019):

"As the PPC pointed out in a statement expressing its disappointment at the preliminary decision, if the commission truly considered "recent political context" it would have to weigh the potential for rapid growth of any populist party in the Western world."

https://nationalpost.com/opinion/john-ivison-whats-a-debate-if-you-dont-hear-from-the-opposite-side.html

"Let Bernier debate so Canadians can see what he's all about" (Dan Leger, The Chronicle Herald, August 16, 2019):

"Whatever motivates Bernier, he's working to build a party based on right-wing ideas that would have seemed un-Canadian in the pre-Trump era just a few years ago. He's crisscrossing the country signing up members and organizing constituency associations, the fundamental building block of every party…. The PPC claims to have 40,000 members across Canada and has named at least 312 out of 338 potential candidates. They won't all be good candidates, but they're evidence of the party's reach."

https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/opinion/local-perspectives/dan-leger-let-bernier-debate-so-canadians-can-see-what-hes-really-all-about-342271/

A countervailing view:

"In defence of leaving Bernier off the leaders' debate invite list (for now)" (Kady O'Malley, iPolitics, August 13, 2019):

https://ipolitics.ca/2019/08/13/process-nerd-in-defence-of-leaving-bernier-off-the-leaders-debate-invite-list-for-now/

His subsequent inclusion, announced September 16, 2019, attracted predictably wide attention:

"Maxime Bernier invité aux débats des chefs" (La Presse, Sept 16, 2019):

https://www.lapresse.ca/elections-federales/201909/16/01-5241447-maxime-bernier-invite-aux-debats-des-chefs.php

The Debates:

Criticism of the English-language debate centred on the following: too many moderators, a chaotic and unfocused format, and the overrepresentation of leaders who had no realistic chance of forming government.

"Flurry of attacks but no knockouts in chaotic federal leaders debate" (The Globe and Mail, October 7, 2019) https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-federal-election-english-leaders-debate/

"The debate featured Mr. Trudeau, Mr. Scheer, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, Green Leader Elizabeth May, Bloc Québécois Leader Yves-François Blanchet and People's Party Leader Maxime Bernier. The leaders frequently talked over each other and jousted on issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. The event was organized by the Leaders' Debates Commission and moderated by five journalists. Held in Gatineau in advance of the Oct. 21 election, the debate began with Mr. Scheer on the attack, accusing Mr. Trudeau of "always wearing a mask." Mr. Scheer, who struggled in last week's French-language debate, appeared more comfortable in his first language. NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh, who has fought to

break through in the election campaign, had a forceful performance in the debate, taking aim at both Mr. Scheer and Mr. Trudeau and earning a rare round of applause from the audience who had been asked to refrain from clapping. "You don't have to choose between Mr. Delay and Mr. Deny," Mr. Singh said in reference to the Liberal and Conservative Leaders' climate change policies. Mr. Trudeau, tried to stay out of the fray, and at times even abstained from defending his record against attacks, for example on Indigenous issues."

The Globe and Mail's editorial was less concerned about the shouting; rather, it decried the fact that there weren't more (English-language) debates:

"But the one truly disappointing thing about this year's first official English-language debate? The fact that it's also the last. The creation of an official Leaders' Debates Commission was supposed to give us more and better debates. Instead, 2015's three unofficial English-language contests were reduced to this year's solitary official meeting. The Liberals have for weeks insisted that's an improvement over last election, apparently relying on a new version of discovery math where one is more than three. One short debate, with space and time limited, and with six competing leaders often forced to talk over one another in order to be heard, left little room for anything more than sound bites and talking points. For undecided voters, the decision will have to come down to meatier stuff – each party's platform, and its record."

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-what-canadians-learned-from-the-one-and-only-english-language-debate/

Media critic Simon Houpt of the Globe echoed a common refrain, that strong moderating was an essential element of a successful debate:

"Where's a cattle prod when you need one? That and other questions from the federal leaders' debates" (Simon Houpt, The Globe and Mail, October 13, 2019):

"To be sure, moderating a debate is harder than it looks. It requires a level of skill that takes years to hone; like electricity in a house, you only notice when it's missing. Moderators need to set an appropriate tone, move the proceedings along, juggle producers talking in their ear, keep the participants in line and make sure that none of the rabid partisans in the audience (at home or in the hall) can accuse you of favouritism. More to the point, TV is no place for amateurs. Delacourt is an impressive political reporter, and she's a knowledgeable commentator and panelist, but she flubbed repeatedly when asking questions or transitioning between speakers. At one point, she told Elizabeth May she had one minute to ask a question, when in fact May had only 25 seconds: Delacourt ended up cutting her off halfway through. But if LaFlamme, Raj and Friesen were perfectly fine, it wasn't until Barton took control for the last segment that viewers may have realized what had been missing all night. She was refreshingly merciless, cutting off the leaders within milliseconds after they'd hit their time limits. After hearing Justin Trudeau give an insufficient answer to a question she'd asked about climate change and the planned construction of the Trans Mountain expansion, she observed flatly: "I noticed you didn't answer the last part of that question."

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/article-wheres-a-cattle-prod-when-you-need-one-and-other-lessons-from-the/

There was also coverage of the injunction successfully pursued by two organizations originally denied media accreditation:

"Right-wing outlets win legal battle to attend leaders' debates" (Canadian Press, October 7, 2019):

"A federal court judge says Rebel Media and the True North Centre for Public Policy have established that they would suffer "irreparable harm" if denied access to Monday night's English-language leaders' debate in Gatineau and the French-language debate happening Thursday. Justice Russel Zinn says the reasons for his ruling will be released at a later date."

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canadian-right-wing-outlets-turn-to-court-after-being-barred-from/

The French-language debate was generally considered to have had a better, more controlled format (i.e. with a single moderator and more methodical interactions among the leaders). Most French media shared the general opinion that the English debate was poorly moderated and formatted. French media, understandably, provided more coverage of the French-language debate, in particular the moderating skills of Patrice Roy and the format itself.

"Débat des chefs en français : un exercice ordonné, à une exception près" (La Presse, October 11, 2019):

https://www.lapresse.ca/elections-federales/201910/10/01-5244938-debat-des-chefs-en-francais-un-exercice-ordonne-a-une-exception-pres.php

"Trudeau, Scheer call on Quebeckers to reject resurgent Bloc in French-language debate" (The Globe and Mail, October 11, 2019):

"The French-language debate was less chaotic than Monday's English-language debate, with a single moderator directing exchanges throughout the evening. Leaders were frequently divided into groups of three to reduce the risk of indecipherable shouting…. The decision to divide the candidates into groups during Thursday's debate meant few opportunities for Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Scheer to challenge each other directly…. The discussion of the economy was the only time the two were grouped together for a debate. While most of the evening was calm, the exchange between the Liberal and Conservative leaders was often heated as each accused the other of lying."

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-trudeau-scheer-call-on-quebeckers-to-reject-resurgent-bloc-in-french/

Post-debates coverage:

Post-debates, there were thoughtful opinion pieces, such as in the Winnipeg Free Press, from Royce Koop, associate professor and head of the political studies department at the University of Manitoba, who argues for fewer leaders in the debate (and implicitly assumes a future role for the Commission itself):

"(W)e got the new Leaders Debate Commission (sic), an impartial government agency tasked with organizing the debates. The commission is supposed to, through its impartiality, give the debates a boost in legitimacy. This was achieved in part through the appointment of the impeccably neutral former governor general David Johnston as commissioner…. The commission also established clear criteria that determine when party leaders may participate in the debate…. The commission hoped to avoid the perception that the opportunity to participate was itself a political football…. Thus, the 2019 English language debate included six leaders. The result was predictable, as the leaders interrupted one another, occasionally yelled and vied for each little snippet of precious time in front of the cameras…. Debates are

one of the few real opportunities Canadians have to evaluate the party leaders. Leaders can speak directly to voters, but they are challenged by their competitors. The frustrating part of the 2019 English debate was that the exchanges between the major party leaders-- Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, Scheer and NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh-- were often interesting and even downright informative. Undecided voters could have learned much from the debate….. But they were likely prevented from doing so by the sideshow of the three minor party leaders using up airtime and speaking over the other leaders… Hopefully the Leaders Debate Commission will recognize this and write much stricter criteria for party inclusion in the next election's debates."

https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/opinion/analysis/time-to-rethink-leaders-debates-563353062.html

In contrast, the Toronto Star's post-election editorial of Saturday, October 26 titled *"After all, a sensible people"* validates the Commission's decision to include the People's Party of Canada leader:

"Most western countries have seen a rise in far-right populist politics and it was never a foregone conclusion that Canada was immune. Bernier had a national political profile and might well have done better…. But voters definitively turned thumbs-down on Bernier's anti-immigrant, "Canadian values" message. They had a chance to hear him out, including two national TV debates and their verdict was a resounding "no thanks." It's an outcome that does the country credit and a victory for the democratic process of open debate. Those who wanted to deny Bernier the right to speak out of fear that gullible voters would fall for his message should be ashamed of themselves for failing to trust the people."

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2019/10/25/canadians-are-a-sensible-people-after-all.html

The Toronto Star, in an earlier editorial, argued for more debates, fewer leaders, and a tighter format:

"After Monday night, it's time to fix the debates" (editorial, October 8, 2019):

"The national Leaders' Debates Commission set up last year by the Trudeau government and chaired by former governor general David Johnston is due to produce a report suggesting how the process can be improved for the next time around. Johnston would do voters a big service by proposing a fundamental rethink of how we do national debates. He should start with the number of debates. Two (one in each official language) just isn't enough. Our federal elections go on for five to seven weeks, plenty of time for at least two in each language. If the parties truly had voters' interests in mind and not just their own partisan advantage, they'd have a debate a week. Monday night showed there should be fewer leaders on stage. Maxime Bernier shouldn't have been there-- not because his ideological positions are so objectionable but because the People's Party is a fringe group. Nor should Bloc Québécois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet be included in an English debate when he doesn't bother to run candidates in more than three-quarters of ridings. National debates are for leaders of national parties. The format should include extended interaction among the main players, not 30-second jabs and rehearsed soundbites. Voters want to see the leaders with a real chance of holding power go at one another directly. That's the whole point of a debate, after all."

https://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/2019/10/08/after-monday-night-its-time-to-fix-the-debates.html

Appendix 5 – Interpretation of Participation Criteria for the Leaders' Debates

Overview and Context

The Leaders' Debates Commission ("the Commission") is mandated to organize two debates (one in French and one in English) for the upcoming 2019 federal general election. As part of its mandate, the Commission is tasked with selecting the party leaders who will be invited to participate in the debates. This invitation is predicated on the application of participation criteria set out in Order in Council P.C. 2018-1322, dated October 29, 2018 ("OIC").

The present document describes the Commission's guiding principles; the open and transparent process it has and will continue to follow to determine which party leaders will be invited to participate in the debates; the Commission's interpretation of the participation criteria; and its decision-making timeline.

Based on a preliminary assessment, the Commission communicated with six political parties from whom it sought submissions as to their interpretation of the participation criteria and whether they qualified to participate in the debates based on the participation criteria. Following a review of these submissions along with an analysis and application of the participation criteria, on August 12, 2019, the Commission issued five invitations to the 2019 leaders' debates. The six letters in respect of each of these political parties are available below:

- Invitation letter to the Bloc Québécois
- Invitation letter to the Conservative Party of Canada
- Invitation letter to the Green Party of Canada
- Invitation letter to the Liberal Party of Canada
- Invitation letter to the New Democratic Party
- Letter to the People's Party of Canada

These letters should be read in conjunction with this document to understand the Commission's decision-making process with respect to which party leaders will participate in the 2019 leaders' debates.

Guiding Principles

As outlined in section 2(b) of the OIC, invitations to participate in the leaders' debates are to be extended to "the leader of each political party that meets two of the following criteria":

i. at the time the general election is called, the party is represented in the House of Commons by a Member of Parliament who was elected as a member of that party,

ii. the Debates Commissioner considers that the party intends to endorse candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts in the general election in question,

iii. the party's candidates for the most recent general election received at that election at least 4% of the number of valid votes cast or, based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Debates Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question.

As part of its assessment of whether the leader of a party should be invited, the Commission is informed by the OIC, including the following provisions:

- Preamble: "it is desirable that leaders' debates be effective, informative and compelling and benefit from the participation and benefit from the participation of the leaders who have the greatest likelihood of becoming Prime Minister or whose political parties have the greatest likelihood of winning seats in Parliament";

- Preamble: "it is desirable that leaders' debates be organized using clear, open and transparent participation criteria";
- Section 3(d): "the decisions regarding the organization of the leaders' debates, including those respecting participation criteria, are made publicly available in a timely manner"; and

- Section 4: "the Leaders' Debates Commission is to be guided by the pursuit of the public interest and by the principles of independence, impartiality, credibility, democratic citizenship, civic education, inclusion and cost-effectiveness."

Open and Transparent Process

In light of the above guiding principles and in order to determine how best to interpret and apply the participation criteria, and in recognition of the importance of its decision, the Commission has followed, and will continue to follow, a process that:

- is open and inclusive: registered political parties have an opportunity to show how they meet the participation criteria;
- provides an opportunity to be heard: political parties are provided with an opportunity to make submissions with respect to how they meet the criteria; in addition, should the Commission conclude that a political party does not meet the participation criteria, that party may provide additional information for the Commission's consideration before a deadline that is communicated to the parties and to the public;
- is independent and impartial: the Commission shall not pre-judge which political parties should be invited;
- is transparent: the Commission will issue written reasons with respect to the application of the participation criteria to political parties, whether they meet such criteria or not; and
- is effective: notwithstanding the above considerations, the Commission will ensure its process is timely and cost effective.

The Commission has been and will be consulting with academics, independent pollsters and the Commission's Advisory Board and also considered other available relevant information, including publicly available polling data and media coverage. The Commission also sought written submissions from those political parties that, based on a preliminary assessment, the Commission concluded had the greatest likelihood of meeting the participation criteria.

Interpretation of the participation criteria

Following its consultations, the Commission reviewed the political parties' submissions. The Commission concludes that the application of the mandated participation criteria contains both objective and subjective elements.

While the OIC sets out what appears to be three criteria to be interpreted and applied, these can in fact be divided as follows:

- Criterion (i): the party is represented in the House of Commons by a Member of Parliament who was elected as a member of that party;
- Criterion (ii): the Commissioner considers that the party intends to endorse candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts in the general election in question;
- Criterion (iii):
    a. the party's candidates for the most recent general election received at that election at least 4% of the number of valid votes cast; or,
    b. based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the **Commissioner considers** that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question.

Criteria (i) and (iii)(a) do not require an extensive assessment by the Commission as these criteria are applied based on the review of objective evidence.

Criteria (ii) and (iii)(b) on the other hand require an assessment and consideration by the Commission.

With respect to criterion (ii), in determining whether a party "intends to endorse candidates in 90% of electoral districts", the Commission has considered and will consider the following:

a. Evidence provided by the party in question, including but not limited to a declared intention by the party leader;
b. Evidence of the party's record in previous elections, if applicable;
c. Evidence of registration with Elections Canada;
d. Evidence of the party's nomination processes; and
e. Evidence of the party's number of riding associations.

With respect to criterion (iii)(b):

1. In determining "recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general results", the Commission has considered and will consider the following:
    a. Evidence provided by the party in question in relation to the criterion;
    b. Both current standing and trends in national public opinion polls;
    c. Riding level polls, both publicly-available and internal party polls if provided as evidence by the party and riding projections;
    d. Information received from experts and political organizations regarding information about particular ridings;
    e. Parties and candidates' performances in previous elections;
    f. Media presence and visibility of the party and/or its leader nation-wide;

g. Whether a party is responsive to or represents a contemporary political trend or movement;
h. Federal by-election results that took place since the last general election;
i. Party membership; and
j. Party fundraising.

2. In interpreting the phrase “candidates endorsed by the party”, the Commission, in accordance with principles of statutory interpretation, considered the words of the OIC in their entire context and in their grammatical and ordinary sense harmoniously with the scheme of the OIC, the object of the OIC, and the intention of the OIC. The Commission concludes that the word “candidates” in the context of the OIC should be interpreted as plural. In other words, political parties will need to demonstrate that more than one candidate endorsed by the party has a legitimate chance to be elected. This is because:

First, some parties argued that “candidates” should be interpreted as a collective noun meaning a field or spectrum made up of individual parts and that the threshold for inclusion in that field could be as low as one. However, this argument is inconsistent with the plain wording of the provision which explicitly refers to candidate as plural;

Second, the drafters of the OIC were explicit in using the singular when that was the intention. Indeed, criterion (i) refers to “a member of Parliament”. Moreover, the preamble to the OIC provides that for the leaders’ debates to be effective they would benefit from the participation of leaders who have the greatest likelihood of becoming Prime Minister or whose political parties have the “greatest likelihood of winning seats in Parliament”; and

Third, some parties argued that provisions in the Commission’s OIC related to the principle of inclusion suggested a more expansive interpretation of the word “candidates”. While “inclusion” is to be considered by the Commission in fulfilling its mandate (OIC, section 4), the OIC also mandates that the leaders’ debate be effective, informative and compelling. It further provides that the leaders’ debates would “benefit from the participation of the leaders (…) whose political parties have the greatest likelihood of winning seats in Parliament”. This provision suggests a more restrictive number of candidates participating in the debates.

In interpreting “legitimate chance to be elected”, the Commission considered the French version of the same provision which refers to “véritable possibilité d’être élus.” Based on the common interpretation of both versions, the Commission is of the view that “legitimate chance” means “a reasonable chance of having someone elected”.

Overall, in its consideration of criterion (iii)(b), the Commission is of the view that its primary decision for the application of criterion (iii)(b) is assessing the chance of candidates to be elected. The factors listed above will be considered in this light. Additionally, the Commission notes that the OIC is silent with respect to a specific threshold for electability.

Decision-making timeline

On July 12, 2019, the Commission sought submissions from those parties that a preliminary assessment concluded had the greatest likelihood of meeting the participation criteria.

Upon review of the submissions from these six political parties and in consideration of the above interpretation of the mandated participation criteria, on August 12, 2019, the Commission invited those political parties that the Commission was of the view met two of the mandated criteria. Each invitation that the Commission issued contained the party-specific reasons underpinning the Commission's determination. These invitations have been issued at this time in order to ensure that the Commission fulfills its mandate to make public its decisions with respect to participation in a timely manner. In addition, it is important for the producer of the debates to begin to meet with the participants to plan an orderly and well-executed leaders' debate. This will improve the quality and ensure the high journalistic standards of the leaders' debates as is mandated by the Order in Council.

The Commission also provided provisional reasons to the party that, at that time, had not met the participation criteria. This party has the opportunity to provide updated evidence to the Commission by September 9, 2019. The Commission also concluded that it required more evidence regarding specific electoral districts in which candidates endorsed by that political party have a legitimate chance to be elected. It therefore asked that party to identify, by August 23, 2019, three to five such electoral districts. The Commission will then seek additional information on the legitimate chance of candidates endorsed by that party being elected in any of those ridings. The Commission will then disclose this information to that party for an opportunity to comment.

The Commission intends to make its final decision with respect to that party by September 16, 2019. The date of September 16, 2019, is necessary as it balances:

1. The need for the Commission to have access to the best evidence available in order to assess whether political parties satisfy the debate participation criteria; and

2. the need to ensure that both the debates producer has sufficient time to produce a debate of high quality, as required by the OIC, and that the political parties can properly prepare for the debates in order to ensure they are informative for Canadians. The debates are scheduled for Monday, October 7, 2019 (English) and Thursday, October 10, 2019 (French).

Appendix 6 – NANOS Research
Examination of the standard for debate inclusion

Leaders' Debates Commission

Commission des débats des chefs

Examination of the Standard for Debate Inclusion

Submitted to
Leaders' Debate Commission

by Nanos Research

January, 2020

Table of Contents

1.0 Executive Summary

The Leaders' Debates Commission was responsible for organizing and managing the two debates held during the most recent federal election. The following is an examination and analysis of the process for deciding which parties should be invited to participate.

For the 2019 federal election, the main question was the appropriateness of inviting a new party such as the People's Party of Canada (PPC) to participate. The Commission decided to invite the PPC because it came to the conclusion that it had a legitimate chance to win seats. The analysis here examines the decision in the context of electoral competition in Canada using results of the 2019 election and previous elections. This examination provides an additional lens to help inform future decisions of the Leaders' Debates Commission.

The report is organized along the following themes:

- **The electoral system and minor parties** – The rules of the game are critical factors in shaping how new and minor parties operate in our democracy.
    - **The first-past-the-post electoral system** – Canada's voting system does not favour minor parties. Here we discuss an analysis of the recent historical pattern in relationship to the minimum votes needed to win a riding.
    - **Movement versus parties formed out of party system failure** – Once the nature of converting votes to seats is considered, an examination of the difference between parties formed out of a movement versus those which are most appropriately thought of as those that emerge out of party system failure is explored. That is, when parties fail to adequately represent a key constituency. In Canada, this tends to be regionally based.
    - **Fixed election dates** – Given that the Commission is trying to establish the potential for a party to be successful before the campaign begins, we introduce the idea that the move to fixed election dates will limit overall campaign effects.
- **The decision to invite the PPC** – After discussing the decision-making process used by the Commission, the report examines the decision compared to the actual election outcome.
    - **PPC did not convert votes to seats** – An analysis of the geographic distribution of support for the Party shows a clear lack of geographic base.
    - **An analysis of riding surveys conducted in four ridings believed to be likely to elect a PPC candidate –** The Commission administered a test based on the per cent of each riding willing to consider voting for the PPC candidate. In light of the nature of the electoral system a post election outcome review suggests that standard was too easy to achieve and overestimated the chance of the Party electing multiple candidates.
- **Lessons from other minor party insurgencies** – The Green Party, the Bloc Québécois (BQ) and the Reform Party experience help inform our understanding of the possibility of the PPC winning seats.
    - **Green Party** – Lacking a regional base, the Party failed to win seats in many elections because vote shares below five per cent nationally are unlikely to generate seats. The party was more successful in later elections when it had regional strength of 10 per cent or more.
    - **Bloc Québécois** – A classic example of party-system failure, the BQ experience highlights the impact of a regional base. Even before the campaign began, its potential to win seats was evident given its strong voter support in Quebec.

- **Reform Party** – Like the BQ, the Reform Party was clearly poised to win seats and had a strong regional base. Finally, it took the Reform Party two elections to establish a base. It did not easily convert electoral presence to seats.

The analysis of the People's Party experience in light of our democratic system and the experience of other parties leads to two elements that the Commission can consider in assessing the process for including minor parties in future debates.

- **Regional strength matters.** Adding a regional popular support criterion (e.g. 10% minimum vote share) to evaluate admission to the Leaders' Debate would help better capture the dynamics of minor parties in Canada. Minor parties without a regional base have a very low likelihood of converting votes to seats.

- **A stronger minimum support level should be considered.** The Commission may want to continue in some circumstances to use a "willingness to consider the party" test to evaluate the legitimate chances of winning a seat. Since few candidates win with between 25 and 30 per cent of the vote, a standard of 40 per cent willing to consider is probably more likely to be a robust indicator of electoral success.

The 2019 federal election represented a positive first step for the Leaders' Debates Commission as it deliberated on how to best operationalize the parameters for including parties in the Leaders' Debate. The analysis by Nanos suggests that, taking the learnings from the 2019 federal election, the parameters for inclusion can be better refined. To follow is a more detailed examination of the items articulated in the Executive Summary.

2.0 Background

The Leaders' Debates Commission is interested in reviewing the process it used for considering which parties should be invited to participate in debates. In the lead up to the debates for the 2019 federal election, the main question was the appropriateness of inviting a new party such as the People's Party of Canada (PPC). Although initially not invited, the Commission ultimately decided to invite the PPC. This memo reviews the process used to invite this new party, considers the true performance of the parties, and reviews the historical record of minor parties to offer a set of observations for the Commission to consider in formulating future decisions. For the purposes of this discussion a minor party is a party without a significant number of seats in the House of Commons.

The inclusion of the PPC in the debate is not an experiment. Including the party could have had an impact on the result. Participation in the debates could have either helped or dampened its electoral prospects. Inclusion may have legitimized the party as a serious party with a chance of winning. Exposure may have also increased awareness of its platform. It may, however, have exposed the public to its platform or to its leader's competence and character that reduced the likelihood of support. The one known in the process is that the electoral prospects of the PPC did not increase with participation in the Leaders' Debates.

One should exercise caution in simply concluding that the lack of seats won is an indicator that the Party should not have been invited. One can, however, use the PPC experience in 2019 along with the experience of other minor parties to evaluate the claim that the party had a legitimate chance to win seats (more than one).

3.0 The Electoral System and Minor Parties

I. Minimum votes to win a riding

Canada's first-past-the-post system does not favour minor parties. The winner-take-all proposition in each riding means that candidates can be elected without getting a majority in the riding. When we examined riding outcomes for the 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2015 federal elections in Canada, there were several key stats that highlight the difficulty in converting votes into seats.

A review of the five elections leads to a number of key observations:

- **Margin of Victory** - The average margin of victory for the most recent elections examined was between 18.9 and 22.8 per cent while the median margin of victory ranged between 15.0 and 19.6 per cent.
- **Winning Support** – The average percentage level of support of the winning candidates was between 48.6 and 50.4 per cent while the median winning support in ridings was between 47.4 and 49.7 per cent.
- **Minimum Required to Win** – The lowest percentage required to win at the riding level in the most recent elections ranged between 26.8 and 32.7 per cent.

All things being equal, an 'average' party expecting an 'average' winning level of support would need support of about 45 per cent to win in a single riding. The lowest possible level of support is 26.8 per cent, which was achieved in 2004 in the Saskatoon-Humboldt riding. Of course, winning with such a low level of support requires three other competitive parties to split the other 73 per cent of the vote.

Election	Mean Margin of Victory (P)	Median Margin of Victory (P)	Mean Winning Support (P)	Median Winning Support (P)	Lowest Winning Support (P)	Margin for Lowest Winning Support (P)	Riding with lowest margin in election
2004	20.4	17.4	49.9	48.0	26.8	1.2	Saskatoon--Humboldt
2006	20.7	18.0	49.0	48.0	32.7	3.3	Hull--Aylmer
2008	22.8	19.6	49.5	47.5	29.2	3.0	Gatineau
2010	21.9	19.4	50.4	49.7	31.0	5.0	Vancouver Centre
2015	18.9	15.0	48.6	47.4	28.6	0.4	Pierre-Boucher--Les Patriotes--Verchères

II. Party system failure versus movement parties

For the purposes of this memo it is useful to consider two types of minor parties. The first, are those who emerge out of party system failure. One or all of the major parties fail to adequately represent a large proportion of Canadians usually with decidedly regional grievances. This is not to say that these parties are not fuelled by and passionate about ideas. The key is that the broad consensus that underlies the party breaks down. Parties fracture.

The second is parties that emerge as a *movement*. Here ideas matter more than electoral success. The Green Party would fit this mould as would many of the plethora of minor parties that offer candidates for office with little expectation of electoral success.

The PPC arguably is closer to this conception of a minor party than a party emerging out of party system failure. The party focuses on unique issues. For this reason, it is worth considering how parties as movement have electoral success in a system that punishes parties for not having concentrated votes.

III. Fixed election dates and campaign effects

One of the additional considerations is the fact that we have fixed electoral dates. While it is possible to have an early election, the expectation that the election will occur regularly every four years on a specific day means that the *campaign* is effectively much longer than the actual writ period. One can reasonably expect that the impact of the formal campaign is smaller when the election day is already decided months in advance of the dropping of the writ. Only something that fundamentally changes what voters know or are thinking about could dramatically change the fortunes of a small party. Much of the likely success of a small party is embedded in the pre-writ survey results.

4.0 The Decision to Invite the People's Party of Canada in 2019

I. How the Commission Decided

In coming to its decision to invite the parties to participate in the debates, the Leaders' Debates Commission requirements to be met are provided below.

As outlined in section 2(b) of the OIC, invitations to participate in the leaders' debates are to be extended to "the leader of each political party that meets two of the following criteria":

i. at the time the general election is called, the party is represented in the House of Commons by a Member of Parliament who was elected as a member of that party,

ii. the Debates Commissioner considers that the party intends to endorse candidates in at least 90% of electoral districts in the general election in question,

iii. (a) the party's candidates for the most recent general election received at that election at least 4% of the number of valid votes cast or, (b) based on the recent political context, public opinion polls and previous general election results, the Debates Commissioner considers that candidates endorsed by the party have a legitimate chance to be elected in the general election in question.[Note: (a) and (b) added by Nanos]

On the basis of these criteria six parties were invited to attend. The PPC was originally not invited but after receiving additional information the Leaders' Debates Commission did extend an invitation. The table below also shows the number of seats won and the criteria that was used to determine participation.

Party	Qualification Criteria	Seats won in the 2019 election
Bloc Québécois	i. (Sitting members in House); ii. More than 4% of vote in previous election	32
Conservative Party of Canada	i. (Sitting members in House); ii. More than 4% of vote in previous election	121
Green Party of Canada	i. (Sitting members in House); ii. Offering candidates in at least 90% of ridings	3
Liberal Party of Canada	i. (Sitting members in House); ii. More than 4% of vote in previous election	157
New Democratic Party	i. (Sitting members in House); ii. More than 4% of vote in previous election	24
People's Party of Canada	ii. Offering candidates in at least 90% of ridings; iii. More than 1 candidate has a chance of being elected	0

NOTE: One seat was won by an Independent candidate in the 2019 election.

The People's Party was the party that the Commission had to evaluate closely given that it had no previous electoral success that would allow it to be qualified under i. or iii. (a). Because the leader was elected as a Conservative and the party had not run candidates in previous elections, there was no basis for including the party unless it met criteria ii. (fielding a full slate of candidates >90%) and iii(b) (having a legitimate chance of being elected. The Commission determined that a legitimate chance of being elected in more than 1 riding was the minimum condition.

The key wording in iii(b) is the words, *recent political context*. The Commission in their words used the following to determine the political context:

1. *Evidence provided by the party in question in relation to the criterion;*
2. *Both current standing and trends in national public opinion polls;*
3. *Riding level polls, both publicly-available and internal party polls if provided as evidence by the party and riding projections;*
4. *Information received from experts and political organizations regarding information about particular ridings;*

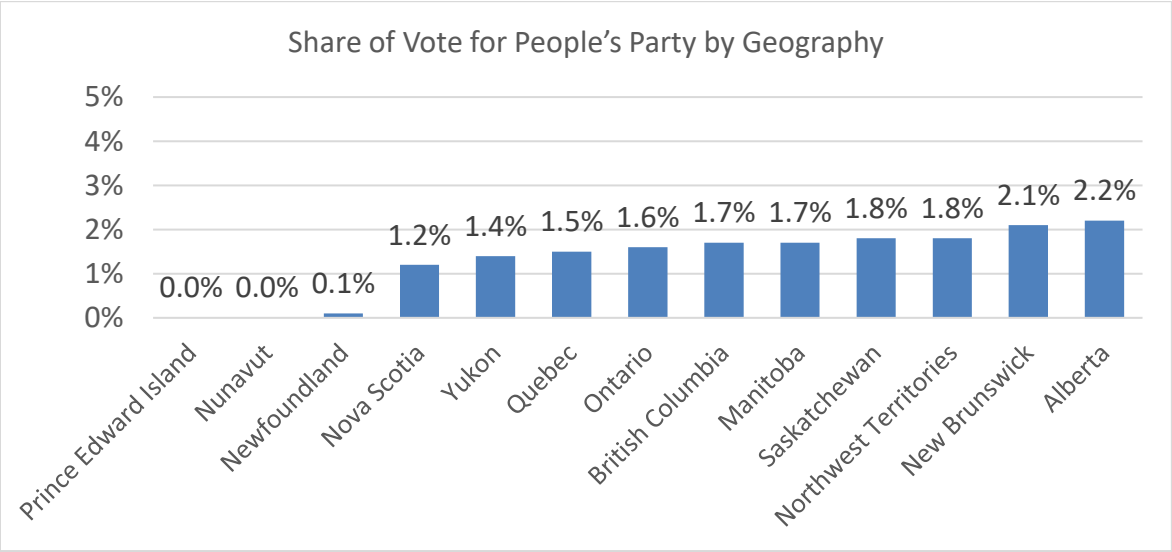
5. *Parties' and candidates' performances in previous elections;*
6. *Media presence and visibility of the party and/or its leader nation-wide;*
7. *Whether a party is responsive to or represents a contemporary political trend or movement;*
8. *Federal by-election results that took place since the last general election;*
9. *Party membership; and*
10. *Party fundraising.*[i]

On the basis of publicly available polling in Beauce, riding polls conducted in four potentially contending ridings by the Commission, and information about fund-raising, party membership and media presence, the decision was made to invite the party.

II. PPC support (national and regional)

Overall, the People's Party received **1.6% of votes cast and no seats**. This is lower than the national poll averages throughout the election, which generally ranged from 2-4 per cent. National vote shares are, however, not necessarily indicative of riding success, especially for regionally oriented parties. Regional or local strength can convert to seats.

The People's Party of Canada, however, had no meaningful regional or provincial support. Below is the share of the vote in the election by province/territory. The final vote shares mirror the national polls at the beginning of the campaign. **The PPC did not have a regional strength, which significantly reduced the likelihood of winning seats.**



III. Analysis of how PPC did in the five ridings the Commission analyzed

One of the ways the Commission assessed the electoral viability of the People's Party was to review publicly released polling for the Beauce riding. This polling suggested that the PPC was viable in Beauce.

To establish whether it had a chance to win elsewhere, riding polls[ii] were commissioned to establish the willingness to consider voting for the PPC in four ridings the PPC felt it was most competitive. In each riding, respondents were asked "How likely are you to vote for_____, the People's Party of Canada candidate in your riding in the next federal election?".

The willingness to consider the party, as was argued elsewhere, has the advantage of assessing the potential support for the party without explicitly asking the vote intention question. Potential support is independent of any strategic considerations that voters might use in forming their final vote decision. If 40 per cent of voters in a riding would consider voting for a candidate, that would represent the maximum vote share for that party. To get 40 per cent, every person would need to act on their consideration. Of course, people are free to consider more than one party.

It is unrealistic to assume that every single person who is considering a party would actually vote for that party. So a party's ultimate vote will be based on what percentage of the electorate can be motivated to act on their openness to consider a party plus any change in the willingness to consider the party between the polling and the actual vote.

The Commission determined that since the Party had more than 25% of the electorate in the riding willing to consider it, the PPC was a legitimate contender to win multiple seats.

As noted earlier, a 25 per cent threshold is the minimum amount of local voter support that has produced a winning seat among the most recent federal elections. In order for the PPC to reach that minimum share of votes (25%), virtually everyone who indicated that they would consider the party would have to actually cast a vote for that party. This represented a minimum standard for the PPC to meet. This 25 per cent threshold also requires a number of competing parties which would effectively split the vote in a first-past-the-post system.

The table below shows the percentage who would consider voting for the party and the ultimate vote share for the party in each riding. Two things are of note:

- **Actual vote shares did not come close to making the districts competitive.** Only in Nipissing-Timiskaming did the PPC party receive more than 5% of the votes. In the end, less than half of those who expressed a certainty to vote for the PPC candidate could have done so to reach their level of electoral support.

- **The Commission used a generous interpretation of willingness to consider.** The question was asked on a 4-point scale and the Commission reached the 25 per cent threshold by adding together the percentage who provided a certain to vote, likely to vote, and possibly will vote. Given that the probability of actually voting for the party increases with the strength of one's conviction, aggregating all three response categories allowed for a higher legitimacy of the PPC

being competitive. For example, for the PPC to reach 26 per cent support in Pickering-Uxbridge, the party would need the 9.3 per cent who only felt a vote for the PPC candidate was a possibility to cast their vote this way.

- **Getting to the 25 per cent threshold did not provide much chance of electoral success.** Even if the party received 25 per cent of the vote (which the consideration data indicated was unlikely), its chance of electoral success was mathematically still remote. Only one candidate between 2004 and 2015 was elected with 27% of the vote.

On election day, the People's Party was only competitive (finishing 2nd) in one riding (Beauce). In fact, its presence in all these ridings did not even impact who won as the winning candidate in each riding won by more than the PPC vote share.

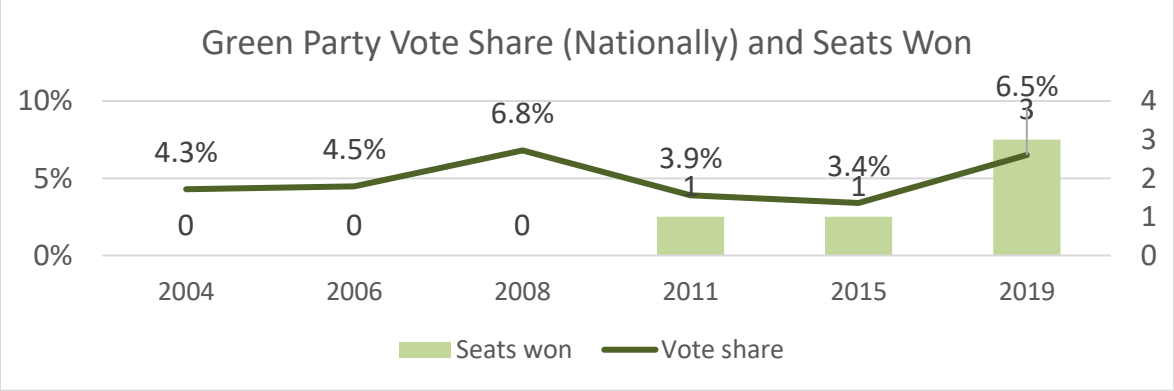
	Nipissing-Timiskaming	**Etobicoke North**	**Pickering-Uxbridge**	**Charleswood-St.-James-Assiniboia-Headingley**
Certain to vote for that candidate	11.2%	15.3%	11.2%	10.6%
Likely to vote for that candidate	6.1%	5.2%	5.4%	4.4%
Possibly will vote for that candidate	16.9%	9.4%	9.3%	9.5%
Will not vote for that candidate	59.0%	62.2%	67.9%	73.2%
No answer	6.9%	7.9%	6.2%	2.3%
Net: Top 3	23.0%	29.9%	25.9%	24.5%
Net: Top 2	17.3%	20.5%	16.6%	15.0%
Actual vote share	5.2%	2.8%	2.0%	4.3%

5.0 Lessons from Other Minor Party Insurgencies

I. Green Party

A useful perspective on the process and the challenges a small party faces having electoral success is the Green Party. It has now won seats in three general elections plus some by-election wins but it had strong showings in the previous elections with no seat success.

The challenge of new parties converting votes to seats is not a minor one. In 2008, the Green Party won 6.5 per cent of the vote nationally but received no seats for their effort. The same vote in 2019 led to 3 seats. For three elections, between 2004 and 2008, the party was able to surpass the four per cent of the national vote but was unable to win any seats.



A look at the regional distribution helps account for the inability of the party to convert votes to seats. In 2004, provincial vote shares varied between two and six per cent. By 2019, the Green Party had achieved double digit vote shares in six provinces or territories. Reaching double digits did not guarantee seats in that region but it made it more probable. In B.C., eight per cent of the vote elected one candidate in 2011 and one in 2015 but nine per cent in 2008 did not lead to electoral success.

Movement parties like the Green Party face significant challenges. Without a strong regional base, there is no guarantee that votes will turn into seats. And, in the absence of major party failure that frees voters to move to other parties, the minor party trajectory for improvement is uneven. Gradually over a course of many elections, there is the possibility of increased electoral success but it is always tenuous.

	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nun.	Total
2019	3%	21%	11%	17%	4%	6%	5%	3%	3%	12%	10%	11%	2%	7%
2015	1%	6%	3%	5%	2%	3%	3%	2%	3%	8%	3%	3%	2%	3%
2011	1%	2%	4%	3%	2%	4%	4%	3%	5%	8%	19%	3%	2%	4%
2008	2%	5%	8%	6%	3%	8%	7%	6%	9%	9%	13%	5%	8%	7%
2006	1%	4%	3%	2%	4%	5%	4%	3%	7%	5%	4%	2%	6%	4%
2004	2%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%	3%	6%	6%	5%	4%	3%	4%

*highlighted cells indicate where party won seats

As an experiment, it is interesting to look back at the criteria for inclusion as they apply to previous elections. In 2019, the Green Party qualified under i. (member of the House of Commons) and ii. (offering candidates in 90% or more of ridings). It did not, however, meet the threshold of four per cent support in the previous election. In fact, electing someone in the previous general election would have been critical to getting an invite in 2019 and 2015. In earlier elections as long as the party offered enough candidates, it would have been invited to the debate even though it had little chance of electoral success.

The Green Party experience provides several insights into the process by which a minor party converts votes to seats. First, vote shares below five per cent nationally are unlikely to generate seats. It is possible for an established leader/ politician to win a seat when their party is at five per cent or below but this requires a unique person. Second, regional strength of 10 per cent or more is the best indicator of potential seats.

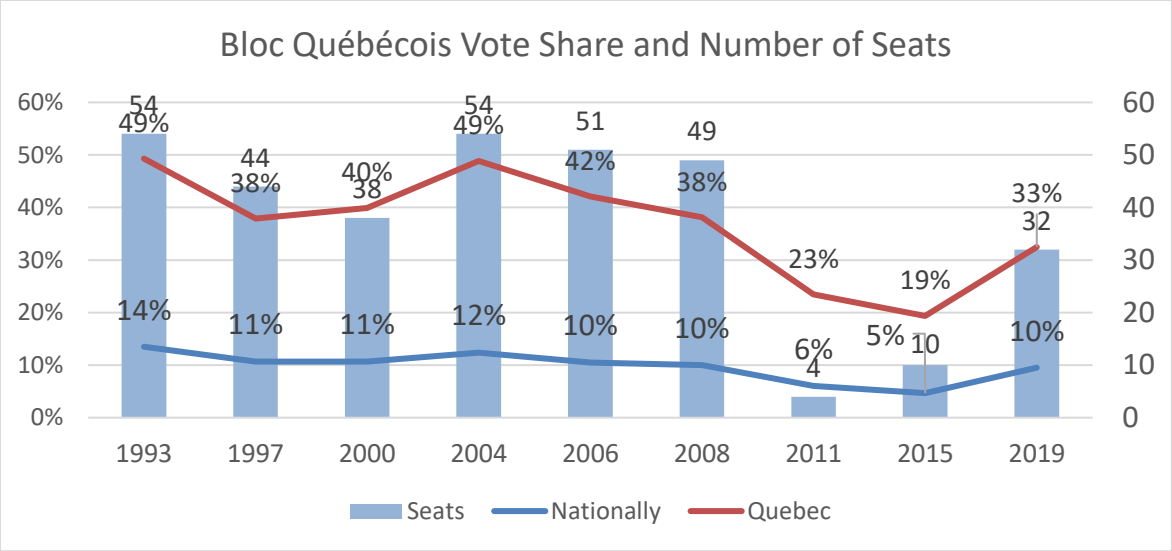
II. Bloc Québécois (BQ)

The Bloc Québécois represents a classic case of a regionally-based disruption to the party system. Since it never offers candidates outside of Quebec, it's national vote total is not particularly relevant except as to understand how a low national vote can sometimes translate into seats.

National vote shares for the BQ have fluctuated from a low of five to a high of 14 per cent. Even at five per cent, the party was able to win 10 seats. Winning seats was a result of receiving 19 per cent of the vote in the region. But the shift between 2008 and 2011 highlights a key aspect of the way votes get converted into seats. Between 2008 and 2011, the share of the vote in Quebec dropped from 38 to 23 per cent (15 points or 39%) but seats dropped from 49 to four (a decline of 92%). Once even regional vote shares drop below 25 per cent, success in terms of seats is not guaranteed.

Technically the party did not win seats until 1993, but Gilles Duceppe was elected in a by-election in 1990, a year before the party was legally formed. As such, the party which would go on to win 54 seats would not have qualified under the Commission's rules for debate inclusion as it had no elected candidates, did not field candidates nationally, and had not received four per cent of the vote (iii.a). Of course, it would have been considered likely to win seats under iii.b.

Significant political support was already evident in the Spring of 1993. An Environics survey[iii] found that among decided voters the B.Q. was at 12.5% nationally and 47% in Quebec.



The Bloc Québécois experience highlights the importance of regional/provincial support. It is also important in showing the dynamic by which traditional parties get usurped by a new party. Finally and importantly, the seeds of the BQ success were evident well before the campaign started.

III. Reform

The BQ represents the most regionally concentrated version of a new party that emerged out of party system failure. The Reform Party is a further example of a party that started with a regional foothold. Formed in 1987, the party contested the 1988 election but did not elect any Members of Parliament.

- In 1988, the early signs of potential regional impact were evident. Although it did not win any seats and was not a national party, it won 15.4 per cent of the vote in Alberta and 4.8 per cent in B.C.

- In June of 1993, an Environics survey found that among decided voters 7.4 per cent would vote for the Reform Party if the election was held today. Months before the election, the Reform Party also had a regional presence with significant support in Manitoba/Saskatchewan (15%), Alberta (19%) and British Columbia (19%).[iv]

- The 1993 election catapulted the party to 52 seats. Again, the regional strength was obvious. The Party won 52 per cent of the vote in Alberta.

There are several lessons we can take from the Reform experience. First, while few would have predicted the size of the electoral success in 1993, the Party was clearly poised to win seats. Second, its electoral legitimacy was driven by its strong regional base. Campaign dynamics shaped the final tally, but they were clearly competitive regionally before the campaign started. Third, it took the Reform Party two elections to establish a base big enough to legitimately compete for seats. Getting to 15 per cent of the vote in 1988 did not lead to any seats but it set the foundation for later success.

	N.L.	P.E.I.	N.S.	N.B.	Que.	Ont.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	B.C.	Y.T.	N.W.T.	Nun.	Total
1988							3.3%		15%	5%				2.1%
1993	0%	1%	13%	8%	0%	20%	22%	27%	52%	36%	13%	8%		18.8%
1997	3%	2%	10%	13%	0%	19%	24%	36%	55%	43%	25%	12%	0%	19.4%

6.0 Considerations

Decisions about who to invite to participate in debates are important for the health of our democracy. While we do not make specific recommendations, the analysis here suggests the following key points for the Commission to consider going forward.

- **Regional strength matters.** The current criteria for inclusion do not specifically address the situation where a party is strong regionally but weak nationally. There is room to add a regional popular support lens to evaluate admission to the Leaders' Debate. The BQ would not have been invited to participate in a debate in 1993 based on the current decision-making due to the fact that they had no previous electoral experience and were not contesting 90 per cent or more of the ridings in Canada. Regional strength also matters because minor parties without a regional base have a very low likelihood of converting votes to seats. A requirement for a minimum vote share (e.g. 10%) in a province might be a useful indicator of whether a seat could be won there.

- **A stronger minimum support level should be considered.** Recognizing that even provincial aggregation may not fully capture significant local support, the Commission may want to continue in some circumstances using a "willingness to consider the party" test to evaluate the legitimate chances of winning a seat. The standard used in 2019, however, was a lowest bar based on recent historical data. Few candidates win with between 25 and 30 per cent of the vote. A standard of 40 per cent willing to consider is probably more likely to be a more robust indicator of electoral success as opposed to the minimum possible. The experience of other minor parties without a strong regional base, such as the Green Party, is that winning more than one seat is highly unlikely with less than 10 per cent of the national vote.

ENDNOTES

[i] Decision: Participation of the leader of the People's Party of Canada ("PPC") in the 2019 leaders' debates [September 16, 2019; https://debates-debats.ca/en/interpretation-participation-criteria-leaders-debates/letter-peoples-party-canada/decision-participation-leader-peoples-party-canada-in-the-2019-leaders-debates/]

[ii] Riding polls were conducted by Ekos Research. https://debates-debats.ca/en/transparency/public-opinion-research-provide-evidence-interpretation-participation-criteria-leaders-debates/

[iii] Telephone survey of 1961 Canadians conduced in June of 2003 by Environics. Data accessed through the Canadian Opinion Research Archive (CORA). Environics and CORA are not responsible for the analysis presented here.

[iv] Telephone survey of 1961 Canadians conduced in June of 2003 by Environics. Data accessed through the Canadian Opinion Research Archive (CORA). Environics and CORA are not responsible for the analysis presented here.

Appendix 7 – Literature Review - Canada's Leaders' Debates in comparative perspective[36]

Spencer McKay, Research Associate, Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions, School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, University of British Columbia

Introduction: What are debates for?

While some observers view debates as little more than glorified press conferences or suggest that they are inappropriate for a parliamentary system in which prime ministers are not directly elected (Rogers 2009, 14–15), most observers seem to agree that debates can play an important role in democracies. Perhaps the most common view is that "the primary function of debates should be to inform the public" (McKinney 2005, 199). Yet, this raises the question of what it is citizens ought to learn. Jamieson and Birdsell (1985, 162-163) argue that debates should allow citizens to learn

(1) What the candidate considers the most pressing problems confronting the country and how he or she plans to respond to them. (2) Whether the candidate can communicate competently about complex issues in private and do so clearly and effectively to the nation as well. (3) Whether the person will see that the laws are faithfully executed and set an appropriate moral tone for the nation. (4) How if at all, the job of president will change those answers we have received to earlier questions. How would the candidate respond to the unexpected.

This clarifies that the expectation is not merely that citizens learn about policy, an outcome that might be better accomplished through other means. Rather, debates with some interaction or clash between candidates are preferable to joint press conferences, as these debates can help highlight the differences between candidates (McKinney and Carlin 2004; Pfau 2002, 251) and lead to less scripted, more authentic performances (Coleman and Moss 2016).

These views are largely consistent with the reasons that citizens provide for why they watch debates. Citizens have reported that they watch debates in order to "learn the candidates' positions on issues, to compare them as personalities, and to help in deciding which way to vote" (Chaffee 1978, 333). This so-called 'uses and gratifications' approach may not accurately capture the motivations or needs that citizens have. For instance, it is also plausible that viewers tune in to cheer on their preferred candidate and find reasons not to vote for the others but do not report their purpose as such (Chaffee 1978, 332–33; Wagner 2017, 549). An alternative approach has focused on the capabilities that citizens need to participate as democratic citizens, using focus groups to allow citizens to voice their frustrations and suggest improvements. Citizens want to participate in debates, interact with party leaders, make informed decisions, and avoid attempts at manipulation (Coleman and Moss 2016).

Debate effects

The existing literature suggests that debates "may be the only televised political event capable of attracting the attention of the "marginally attentive" citizen" (McKinney and Carlin 2004, 204). They provide a focal point for campaigns that can enable democratic citizenship. This includes, but is not limited to, allowing citizens to influence the election agenda; to learn about the candidates, their parties,

[36] Thanks to Candice Chan, Sarah Despatie, and Arian Zand for helpful research assistance.

and their platforms; to participate in political discussion; and to feel capable of participating in the electoral process. A considerable body of research has now addressed whether or not these effects occur, although much of the research is focused on the United States and is largely observational rather than experimental (Zhu, Milavsky, and Biswas 1994, 311–12).

The broader political context often affects the size or presence of debate effects. As Jamieson (2015, 87) puts it: "debates are most likely to affect the votes of individual viewers and, hence, electoral outcomes when at least one candidate is relatively unknown, when many are undecided, when the contest is close, and when party ties are weak."[37] Additionally, the effects of debates are also shaped by post-debate coverage, interactions on social media, and other forms of citizen interaction and discussion. As a result, there is also some debate about whether debate effects are short lived or whether they only appear that way because campaigns are ongoing (McKinney and Carlin 2004, 213–14).

Media coverage and social media

It has long been noted that it is futile to measure the effects of debates without considering the "total communication environment" (Lang and Lang 1978). Pfau uses the term "commingled influence" to described the challenge of studying debate effects "in an interwoven communication environment" where "attempts to assess the total influence of any one communication form, such as a televised debate, need to examine all relevant communication forms simultaneously, assessing the impact of any one form while controlling for the influence of all other forms" (Pfau 2002, 257).

Media coverage tends to follow an established narrative: the 'debate about the debates', setting expectations for candidates, the debate itself and real-time engagement, and then the post-debate coverage (Chadwick 2011; McKinney and Carlin 2004, 214–15). The debates themselves tend to be the single most covered campaign event and most studies have focused on post-debate coverage as a result (Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco 2000, 135). Winneg and Jamieson find that about 65% of debate viewers watch post-debate coverage the same night or following morning.[38] This number is higher for those who watched the whole debate and lower for those who only watched part of it (Winneg and Jamieson 2017, 368). Evidence from Australia suggests that even those who did not watch the debates are influenced by it due to media coverage (Senior 2008a).

Despite this emphasis on media coverage of debates, there is some evidence that citizens think that the "postdebate period of spin and counterspin is irritating and confusing" (Coleman and Moss 2016, 18). This may be because much coverage focuses on the 'horse-race', asking who won and who lost the debate, rather than revisiting the key issues (McKinney and Carlin 2004, 215). These features may contribute to wider perceptions of incivility (Cho et al. 2009), particularly since the media disproportionately emphasizes the negative features of the debate, such as attacks on other candidates (Benoit and Currie 2001; Reber and Benoit 2001). A content analysis of German news articles suggests that twice as much coverage is dedicated to the question of who won than to discussion of the debate's content (Maier and Faas 2011, 81).

Debates can also lead to increased TV coverage for candidates, particularly those deemed to have 'won', although these effects may be short-lived (Denemark, Ward, and Bean 2007, 102). Perhaps part of the

[37] This is a reference to Chaffee (1978). For these reasons, it appeared that the debates in the 2019 Canadian election had the potential to be particularly influential, with several party leaders contesting their first election and polls showing the Liberals and the Conservative Party quite close.

[38] They measure post-debate coverage with the following question: "Did you watch, follow, or listen to any of the news discussions right after the debate or the next morning?" (Winneg and Jamieson 2017, 368).

reason is that the pressure to provide polling and analysis immediately after the election leads to conclusions that do not hold up upon reflection (Chadwick 2011, 39). Not only do some candidates receive more coverage, but experimental and observational studies suggest that exposure to coverage can actually change viewers' perceptions of who 'won' the debate (Davis, Bowers, and Memon 2011; McKinney and Carlin 2004). The influence of the media on voters' perceptions understandably appears to be stronger for those who did not watch the debate, rather than those who did and are thus equipped to make their own evaluations (Tsfati 2003). While some evidence suggests that voters who watch the debates may learn more than those who don't watch (Benoit and Hansen 2004), Blais and Boyer (1996) warn that debate effects cannot be determined solely by comparing watchers and non-watchers since debates appear to have effects even beyond those who view them. Indeed, media coverage and social media may play a role in determining the total influence of debates.

Some voters follow debates primarily by following online discussion, rather than watching the debate itself (Vaccari, Chadwick, and O'Loughlin 2015). Viewers appear to use Twitter to address issues that are neglected in the actual debate (Trilling 2015); however, it seems that multitasking by watching the debate while also using social media may reduce the amount that viewers learn (Gottfried et al. 2017). Journalists and political elites can also shape Twitter discussion, as they garner retweets and engage in "real-time spin" (Wells et al. 2016). These users can have large numbers of followers, expanding the reach of the debate and perhaps leading more users to tune in (Chadwick 2011; Vaccari, Chadwick, and O'Loughlin 2015). While there is increasing integration of social media into debate coverage, many of these partnerships have "digital players ended up tailoring their offerings in ways that closely fitted with the broadcasters' and newspaper editors' requirements" (Chadwick 2011, 31).

The effects of media and social media coverage may disproportionately affect candidates based on their personal identities. For instance, debates are often framed and conceived of in stereotypically masculine terms, "as battles, sporting events or back street brawls" (Gidengil and Everitt 2003, 561). A study of the 1993 Canadian leaders' debates found that, although the female party leaders were not more aggressive than their male counterparts, media coverage disproportionately emphasized and negatively characterized their more combative contributions to the debate, perhaps because such behaviour is inconsistent with gender norms (Gidengil and Everitt 1999). Further research reinforced these findings and also suggested that women who choose to refrain from aggressive behaviour may receive less media coverage as a result (Gidengil and Everitt 2003). Evidence from the U.K. similarly finds that newspaper coverage judged women against stereotypically male standards (Harmer, Savigny, and Ward 2017).

Agenda-setting and issue salience

Findings about "whether or not those issues discussed during a debate influence viewers' issue salience" are mixed (McKinney and Carlin 2004, 205). Evidence from Canadian election debates over several decades suggests that "the longer an issue is debated by the leaders, the more it is reported by journalists" (Bastien 2018, 15). There is also some evidence that debate viewers take more issues into consideration when evaluating candidates, compared to non-viewers (Benoit and Hansen 2004, 136; Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003, 345). It is possible that those who watch debates are simply more likely to be interested in a variety of issues, although there is some evidence that this is not the case (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003, 348). However, some of these effects may also be related to other campaign or debate coverage (Benoit and Hansen 2004, 137).

While debates may have agenda-setting effects, participants do not necessarily have free reign to introduce topics that they believe will give them an advantage. Experimental evidence suggests that

viewers are capable of identifying 'spin' and may penalize candidates who deviate from the prompt or question provided by the moderator(s), unless the topic is also considered of great interest to citizens (Boydstun, Glazier, and Pietryka 2013).

Knowledge effects

One of the most well-supported findings in the existing literature is that debates play a role in helping citizens learn useful information. A meta-analysis of 13 studies finds that "watching debates has a positive effect on issue knowledge" (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003, 339). Post-debate coverage can also increase issue knowledge for non-viewers (Winneg and Jamieson 2017, 370–73). However, knowledge effects are likely heterogeneous, with viewers who know little about politics learning the most and politically knowledgeable viewers learning relatively little (Lee and Lee 2015). Additionally, the fact that voters tend to process information in different ways depending on their pre-existing beliefs and interests may affect how they learn from debates. Gottfried et al. (2014) find that viewers are most likely to learn information that is presented and uncontested. When a piece of information is contested, their evaluations of the candidates shapes whether they learn this information or not.

The process of learning from debates is likely to be more complicated in multi-party systems. Even when voters are confident that they know where the parties stand, they tend to be most accurate in their assessments on issues that parties have spent the most time speaking about and which chime with broader campaign messages (Meer, Walter, and Aelst 2016).

Yet, there are a number of methodological challenges that should give us caution in interpreting evidence about learning among viewers. Jamieson (2015, 88–89) contends that survey respondents often report watching a debate that they did not watch (or only saw part of), although this is less of a problem if researchers measure knowledge of content from the actual debates, in which case findings would underestimate the amount of learning among viewers. While it has long been agreed that it is "a mistake to attempt to measure issue learning from a debate with questionnaire items concerning the candidates' stands on abortion if abortion was not discussed in that debate" (Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003, 347), this imposes logistical challenges for researchers developing research questions.[39] Furthermore, viewers may be hearing information and drawing the relevant inferences without retaining the underlying information (Jamieson 2015, 90), although this would also understate the effect of learning from debates. However, citizens may also draw incorrect inferences from facts that they learn through debates, a phenomenon that candidates may take advantage of by selectively presenting information in a misleading way (Maurer and Reinemann 2006).

Candidate performance and perception

Debates may change viewers' evaluations of candidate character and their competence, although there is stronger evidence that debates change perceptions of character rather than competence (Benoit and Hansen 2004; Benoit, Hansen, and Verser 2003, 340–45). For instance, the 2016 U.S. presidential debates appears to have done little to change viewers' evaluations of candidate competency.[40] Although even if evaluations of character change, debates do not appear to increase the degree to which viewers find it an important determinant of vote choice (Benoit, McKinney, and Lance Holbert 2001, 267–68).

---

[39] Additionally, "instruments that ask which candidate supports a position but fail to include the options "both" and "neither" will have difficulty winnowing the guesses from actual knowledge" (Jamieson 2015, 89).

[40] Measured with the following question: "Which of the two major party candidates is qualified to be president of the United States: Hillary Clinton, Donald Trump, neither, or both equally (pre- and post-debates)?"

The effects of debates on candidate perceptions is likely to be determined, in part, by how well-known the participants are prior to the debate (Holbrook 1999; Senior 2008a, 453). This likely explains why primary debates appear to have consistently larger effects on evaluations of candidates than general election debates and why challengers often benefit in initial debates against incumbents, whose evaluations remain more stable (McKinney and Warner 2013, 246–47, 254; Yawn and Beatty 2000, 280). Since Canada does not have primary debates, it may be the case that the effects of the leaders' debates may be larger. On the other hand, there is some evidence from the U.S. and Canada that incumbents are not disadvantaged by debates (Blais and Perrella 2008).

Political efficacy

Political information efficacy is "the level of confidence one has in their political knowledge and that one possesses sufficient knowledge to engage the political process through such behaviors as voting and persuading others how to vote" (McKinney and Warner 2013, 242). Debates have been shown to increase voters' confidence and may be more effective than other efforts for young voters (McKinney, Rill, and Thorson 2014).

Partisan polarization and mobilization

Debates generally reinforce existing vote choice and party identity, although there are circumstances under which debates can lead partisans to support an out-party candidate (Senior 2008a, 456). Debates have little effect on out-party viewers although "debates do enhance support from the partisan ingroup and […] the nature of this effect varies considerably across debates" (Warner et al. 2019, 13). Jamieson and Birdsell (1988) similarly point out that "debates don't very often convert partisans on one side to the other" (p. 161).

A quasi-experimental study suggests that the effects of polarization are largest among viewers who are least polarized to begin with, suggesting that debates allow them to resolve uncertainty and ambivalence in ways that might produce more political engagement (McKinney and Warner 2013). This may be because partisans process information in a biased way, which makes debates polarizing events as they are forced to "experience messages with which they may disagree" (Warner and McKinney 2013, 519).

Debate exposure appears to increase political talk and discussing the debate with others may change voters' perceptions of who 'won' the debate (Tsfati 2003, 78). Evidence suggests "that the reinforcement effects may occur partly due to political conversation encouraged by negative, debate induced emotions about the opposed candidate" (Cho and Choy 2011, 795). On the other hand, these effects might be driven by other campaign activities or post-debate media coverage (Cho and Ha 2012, 201).

Vote choice

Despite some disagreement about whether the importance of party leaders has increased over time or not, party leaders in Westminster democracies appear to impact vote choice, even for those who do not vote directly for the leader (Senior 2008a, 44–45; Bittner 2018; Gidengil et al. 2000). Evidence from several countries suggests that leaders' debates can influence vote choice, although the effect may be larger for non-partisans than partisans (Blais et al. 2003; Maier and Faas 2011, 88; Senior 2008a, 456–58). Debates may also be capable of increasing voters' confidence in their vote choice (Benoit, McKinney, and Lance Holbert 2001).

How big of an effect do debates have? It may depend on the context of the election and the margin by which the public perceives a particular candidate to have 'won' the debate (Senior 2008a, 460–62).

Among a U.S. student sample, roughly 87% of respondents do not change their anticipated vote choice immediately after watching a debate, although much larger changes occur among those who watch primary election debates (McKinney and Warner 2013, 245–46). Evidence from the 1988 Canadian election finds that the debates were responsible for a shift in votes of somewhere between 6 and 12 percentage points between the 2nd and 3rd place parties (Blais and Boyer 1996, 161). Blais et al. find that in the 2000 election, "the debate produced a permanent increase of four points in both [Joe] Clark's ratings and Conservative vote intentions" (Blais et al. 2003, 46).

Partisans tend to evaluate their own party's candidates positively; however, voters who believe that a different party's leader won the debate do appear to change their evaluation of those leaders and are more willing to change their vote (Maier and Faas 2011, 84–86; Pattie and Johnston 2011, 161, 170).

Turnout

There is relatively little research that investigates the effects of debates on voter turnout. Some have suggested that debates may increase turnout by mobilizing voters who are not generally interested in politics (Maier and Faas 2011, 83) or that the effect of debates on turnout are largely indirect and thus difficult to measure (Benoit, McKinney, and Lance Holbert 2001).

Viewership

If debates are to serve as a focal point in campaigns that draws in even voters who are not particularly attentive to politics, it stands to reason that a larger number of viewers would be preferable. Unfortunately, there is relatively little research that explores debate viewership. Audience sizes usually decline with each successive debate in a single campaign, but we lack estimates of how many viewers tuned in to a previous debate versus how many new viewers are catching up.

There have also been relatively few studies that look at how the broader political context shapes how many people tune into a debate. Although Maier and Faas compared survey results to audience share numbers and found that surveys may overstate debate viewership (Maier and Faas 2011, 78). More research has been done on the individual characteristics that lead voters to tune into debates. Various U.S. studies suggest that the "Audience watching all of a given debate was older, more educated, had higher household incomes, and expressed stronger party identification in comparison to non-viewers," as are those who are following the campaign closely (Kenski and Hall Jamieson 2011, 319; Kenski and Stroud 2005). Evidence from Germany largely confirms these findings, suggesting that political interest, party identification, and age drive the choice to tune in (Maier and Faas 2011, 80–81).

Debate quality and format

Theoretically, we have good reasons to believe that the effects of debates will be shaped not only by the broader public context, but also the quality and content of the debates themselves. These features are shaped by various choices about the debate format, such as who participates, who moderates, and who poses questions. Both citizens and experts have indicated how they believe debates should be designed in order to produce political events that attract attention and allow voters to learn what they need to know to act as citizens. McKinney and Carlin argue that debates suffer from "insufficient opportunity for follow-up questioning, thus allowing candidates to avoid responding to particular queries, or tight controls on candidate responses that prohibit direct candidate exchange or clash, thus limiting comparison of campaign issues" (McKinney and Carlin 2004, 219). This conclusion is also based on several years' worth of focus group discussions that generally find that citizens "prefer a debate series featuring a

variety of debate formats" and wish to see more discussion of issues of public interest rather than candidate character (McKinney and Carlin 2004, 220). However, citizens also think of debates as opportunities for candidates to be held accountable, seeing them as akin to a job interview (Coleman and Moss 2016, 9), and raising the need for citizen involvement in the debate process.

An influential white paper by the Racine Group (The Racine Group 2002, 214) suggested that future research should focus more on the format of the debates:

"Over the past decade, especially, we have experimented with formats including the single moderator, the town hall, and the talk show. Research is needed on the differential effects of these and other possible formats. On the other hand, we have not experimented to a significant degree with such format variables as length of statements, opportunity for follow-up questions and answers, and specificity of topics for debate. In the abstract, we can imagine changes in each of these variables that would seem to facilitate more focused clash, more probing discussions, and more sustained interaction. Whether these results actually occur and whether they correlate with improved voter learning and satisfaction are questions needing to be tested."

Debate quality

While there is an increasing amount of research that focuses on the differential effects of debate formats on issue salience, learning, political efficacy, or vote choice, many of these studies neglect to account for the quality of debate. That is, we may expect that some portion of the effects of format changes operate through their capacity to change the quality of debate. For instance, it seems plausible that citizens may learn more when debates are of high quality. Yet, the standards of political debate are distinctly – and appropriately – different than the standards of, say, academic debate (Cho and Choy 2011, 792). How then, should we assess the quality of debate?

Several scholars have suggested that theories of deliberative democracy provide insight into how to measure debate quality. For instance, Coleman writes that "debate without voting would be insufficient for the realization of democracy, as would be voting without any public deliberation" (Coleman 2000, 1). Similarly, Marien et al. (2019, 3–4) worry that debates create incentives for soundbites rather than policy deliberation in ways that encourage uncivil discussion that ultimately reduces political learning and increases cynicism. It appears that deliberative standards for debates have long been implicitly held by voters (Rowland 2018) and earlier studies that compared televised debates against other forms of political communication in terms of their capacity to provide justifications (The Racine Group 2002, 207).

Empirical studies of deliberation often apply the deliberative quality index (DQI), which measures interruptions, the provision of justifications, the degree to which justifications refer to the common good, expressions of (dis)respect, the acknowledgement of counterarguments, and indicators of a search for consensus.[41] There is also wide acknowledgement that a modification of the DQI is necessary since debates are embedded within strategic and competitive election campaigns where the search for consensus is unlikely and perhaps even inappropriate. Davidson et al. outline the three aspects of deliberation that debates appear most capable of addressing – providing justifications, responding to counterarguments, and reasoning around the common good – but conclude from their content analysis

[41] Other studies measure combative debate performances with indicators such as use of the pronoun 'you', referring to other leaders by name, interrupting other speakers, pointing, or making a clenched fist (Gidengil and Everitt 1999, 53).

that the main advantage of debates, in comparison to debates in the House of Commons, is that "participants felt much more often compelled to justify their positions" (Davidson et al. 2017, 197).

However, Davidson et al. (2017, 198) suggest that the DQI alone understates the benefits of election debates, suggesting the need to add an additional criterion: "the degree to which they encourage public debate and participation in other areas of the deliberative system." Indeed, studies suggest that debates can lead citizens to discuss politics with their friends and family, although not their co-workers (Cho and Choy 2011; Cho and Ha 2012). This approach suggests the need to consider how debates are integrated with other democratic institutions. A recent study investigating the deliberative quality of election debates in the U.K., Germany, and the Netherlands found that despite having more "Electoral rules that foster power-sharing do not seem to enhance the deliberative qualities of televised debates" (Marien, Goovaerts, and Elstub 2019, 16). Others have proposed having a representative panel of citizens deliberate about questions to be asked during the debates or to have the debates precede a national 'Deliberation Day' (Ackerman and Fishkin 2004).

However, the lack of movement in the polls after the 2016 presidential debates suggests that voters, at least in the United States, may not punish candidates who do not "lay out their positions, provide evidence for those positions, and treat their opponent respectfully" (Rowland 2018, 90). This raises questions about whether debates are capable of accomplishing their apparent functions of connecting voters and political elites. Indeed, disrespectful comments or unjustified assertions may receive substantial coverage in post-debate discussion and media coverage, propelled in part by candidates who amplify their own positive press and engage in feuding that draws attention (Cornfield 2017). Marien et al. (2019, 3) contend that these kinds of non-deliberative discourses may undermine the capacity of debates to educate citizens. More empirical investigation of this possibility is required, although the 2016 U.S. Presidential debate offers a suggestive example of how candidates can misinform.[42] In the debate Donald Trump misrepresented Hilary Clinton's position on the Trans Pacific Partnership and post-debate surveys revealed a "significant increase in the number of viewers who [wrongly] believed that Hillary Clinton supported TPP" (Winneg and Jamieson 2017, 374).

Participation

Much of the anticipation and controversy that precedes debates concerns who will participate. Incumbents often have little to gain from participating while new parties and small parties are frequently excluded. Accommodating a greater number of participants can be done through several different formats and may have effects on voter learning. However, it is not only the number of participants that matters, but also their manner of interacting with other candidates.

The National Democratic Institute (2019) points out that participation criteria are often controversial and so debate sponsoring organizations should be transparent about the criteria, use multi-faceted criteria, and be prepared for legal challenges and public criticism. They outline several commonly used types of criteria, such as evidence of public support (e.g. poll results, official party status), organized political force (e.g. national party structure, raised a threshold amount of money through fundraising), legal eligibility to run for office, and a commitment to non-violence. Where there are multiple debates, different debates may have different participation criteria. Rogers (2009, 42) contends that the French-

[42] Of course, citizens are also capable of misunderstanding accurate information presented in debates, although earlier estimates that 25% of debate content was misunderstood suffer notable methodological challenges (Jacoby, Troutman, and Whittler 1986).

and English-language debates should both apply the participation thresholds on the basis of support in predominantly French and English ridings.

There is some debate about whether the participation of party leaders should be compulsory, in particular because the incumbent prime minister often has the smallest incentive to participate but the prime minister's refusal to participate can also scuttle the planning of debates. Some countries, such as Ukraine (Rogers 2009, 39) compel participation by party leaders. Several unsuccessful legislative proposals in the United States have attempted to compel participation by making receipt of federal funding dependent on participation (Eisner 1993, 981) and South Korea has considered similar proposals (National Election Commission 2017). Existing research does not address the effect of the party system on participation. In other words, it seems plausible that debates may still take place where there are multiple other parties willing to participate and this may even increase the amount of pressure on those who would refuse.

What are the effects of more inclusive participation criteria? A study of the United Kingdom's 2015 election debates indicates that including the leaders of small challenger parties may broaden the scope of debate topics (Allen, Bara, and Bartle 2017). On the other hand, a debate with "four to eight politicians is likely to incur misunderstandings" since ideologically similar parties seek to differentiate themselves, "making it more problematic for voters to get a clear overview of the party landscape" (Meer, Walter, and Aelst 2016, 151).

Indeed, multi-candidate debates "reduce the amount of time each candidate has to respond, the number of topics covered, depth of analysis, opportunities for defense as well as attack, and the direction of candidates' address" (The Racine Group 2002, 205). Other studies suggest that the number of participants does not appear to change the frequency of attacks on other candidates (Maier and Jansen 2017, 556), although the particular participants do seem to affect the nature of criticism in debates. Evidence from multiple Western democracies suggests that right-wing populist candidates play a significant role in diminishing the deliberative quality of debates, offering fewer justifications and making disrespectful statements (Marien, Goovaerts, and Elstub 2019; Rowland 2018). This suggests that there may be trade-offs between inclusion and debate quality that organizers need to consider carefully.

The presence of an audience appears to reduce the amount of aggression among participants (Carlin, Morris, and Smith 2001; Kaid, McKinney, and Tedesco 2000), although evidence from Germany suggests that there is no significant effect (Maier and Jansen 2017, 555). Citizens do not appear to feel strongly about the presence or absence of an audience (Bailey 2011, 19).

Moderation and questioning

While the debate format in the U.S. remained largely consistent for roughly 30 years, the U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates began to experiment with changes in response to citizen complaints throughout the 1990s. Largely in response to findings from focus groups, the CPD switched from a panel of journalists to a single moderator, made speaking interactions less rigid to encourage candidate clash, reduced the number of issues discussed in order to encourage more in-depth discussion, and developed opportunities for citizen participation.

Citizens voiced their distaste for scripted interactions and brainstormed ways of forcing candidates to be more authentic, perhaps by having moderators push candidates to "justify unsubstantiated claims" (Coleman and Moss 2016, 12). One of the co-founders of the Commission on Presidential Debates agrees, suggesting the need for a debate "without canned speeches, and with opportunities for the candidates to question one another and for citizens to question candidates directly" (Minow and LaMay 2008, 105).

Citizens have also lamented the disconnect between viewers and participants, with several of them contemplating ways to allow citizens to ask questions or influence the topics addressed (Coleman and Moss 2016, 15). While it is common to have journalists ask questions, their professional norms tend to lead them to focus on references to elite sources, such as media coverage or academic research, much more often than concerns raised by members of the public (Turcotte 2017). Gender dynamics also affect the substance of debates as "issues mattering most to women voters are nonetheless muted in the debate agenda regardless of journalist gender. What's more, the presence of a women candidate does little to improve the agenda inequities" (Turcotte and Paul 2015, 782).

The interests of journalists to create compelling news may also lead them to ask 'soft news' questions that emphasize image, tactics, or scandal over policy detail as well as questions that use cynical and polarizing frames more often than in debates where citizens pose questions (Minow and LaMay 2008, 107; Turcotte 2014, 2015).[43] On the other hand, some of the knowledge effects attributed to debates may actually be the result of journalists who "[embed] clear accurate information in the questions themselves" (Winneg and Jamieson 2017, 374).

A study by Kaid et al. (2000, 174) found that in the 1996 U.S. Presidential Debates, the questions posed by citizens in a townhall-style debate reflected issues of public concern more closely than the questions asked in the moderated debate. While McKinney (2005) acknowledges that journalists can raise important issues that might not be highly salient for the public, he finds that the major issues of public concerns are better represented in debates when moderators do not screen citizen questions, when citizens are permitted to ask follow up questions, and when candidates are allowed to pose questions to citizens as well. These tendencies have been compounded by a tendency of moderators to "increasingly hijack the town hall format by interjecting with their own agenda of questions" (Turcotte 2014, 784).

Rogers (Rogers 2009, 44) argues that "Local experts, policy analysts and members of the public should direct questions to the candidates, and candidates should be able to direct questions amongst themselves." It seems plausible that candidates would likely pose questions that reflected the same incentives as those held by members of the press: to emphasize image or scandal that will be covered in the news.

However, it is not merely the content of questions that matters but their structure. Several U.S. presidential debates "enabled the moderator to ask a series of follow-up questions and to build the follow-ups on responses to previous questions. The result was a longer period of time spent on an issue and a more positive response for the format and for the information received by the viewers" (The Racine Group 2002, 205). However, the Racine Group also notes that follow-up questions are often omitted from multi-candidate debates due to time constraints (The Racine Group 2002, 205). Evidence from the United Kingdom also suggests that viewers wish to see follow-up questions – from both citizens and moderators – particularly on issues where "leaders themselves may be reluctant to engage with each other" (Bailey 2011, 19).

Number of debates

How many debates should there be? In the United States, the "FCC claimed that "exempting broadcaster sponsored debates should serve to increase the number of such events, which would ultimately benefit the public" (quoted in Modrzejewska 2014, 102). In Canada, there have similarly been calls for a greater

[43] Somewhat surprisingly, it appears that questions non-commercial news organizations are more likely to pose 'soft news' questions (Turcotte 2015, 251).

number of debates, with some suggesting that "Voters crave them" (Hurst 2019). Yet, the question of whether a greater number of debates is a clear democratic good is somewhat complicated.

While multiple debates may have a large impact by allowing voters to develop a clearer picture of the candidates (Senior 2008a, 453), research suggests that there are diminishing effects for each debate past the first one (Holbrook 1999; Winneg and Jamieson 2017, 369). Multiple debates might also fragment the audience, reducing their capacity to serve as a focusing moment in the election. As a result, it is worth looking at the rationales that might explain why some jurisdictions host multiple debates in order to weigh the possible trade-offs.

One rationale for organizing multiple debates might be to avoid having too many candidates on one stage, which may reduce debate quality. For example, "In the run-up to the 2013 parliamentary election in Austria, the top candidates of the six major parties faced off in pairwise debates, leading to a total of 15 debates between the different candidates" (Wagner 2017, 534–35). An alternative approach is to host separate debates for major and minor party leaders, as was done in the 1993 Canadian election (Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs 2018, 8) and the 2015 U.K. election. Other similar proposals suggest holding an earlier debate with multiple party leaders and a debate closer to election day that only includes the two highest-polling party leaders who have a chance of winning office or forming government (2009, 44).

Another rationale is to address multilingual audiences. Since 1984, Canada has had at least two debates per election due to the decision to host separate English- and French-language debates (Rogers 2009, 19).

Another rationale for hosting multiple debates may be to focus on particular issues. While there is little research on this subject, hosting separate debates on particular issues may broaden the set of viewers by attracting attention from individuals who care about particular issues. However, this may not address the problem of substantive debate since even across three debates on separate issues, the U.K. experience suggests that "similar soundbites and arguments came to be repeated ad nauseam" (Pattie and Johnston 2011, 151).

Lastly, more debates could provide time for more substantive policy discussion. The former chair of Canada's broadcast consortium once wrote that it is absurd that the "complexity of a federal election in Canada was reduced to two hours of debating time" (Burman 2008). On the other hand, this might simply allow more time for candidates to repeat their talking points, suggesting the need for an overall assessment of the format.

Timing of the debates

Some countries usually host debates early in the campaign, such as Australia, while others usually host them near the end of the campaign, such as France, Germany, and Denmark (Senior 2008a, 453). Debates late in the campaign are normally seen as advantageous to leaders who are behind in the polls, while "a limited number of debates, or a single debate, held early in the campaign, represents a viable strategic alternative to a refusal to debate" (Leduc 1990, 126)

Unfortunately, there is a relative absence of evidence regarding the effect of debate timing.

While there has been some speculation that the timing of the debates may affect the level of attacks and negative comments by participants, evidence from Germany suggests that there may not be any such relationship (Maier and Jansen 2017). It also seems plausible that the larger the period between the

debates and election day, the smaller the effect of the debate will be as it is drowned out by the rest of the campaign (Senior 2008a, 453).

It is not merely the date of the debate that matters, but also the time at which it is broadcast. Canada's multiple time zones have also stirred controversy over when to broadcast a debate so as to allow as many viewers as possible to watch it live (Dawson 2019). Chadwick (2011, 27) also describes how scheduling of the 2010 U.K. election debates affects viewership and media coverage:

All three ran on Thursday evenings, in television's hallowed 8–10 p.m. prime time. This schedule ensured close temporal integration with the rhythms of the British media's regular politics, commentary and opinion cycle, which now reaches a crescendo with the weekend newspapers and the Sunday political television shows. BBC and ITV, the major television news players, run their main nightly news shows at 10 p.m. The scheduling meant that they could guarantee immediate post-debate coverage in these regular bulletins. Thursday evenings have also long been the favoured slot for the influential political discussion show, Question Time, which was aired as usual on the BBC soon after each debate (2011, 27).

Production decisions

Using split-screens appears to heighten conflict as it characterizes a debate as "a contest between opponents who display their contempt and disagreement for one another with every nonverbal, off-handed gesture, inaudible sigh, and shift in body language" (Cho et al. 2009, 245). Experimental evidence suggests that some candidates benefit from split-screening debates while other candidates benefit from single-candidate shots (Scheufele, Kim, and Brossard 2007).

Some debates have also featured real-time interaction integrated into the production of the debate. Perhaps the most infamous example is the 'worm', which is essentially a trendline that represents the approval or disapproval of what is happening during the debate, calculated in real-time as the debate is airing by averaging the responses of a small sample of viewers who each turn a dial to indicate positive or negative responses. The worm has been used in Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S. and studies suggest that viewers' evaluations of candidate performance are influenced by the worm (Davis, Bowers, and Memon 2011). Other examples include live commenting functions for online viewers or the real-time sentiment analysis of messages posted to social media (Chadwick 2011); however, these tools have been criticized for being "unrepresentative, nontransparent, and in some cases easily manipulated" (Chadwick 2011, 33) given the fact that they do not meet traditional polling standards (e.g. small, non-random samples).

Debate sponsoring organizations

While debates around the world are united by some common goals, they also differ significantly in their structure and organization. Debate sponsoring organizations (which organize the debate) may be constituted of a single organization or a coalition of non-governmental organizations, election authorities, broadcast regulation bodies, or media associations. Both the emergence of debates as a regular occurrence and the creation of organizations designed specifically to organize election debates seem to be more likely when all parties see possible advantage in them (Bailey 2011; LeDuc and Price 1985; Minow and LaMay 2008, 63–65). This may be the case when there is no incumbent, the incumbent is behind in the polls, parties have unfamiliar leaders, or the polls show a close race. However, no matter their makeup, there is wide agreement that debate sponsoring organizations must be impartial and independent, and have a reputation for credibility that ensures continued support for debates by candidates, the public, and the

media. Rogers (2009, 40) similarly contends that, whatever institutional structures are put in place, "transparency in election debates is essential."

Argentina

In 2016, Argentina amended its electoral code to require participation of presidential candidates in two debates (Mercado 2019). The debates are organized by the National Electoral Chamber and must take place between 20 days and 7 days prior to the election. If a run-off election is required, a third debate must be held within ten days of the final vote. One debate must be held outside of the capital city. The format is to be determined by the National Electoral Chamber in consultation with candidates, academics, and civil society groups.

Australia

Media companies have organized televised leaders' debates in Australia since 1984 (Rogers 2009, 33). While the Australian Broadcasting Corporation originally organized debates, other broadcasters have also hosted the debates. To date, only the leaders of the Labour and Liberal parties have ever participated in leaders' debates, despite small-scale electoral successes for other parties and calls to issue invitations to them (Anstead 2016, 518). The number of debates in the election campaign fluctuates, with three debates held in the 1993, 2013, 2016, and 2019 elections and only one debate in the 1990, 1998, 2001, 2007, and 2010 elections (Senior 2008b, 447). The format has also been altered over time, such as having one moderator or a panel of five moderators representing Australia's major media interests (Rogers 2009, 36).

Legislation to create an independent debates commission to organize "3 or more debates between the leaders of each party that is a registered political party within the period of 3 months prior to each general election for the House of Representatives" failed to pass in 2013. In the 2019 election, party negotiations appear to have limited the number of debates, generating public criticism (Dobell 2019). The leaders of the Labour and Liberal parties recently indicated renewed support for the idea of an independent debates commission (Grattan 2019).

France

France has broadcast presidential debates since 1974 and there has been one at every presidential election except in 2002, when incumbent president Jacques Chirac refused to debate the Front National's Jean-Marie Le Pen (Houchard 2012). The national broadcast regulator has a mandate to ensure that election debates allocate time to candidates equally during certain periods of the campaign, in accordance with laws governing French election coverage. Because France uses a two-round system for electing a president, in which a wider field of candidates is reduced to a final vote between two candidates, debates have traditionally only been held prior to the final round. This makes it clear who is eligible to participate and makes it easy to divide speaking time equally. However, the 2017 election introduced a first-round debate featuring the five candidates who ranked highest in the polls at the time (Antkowiak 2017).

Germany

Two-candidate TV debates in Germany started in 2002 in a format called TV-Duelle, and only the leaders of the two major parties—the Christian Democratic Unions and the Social Democratic Party— have ever been invited (Maier and Faas 2011). Inclusion in the TV-Duelle is based on tests measuring former, present, and probable future electoral success of the party (Anstead 2016, 516). In 2013, an Elephantenrunden (elephant-round) debate, which invites leaders of all parties holding a seat in the

Bundestag (Maier and Faas 2011, 75), was added alongside the TV-Duelle, although the leaders of the two major parties sent a senior representative instead (Anstead 2016, 517).

Jamaica

The Jamaica Debates Commission stages national and local political debates. It was formed in 2002 as a partnership between the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce and the Media Association of Jamaica and it has applied to be recognized as an official charity (daCosta 2018). The Commission has organized three debates each year for national elections in 2002, 2007, and 2011: one on social issues, one on economic issues, and a final debate between the leaders (daCosta 2018).

The broadcasts of the debate are fully funded by the private sector; there is no government support. All the debates have included two parties, but other parties may join provided they have a written constitution and have received either more than 10% of the votes cast in the previous election or have 15% of support in a recognized national public opinion poll (daCosta 2018).

Spain

Televised debates between candidates of the two major parties returned to the Spanish political scene for the first time since 1993 in 2008. They were hosted by the Academy of Television and broadcast by public and private television stations (Sampedro and Seoane Pérez 2008, 337). In the 2015 election campaign, there were four debates – two organized by major television stations, one organized by the newspaper El Pais, and one organized by a student group at a university – although the Prime Minister only agreed to participate in one of the television debates (Orriols and Cordero 2016, 479,488). While media companies are primarily responsible for organizing debates, Spain's electoral commission has the capacity to determine who is allowed to participate. Despite an invitation from the broadcaster Atresmedia, the electoral commission stated that the leader of the Vox party would not be allowed to participate in a televised debate "since it does not hold any seats in the national parliament and attracted a very small percentage of the vote in the last general election" (Spanish far-right Vox party banned from TV debate 2019).

South Korea

Debates in South Korea are organized by the National Election Broadcasting Debate Commission (NEBDC), which was established in 2004 by the National Election Commission. The goal of the Commission is to promote "policy-oriented debates in democratic elections" (National Election Commission n.d.). The NEBDC pursues this goal for broadcast debates at the national and local levels. The NEBDC is comprised of 11 people, including one from each of the parties within the national assembly, one from each public broadcaster, academics, and members of civic groups. Commissioners are appointed for a three year term.

Parties are eligible to participate in debates if they are eligible for national subsidies (National Election Commission 2013). Debates have been organized in different ways, with questions being posed by participants, by a professional panel (which may include academics or business people), or citizens (National Election Commission 2013). The NEBDC has used surveys to determine themes for debates (National Election Commission 2013).

The NEBDC also undertakes efforts to educate citizens about debates, organizes events to improve the debate process, and to help candidates learn about debates (National Election Commission 2016, 2018).

Mexico

Mexico requires that two debates are held for presidential elections, although candidates are not required to participate (ACE Project n.d.). Debates are generally organized by the National Electoral Institute (formerly the Federal Electoral Institute), which is the independent government body responsible for organizing federal elections (ACE Project n.d.). The Institute negotiates with individual networks and media outlets to arrange for the debates' broadcast, which the networks could access for free (Debates Presidenciales 2012). Debates are also transmitted online, including streaming on Facebook Live (Facebook 2018). The format of the debates has varied in response to criticisms and other entities, such as the student-movement Yosoy132, have also organized debates in the past (Council on Hemispheric Affairs 2012).

Panama

Presidential debates in Panama are now organized by the Electoral Tribunal under section 234 of the Electoral Code (Richards 2018). The tribunal is required to hold two debates, one within 30 days of the end of the nomination period and one within 15 days of election day (Richards 2018). It appears as though all presidential candidates are invited, although the order of their participation is determined through random draw (Tribunal revela orden de participación para el primer debate presidencial 2019).

Trinidad and Tobago

The Trinidad and Tobago Debates Commission was created by the Chamber of Industry and Commerce in 2010 as an independent and autonomous organisation charged with organising electoral debates and with making debating an established part of the democratic process (About Us 2015). To participate, a party must run candidates for at least 50% of the available seats or have 12.5% support in recent polls (Kumar 2018).

The Commission has no legal standing and relies on no government support (Kumar 2018). Without such status and without strong media partnerships, the Commission has not succeeded in organizing a national leaders' debate, although it has organized various local and provincial leaders' debates (Kumar 2018). The cost of organising and broadcasting debates is borne by businesses in Trinidad and Tobago and public supporters (About Us 2015).

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is a recent adopter of the televised campaign debate. Given the U.K.'s ban on political advertising on television, debates are an important way for candidates to make their platform and themselves known to viewers (Benoit and Benoit-Bryan 2013, 464). In the U.K., debates are viewed as a private arrangement between broadcasters and political parties, leading to considerable negotiation around participation (Anstead 2016, 519). While broadcasters had made numerous attempts to organize debates from 1964 onward, negotiations frequently broke down as party leaders refused to participate (Rogers 2009, 32–33).

In 2010, the Labour, Conservative, and Liberal Democrat leaders debated on three separate occasions in the U.K.'s first televised debates (Benoit and Benoit-Bryan 2013, 463). According to Pattie and Johnson (2011, 150)

The debates were spread across different TV channels (BBC, ITV and Sky each getting one) and over three weeks of the campaign: on 15, 22 and 29 April. Although each took a different policy area

(domestic, foreign and economic affairs respectively) as its primary focus, the basic format varied little from broadcaster to broadcaster. They involved brief (1–1.5 minute) opening and closing statements from each leader, questions from a studio audience (which was allowed neither to ask follow-up questions nor to show approval or disapproval of the respective answers), short answer periods and limited opportunities for the leaders to challenge what each other had said.

The 2015 election included many smaller debates – including one between only the leaders of parties who were not currently in government – but there would only be one principal television debate including all seven major parties (Anstead 2016, 518). The 2017 election saw two large debates among seven party leaders, although Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May refused to participate in either debate, Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn took part in the second one (Peck 2017; Rivals attack May for missing TV debate 2017).

United States

The first televised debate in the United States took place in 1960, although the next one did not occur until 1976 due to section 315 of the Communications Act, which required that broadcasters provide equal time to candidates. A new interpretation of the law allowed debates to resume in 1976 and the League of Women Voters began to organize debates. However, due to concerns about the long-term stability of this arrangement and its capacity to ensure participation of candidates, steps were taken by the chairs of the Republican and Democratic National Committees to organize an alternative (Minow and LaMay 2008, 63–64).

Debates are now organized by the Commission on Presidential Debates (CPD), which initially negotiated with Presidential candidates and their parties regarding the timing, format, and moderators of the debates. Since 2004 the Commission has not allowed candidates to negotiate these features (Minow and LaMay 2008, 73–74). Candidates are invited to participate if they are on the ballot in enough states to potentially win the election and have more than 15% support in a set of five national polls (Commission on Presidential Debates 2016). Prior to 2000, the criteria included (1) evidence of national organization, (2) signs of national newsworthiness and competitiveness, and (3) indicators of national public enthusiasm or concern, to determine whether a candidate had a realistic chance of election (Commission on Presidential Debates 2019).

The format of debates in the United States has changed over time, although generally they allow for opening and closing statements as well as two-minute responses to questions from each candidate on a variety of topics with follow-up questions by the moderator. The town-hall format, which allows citizens to ask questions, was introduced in 1992. Most election campaigns have featured two or three ninety-minute debates.

The CPD is a non-profit that receives funding primarily from the communities that host the debates and various corporate and private donors (Commission on Presidential Debates 2019). Between elections the Commission on Presidential Debates advises other countries on debate planning, assists media and civil society groups on the organization of state or local debates, and plans for the upcoming presidential debates (Minow and LaMay 2008, 65–66).

The history of debates in Canada

The first televised leaders' debate in 1968 saw the Liberal party demand that all parties with MPs in the house be present, although the Social Credit party leader was only allowed to participate for the final forty-five minutes. The Liberals also demanded that the debate be bilingual, although they conceded that interpretation could be used (Rogers 2009, 18). This debate was two hours long and did not allow for rebuttals. As a result, it has been criticized for essentially being a joint press conference rather than a real debate (Rogers 2009, 18).

In 1979, the broadcast networks organizing the debate – CBC, CTV, and Global – "decided to exclude Fabien Roy, of the Ralliement des créditistes because his party was running candidates in only Quebec, and he did not speak English" (Rogers 2009, 18). The 1979 and 1984 debates included the Liberal, Progressive Conservative, and NDP party leaders and were "conducted pairwise in three separate segments by the three leaders" (Leduc 1990, 125). The 1988 debates similarly broke down debate into three one-hour blocks that allowed each leader to debate another, one-on-one (Rogers 2009, 19).

The 1993 debates were two and a half hours long. These debates were notable because they allowed citizens from the audience to pose questions for the first time and the organizing broadcast consortium invited the leaders of smaller parties – the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party – against the wishes of the larger parties (Rogers 2009, 19). The format allowed party leaders to make opening statements, followed by five topics introduced by a panel of three journalists, followed by audience questions, and closing remarks. The 1997 and 2000 debates were similar in length and format, although the 1997 and 2000 debates featured only four topics. (The 2000 debate would also be the return of a two-hour format that would continue with the exception of the 2015 Maclean's National Leaders' Debate.) In 2000, there was also a separate debate for smaller parties that included "Natural Law Party, the Marijuana Party, the Green Party, the Canadian Action Party, the Communist Party, and the Marxist-Leninist Party" (Rogers 2009, 19–20).

The 2004 debates abandoned questions from citizens in favour of a panel of journalists and tackled four topics over two hours with each question permitting both one-on-one exchanges and an open debate between all four participants. Each leader was also able to provide an opening and closing statement. The 2004 election English debates were criticized for devolving "into a two-hour, four-person, non-stop shouting match, interrupted by the occasional question" (Waddell and Dornan 2006, 246). As a result, the 2006 election campaign featured four debates, two in English and two in French, which was made easier by a long election campaign that started in 2015 and was punctuated by Christmas and New Year's holidays (Rogers 2009, 20). These featured a more rigid format in which leaders answered specific questions – submitted by citizens in the December debate and by broadcasters in the January debate – and other leaders could only briefly reply to those answers within strict time limits and without interruption by the other leaders (Rogers 2009, 20; Waddell and Dornan 2006, 246). While reporters dismissed the format as boring, polls suggest that citizens outside of Quebec preferred the new format over the previous one, whereas the opposite was true within Quebec (Waddell and Dornan 2006, 247).

The 2008 debates changed the format to have the party leaders seated around a table, rather than standing at podiums. The English leaders' debate featured eight video-recorded questions that were submitted by the public and selected by a panel of journalists (Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs 2018, 11). Candidates received time to respond to each question without interruption, followed by an open debate. There were no opening or closing statements. The 2008 debate was also the first time that Green Party Leader Elizabeth May was invited to participate, although this nearly led to NDP leader Jack Layton and Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper refusing to participate (2008 leaders' debate n.d.). The 2011 debate adopted a similar format, with leaders responding to six questions submitted by citizens. However, there were also some differences. Candidates returned to their podiums, Elizabeth May was not invited, and candidates were provided with the opportunity to make closing statements.

From 1984 to 2011, the debates were organized by the broadcast consortium of CBC, CTV, Global, Radio-Canada, and TVA. During this period, debates were "completely produced and financed by the Consortium. Each network provides 20% of the funds needed, and other, non-Consortium networks (Rogers, CPAC, A Channel) are charged to air the debates" (Rogers 2009, 17). While the Consortium tried to organize a debate in 2015, Prime Minister Harper refused to participate, instead choosing to take part in debates organized by other organizations, such as Maclean's, the Munk Debates, TVA, Radio-Canada, and The Globe and Mail.

There are three commonly cited problems with Canadian election debates. For one, the criteria by which participants are invited to participate have often been unclear. Second, the party leaders are not compelled to participate. Third, the debates have often been criticized for their format or perceived quality.

In Canada, prior to the creation of the Leaders' Debates Commission, the consortium's decisions to invite participants was "decision had been made based on criteria that were known to political parties and debate organizers but not the public. Moreover, the rationale for the decision was not communicated and defended in the public square" (Fox and Tabbara 2018, 18). These criteria may have been implicit, such as the claim by the former Consortium chair that "the most accepted criteria requires that a political party needs to have representation in the House of Commons as well as proven popular support in the country - which we interpreted to be at least 5 per cent of popular vote reflected in the polls" (Burman 2008). In 2011, the Consortium denied Elizabeth May's participation on the grounds that "the Green Party has never elected a member to Parliament" (Leaders' debates set without May 2011)

There have been several attempts at articulating alternative criteria. In 2007, the Green Party proposed that a leader should be included if their party meets two of the following three criteria: "a party must have an elected MP in the House, run in all or nearly all ridings in Canada and/or have 4 percent of the vote in the previous election" (Leblanc 2011). The NDP at this time also called for the consortium to have "clear criteria" (Leblanc 2011). Drawing upon the U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates, Rogers recommended that a "Canadian Debates Commission adopt a Canadian application of the Appleseed criteria, on polling results and majority riding presence, for the right to participate in each of the English or the French debates" (Rogers 2009, 42).

Making the criteria explicit should make the process transparent and ensure public accountability. On the other hand, doing so also creates incentives for parties to take actions, where possible, specifically to make themselves eligible to enter the debates.

The refusal of candidates to participate can lead to debates being cancelled, such as in 1972, 1974, 1980, and 2015 (Leduc 1990, 122; LeDuc and Price 1985, 135; Rogers 2009, 18). Additionally, party leaders may strategically use the threat of refusal to demand concessions, such as the exclusion of other party

leaders, a gambit that was tried unsuccessfully in 2008. This suggests that even where there are criteria in place, even if implicit or not publicly known, negotiations between the parties and debate sponsoring organizations may override the criteria.

Lastly, the quality and format of the debates has often been criticized by academics and the media. An editorial cartoon published following the 1984 debates depicts "a man in a straitjacket who thinks he's from outer space, saying how much he enjoyed the televised election debates" (Library and Archives Canada 2017). The 1993 debates were criticized for "So many words, so few substantial answers." Rex Murphy compared the 2004 debates to professional wrestling, while a 2005 headline complained that the "New Format Drains Drama From Debates." The 2015 debate process was described as "unsuccessful" as "The benefit to voters of having five debates was lost as online and cable audiences were small compared to the audiences for broadcast debates of past campaigns."

An evaluation from a non-Canadian academic concludes that Canadian debates "seemed rarely to have performed the functions associated with the enhancement of democratic culture" (Coleman, cited in Rogers 2009, 32). Yet, how much disappointment with debates is driven by a gap between idealized notions of what debates should do and the reality of partisan competition and the need for media companies to attract viewers? One of the major obstacles to reforming the debate process is the risk of upsetting the delicate equilibrium between political parties, the audience, and the involved media outlets, all of whom have different interests (Fox and Tabbara 2018, 11–12; Rogers 2009, 15).

References

"2008 Leaders' Debate." *CBC Archives*. https://www.cbc.ca/archives/entry/2008-leaders-debate (October 21, 2019).

"About Us." 2015. *Trinidad & Tobago Debates Commission*. https://web.archive.org/web/20170627213756/http://ttdc.org.tt/about-page/ (August 26, 2019).

ACE Project. "Comparative Data: Television Debates." *The Electoral Knowledge Network*. http://aceproject.org/epic-en/CDTable?view=country&question=ME059 (August 25, 2019a).

———. "Instituto Nacional Electoral - Mexico." *The Electoral Knowledge Network*. http://aceproject.org/about-en/ace-partners/INE (August 26, 2019b).

Ackerman, Bruce A., and James S. Fishkin. 2004. *Deliberation Day*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press.

Allen, Nicholas, Judith Bara, and John Bartle. 2017. "Finding a Niche? Challenger Parties and Issue Emphasis in the 2015 Televised Leaders' Debates." *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 19(4): 807–23.

Anstead, Nick. 2016. "A Different Beast? Televised Election Debates in Parliamentary Democracies." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21(4): 508–26.

Antkowiak, Tifany. 2017. "Présidentielle : TF1 annonce un débat télévisé à cinq candidats qui pose question." *France Bleu*. https://www.francebleu.fr/infos/politique/presidentielle-debat-televise-entre-cinq-candidats-le-20-mars-sur-tf1-1487690831 (August 25, 2019).

Bailey, Ric. 2011. “What Took So Long? The Late Arrival of TV Debates in the UK General Election of 2010.” *In Political Communication in Britain: The Leader Debates, the Campaign and the Media in the 2010 General Election*, eds. Dominic Wring, Roger Mortimore, and Simon Atkinson. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 7–21. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230305045_2 (October 15, 2019).

Bastien, Frédérick. 2018. “Using Parallel Content Analysis to Measure Mediatization of Politics: The Televised Leaders’ Debates in Canada, 1968–2008.” *Journalism: Theory, Practice & Criticism*: 146488491775196.

Benoit, William L., and Jennifer M. Benoit-Bryan. 2013. “Debates Come to the United Kingdom: A Functional Analysis of the 2010 British Prime Minister Election Debates.” *Communication Quarterly* 61(4): 463–78.

Benoit, William L., and Heather Currie. 2001. “Inaccuracies in Media Coverage of the 1996 and 2000 Presidential Debates.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 38(1): 28–39.

Benoit, William L., and Glenn J. Hansen. 2004. “Presidential Debate Watching, Issue Knowledge, Character Evaluation, and Vote Choice.” *Human Communication Research*. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2004.tb00727.x (August 27, 2019).

Benoit, William L., Glenn J. Hansen, and Rebecca M. Verser. 2003. “A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Viewing U.S. Presidential Debates.” *Communication Monographs* 70(4): 335–50.

Benoit, William L., Mitchell S. McKinney, and R. Lance Holbert. 2001. “Beyond Learning and Persona: Extending the Scope of Presidential Debate Effects.” *Communication Monographs* 68(3): 259–73.

Bittner, Amanda. 2018. “Leaders Always Mattered: The Persistence of Personality in Canadian Elections.” *Electoral Studies* 54: 297–302.

Blais, André, and M. Martin Boyer. 1996. “Assessing the Impact of Televised Debates: The Case of the 1988 Canadian Election.” *British Journal of Political Science* 26(2): 143–64.

Blais, André, Elisabeth Gidengil, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte. 2003. “Campaign Dynamics in the 2000 Canadian Election: How the Leader Debates Salvaged the Conservative Party.” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 36(1): 45–50.

Blais, André, and Andrea M. L. Perrella. 2008. “Systemic Effects of Televised Candidates’ Debates.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(4): 451–64.

Boydstun, Amber E., Rebecca A. Glazier, and Matthew T. Pietryka. 2013. “Playing to the Crowd: Agenda Control in Presidential Debates.” *Political Communication* 30(2): 254–77.

Burman, Tony. 2008. “Former CBC News Chief: The Election Debate Process Is a Sham.” *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/former-cbc-news-chief-the-election-debate-process-is-a-sham/article25581608/ (October 21, 2019).

Carlin, Diana B., Eric Morris, and Shawna Smith. 2001. “The Influence of Format and Questions on Candidates’ Strategic Argument Choices in the 2000 Presidential Debates.” A*merican Behavioral Scientist* 44(12): 2196–2218.

Chadwick, A. 2011. “Britain’s First Live Televised Party Leaders’ Debate: From the News Cycle to the Political Information Cycle.” *Parliamentary Affairs* 64(1): 24–44.

Chaffee, Steven H. 1978. “Presidential Debates--Are They Helpful to Voters?” *Communication Monographs* 45(4): 330.

Cho, Jaeho, and Syng Pom Choy. 2011. “From Podium to Living Room: Elite Debates as an Emotional Catalyst for Citizen Communicative Engagements.” *Communication Research* 38(6): 778–804.

Cho, Jaeho, and Yerheen Ha. 2012. “On the Communicative Underpinnings of Campaign Effects: Presidential Debates, Citizen Communication, and Polarization in Evaluations of Candidates.” *Political Communication* 29(2): 184–204.

Cho, Jaeho, Dhavan V. Shah, Seungahn Nah, and Dominique Brossard. 2009. “‘Split Screens’ and ‘Spin Rooms’: Debate Modality, Post-Debate Coverage, and the New Videomalaise.” *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53(2): 242–61.

Coleman, Stephen. 2000. “Meaningful Political Debate in the Age of the Soundbite.” *In Televised Election Debates: International Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Coleman. New York: St Martin’s Press, 1–34.

Coleman, Stephen, and Giles Moss. 2016. “Rethinking Election Debates: What Citizens Are Entitled to Expect.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 21(1): 3–24.

Commission on Presidential Debates. 2016. “Commission on Presidential Debates Announces Polls to Be Used in 2016 Candidate Selection Criteria.” https://www.debates.org/2016/08/15/commission-on-presidential-debates-announces-polls-to-be-used-in-2016-candidate-selection-criteria/ (August 2, 2019).

———. 2019. “Overview.” https://www.debates.org/about-cpd/overview/ (October 17, 2019).

Cornfield, Michael. 2017. “Empowering the Party-Crasher: Donald J. Trump, the First 2016 GOP Presidential Debate, and the Twitter Marketplace for Political Campaigns.” *Journal of Political Marketing* 16(3–4): 212–43.

Council on Hemispheric Affairs. 2012. “The Mexican Debates: New Perspectives, Same Electoral Results.” http://www.coha.org/17740/ (August 26, 2019).

daCosta, Noel. 2018. (House of Commons) Evidence. Ottawa, ON: Parliament of Canada. https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/PROC/meeting-86/evidence#Int-9933774 (August 23, 2019).

Davidson, Stewart, Stephen Elstub, Robert Johns, and Alastair Stark. 2017. “Rating the Debates: The 2010 UK Party Leaders’ Debates and Political Communication in the Deliberative System.” *British Politics* 12(2): 183–208.

Davis, Colin J., Jeffrey S. Bowers, and Amina Memon. 2011. “Social Influence in Televised Election Debates: A Potential Distortion of Democracy.” *PLoS One; San Francisco* 6(3): e18154.

Dawson, Tyler. 2019. “Early Start Time for Debate Means That Many People in the West Will Not Be Able to See It All.” *National Post*. https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2019/early-start-time-for-todays-debate-means-that-many-people-in-the-west-will-not-see-it-all (October 9, 2019).

Debates Presidenciales. 2012. Técnica de la Comisión Temporal para los Debates. https://www.debatesinternational.org/sites/default/files/DEBATES%20MEXICO%20%202012.pdf (August 26, 2019).

Denemark, David, Ian Ward, and Clive Bean. 2007. “Election Campaigns and Television News Coverage: The Case of the 2001 Australian Election.” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 42(1): 89–109.

Dobell, Graeme. 2019. “Australia’s Election Silences Show Need for Mandatory Debates.” *The Strategist*. https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-election-silences-show-need-for-mandatory-debates/ (October 17, 2019).

Eisner, Keith Darren. 1993. “Non-Major-Party Candidates and Televised Presidential Debates: The Merits of Legislative Inclusion.” *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 141(3): 973–1027.

Facebook. 2018. “Protecting the Mexican Election from Abuse.” *Facebook Newsroom*. https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2018/06/protecting-the-mexican-election/ (August 26, 2019).

Fox, Graham, and Mohy-Dean Tabbara. 2018. *Creating an Independent Commission for Federal Leaders’ Debates*. Institute for Research on Public Policy. Roundtable Report. https://irpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Creating-an-Independent-Commission-for-Federal-Leaders-Debates.pdf.

Gidengil, Elisabeth, André Blais, Richard Nadeau, and Neil Nevitte. 2000. “Are Party Leaders Becoming More Important To Vote Choice in Canada?” In Washington, D.C. https://s3.amazonaws.com/academia.edu.documents/44106336/Are_Party_Leaders_Becoming_More_Importan20160325-549-umea9n.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DAre_party_leaders_becoming_more_importan.pdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAIWOWYYGZ2Y53UL3A%2F20190830%2Fus-east-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20190830T055147Z&X-Amz-Expires=3600&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=6e6f896c604d46e7f03b1e7bc98848ad32dd767a3af5426507cf1c89aa656927.

Gidengil, Elisabeth, and Joanna Everitt. 1999. “Metaphors and Misrepresentation: Gendered Mediation in News Coverage of the 1993 Canadian Leaders’ Debates.” *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 4(1): 48–65.

———. 2003. “Conventional Coverage/Unconventional Politicians: Gender and Media Coverage of Canadian Leaders’ Debates, 1993, 1997, 2000.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 36(3): 559–77.

Gottfried, Jeffrey A. et al. 2017. “The Changing Nature of Political Debate Consumption: Social Media, Multitasking, and Knowledge Acquisition.” *Political Communication* 34(2): 172–99.

Gottfried, Jeffrey A., Bruce W. Hardy, Kenneth M. Winneg, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2014. “All Knowledge Is Not Created Equal: Knowledge Effects and the 2012 Presidential Debates.” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/psq.12129 (August 27, 2019).

Grattan, Michelle. 2019. “The Two Moments That Said a Lot about Morrison and Shorten.” *ABC News*. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-05-09/federal-election-2019-third-debate-two-moments/11095438 (August 1, 2019).

Harmer, Emily, Heather Savigny, and Orlanda Ward. 2017. “‘Are You Tough Enough?’ Performing Gender in the UK Leadership Debates 2015.” *Media, Culture & Society* 39(7): 960–75.

Holbrook, Thomas M. 1999. “Political Learning from Presidential Debates.” *Political Behavior* 21(1): 67–89.

Houchard, Béatrice. 2012. “Les duels présidentiels, un rite qui date de 1974.” FIGARO. http://www.lefigaro.fr/presidentielle-2012/2012/04/24/01039-20120424ARTFIG00651-un-premier-affrontement-presidentiel-a-la-radio-en-1974.php (August 25, 2019).

Hurst, Robert. 2019. “Who’s Afraid of Live TV Debates? Canada’s Political Leaders, Apparently.” *The Globe and Mail*: A11.

Jacoby, Jacob, Tracy R. Troutman, and Tommy E. Whittler. 1986. “Viewer Miscomprehension of the 1980 Presidential Debate: A Research Note.” *Political Psychology* 7(2): 297–308.

Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 2015. “The Discipline’s Debate Contributions: Then, Now, and Next.” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101(1): 85–97.

Kaid, Lynda Lee, Mitchell S. McKinney, and John C. Tedesco. 2000. *Civic Dialogue in the 1996 Presidential Campaign: Candidate, Media, and Public Voices*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Kenski, Kate, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2011. “Presidential and Vice Presidential Debates in 2008: A Profile of Audience Composition.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 55(3): 307–24.

Kenski, Kate, and Natalie Jomini Stroud. 2005. “Who Watches Presidential Debates? A Comparative Analysis of Presidential Debate Viewing in 2000 and 2004.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 49(2): 213–28.

Kumar, Catherine. 2018. (House of Commons) *Evidence*. Ottawa, ON: Parliament of Canada. https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/PROC/meeting-86/evidence#Int-9933774 (August 23, 2019).

Lang, Gladys Engel, and Kurt Lang. 1978. "Immediate and Delayed Responses to a Carter-Ford Debate: Assessing Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 42(3): 322–41.

"Leaders' Debates Set without May." 2011. CBC News. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/leaders-debates-set-without-may-1.976646 (October 21, 2019).

Leblanc, Daniel. 2011. "Elizabeth May Excluded from Election Debates." *The Globe and Mail*. https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/elizabeth-may-excluded-from-election-debates/article574671/ (October 21, 2019).

Leduc, Lawrence. 1990. "Party Strategies and the Use of Televised Campaign Debates." *European Journal of Political Research* 18(1): 121–41.

LeDuc, Lawrence, and Richard Price. 1985. "Great Debates: The Televised Leadership Debates of 1979." *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique* 18(1): 135–53.

Lee, Han Soo, and Jae Mook Lee. 2015. "Televised Presidential Debates and Learning in the 2012 Korean Presidential Election: Does Political Knowledge Condition Information Acquisition?" *International Journal of Communication* 9(0): 20.

Library and Archives Canada. 2017. "I WATCHED THE TELEVISED ELECTION DEBATE AND, QUITE FRANKLY, I WAS IMPRESSED!!.." http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=2919010&new=-8586304441911791706 (October 15, 2019).

Maier, Jürgen, and Thorsten Faas. 2011. "'Miniature Campaigns' in Comparison: The German Televised Debates, 2002–09." *German Politics* 20(1): 75–91.

Maier, Jürgen, and Carolin Jansen. 2017. "When Do Candidates Attack in Election Campaigns? Exploring the Determinants of Negative Candidate Messages in German Televised Debates." *Party Politics* 23(5): 549–59.

Marien, Sofie, Ine Goovaerts, and Stephen Elstub. 2019. "Deliberative Qualities in Televised Election Debates: The Influence of the Electoral System and Populism." *West European Politics*: 1–23.

Maurer, Marcus, and Carsten Reinemann. 2006. "Learning Versus Knowing: Effects of Misinformation in Televised Debates." *Communication Research* 33(6): 489–506.

McKinney, Mitchell S. 2005. "Let the People Speak: The Public's Agenda and Presidential Town Hall Debates." *American Behavioral Scientist* 49(2): 198–212.

McKinney, Mitchell S., and Diana B. Carlin. 2004. "Political Campaign Debates." *In Handbook of Political Communication Research*, ed. Lynda Lee Kaid. http://www.taylorfrancis.com/ (August 30, 2019).

McKinney, Mitchell S., Leslie A. Rill, and Esther Thorson. 2014. “Civic Engagement Through Presidential Debates: Young Citizens’ Political Attitudes in the 2012 Election.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 58(6): 755–75.

McKinney, Mitchell S., and Benjamin R. Warner. 2013. “Do Presidential Debates Matter? Examining a Decade of Campaign Debate Effects.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 49(4): 238–58.

Meer, Tom W. G. van der, Annemarie Walter, and Peter Van Aelst. 2016. “The Contingency of Voter Learning: How Election Debates Influenced Voters’ Ability and Accuracy to Position Parties in the 2010 Dutch Election Campaign.” *Political Communication* 33(1): 136–57.

Mercado, Silvia. 2019. “Ya es oficial: Mauricio Macri y Alberto Fernández están obligados a debatir dos veces antes de los comicios.” *Infobae*. https://www.infobae.com/politica/2019/06/21/quedo-reglamentada-la-ley-de-debates-presidenciales-obligatorios/ (October 22, 2019).

Minow, Newton N., and Craig L. LaMay. 2008. *Inside the Presidential Debates: Their Improbable Past and Promising Future*. University of Chicago Press. http://www.bibliovault.org/BV.landing.epl?ISBN=9780226530413 (August 2, 2019).

Modrzejewska, Magdalena. 2014. “Presidential Debate. Where Is the Question?” *In 2012 U.S. Presidential Election: Challenges and Expectations*, eds. Laidler Pawel and Turek Maciej. Krakow: Jagiellonian University Press, 99–113.

National Democratic Institute. 2019. *International Comparative Candidate Debate Participation Criteria. Washington*, D.C.

National Election Commission. 2013. “National Election Broadcasting Debate Commission Holds the 2nd Policy Debate among Parties.” http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/04_news/02_02.jsp?num=331&pg=1&col=Subject&sw=debate (October 18, 2019).

———. 2016. “Election Broadcasting Debate Commission Holds Talk Concert to Communicate with Citizens.” http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/04_news/01_02.jsp?num=171&pg=1&col=&sw= (October 21, 2019).

———. 2017. “NEBDC to Hold 2017 2nd and 3rd Political Party Policy Debates.” http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/04_news/02_02.jsp?num=506&pg=1&col=&sw= (October 17, 2019).

———. 2018. “NEBDC Opens ‘TV Debate Academy’ for Would-Be Candidates.” http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/04_news/02_02.jsp?num=514&pg=1&col=&sw= (October 21, 2019).

———. “National Election Boradcasting Debates Commission.” http://www.nec.go.kr/engvote_2013/Mobile/aboutnec/nebdc_info01.jsp (October 18, 2019).

Orriols, Lluis, and Guillermo Cordero. 2016. “The Breakdown of the Spanish Two-Party System: The Upsurge of Podemos and Ciudadanos in the 2015 General Election.” *South European Society and Politics* 21(4): 469–92.

Pattie, Charles, and Ron Johnston. 2011. “A Tale of Sound and Fury, Signifying Something? The Impact of the Leaders’ Debates in the 2010 UK General Election.” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties* 21(2): 147–77.

Peck, Tom. 2017. “Election 2017 TV Debates: Who Is Taking Part and When Are They On?” *The Independent.* http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/election-2017-tv-debates-who-take-part-when-date-time-which-channel-leaders-party-liberal-democrat-a7740986.html (October 22, 2019).

Pfau, Michael. 2002. “The Subtle Nature of Presidential Debate Influence.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 38(4): 251–61.

Reber, Bryan H., and William L. Benoit. 2001. “Presidential Debate Stories Accentuate the Negative.” *Newspaper Research Journal* 22(3): 30–43.

Richards, Ricardo. 2018. “TE inicia organización de debates presidenciales previo a Elecciones Generales de 2019.” *Telemetro*. http://www.telemetro.com/politica/elecciones-Panama/voto19/organizacion-debates-presidenciales-Elecciones-Generales_0_1133887128.html (October 21, 2019).

“Rivals Attack May for Missing TV Debate.” 2017. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/election-2017-40105324 (October 22, 2019).

Rogers, Michelle. 2009. *Fair, Informative and Tantalizing: Reforming Federal Election Debates in Canada*. Kingston: Centre for the Study of Democracy, Queen’s University.

Rowland, Robert C. 2018. “Implicit Standards of Public Argument in Presidential Debates: What the 2016 Debates Reveal about Public Deliberation.” *Argumentation and Advocacy* 54(1–2): 76–94.

Sampedro, Víctor, and Francisco Seoane Pérez. 2008. “The 2008 Spanish General Elections: ‘Antagonistic Bipolarization’ Geared by Presidential Debates, Partisanship, and Media Interests.” *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(3): 336–44.

Scheufele, Dietram A., Eunkyung Kim, and Dominique Brossard. 2007. “My Friend’s Enemy: How Split-Screen Debate Coverage Influences Evaluation of Presidential Debates.” *Communication Research* 34(1): 3–24.

Senior, Philip. 2008a. “Electoral Impact of Televised Leaders’ Debates on Australian Federal Elections.” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43(3): 443–64.

———. 2008b. “Electoral Impact of Televised Leaders’ Debates on Australian Federal Elections.” *Australian Journal of Political Science* 43(3): 443–64.

“Spanish Far-Right Vox Party Banned from TV Debate.” 2019. *BBC News.* https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-47957010 (August 25, 2019).

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. 2018. *The Creation of an Independent Commissioner Responsible for Leaders' Debates*. House of Commons, Canada.

The Racine Group. 2002. "White Paper on Televised Political Campaign Debates." *Argumentation and Advocacy* 38(4): 199–218.

"Tribunal revela orden de participación para el primer debate presidencial." 2019. *TVN*. https://www.tvn-2.com/nuevogobierno/noticias/Tribunal-Electoral-debate-presidencial-Elecciones-Panama-2019-Politica-Noticias_0_5235976442.html (October 21, 2019).

Trilling, Damian. 2015. "Two Different Debates? Investigating the Relationship Between a Political Debate on TV and Simultaneous Comments on Twitter." *Social Science Computer Review* 33(3): 259–76.

Tsfati, Yariv. 2003. "Debating the Debate: The Impact of Exposure to Debate News Coverage and Its Interaction with Exposure to the Actual Debate." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics* 8(3): 70–86.

Turcotte, Jason. 2014. "Debates and the Disincentives of Democracy." *Journalism Practice* 8(6): 772–88.

———. 2015. "The News Norms and Values of Presidential Debate Agendas: An Analysis of Format and Moderator Influence on Question Content." *Mass Communication and Society* 18(3): 239–58.

———. 2017. "Who's Citing Whom? Source Selection and Elite Indexing in Electoral Debates." *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly; Thousand Oaks* 94(1): 238–58.

Turcotte, Jason, and Newly Paul. 2015. "A Case of More Is Less: The Role of Gender in U.S. Presidential Debates." *Political Research Quarterly* 68(4): 773–84.

Vaccari, Cristian, Andrew Chadwick, and Ben O'Loughlin. 2015. "Dual Screening the Political: Media Events, Social Media, and Citizen Engagement." *Journal of Communication* 65(6): 1041–61.

Waddell, Christopher, and Christopher Dornan. 2006. "The Media and the Campaign." In *The Canadian Federal Election of 2006*, eds. Christopher Dornan and Jon H Pammett. Toronto [Ont.: Dundurn, 220–52. http://www.deslibris.ca/ID/410771 (October 15, 2019).

Wagner, Markus. 2017. "Selective Exposure, Information Utility, and the Decision to Watch Televised Debates." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 29(4): 533–53.

Warner, Benjamin R. et al. 2019. "Reconsidering Partisanship as a Constraint on the Persuasive Effects of Debates." *Communication Monographs*: 1–21.

Warner, Benjamin R., and Mitchell S. McKinney. 2013. "To Unite and Divide: The Polarizing Effect of Presidential Debates." *Communication Studies* 64(5): 508–27.

Wells, Chris et al. 2016. "Coproduction or Cooptation? Real-Time Spin and Social Media Response during the 2012 French and US Presidential Debates." *French Politics* 14(2): 206–33.

Winneg, Kenneth, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson. 2017. “Learning From the 2016 U.S. General Election Presidential Debates.” *American Behavioral Scientist* 61(4): 362–78.

Yawn, Mike, and Bob Beatty. 2000. “Debate-Induced Opinion Change: What Matters?” *American Politics Quarterly* 28(2): 270–85.

Zhu, Jian-Hua, J. Ronald Milavsky, and Rahul Biswas. 1994. “Do Televised Debates Affect Image Perception More Than Issue Knowledge? A Study of the First 1992 Presidential Debate.” Human Communication Research 20(3): 302–33.

Appendix 8 – Canadian Election Study
Evaluation of the 2019 leaders' debates

Evaluation of the 2019 Federal Leaders' Debates

John R. McAndrews[1], Aengus Bridgman[2], Peter John Loewen[1], Daniel Rubenson[3], Laura B. Stephenson[4], and Allison Harell[4]

[1]University of Toronto

[2]McGill University

[3]Ryerson University

[4]Western University

[5]Université du Québec à Montréal

January 19, 2020

1. Executive summary

Our research team was tasked by the Leaders' Debates Commission to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the leader's debates organized in the 2019 Canadian federal election. We worked with the Commission to identify the impacts they were interested in assessing. We then independently designed and analyzed a series of surveys of Canadians. Our findings concerning the impact of the debates follow in this report.

Our summary conclusion is that the debates had a positive impact on the election. The debates were widely viewed, on both traditional and social media. They increased Canadians' engagement with the election by increasing the attention paid to the election and by increasing democratic discourse between citizens about the election. We further find that the debates helped Canadians clarify the positions of the parties on key election issues. In short, the debates were an instrument for improving democracy. Taking into account the views of Canadians, we conclude the Commission conducted a series of informative, high-quality debates, in keeping with their mandate.

Our report also contains several important insights on how debates can be conducted in the future. We see value in ongoing research efforts to better understand the role that leaders' debates play in our democracy. We believe this report provides a useful framework for doing so–including greater use of panel-based survey designs to assess the impact of debate watching and survey-based experiments to elicit Canadians' preferences about debate formats.

2. Introduction

The 2019 Canadian federal election featured two official leaders' debates, organized by the Leaders' Debates Commission. The Commission is an organization mandated by the Government of Canada to convene debates during federal elections. The 2019 election was the Commission's first, effectively replacing an ad hoc system of debate organization. As part of its mandate, the Commission is to submit a report to Parliament.

This study is drafted in support of the Commission's report. Our aim is to provide an even-handed, data-driven assessment of the 2019 Commission debates so as to inform policy makers going forward on the practice of holding leaders debates during elections. In what follows, we present results from a multi-wave survey of several thousand Canadians, as well as a social media analysis of hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

3. Summary of overall findings

In working with the Commission, we were asked to provide data-based insights on nineteen questions. Below, we present each question, followed by a response and a summary of the relevant results from our report.

1. Are the debates associated with increases in information and factual knowledge, such as increased understanding of the parties' positions, increased information on where and how to vote, etc.?

We fail to find that the debates were associated with increased information about when and how to vote. We do, however, find that debate viewers, compared to non-viewers, showed significant increases in their knowledge of party promises and positions.

2. Are the debates associated with increases in participation, conversation, engagement, and interest in politics, as a result of watching the debates and/or discussing the debates with others?

We find substantial evidence that the debates were associated with increases in participation, conversation, and engagement. Specifically, while we do not find an increased likelihood of voter turnout as a result of watching the debates, we do find that debate watchers became more likely to say they would participate in non-voting forms of political participation (e.g., attending a political meeting, using social media to discuss politics, or signing a petition) over the next 12 months. We also find that debate watchers displayed a significant increase in their news consumption about the federal election following the debate, compared to non-viewers. Further, we find that–again compared to non-viewers–debate viewers reported substantially greater increases in their discussion of the federal

election with others. Finally, we find that the days where the most discussion of Canadian politics was observed on Twitter were those immediately following the two debates.

3. Are the debates associated with an increase in positive democratic attitudes, such as a belief that democracy is the best system for choosing leaders, satisfaction with democracy, and higher levels of internal and external democratic efficacy?

Our study does not provide evidence of either systematic positive or negative effects of debate viewership on support for democracy or individual senses of efficacy.

4. Are the debates associated with knowledge of and changes in views of the parties, leaders, and their policies?

We find some evidence that the debates were associated with changes in views of the parties, leaders, and their policies. In particular, we find that viewers were better able to identify party positions as a result of watching the debate. We also find that debate viewers changed their ratings of the parties and their leaders more than non-viewers.

5. Did the Commission ensure the delivery of two informative debates of high journalistic quality?

Recognizing the important role of journalists and media critics in answering this question, our report only provides a partial answer. As noted above, we find evidence that the debate was both informative and that it spurred discussion and greater news consumption. On these scores, it generated a more engaged and informed audience. As to the debate format itself, we find that a majority of viewers of the English and French debates agreed that the debates were informative, aided them in better understanding the issues at hand, and in understanding differences between the parties.

Viewers told us that they believed moderators treated leaders fairly, that they asked good questions, and that they gave leaders enough time to answer questions. On the other hand, there is some evidence that viewers would have preferred leaders had more time to debate one another, and that moderators could have pushed leaders harder to provide factual answers and to not avoid answering questions.

6. Did the Commission ensure that as many Canadians as possible had access to the debates?

We find clear evidence that debate-based content following the broadcasts was widely consumed–both on traditional media and social media. To the degree that the debates were not consumed, it was likely a function of interest. The Commission can aim, however, for an improvement in public awareness of the debates in the days leading up to the debates, especially among those in harder-to-reach communities–such as disabled Canadians, racialized communities, rural residents, and younger Canadians.

7. Were the debates organized in the public interest and in a cost-effective manner?

We find that the debates had a wide reach across multiple platforms. Given that the debates were carried by multiple broadcasters and widely pushed across social media channels and given that viewers themselves indicated that they found the debates informative, we conclude that the public interest was well-served. While we cannot comment directly on costs, our findings that the debates did have an effect in increasing information and news consumption in an already highly saturated information environment suggests that they were effective.

8. Did the Commission respect its guiding principles of independence and impartiality, transparency, credibility, democratic citizenship, civic education and inclusion?

Taking all of our findings together, we would on balance conclude that the Commission conducted a series of informative, high-quality debates, in keeping with their mandate. Viewers were largely happy with the performance of the moderators, especially when asked if the moderators were fair and posed good questions. We find evidence that citizens were more informed by viewing the debates, and more engaged politically following them. On measures of inclusion, our findings are mixed. We find lower reported awareness of the debates (in the days leading up to the debates) among disabled, non-European, and rural Canadians, as well as among younger individuals. With respect to eventual viewership, however, we find no clear evidence that disabled Canadians, Canadians of non-European ancestry, or rural Canadians were less likely to watch. We do find that younger Canadians were less likely to report watching the debates.

9. What was the survey-based estimate of viewership of the debates?

According to our survey estimates, approximately 40% of Canadians watched the debates.

10. How important were the debates to the 2019 electoral process?

A broad view of our evidence suggests that the debates were central to the electoral process. First, they were widely viewed by Canadians, both through traditional media and social media. Second, they served an important role in clarifying party positions. Third, those who watched the debates report greater discussion and news consumption. Fourth, we present evidence that those who watched the debates also updated their views of the parties and their leaders. On balance, the debates played an important role in increasing engagement with the issues, leaders, and choices before voters.

11. How effective was the Commission's public outreach strategy?

We find that awareness of the debates before they aired was limited. Only 38% of Canadians were aware of the debates, and of that group, just 24% and 8% knew the dates of the English and French

debates, respectively. With greater resources, the Commission may be able to reach a larger group of Canadians.

12. What was the quality of the Commission's two debates in terms of broadcast and journalistic standards, format and content?

We find substantial agreement that the debates were well-moderated, with some room for improvement in encouraging leaders to be more forthright. To the degree that Canadians express reservations about debate content, it is more attributable to their evaluations of the conduct of party leaders than the moderators or the format.

13. Did the debates take optimum advantage of both traditional and new media?

We find that while the debates were overwhelmingly consumed over television, many Canadians viewed or listened to the debates online or over the radio. We also find that the debates dominated social media channels on the days they were broadcast, suggesting substantial reach across traditional and new channels.

14. Did the debates meet the objective of reaching out to Canadians with disabilities, indigenous groups, remote communities, linguistic minorities and ethno-Canadian communities?

We find lower reported awareness of the debates among disabled Canadians, Canadians of non-European ancestry, and rural Canadians. We do not find lower reported awareness among Indigenous peoples or among official language minorities. In addition, we find no clear evidence that eventual viewership was lower among these groups. We note that these findings should be treated with caution, however, given the limits of survey research among smaller groups in the population.

15. Did the debates help Canadians make informed voting decisions and/or contribution a meaningful way to Canadians' knowledge and voter turnout?

We find evidence in our report that the debates increased news consumption and discussion, both well-known antecedents to vote choice. We also find that the debates clarified party positions among voters, while also allowing them to better update evaluations of leaders. We find no direct effect on voter turnout, however.

16. Were the debates perceived as reinforcing trust in democracy/democratic institutions?

We find no evidence that the debates increased Canadians' evaluations of or trust in Canadian democratic institutions.

17. Did the debates contribute to Canadians' perceptions of feeling more confident/secure in their voting decisions?

While we find evidence that Canadians were informed by the debates (i.e., in terms of objective indicators of their knowledge of party promises), we do not find a difference between debate viewers and non-viewers in terms of change in self-reported confidence in knowing enough to vote.

18. What are the perceptions of Canadians with regards to leader participation in leaders' debates?

When asked directly, we find that the majority of viewers of the English debates believed there were too many leaders participating. Viewers of the French debate do not agree with this sentiment, with a majority disagreeing that too many leaders participated. When we later present respondents with a number of scenarios to measure their preferred debate format, we find that respondents are indifferent to the number of leaders participating. On balance, then, the number of leaders allowed to participate is not a settled question among Canadians.

19. What are the views of Canadians with regards to whether broadcasters should be compelled to carry leaders' debates?

When asked directly, we find that a clear majority of Canadians believe that TV broadcasters should be compelled to carry the debates.

4. Methods

For each of the preceding questions, we marshal either survey data, social media data, or both. Our survey research relies on a three-wave study of a broadly representative sample of Canadians. Our social media analysis relies on text-as-data analysis of more than 19 million tweets about the Canadian election from 1.1 million Twitter accounts tweeting on Canadian politics.

4.1. Survey methodology

The survey portion of our study relies on a three-wave survey conducted during and after the election. We partnered with a leading sample provider – Dynata – to create a broadly representative online sample of Canadians.

Our initial survey wave was conducted in the week before debate week, i.e. from October 1 to October 7 (the last response to the first wave was completed shortly before the English debate began at 7 pm ET on October 7). Three-thousand seven-hundred individuals completed this wave. Our second wave commenced on October 8, the morning after the English debate, and closed on Oct 18. Respondents from the first wave of the survey were invited to complete this survey. We issued sufficient invitations such that 2,420 respondents completed this wave. Of these 2,420 respondents, 1,809 completed the survey after the English debate but before the French debate, while 611 completed the survey after both the English and French language debates. A third wave of the survey

was conducted shortly after the election, commencing on October 24 and ending on October 29. We issued invitations to respondents to our second wave survey such that 1,013 completed the third wave.

In partnership with our survey sample provider, the first wave of our survey was sampled from online panels with quotas for age, gender, and province. We also employed a quota for official language. Our second and third waves were sampled in a convenience framework from previous wave responses, with the exception of a quota for official language.

Post data collection, to further improve the representativeness of our inferences, we generate a separate IPF or "raking" weight for each wave of the survey using the *ipfweight* command in STATA 15. Marginal values were successively weighted according to observed census levels on age, gender, immigration status, and province, as well as voter turnout in 2015. For each weight, a maximum of 100 iterations were made. Weights were bounded at 0.2 and 5.

4.2. Social media methodology

Twitter data used in this report was collected from August 1, 2019 to October 21, 2019. The objective of the Twitter data collection effort was to capture all major party candidates, major news organizations, as many Canadian journalists as possible, and a broad swath of the public conversation. Journalists and media organizations were identified using an iterative approach that began with a core seed list of all Members of Parliament, the Twitter handles of all declared candidates, and approximately 300 journalists, academics and news outlets validated by a Canadian politics media expert. Additional accounts were added throughout the election based on frequency of posting on Canadian election related themes and mentions to and from existing tracked accounts. This algorithm yielded approximately 5000 likely accounts of interest, each of which were reviewed manually for Canadian politics relevance and then tracked. This yielded a total of 3889 explicitly tracked accounts, of which 830 are journalists, 272 are official accounts of news outlets, 1280 are candidates of major parties, and 1507 are third-parties (a broad category including provincial politicians of note, registered third-party advocacy groups, academics, and public users of Twitter with many followers).

To supplement this elite-oriented collection effort, we gathered a list of Canadian Politics hashtags. We used a similarly iterative strategy and began with a list of 33 well known Canadian Politics seed hashtags. This list was expanded in an iterative manner based on hashtag co-occurance and frequency of use by our existing tracked users on a weekly basis throughout the entire campaign. 1854 hashtags were identified in this manner, and then manually reviewed to identify their Canadian politics relevance. This yielded a list of 544 Canadian Politics hashtags. A full list of handles and hashtags tracked is available upon request.

There are other social media on which Canadians discussed the election. These include Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Reddit, Tumblr, 4Chan, Parler, Gab, and many more. This report draws exclusively upon Twitter data given that it is almost entirely publicly available and was able to be accessed by the report team. Other social media sites may offer additional insights beyond those on Twitter, and further research should be done to evaluate the extent to which the findings on Twitter are reflective of the broader online community and the Canadian public more generally.

For sentiment analysis, the Lexicoder dictionary is used (Young and Soroka 2012) for English-language texts, and a French-language translation is used for French-language texts (Duval and Pétry 2016). These tools identify a set of positive and negative word tokens that can be measured over a set of texts to classify those texts as generally negative or positive in tone. The proportion of positive to negative words allows the overall tone of a set of texts to be identified in an automated manner. We show how this dictionary-based approach meets expectations in Figure 7 and then apply it to a number of debate-related tasks.

4.3. Estimation strategies

Our essential empirical strategy to detect "debate effects" with our survey is to compare changes in opinions and views between survey waves. For most of the questions we address, then, we leverage changes between Waves 1 and 2, comparing those who did and did not report watching the debates. This is effectively the well-known "difference-indifference" approach to estimate debate effects. For other quantities, such as estimates of debate viewership, or one-time retrospective evaluations of debate format, we simply rely on frequencies observed within a discrete survey wave.

5. Debate awareness

Prior to the debates, we find relatively modest levels of awareness of the Commission debates. In the days leading up to the debates, we asked respondents in Wave 1 whether they knew if there were any more scheduled debates. As shown in Table 1, more than half of respondents were unaware of any upcoming debates.

In addition, we asked respondents who indicated that they were aware of upcoming debates if they knew the date of the English debate (Table 2) and the French debate (Table 3). In both instances, relatively few of these respondents were able to identify the correct dates.

Table 1: Awareness of upcoming debates

	Percent	Standard error	N

Unaware	62.41	0.90	1938
Aware	37.59	0.90	1373
Total	100.00	0.00	3311

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). 90 percent of sample randomly assigned to this question.

Table 2: Knew date of English debate

	Percent	Standard error	N
Incorrect	75.81	1.23	1032
Correct	24.19	1.23	341
Total	100.00	0.00	1373

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Question only administered to participants who thought there were upcoming debates.

This comparatively low level of awareness about the leaders' debates was similarly found in social media discussions. We searched all tweets for "debate" and "débat" to show the frequency of discussion on the debates over the course of the campaign. Figure 1 shows debate mentions across the platform from the beginning of the campaign to one day before the English-language debate. The two non-Commission debates hosted by Maclean's and TVA saw same and next-day spikes that quickly fell off. The week before the first Commission debate did not see a large increase in anticipatory attention.

Table 3: Knew date of French debate

	Percent	Standard error	N
Incorrect	91.33	0.82	1257
Correct	8.67	0.82	116
Total	100.00	0.00	1373

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Question only administered to participants who thought there were upcoming debates.

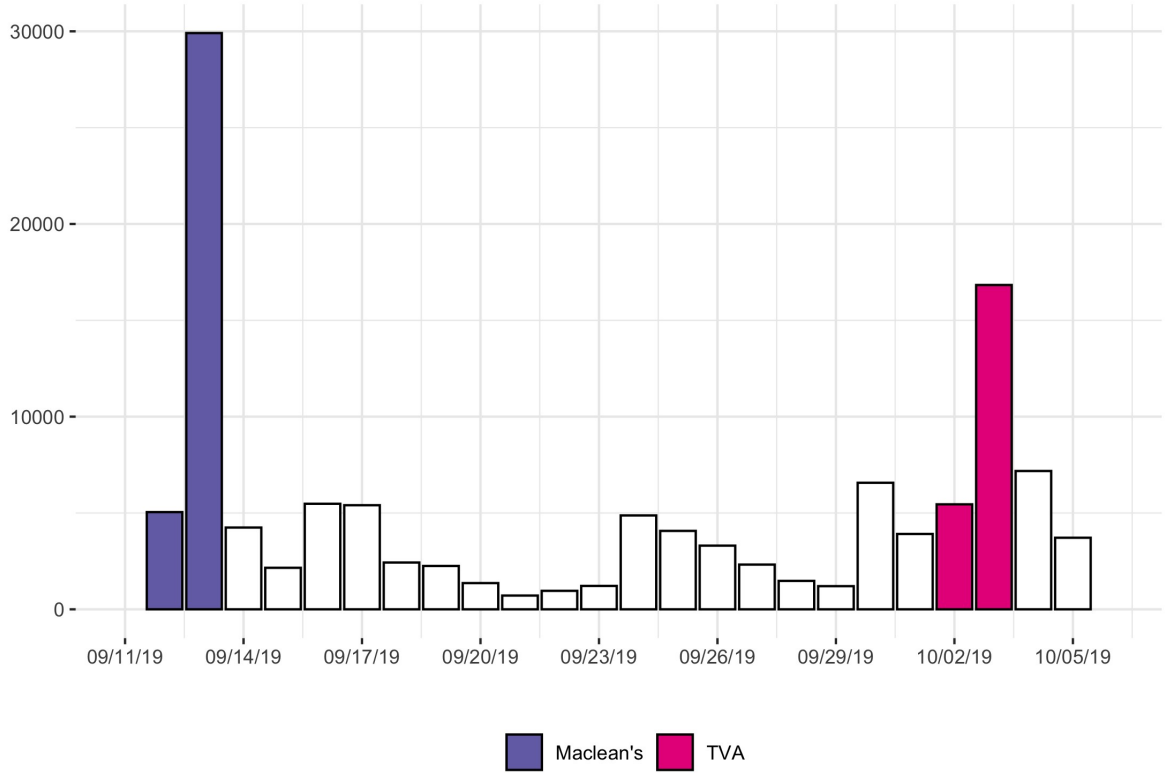


Figure 1: Debate-related Twitter activity prior to the Leaders' Debates Commission events

5.1. Debate viewership

Despite the levels of knowledge and anticipation regarding the Commission debates, actual viewership of the debates was significant. In Wave 2, we asked all respondents whether they watched the English debate on October 7: 37% said they did (Table 4). In addition, as of October 10, we asked respondents whether they watched the French debate: 41% said yes (Table 5).[1]

[1] . The aim of the second wave of the survey was to re-assess respondents' attitudes as soon as possible after each debate. Wave 2 began on October 8, the day after the English-language debate. Between October 8 and the evening of October 10, respondents were only asked whether they had watched the English-language debate–since the French-language had not yet taken place. Respondents contacted after the start of the French-language debate were asked whether they had watched the English-language debate *and* whether they had watched the French-language debate. Thus, Table 5 reports French-language debate viewership among those contacted after the French-language debate. By design, most French-speaking respondents in Wave 2 were contacted after the French-language debate.

Table 4: Watched English Debate

	Percent	Standard error	N
Did not watch	63.45	1.10	1439
Watched	36.55	1.10	963
Total	100.00	0.00	2402

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details).

Table 5: Watched French Debate

	Percent	N
Did not watch	59.25	362
Watched	40.75	249
Total	100.00	611

Question administered to respondents who completed the survey after the start of French debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

5.1.1. Twitter viewership

To evaluate Twitter engagement, we looked at so-called “second-screeners” or those that posted on social media about the debates during the debates themselves. Figure 2 shows the percentage of users that were active during the debates (October 7th from 7 to 9 EDT and the 10th from 8 to 10 EDT.) that directly engaged with the debates through a relevant hashtag or keyword, by language of debate and language used by the Twitter user. For the English-language debate, approximately 65% of English-language Canadian Politics Twitter users engaged with the debate and approximately 51% of French-language users did the same. For the French-language debate, only 33% of English-language users “second-screened” whereas 61% of French-language users did.

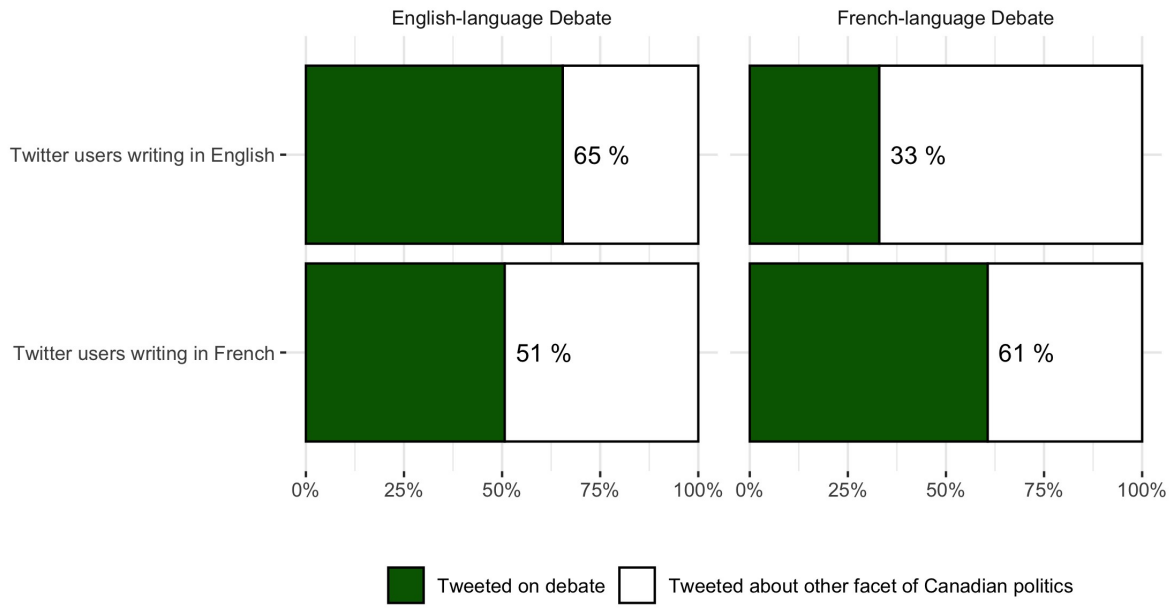


Figure 2: Debate-related Twitter activity during English-language debate

A different measure is to look at the politics-related conversation during the two debates on Twitter and see the extent to which the debates were the subject of tweets. Figures 3 and 4 show the debate-related activity during the two debates. The debates are divided into their thematic areas by time stamp, with the faded-out bars representing the total volume of Canadian politics-related tweets during the debate time. Approximately 40% of the discussion on Canadian political Twitter during the debates was explicitly about them, and the volume of conversation increased during the debate.

As expected, the same comparison for the French-language debate shows high engagement, with a full 47% of French-language Twitter activity explicitly focused on the debates during those two hours, with much of the surrounding volume also driven by the debate. Figure 4 shows the volume of activity during the debate, by theme, as compared to the overall level of activity on French-language Canadian politics Twitter.

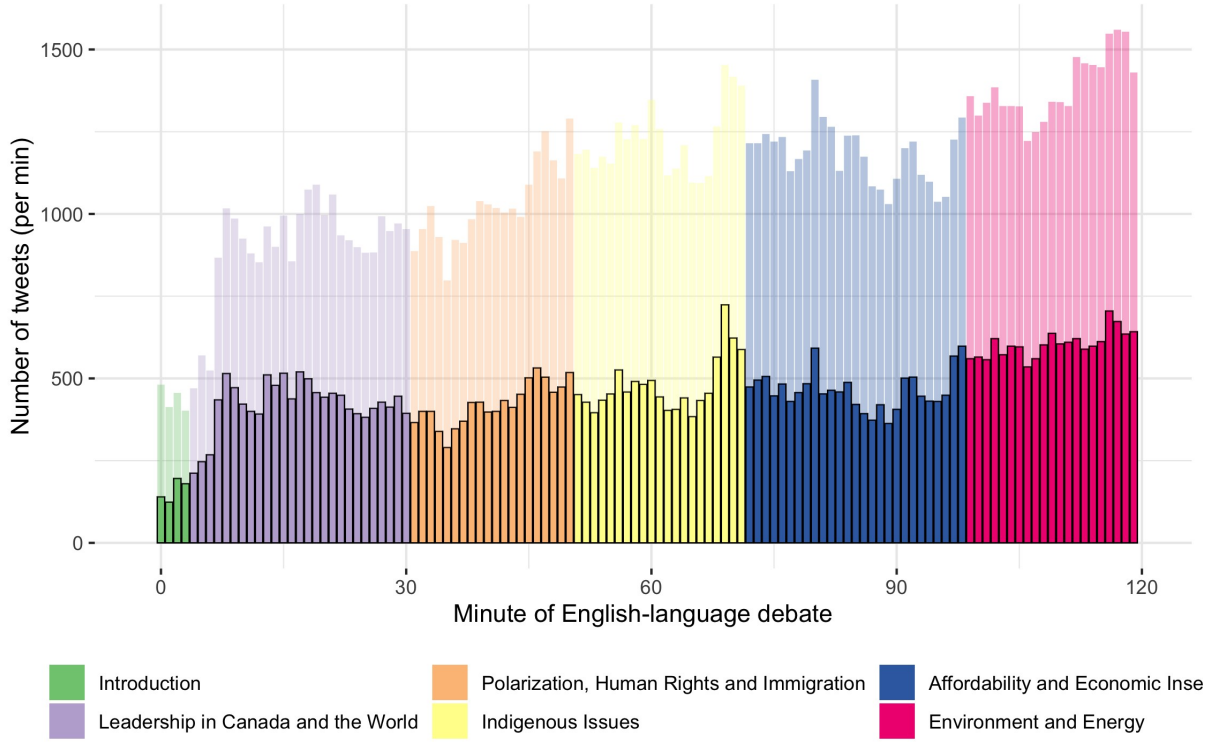


Figure 3: Debate-related Twitter activity during English-language debate

A final measure concerns those on Twitter who most actively follow Canadian politics. Here we examine only those who follow 5 or more candidates and/or Canadian politics journalists, who tweet regularly on Canadian politics, and who were active around the week of the debate. Of the 15 751 users that fit that criteria, 55% tweeted about the debates. The debate was well watched and commented by those who are among the loudest in online Canadian politics.

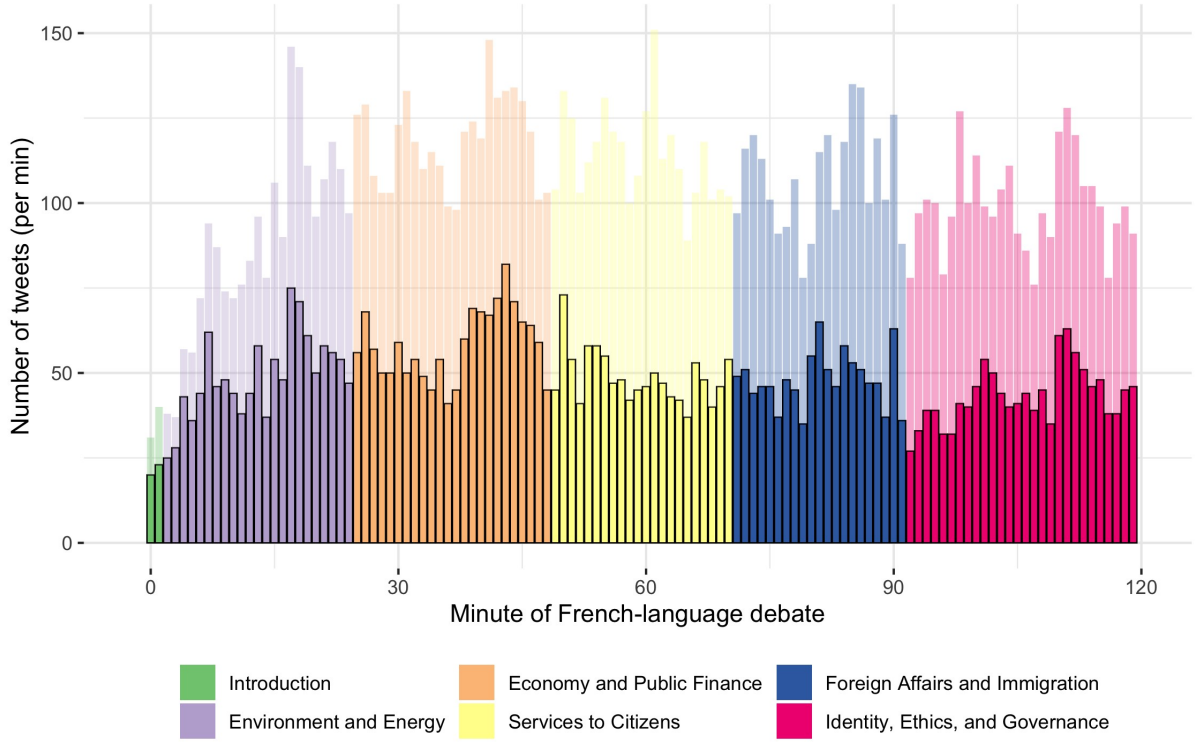


Figure 4: Debate-related Twitter activity during French-language debate

5.2. Debate Awareness and Viewership Across Demographic Groups

We were asked by the Commission to assess outreach toward Canadians with disabilities, Indigenous groups, remote communities, linguistic minorities, and ethno-Canadian communities.

To assess the demographic distribution of debate awareness, we modeled awareness as a function of disability identity, ethnicity, rural/urban residence, official language minority status, and age (Table 6). The results show that: (1) respondents who identified as disabled were 10 percentage points less likely to be aware of the upcoming debates than respondents who did not identify as disabled; (2) respondents of non-European ancestry were 6 percentage points less likely to be aware of the debates than respondents of European ancestry; (3) respondents living in rural ridings were 9 percentage points less likely to be aware of the debates than respondents living in urban ridings; and (4) older Canadians were more likely to be aware of the debates (awareness increased by approximately three-quarters of a percentage point for each additional year of age). We did not find evidence of differences in debate awareness between Indigenous respondents and respondents of European ancestry, or between official language minorities and other Canadians.

To assess the demographic distribution of debate viewership, we modeled debate viewership (defined as having watched the English debate, the French debate, or both) as a function of the same set of demographic factors (Table 7). Unlike debate awareness, however, we find no clear evidence that debate viewership varied with respect to disability, ethnicity, or rural/urban residence. We do,

however, find that: (1) official language minorities were 10 percentage points more likely to watch a debate; and (2) older Canadians were also more likely to watch (viewership increased by approximately four-tenths of a percentage point for each additional year of age).

Table 6: Debate awareness by demographic group

Disability	-0.0994*** (0.0268)
Non-European	-0.0572* (0.0274)
Indigenous	-0.0136 (0.0469)
Rural	-0.0912*** (0.0237)
Official language minority	0.0285 (.0283)
Age	0.00732*** (0.000577)
Constant	0.0594 (0.0320)
Observations	2939

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details.)
The dependent variable is binary. Disability is measured by respondent self-identification; the reference category is no disability. Ethnicity is categorized as European, Non-European, or Indigenous ancestry; the reference category is European ancestry. Rural is identified as respondents who live in a federal riding that is in the bottom quartile by population density; the reference category is urban. Official language minority is identified as either a French mother-tongue respondent living outside Quebec or an English mother-tongue respondent living in Quebec; the reference category is not an official language minority. Age is treated as continuous.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 7: Debate viewership by demographic group

Disability	-0.000797 (0.0345)
Non-European	-0.0142 (0.0362)
Indigenous	0.00610 (0.0685)
Rural	-0.0451 (0.0324)
Official language minority	0.0905* (0.0378)
Age	0.00381*** (0.000786)
Constant	0.221*** (0.0447)
Observations	2162

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details.)
The dependent variable is binary. Disability is measured by respondent self-identification; the reference category is no disability. Ethnicity is categorized as European, Non-European, or Indigenous ancestry; the reference category is European ancestry. Rural is identified as respondents who live in a federal riding that is in the bottom quartile by population density; the reference category is urban. Official language minority is identified as either a French mother-tongue respondent living outside Quebec or an English mother-tongue respondent living in Quebec; the reference category is not an official language minority. Age is treated as continuous. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

5.3. Viewership medium

We asked respondents who reported watching the debates what medium they used: TV, radio, or online. Table 8 reports the distribution for those who watched the English debate; Table 9 reports the same for those who watched the French debate. For both the English and French debates, respondents overwhelming reported watching the debate on television.

Table 8: How Watched English Debate

	Percent	N
TV	85.35	827
Radio	5.06	49
Online	9.60	93
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 9: How Watched French Debate

	Percent	N
TV	93.17	232
Radio	1.61	4
Online	5.22	13
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

5.4. Viewed with others

We asked respondents who reported watching the debates whether they did so in the company of others. Majorities of both those who watched the English-language debate (Table 10) and those who watched the French-language debate (Table 11) report doing so alone.

We then followed up by asking respondents who reported watching with others whether they did so as part of an organized event. This was the case for approximately 1 in 10 respondents who watched with others (Tables 12 and 13).

Table 10: Watched English Debate with Others

	Percent	N
Alone	58.10	563
With Others	41.90	406
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 11: Watched French Debate with Others

	Percent	N
Alone	63.05	157
With Others	36.95	92
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 12: Watched English Debate as Part of Organized Event

	Percent	N
Not part of organized event	89.16	362
Part of organized event	10.84	44
Total	100.00	406

Question administered to respondents who watched with others. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 13: Watched French Debate as Part of Organized Event

	Percent	N
Not part of organized event	86.96	80
Part of organized event	13.04	12
Total	100.00	92

Question administered to respondents who watched with others. Survey responses are unweighted.

5.5. Discussed debates with others, including on social media

Significant proportions of debate watchers report discussing the debates with others: approximately 60% of those who watched the English-language debate reported discussing the debate (Table 14); approximately 50% of those who reported watching the French-language debate reported doing the same (Table 15).

Table 14: Discussed what happened in the English-language leaders' debate with others

	Percent	N
Yes	58.72	569
No	41.28	400
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 15: Discussed what happened in the French-language leaders' debate with others

	Percent	N
Yes	48.59	121
No	51.41	128
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

The rate of reported discussion online, however, was more modest. Among those who watched the English-language debate, 12% commented on social media about the debate (Table 16). Among those who watched the French-language debate, 8% commented on social media (Table 17).

Table 16: Commented about what happened in the English-language leaders' debate on social media

	Percent	N
Yes	12.38	120
No	87.62	849
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 17: Commented about what happened in the French-language leaders' debate on social media

	Percent	N
Yes	8.43	21
No	91.57	228
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

5.6. Reasons for not watching the debates

We asked respondents in Wave 2 who reported not watching the debate what their "main reason" for not watching was. The results for the English and French debates are reported in Tables 18 and 19, respectively. For both debates, the most common reason given was "I was too busy." Other common responses were "I already know how I'm going to vote," "I don't think debates are useful," and "I'm not interested in politics." In short, the typical reasons for not watching refer to either the respondent's prior time commitments or a lack of interest in election debates. By contrast, only a minority of reasons pertain to a lack of awareness about the debate or a lack of access to the debate.[2]

[2] We further investigated the "Was not able to access" response. For the English-language debate, we examined whether this response was a function of disability, ethnicity, rural residence, official language minority, and age. Due to the infrequency of the "Was not able to access" response, we used King and Zeng's (King and Zeng 2001) rare events model as implemented in the *-relogit-* package in Stata. We found no evidence that these factors influenced a lack of access. We took a similar approach for the French-language debate, again estimating a rare events model of the "Was not able to access" response. In this instance, however, we could not estimate the impact of ethnicity due to sparseness of the data. Of the remaining factors, we found that rural residents were more likely to say they were not able to access the debate.

Table 18: Main reason for not watching the English-language leaders' debate

	Percent	N
Did not know about debate	6.75	98
Did not know where to watch	2.96	43
Was not able to access	8.61	125
Too busy	25.36	368
Already know how will vote	18.47	268
Debates are not useful	14.82	215
Not interested in politics	13.44	195
Other	9.58	139
Total	100.00	1451

Question administered to respondents who did not watch the debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 19: Main reason for not watching the French-language leaders' debate

	Percent	N
Did not know about debate	4.97	18
Did not know where to watch	1.38	5
Was not able to access	9.94	36
Too busy	23.76	86
Already know how will vote	20.44	74
Debates are not useful	12.98	47
Not interested in politics	13.81	50
Other	12.71	46
Total	100.00	362

Question administered to respondents who did not watch the debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

5.7. Overall level of interest on Twitter

The overall level of interest in the debates on Twitter was very high. As shown in Figure 5, the highest amount of Canadian politics English language Twitter activity was in the day immediately following the English-language debate. The French-language debate seemed to also spark some conversation, but the last days of the campaign generally saw higher activity.

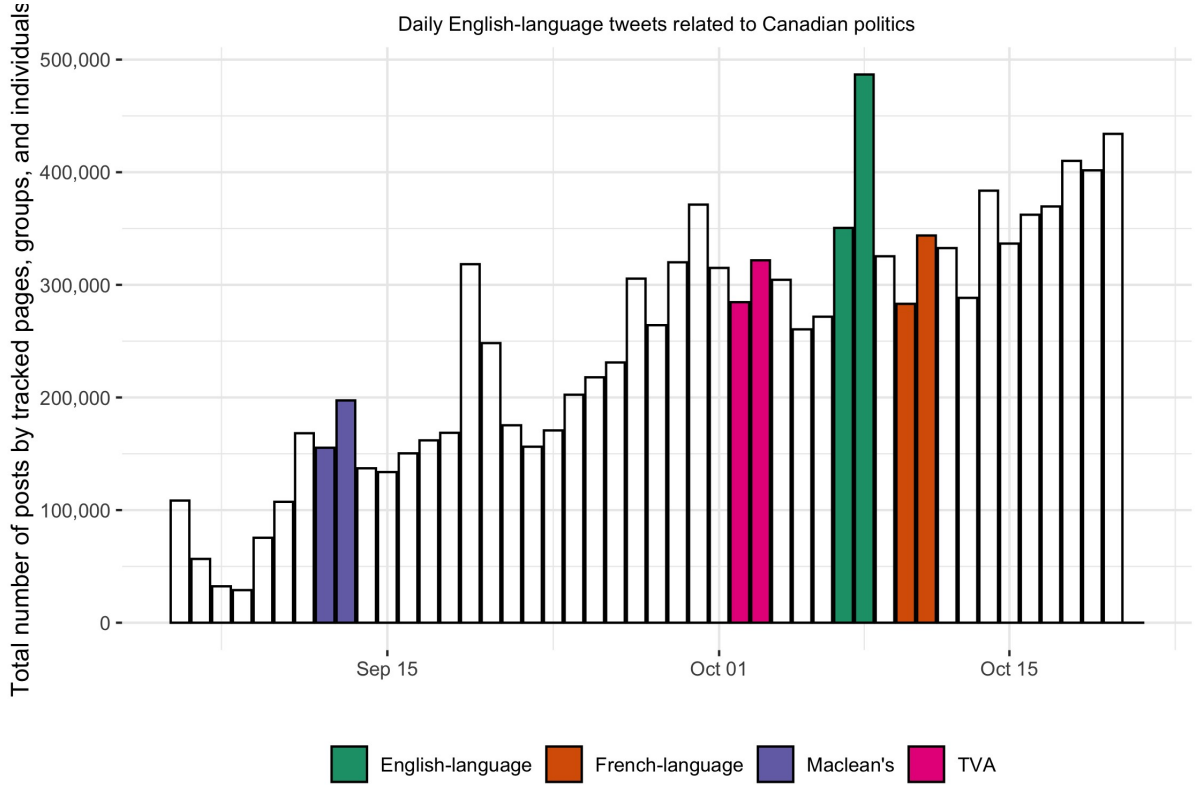


Figure 5: Debate-related Twitter activity during English-language debate

The level of French-language conversation was also very high after the French-language debate amongst French-language social media users as shown in Figure 6, although the level of conversation after the TVA Face-à-Face debate slightly edged out that of the Leaders' Debates Commission one.

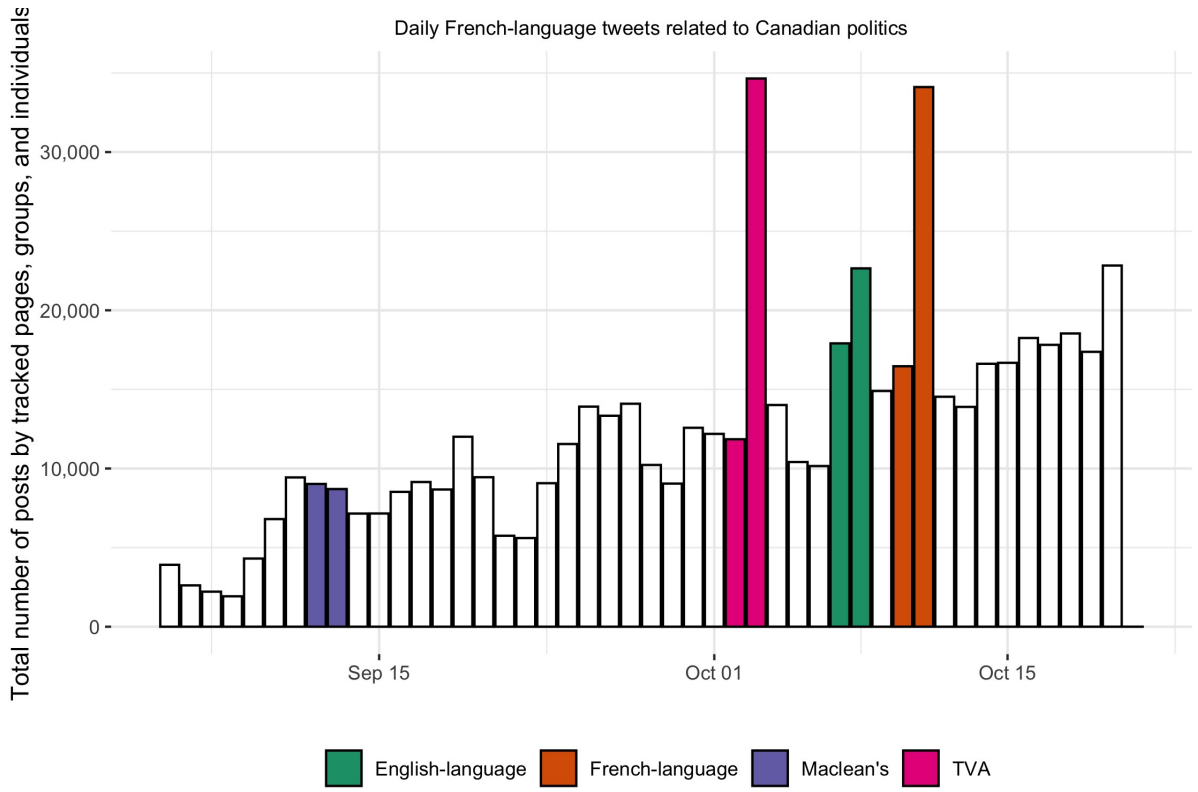


Figure 6: Debate-related Twitter activity during French-language debate

6. Debate evaluation

6.1. Survey respondents

In Wave 2 of the survey, we presented debate watchers with a series of questions aimed gauging their attitudes about the debate. More specifically, we presented respondents with a battery of 18 statements about each debate. By design, some statements were framed in a positive light and others were framed in a negative light. Respondents were then asked whether they strongly disagree, somewhat disagreed, somewhat agreed, or strongly agreed with each statement.

The 18 statements can be grouped into three main dimensions: evaluations of the debate content and format; evaluations of the debate moderators; and evaluations of the party leaders.

6.1.1. Evaluation of debate content and format

Respondents offered a mixed set of evaluations of the debate content and format. On the one hand, majorities of both those who watched the English-language debate and those who watched the French-language debate agreed: that the debate was informative (Tables 20 and 21); that the debate helped them to better understand the issues (Tables 26 and 27); and that the debate helped them to better understand the difference between the parties (Tables 28 and 29). At the same time, 52% of those who watched the English-language debate agreed that the debate was dull (Table 22); 45% of

those of watched the French-language debate said the same (Table 23). In addition, majorities of both those who watched the English-language debate and those who watched the French-language debate agreed: that the debate was repetitive (Tables 24 and 25) and that the debate didn't cover the issues that were most important to them (Tables 30 and 31).

We also note that 63% of those who watched the English debate either somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement that "There were too many leaders participating in the debate." (Table 32). Only 41% of those who watched the French-language debate agreed that there were too many leaders on the stage (Table 33).

Table 20: English debate: The debate was informative.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	10.11	98
Somewhat disagree	30.55	296
Somewhat agree	45.61	442
Strongly agree	11.66	113
DK	2.06	20
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 21: French debate: The debate was informative.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	3.21	8
Somewhat disagree	20.48	51
Somewhat agree	59.84	149
Strongly agree	12.45	31
DK	4.02	10
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 22: English debate: The debate was dull.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	8.05	78

Somewhat disagree	37.56	364
Somewhat agree	35.50	344
Strongly agree	16.00	155
DK	2.89	28
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 23: French debate: The debate was dull.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	9.64	24
Somewhat disagree	43.78	109
Somewhat agree	32.93	82
Strongly agree	11.65	29
DK	2.01	5
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 24: English debate: The debate was repetitive.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.37	23
Somewhat disagree	17.75	172
Somewhat agree	53.77	521
Strongly agree	22.50	218
DK	3.61	35
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 25: French debate: The debate was repetitive.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.81	7
Somewhat disagree	32.53	81
Somewhat agree	46.99	117
Strongly agree	16.06	40
DK	1.61	4
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 26: English debate: The debate helped me to better understand the issues.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	12.59	122
Somewhat disagree	34.88	338
Somewhat agree	39.73	385
Strongly agree	10.73	104
DK	2.06	20
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 27: French debate: The debate helped me to better understand the issues.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	3.21	8
Somewhat disagree	21.69	54
Somewhat agree	57.03	142
Strongly agree	13.25	33
DK	4.82	12
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 28: English debate: The debate helped me to better understand the differences between the parties.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	9.18	89
Somewhat disagree	24.66	239
Somewhat agree	47.78	463
Strongly agree	15.89	154
DK	2.48	24
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 29: French debate: The debate helped me to better understand the differences between the parties.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.81	7
Somewhat disagree	18.88	47
Somewhat agree	57.83	144
Strongly agree	16.47	41
DK	4.02	10
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 30: English debate: The debate didn't cover the issues that were most important to me.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	3.61	35
Somewhat disagree	29.51	286
Somewhat agree	42.72	414
Strongly agree	20.85	202
DK	3.30	32
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 31: French debate: The debate didn't cover the issues that were most important to me.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	6.43	16
Somewhat disagree	36.95	92
Somewhat agree	41.37	103
Strongly agree	12.05	30
DK	3.21	8
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 32: English debate: There were too many leaders participating in the debate.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	11.15	108
Somewhat disagree	22.39	217
Somewhat agree	31.79	308
Strongly agree	31.37	304
DK	3.30	32
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 33: French debate: There were too many leaders participating in the debate.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	14.86	37
Somewhat disagree	38.96	97
Somewhat agree	26.10	65
Strongly agree	14.46	36
DK	5.62	14
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

6.1.2. Evaluations of the debate moderators

Respondents' evaluations of the debate moderators reflected an appreciation for their conduct, but also a desire for them to take a more assertive stance with respect to the party leaders. Very large majorities of both those who watched the English-language debate and those who watched the French-language debate agreed that the moderators treated each leader fairly (Tables 34 and 35) and that the moderators asked good questions (Tables 36 and 37). Majorities of debate watchers also said that the moderators provided enough time to the leaders to answer questions (Tables 38 and 39). Debate watchers were divided over the question of whether the moderators should have provided more time for the leaders to debate each other directly (Tables 40 and 41).

At the same time, respondents indicated that they would have liked to see moderators doing more to push the party leaders. Over 80% of those who watched the English-language debate agreed that the moderators "should have done more to push leaders who avoided answering the question" (Table 42); 72% of those who watched the French-language debate agreed with the same statement (Table 43). In addition, more than three-quarters of those who watched the English-language debate and those who watched the French-language debate agreed that the moderators "should have done more to push leaders who gave factually inaccurate answers" (Tables 44 and 45).

Table 34: English debate: The moderators treated each leader fairly.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	5.37	52
Somewhat disagree	11.15	108
Somewhat agree	47.68	462
Strongly agree	31.27	303
DK	4.54	44
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 35: French debate: The moderators treated each leader fairly.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.41	6
Somewhat disagree	8.84	22
Somewhat agree	57.83	144

Strongly agree	27.31	68
DK	3.61	9
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 36: English debate: The moderators asked good questions.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	4.23	41
Somewhat disagree	15.79	153
Somewhat agree	55.42	537
Strongly agree	21.26	206
DK	3.30	32
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 37: French debate: The moderators asked good questions.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.01	5
Somewhat disagree	8.84	22
Somewhat agree	59.84	149
Strongly agree	25.70	64
DK	3.61	9
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 38: English debate: The moderators gave the leaders enough time to answer the questions.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	12.07	117
Somewhat disagree	29.93	290
Somewhat agree	41.38	401
Strongly agree	13.52	131

DK	3.10	30
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 39: French debate: The moderators gave the leaders enough time to answer the questions.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.41	6
Somewhat disagree	22.49	56
Somewhat agree	55.02	137
Strongly agree	17.27	43
DK	2.81	7
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 40: English debate: The moderators didn't give the leaders enough time to debate each other directly.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	5.06	49
Somewhat disagree	29.62	287
Somewhat agree	37.46	363
Strongly agree	22.91	222
DK	4.95	48
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 41: French debate: The moderators didn't give the leaders enough time to debate each other directly.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	6.43	16
Somewhat disagree	41.37	103
Somewhat agree	36.55	91
Strongly agree	9.24	23
DK	6.43	16
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 42: English debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who avoided answering the question.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	1.75	17
Somewhat disagree	9.70	94
Somewhat agree	38.91	377
Strongly agree	45.41	440
DK	4.23	41
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 43: French debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who avoided answering the question.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.41	6
Somewhat disagree	17.67	44
Somewhat agree	44.18	110
Strongly agree	28.11	70
DK	7.63	19
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 44: English debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who gave factually inaccurate answers.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.48	24
Somewhat disagree	11.15	108
Somewhat agree	37.25	361
Strongly agree	42.31	410
DK	6.81	66
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 45: French debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who gave factually inaccurate answers.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	1.20	3
Somewhat disagree	15.66	39
Somewhat agree	51.81	129
Strongly agree	23.29	58
DK	8.03	20
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

6.1.3. Evaluations of the party leaders

Debate watchers typically reported negative evaluations of the party leaders' conduct during the debates. Less than half of those who watched the English-language debate and those who watched the French-language debate agreed that the leaders gave clear answers (Tables 46 and 47). Approximately one-third of those who watched the English-language debate agreed that the leaders were respectful of each other; by contrast, just over 60% of those who watched the French debate agreed that the leaders were respectful (Tables 48 and 49).

In addition, large majorities of both those who watched the English-language debate and those who watched the French-language debate agreed that the leaders "interrupted each other too much" (Tables 50 and 51), gave answers that "felt scripted and rehearsed" (Tables 52 and 53), and "often avoided answering the question" (Tables 54 and 55).

Table 46: English debate: The leaders' answers were clear.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	18.68	181
Somewhat disagree	46.13	447
Somewhat agree	25.70	249
Strongly agree	6.91	67
DK	2.58	25
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 47: French debate: The leaders' answers were clear.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	5.62	14
Somewhat disagree	50.60	126
Somewhat agree	30.92	77
Strongly agree	10.04	25
DK	2.81	7
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 48: English debate: The leaders were respectful of each other.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	20.64	200
Somewhat disagree	40.66	394
Somewhat agree	28.28	274
Strongly agree	7.84	76
DK	2.58	25
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 49: French debate: The leaders were respectful of each other.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	5.62	14
Somewhat disagree	29.72	74
Somewhat agree	49.80	124
Strongly agree	10.84	27
DK	4.02	10
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 50: English debate: The leaders interrupted each other too much.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	1.34	13
Somewhat disagree	7.53	73
Somewhat agree	31.58	306
Strongly agree	57.59	558
DK	1.96	19
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 51: French debate: The leaders interrupted each other too much.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.01	5
Somewhat disagree	27.31	68
Somewhat agree	45.38	113
Strongly agree	21.69	54
DK	3.61	9
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 52: English debate: The leaders' answers felt scripted and rehearsed.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	1.86	18
Somewhat disagree	16.00	155
Somewhat agree	51.39	498
Strongly agree	27.86	270
DK	2.89	28
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 53: French debate: The leaders' answers felt scripted and rehearsed.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	0.40	1
Somewhat disagree	15.26	38
Somewhat agree	55.42	138
Strongly agree	24.50	61
DK	4.42	11
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 54: English debate: The leaders often avoided answering the question.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	1.03	10
Somewhat disagree	8.88	86
Somewhat agree	46.85	454
Strongly agree	40.97	397
DK	2.27	22
Total	100.00	969

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 55: French debate: The leaders often avoided answering the question.

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	0.80	2
Somewhat disagree	15.66	39
Somewhat agree	58.63	146
Strongly agree	20.88	52
DK	4.02	10
Total	100.00	249

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

6.2. Evaluation of which leader won the debate

We asked respondents–regardless of whether they reported watching the debates–which party leader they thought won. In the English debate, setting aside the Don't Know responses, Jagmeet Singh was the leader most frequently identified as the winner (Table 56). In the French debate, again putting the Don't Know responses to one side, Yves-François Blanchet was the most frequent choice as the winner (Table 57).

Table 56: Who won the English-language leaders' debate

	Percent	Standard error	N
Trudeau	11.35	0.74	276
Scheer	13.30	0.77	343
Singh	19.34	0.89	495
May	2.49	0.35	63
Blanchet	3.78	0.42	101
Bernier	1.40	0.30	30
DK	48.33	1.18	1094
Total	100.00	0.00	2402

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details).

Table 57: Who won the French-language leaders' debate

	Percent	N
Trudeau	12.27	75
Scheer	5.89	36
Singh	6.22	38
May	2.29	14
Blanchet	28.15	172
Bernier	2.62	16
DK	42.55	260
Total	100.00	611

Question administered to respondents who completed the survey after the start of French debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

6.3. Twitter

Overall there was a generally positive conversation on the debates as measured by sentiment of tweets appearing with debate-related hashtags. Figure 7 shows debate-related hashtag sentiment as compared to popular pro-Liberal and -Conservative hashtags as well as popular anti-Trudeau and anti-Scheer hashtags. The sentiment dictionary employed here adequately identifies positive and negative hashtags, with anti-Trudeau and anti-Scheer hashtags having overall negative sentiment and pro-Liberal and pro-Conservative ones having overall positive sentiment.

We find that debate-related hashtags generally had a positive tone and were overall more positive than major neutral Canadian politics ones. This reflects a degree of rallying where partisans use these debate hashtags to support their own party, however, also generally reflect on reception on the debates.

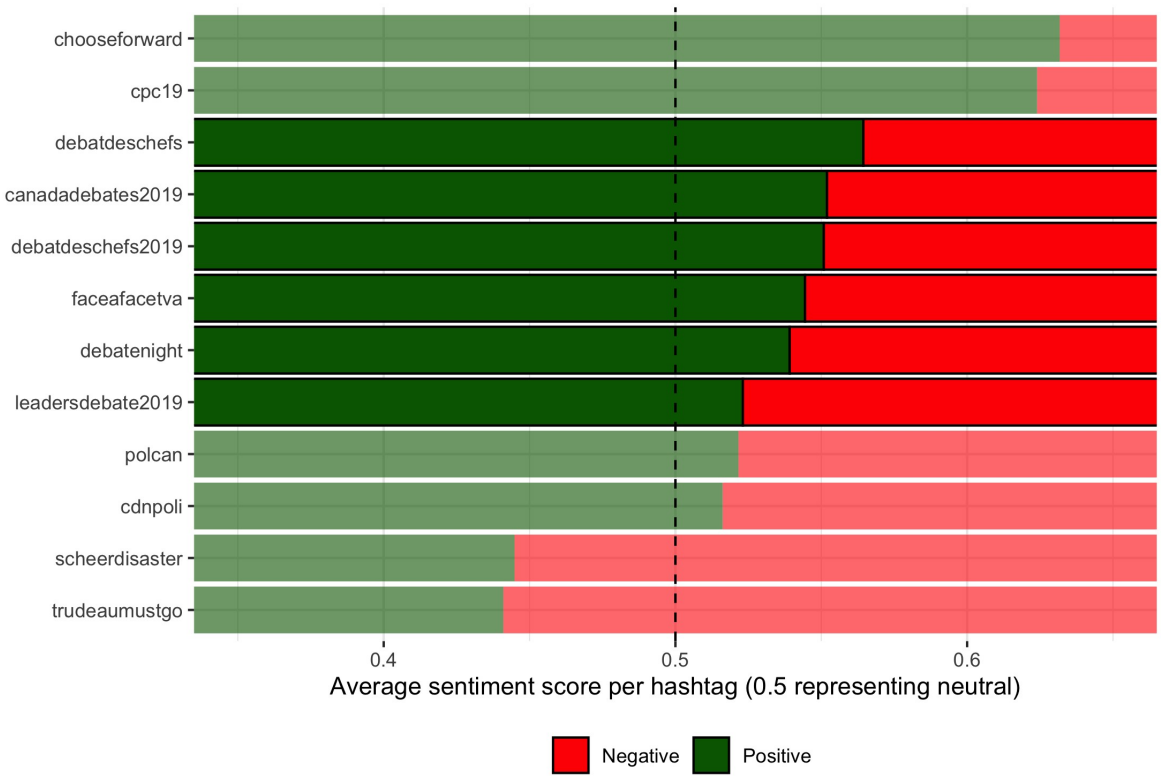


Figure 7: Sentiment evaluation of debate hashtags in comparison to popular Canadian politics hashtags

Figure 8 shows the over-time sentiment in Tweets related to the debates. Immediately following the English-language debate on the evening of the 7th there was overall positive sentiment that steadily increased until the morning of the 9th at which point there was a steady decrease. This may be the result of a negative elite-driven evaluation of the debate which seemed to appear the day following the debate and then 'trickled-down' to the mass public.

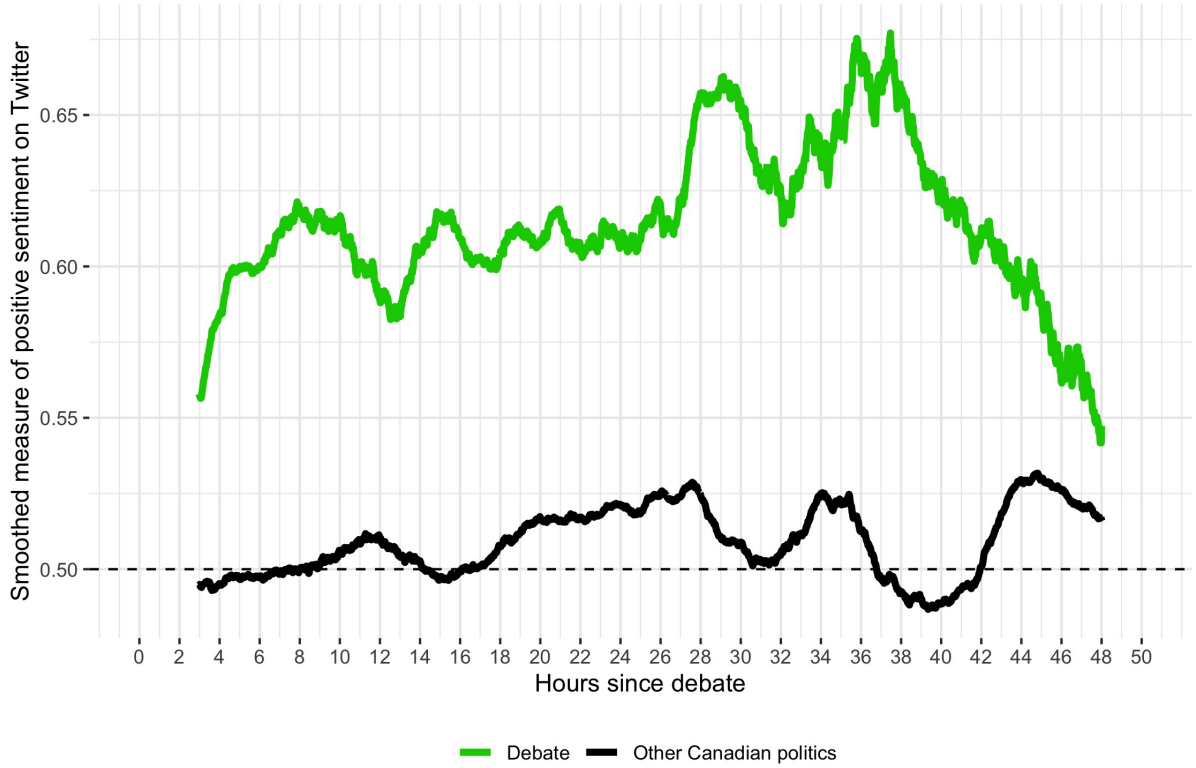


Figure 8: Sentiment evaluation of post-English debate debate-related commentary relative to that of overall discussion of Canadian politics

To test this, we examined the same sentiment over time but instead split the tweets into those of journalists and media outlets versus the general population. Figure 9 shows the overall difference in sentiment between the two populations. There are two striking findings here: 1) the sentiment of journalists is overall less positive than the mass population; and 2) the decline in positive sentiment occurred amongst journalists approximately 24 hours after the first debate and 12 hours before we saw a similar decline in the mass population. This suggests that the full Twitter population took sentiment cues from the journalists and the overall evaluation of the debate shifted in a negative direction well after the debate had concluded.

While the initial conversation during the debate was largely positive, later discussions of the English-language debate were more negative in tone.

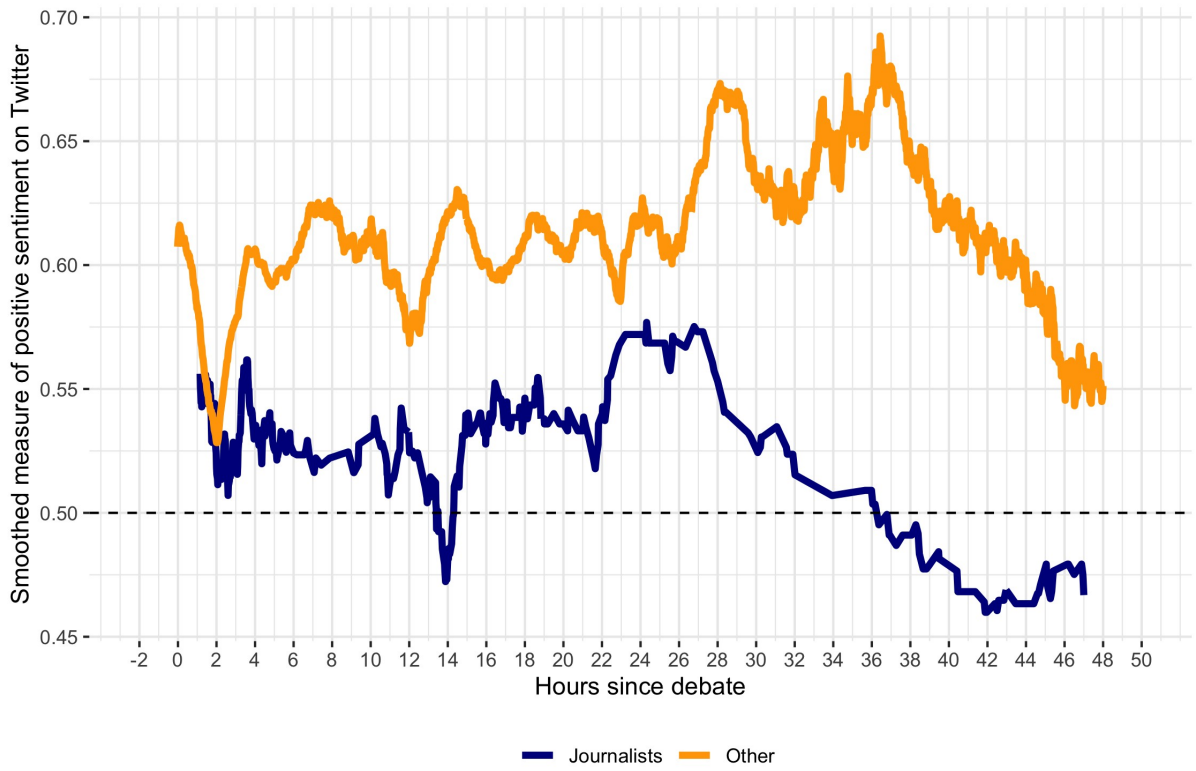


Figure 9: Sentiment evaluation of post-English debate debate-related commentary relative to that of overall discussion of Canadian politics.

7. Debate Consequences

Our study allows us to estimate several consequences of watching the leaders' debates, including on political interest, news consumption, political knowledge, and engagement with the election.

7.1. Interest in federal election and in politics generally

Table 58 estimates the effect of debate viewership on general interest in politics. We do not find a statistically significant relationship between debate viewing and changes in respondents' general interest in politics. When we ask about specific interest in the federal election, rather than general political interest, we once again fail to find a statistically significant relationship (Table 59). On balance, then, there is little evidence that debate viewership increased political interest in the short-term.

Table 58: Change in interest about politics generally

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0139 (0.0198)
Female	0.0155 (0.0203)
Age	-0.000289 (0.000679)
College	-0.0567* (0.0253)
University	-0.0330 (0.0261)
HH Income	-0.00455 (0.00601)
Constant	0.0474 (0.0513)
Observations	2105

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details.) Interest was originally measured on a 0 to 10 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 7. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Table 59: Change in interest about federal election

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0197 (0.0209)
Female	-0.00331 (0.0211)
Age	-0.000646 (0.000753)
College	-0.0204 (0.0278)
University	0.00316 (0.0289)
HH Income	-0.00941 (0.00627)
Constant	0.0570 (0.0529)
Observations	2108

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details.) Interest was originally measured on a 0 to 10 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 7. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

7.2. News consumption

Viewing a debate may cause individuals to pursue more information via news sources, as they seek out answers to questions raised during the debate or wish to understand media perspectives on the debate. Table 60 estimates whether individuals who watched the debate were more likely to change their general news consumption. We find no statistically significant evidence of this. However, we do find a substantial increase in news consumption about the federal election specifically. Compared to individuals who did not watch the debate, those who watched the debate had a 9-percentage point greater net increase in election news consumption (Table 61).

Table 60: Change in news consumption in general

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	-0.0100 (0.0219)
Female	0.00361 (0.0226)
Age	-0.00139 (0.000710)
College	0.0514 (0.0272)
University	0.0229 (0.0287)
HH Income	-0.00107 (0.00666)
Constant	0.0610 (0.0482)
Observations	2213

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). News consumption was originally measured on a 1 to 6 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 3. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

Table 61: Change in news consumption about federal election

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0925*** (0.0229)
Female	0.0311 (0.0225)
Age	-0.000412 (0.000695)
College	-0.0335 (0.0288)
University	-0.0365 (0.0304)
HH Income	-0.00503 (0.00656)
Constant	0.0366 (0.0534)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). News consumption was originally measured on a 0 to 4 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 1. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.3. Knowledge

7.3.1. Election date and where to vote

We asked respondents about the technical details of the election – if they knew the date of the election and if they knew where to vote. We find that while debate viewers did increase their knowledge on the date of the election in the period between Waves 1 and 2, the increase was greater among non-debate viewers (Table 62). That said, this is largely an artefact of those who watched the debates already exhibiting high levels of knowledge about the election date. Indeed, among those who reported watching a debate in Wave 2, 87% already knew the correct election date prior to the debate (by comparison, only 69% of individuals who reported not watching a debate in Wave 2 knew the correct election date prior to the debate).

Table 63 presents estimates of the effects of watching the debate on knowledge of one's polling place. We find no difference between debate viewers and non-viewers, though both groups increased in self-reported knowledge about polling place location in the time between the two surveys.

Table 62: Change in knowledge of federal election date

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	-0.0686*** (0.0192)
Female	0.0535** (0.0199)
Age	-0.0000520 (0.000696)
College	-0.0729* (0.0291)
University	-0.0917** (0.0295)
HH Income	0.00357 (0.00643)
Constant	0.173***(0.0520)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from knowing the correct answer to not knowing the correct answer; 0 if the respondent did not know the correct answer in both waves, or knew the correct answer in both waves; and 1 if the respondent moved from not knowing the correct answer to knowing the correct answer. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

Table 63: Change in knowledge of polling place

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	-0.0126 (0.0159)
Female	0.0169 (0.0180)
Age	-0.00121* (0.000524)
College	0.00994 (0.0244)
University	-0.000845 (0.0244)
HH Income	0.00544 (0.00588)
Constant	0.104* (0.0442)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from knowing where to vote to not knowing where to vote; 0 if the respondent did not know where to vote in both waves, or knew where to vote in both waves; and 1 if the respondent moved from not knowing where to vote to knowing where to vote. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ p < 0.05, $**$ p < 0.01, $***$ p < 0.001

7.3.2. Current economic and social conditions

We quizzed individuals about their knowledge of objective current social and economic conditions. In particular, we asked them the following:

- Is Canada on track to meet its climate change commitments under the Paris Accord? (Correct answer: No)
- On average, does Canada admit more or less refugees as a percentage of the population than the United States? (Correct answer: More)
- Is the number of all immigrants (including refugees) admitted to Canada in 2018 higher or lower than in 2015? (Correct answer: Higher)
- Does a Canadian family with two children earning $50,000 receive more in monthly payments from the federal government in 2018 than in 2015, or less? (Correct answer: More in 2018)
- Was the federal deficit in 2018 greater than the federal deficit in 2015? (Correct answer: Greater in 2018)
- Was the unemployment rate lower in 2018 or in 2015? (Correct answer: Lower in 2018)

We find no measurable difference between debate watchers and non-watchers in terms of their change in knowledge about these items (Table 64).

Table 64: Change in knowledge of current economic and social conditions

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0271 (0.0252)
Female	-0.0255 (0.0243)
Age	-0.000567 (0.000819)
College	-0.0653* (0.0323)
University	-0.0246 (0.0319)
HH Income	0.00877 (0.00800)
Constant	0.0657 (0.0539)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Knowledge was originally measured on a 0 to 6 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 4. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.3.3. Party platforms

We also quizzed voters about their knowledge of party promises. We presented voters with six promises forwarded by parties during the campaign. We then asked them to attribute promises to parties. Prior to the debate, the median number of correct attributions was 2 (out of 6 promises). According to our estimates in Table 65, debate viewers demonstrated a clear improvement over non-viewers in their ability to make more than the median number of correct promise attributions. Compared to non-viewers, debate viewers experienced a 10-percentage point greater net increase in party platform knowledge following the debates. In short, debate viewership increased knowledge of parties' promises.

Table 65: Change in knowledge of party promises

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.101*** (0.0249)
Female	0.0486* (0.0244)
Age	-0.000148 (0.000817)
College	-0.00492 (0.0316)
University	-0.0174 (0.0308)
HH Income	0.0151 (0.00774)
Constant	-0.0387 (0.0556)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Knowledge was originally measured on a 0 to 6 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 2. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.4. Self-reported confidence in knowing enough to vote

Finally, we asked respondents if they felt that were confident that they could make a good voting decision. According to our estimates in Table 66, we find no differences between watchers and non-watchers with respect to changes in this self-reported confidence.

Table 66: Change in confidence to make a good voting decision

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.00225 (0.0235)
Female	0.0318 (0.0232)
Age	0.000847 (0.000807)
College	-0.0493 (0.0325)
University	-0.0662 (0.0338)
HH Income	0.0104 (0.00765)
Constant	-0.0425 (0.0628)
Observations	2097

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Confidence was originally measured on a 0 to 10 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 7. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.5. Democratic satisfaction

We asked respondents about their general satisfaction with Canadian democracy. We find that debate viewership is unrelated to changes in democratic satisfaction over this period (Table 67).

Table 67: Change in satisfaction with Canadian democracy

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0209 (0.0172)
Female	0.0177 (0.0170)
Age	0.000271 (0.000575)
College	-0.0167 (0.0226)
University	-0.0260 (0.0236)
HH Income	0.0103 (0.00588)
Constant	-0.0797 (0.0413)
Observations	2141

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Satisfaction was originally measured on a 0 to 3 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 2. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.6. Confidence in democratic institutions

We also queried respondents on their faith in Canadian democratic institutions. In this instance, we actually find a decrease in confidence among debate viewers versus nonviewers. According to our estimates in Table 68, we find that debate viewers experienced a 4.6 percentage point greater net decline in their confidence in democratic institutions– compared to non-viewers.

We also explored debate effects on trust in political parties to provide factual information. We find no measurable difference between viewers and non-viewers on this metric (Table 69).

Table 68: Change in confidence in Canadian institutions

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	-0.0459* (0.0213)
Female	-0.0547* (0.0215)
Age	-0.000820 (0.000706)
College	0.0463 (0.0304)
University	0.00873 (0.0286)
HH Income	0.000684 (0.00751)
Constant	0.0635 (0.0516)
Observations	2179

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Confidence was originally measured on a 0 to 3 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 1.25. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

Table 69: Change in trust in political parties to provide factual information

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	-0.0154 (0.0234)
Female	-0.00527 (0.0242)
Age	0.000547 (0.000747)
College	-0.0172 (0.0352)
University	-0.00469 (0.0322)
HH Income	-0.000910 (0.00696)
Constant	-0.0172 (0.0543)
Observations	1984

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Trust was originally measured on a 0 to 10 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 4. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.7. Political efficacy

Having watched the debate and learned about parties and their positions, viewers may then feel more confident in the responsiveness of democratic institutions and in their own ability to understand and influence politics. This is typically referred to as efficacy. However, following Table 70, we find no effect of debate viewership on changes in voters' sense of political efficacy over this period.

Table 70: Change in political efficacy

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.00679 (0.0225)
Female	0.0276 (0.0233)
Age	-0.000114 (0.000787)
College	-0.0359 (0.0327)
University	0.00566 (0.0337)
HH Income	0.000837 (0.00776)
Constant	0.000367 (0.0602)
Observations	2226

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Efficacy was originally measured on a 0 to 3 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 1. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.8. Discussion of federal election

Table 71 presents our estimates of the effect of debate viewership on discussion of the federal election. Reflecting our finding of increased news consumption about the election in Table 61, we find that, compared to non-viewers, debate viewers had an 8.5 percentage point greater net increase in discussion about the federal election following the debates.

Table 71: Change in discussion of federal election

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0846*** (0.0249)
Female	-0.0222 (0.0240)
Age	0.0000512 (0.000818)
College	-0.000306 (0.0334)
University	0.0187 (0.0340)
HH Income	0.00745 (0.00769)
Constant	-0.0240 (0.0567)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Discussion was originally measured on a to 3 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 0. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.9. Turnout intention and vote choice

We find no difference in the change in intended turnout between debate viewers and non-viewers (Table 72). We likewise find no measurable difference between viewers and non-viewers with respect to change in vote intention–i.e., choice of party (Table 73).

Table 72: Change in intention to turn out to vote

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	-0.0131 (0.0160)
Female	0.0169 (0.0169)
Age	0.0000225 (0.000568)
College	0.00239 (0.0215)
University	-0.00228 (0.0244)
HH Income	-0.00762 (0.00570)
Constant	0.0159 (0.0458)
Observations	2235

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from certain to vote to not certain to vote; 0 if the respondent remained not certain to vote or remained certain to vote; and 1 if the respondent moved from not certain to vote to certain to vote. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

Table 73: Change in vote choice

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0123 (0.0199)
Female	0.00815 (0.0209)
Age	-0.00222*** (0.00065)
College	0.0107 (0.0283)
University	0.0244 (0.0281)
HH Income	-0.0164* (0.00687)
Constant	0.327*** (0.0524)
Observations	2174

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). The dependent variable is coded 0 if the respondent reported the same vote choice; and 1 if the respondent reported a different vote choice. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$

7.10. Party Evaluations

7.10.1. Feeling thermometers

Did the debates help voters update their evaluations of parties? On this measure, we find a clear effect. We asked respondents to rate every party on a feeling thermometer from 0 to 100 in both waves of our survey. We then observe the differences between these scores and calculate an average absolute change. Essentially, this recovers a measure in overall change in leader ratings without estimating the direction of these changes. We find that viewers were significantly more likely to change their evaluations of parties than non-viewers, though the effect is not substantively very large (Table 74). We later find that debate viewers also show more updating in their leader ratings (Table 78).

Table 74: Change in party ratings

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.971** (0.365)
Female	0.178 (0.392)
Age	-0.0236* (0.0117)
College	0.388 (0.574)
University	-0.129 (0.552)
HH Income	0.0288 (0.121)
Constant	11.09*** (0.944)
Observations	2151

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Respondents originally rated each party on a 0 to 100 scale. The dependent variable is the absolute difference in these party ratings between waves, averaged across the parties for each respondent. This scale of average absolute differences ranges from 0 to 80. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

7.10.2. Party placement on left-right scale

While viewers did show a greater change in their party evaluations, we find no significant differences between viewers and non-viewers with respect to changes in their average placements of the parties on a left-right dimension (Table 75) or changes in their ability to place parties on that dimension in the first place (Table 76).

Table 75: Change in left-right placement of the parties

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.00305 (0.0673)
Female	0.0388 (0.0717)
Age	-0.00105 (0.00224)
College	-0.0668 (0.103)
University	-0.0114 (0.101)
HH Income	-0.00486 (0.0235)
Constant	1.391*** (0.182)
Observations	1785

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Respondents originally placed each party on a 0 to 10 scale. The dependent variable is the absolute difference in these party placements between waves, averaged across the parties for each respondent. This scale of average absolute differences ranges from 0 to 10. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

Table 76: Change in ability to place all six parties on left-right scale

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0239 (0.0217)
Female	-0.0171 (0.0222)
Age	0.000383 (0.000716)
College	-0.0483 (0.0313)
University	-0.0184 (0.0318)
HH Income	-0.000844 (0.00759)
Constant	0.0424 (0.0537)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details).
In Wave 1, most respondents were able to place all six parties. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from placing all six parties to placing less than six parties; 0 if the respondent placed less than six parties in both waves, or placed all six parties in both waves; and 1 if the respondent moved from placing less than six parties to placing all six parties. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. $*$ $p < 0.05$, $**$ $p < 0.01$, $***$ $p < 0.001$.

7.10.3. Best party to handle most important issue

We find no evidence that viewers were more likely than non-viewers to change their evaluation of which party was best suited to address the respondents' most important issue (Table 77).

Table 77: Change in party best able to address most important issue

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0207 (0.0233)
Female	0.0281 (0.0238)
Age	-0.00105 (0.000740)
College	0.0268 (0.0334)
University	-0.0372 (0.0322)
HH Income	-0.0141 (0.00763)
Constant	0.424*** (0.0572)
Observations	2244

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). The dependent variable is coded 0 if the respondent gave the same response in both waves; and 1 if the respondent gave a different response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

7.11. Evaluations of the party leaders

Table 78: Change in party leader ratings

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.739 (0.385)
Female	0.343 (0.422)
Age	-0.0108 (0.0125)
College	-0.866 (0.617)
University	-0.412 (0.622)
HH Income	0.142 (0.144)
Constant	10.86*** (1.095)
Observations	2111

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Respondents originally rated each leader on a 0 to 100 scale. The dependent variable is the absolute difference in these party leader ratings between waves, averaged across the leaders for each respondent. This scale of average absolute differences ranges from 0 to 78. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

7.12. Non-voting forms of political participation

We asked respondents how likely they would be to participate in non-voting forms of political participation (e.g., attending a political meeting, using social media to discuss politics, or signing a petition) over the next 12 months. We find that debate viewers report a significant increase in these expected activities in comparison to non-viewers. Namely, compared to non-viewers, debate viewers experienced a 5.7 percentage point greater net increase in expected future participation (Table 79).

Table 79: Change in expected future engagement in non-voting forms of political participation

	Wave 1 to Wave 2
Watched	0.0568** (0.0213)
Female	0.0199 (0.0205)
Age	-0.000860 (0.000663)
College	-0.0135 (0.0283)
University	-0.0167 (0.0304)
HH Income	-0.00687 (0.00662)
Constant	-0.00464 (0.0501)
Observations	2203

Standard errors in parentheses. Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details). Participation was originally measured on a 0 to 3 scale. The median response in Wave 1 was 0.37. The dependent variable is coded -1 if the respondent moved from above the Wave 1 median response to at or below the Wave 1 median response; 0 if the respondent remained at or below the Wave 1 median response, or remained above the Wave 1 median response; and 1 if the respondent moved from at or below the Wave 1 median response to above the Wave 1 median response. Gender, age, education, and income–all measured at Wave 1–are included as covariates. The reference categories for gender and education, respectively, are Male and High School or Less. Age and income are treated as continuous. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

8. Future debates

8.1. Conjoint experiment eliciting preferences about hypothetical debate formats

What do voters want from debates? In addition to estimating the effects of debates, we also aimed to ascertain what features of debates matters to voters. To ascertain this, we conducted a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller et al. 2014) in which voters were presented with 12 different hypothetical debate formats, and then asked for their likelihood of watching the debate in each format. The hypothetical debates had eight different features, namely:

- The topic, which could be foreign affairs, healthcare only, the environment only, the economy only, or the economy, healthcare, and the environment.
- The number of leaders, which could be 2, 4, or 6.
- The format for responses, whether leaders mainly responded to the moderators or to each other.
- The main source of questions, whether from journalists, policy experts, or ordinary citizens.
- Whether moderators were allowed to cut off leaders who interrupt each other.
- Whether moderators were allowed to challenge leaders' answers.
- The number of moderators, whether one, two, or five; and
- The debate language. In the experiment, this could take on one of three possible values: "English only (translation provided);" "French only (translation provided);" or "Switching between English and French (translation provided)." For the analysis, the variable was recoded to reflect the respondent's language (e.g., coded as "Own Language" when a French-speaking respondent was assessing a French-only debate or when an English-speaking respondent was assessing an English-only debate).

The conjoint approach allows us to estimate the independent effect of any single debate across all other factors (and combinations of factors).

Figure 10 presents our results. We find that respondents were significantly more likely to prefer a debate focused on the economy, healthcare, and the environment than any debate focused on one standalone issue. Compared to any other debate topics, foreign affairs was least preferred as a debate topic.

Respondents did not reveal a preference for the number of leaders present, though they appear to prefer more leaders to fewer.

Respondents were indifferent between a format in which leaders mainly respond to moderators and one in which they mainly respond to each other. They were, however, measurably more likely to watch debates in which a moderator had the power to cut off leaders who interrupt each other. There is no clear preference for moderators that are empowered to challenge leaders' answers.

We find clear evidence that respondents prefer a single moderator to multiple moderators.

Finally, we find that respondents express a strong preference for a debate conducted in their own language as opposed to one conducted in the other official language. They also express less enthusiasm about bilingual debates, though this effect is not as stark.

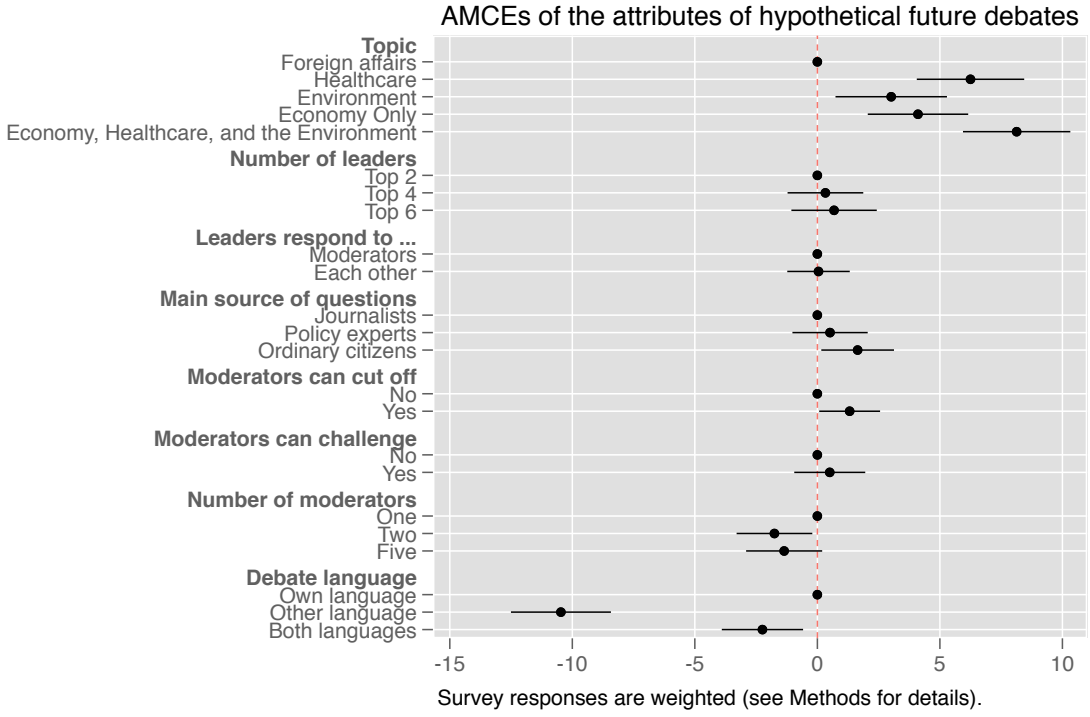


Figure 10

8.2. How to select which leaders to invite to participate in debates

In addition to probing respondents' preferences over various debate formats, we also asked them to evaluate the criteria on which parties could be selected to participate in debates. We presented respondents with six different criteria and asked them to rank them. Table 80 presents the criteria and average rank, where lower numbers indicate a greater preference for any single criterion. Respondents most preferred the number of ridings a party is competing in, followed by their poll

standings. The number of MPs held the third highest rank, while the size of a party's membership was next. The standalone judgments of debate organizers received the second lowest rank. The clearly least preferred metric was the number of donors.

Table 80: Mean rank of selection criteria for parties in future debates

	Mean Rank
Number of ridings with candidates	2.71
Support in polls	2.92
Number of MPs	3.03
Size of membership	3.71
Judgments of debate organizers	3.78
Number of donors	4.85
Observations	1006

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details).

8.3. Requirement for broadcasters to carry debates

Thinking again about the next federal election, we asked respondents whether TV broadcasters should be required by law to broadcast the federal leaders' debate. Table 81 shows that a majority of Canadians, 57%, thought they should.

Table 81: TV broadcasters should be required by law to broadcast the debate

	Percent	Standard error	N
Yes	57.10	1.83	599
No	24.62	1.59	239
Not sure	18.29	1.51	168
Total	100.00	0.00	1006

Survey responses are weighted (see Methods for details).

References

Duval, Dominic, and François Pétry. 2016. “L’analyse Automatisée Du Ton Médiatique : Construction et Utilisation de La Version Française Du Lexicoder Sentiment Dictionary.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue canadienne de science politique* 49 (2).

Hainmueller, Jens, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto. 2014. “Causal Inference in Conjoint Analysis: Understanding Multidimensional Choices via Stated Preference Experiments.” *Political Analysis* 22 (1).

King, Gary, and Langche Zeng. 2001. “Logistic Regression in Rare Events Data.” *Political* Analysis 9 (2).

Young, Lori, and Stuart Soroka. 2012. “Affective News: The Automated Coding of Sentiment in Political Texts.” *Political Communication* 29 (2). https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2012.671234.

Appendices

A Responses from survey fielded through Commission website

In addition to the three-wave panel survey presented above, which was fielded to a broadly representative sample of Canadians, we also created a short cross-sectional survey that was fielded through the Commission's website. The goal was to allow all Canadians the opportunity to provide feedback on the Commission debates.

Unlike the panel survey, this Commission-fielded survey is not intended to approximate a representative sample. Respondents could freely opt in. By design, no demographic information was collected.

With the exception of one question pertaining to organized debate viewing events, the Commission-fielded survey consisted of a subset of questions that appeared in Waves 2 and 3 of the three-wave panel survey.

The Commission-fielded survey was available to Canadians between October 7 and November 12. We received a total of 457 complete responses. Although the survey was made available in both English and French, the vast majority of respondents (97%) completed the survey in English.

The results for each question are reported below.

A.1 Debate viewership

Table 82: Watched English Debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Did not watch	3.28	15
Watched	96.72	442
Total	100.00	457

Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 83: Watched French Debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Did not watch	54.08	126
Watched	45.92	107
Total	100.00	233

Question administered to respondents who completed the survey after the start of French debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.2 Viewership medium

Table 84: How Watched English Debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
TV	55.20	244
Radio	2.94	13
Online	41.86	185
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 85: How Watched French Debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
TV	50.47	54
Online	49.53	53
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.3 Viewed with others

Table 86: Watched English Debate with Others (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Alone	49.32	218
With Others	50.68	224
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 87: Watched French Debate with Others (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Alone	65.42	70
With Others	34.58	37
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 88: Watched English Debate as Part of Organized Event (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Not part of organized event	89.29	200
Part of organized event	10.71	24
Total	100.00	224

Question administered to respondents who watched with others. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 89: Watched French Debate as Part of Organized Event (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Not part of organized event	89.19	33
Part of organized event	10.81	4
Total	100.00	37

Question administered to respondents who watched with others. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 90: Who Organized the English Debate Viewing Event (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Me personally	25.00	6
Friends	8.33	2
Family	8.33	2
Co-workers	4.17	1
A political party	4.17	1
Other	37.50	9
DK	12.50	3
Total	100.00	24

Question administered to respondents who watched as part of an organized event. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 91: Who Organized the French Debate Viewing Event (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Me personally	25.00	1
Family	50.00	2
Other	25.00	1
Total	100.00	4

Question administered to respondents who watched as part of an organized event. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.4 Discussed debates with others, including on social media

Table 92: Discussed what happened in the English-language leaders' debate with others (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Yes	91.86	406
No	8.14	36
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 93: Discussed what happened in the French-language leaders' debate with others (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Yes	71.03	76
No	28.97	31
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 94: Commented about what happened in the English-language leaders' debate on social media (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Yes	33.94	150
No	66.06	292
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 95: Commented about what happened in the French-language leaders' debate on social media (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Yes	33.64	36
No	66.36	71
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.5 Reasons for not watching the debates

Table 96: Main reason for not watching the English-language leaders' debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Did not know about debate	13.33	2
Was not able to access	6.67	1
Too busy	13.33	2
Debates are not useful	20.00	3
Other	46.67	7
Total	100.00	15

Question administered to respondents who did not watch the debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 97: Main reason for not watching the French-language leaders' debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Did not know about debate	2.38	3
Did not know where to watch	3.17	4
Was not able to access	4.76	6
Too busy	19.84	25
Already know how will vote	10.32	13
Debates are not useful	3.17	4
Other	56.35	71
Total	100.00	126

Question administered to respondents who did not watch the debate. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.6 Evaluation of debate content and format

Table 98: English debate: The debate was informative. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	35.97	159
Somewhat disagree	30.54	135
Somewhat agree	27.83	123
Strongly agree	5.43	24
DK	0.23	1
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 99: French debate: The debate was informative. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	9.35	10
Somewhat disagree	14.02	15
Somewhat agree	52.34	56

Strongly agree	21.50	23
DK	2.80	3
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 100: English debate: The debate was dull. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	11.76	52
Somewhat disagree	33.71	149
Somewhat agree	28.51	126
Strongly agree	22.85	101
DK	3.17	14
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 101: French debate: The debate was dull. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	28.97	31
Somewhat disagree	41.12	44
Somewhat agree	16.82	18
Strongly agree	9.35	10
DK	3.74	4
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 102: English debate: The debate was repetitive. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.04	9
Somewhat disagree	14.48	64
Somewhat agree	38.24	169
Strongly agree	42.08	186
DK	3.17	14
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 103: French debate: The debate was repetitive. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	13.08	14
Somewhat disagree	43.93	47
Somewhat agree	27.10	29
Strongly agree	10.28	11
DK	5.61	6

Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 104: English debate: The debate helped me to better understand the issues. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	41.40	183
Somewhat disagree	31.45	139
Somewhat agree	22.40	99
Strongly agree	4.52	20
DK	0.23	1
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 105: French debate: The debate helped me to better understand the issues. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	12.15	13
Somewhat disagree	15.89	17
Somewhat agree	54.21	58
Strongly agree	14.95	16
DK	2.80	3
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 106: English debate: The debate helped me to better understand the differences between the parties. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	25.34	112
Somewhat disagree	25.57	113
Somewhat agree	36.88	163
Strongly agree	11.99	53
DK	0.23	1
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 107: French debate: The debate helped me to better understand the differences between the parties. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	7.48	8
Somewhat disagree	16.82	18
Somewhat agree	50.47	54
Strongly agree	20.56	22
DK	4.67	5
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 108: English debate: The debate didn't cover the issues that were most important to me. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	4.07	18
Somewhat disagree	21.72	96
Somewhat agree	30.77	136
Strongly agree	42.31	187
DK	1.13	5
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 109: French debate: The debate didn't cover the issues that were most important to me. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	10.28	11
Somewhat disagree	33.64	36
Somewhat agree	27.10	29
Strongly agree	25.23	27
DK	3.74	4
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 110: English debate: There were too many leaders participating in the debate. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	16.74	74
Somewhat disagree	13.12	58
Somewhat agree	20.59	91
Strongly agree	48.42	214
DK	1.13	5
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 111: French debate: There were too many leaders participating in the debate. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	22.43	24
Somewhat disagree	14.95	16
Somewhat agree	27.10	29
Strongly agree	31.78	34
DK	3.74	4
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.6.1 Evaluations of the debate moderators

Table 112: English debate: The moderators treated each leader fairly. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	24.66	109
Somewhat disagree	15.16	67
Somewhat agree	31.22	138
Strongly agree	24.43	108
DK	4.52	20
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 113: French debate: The moderators treated each leader fairly. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	9.35	10
Somewhat disagree	6.54	7
Somewhat agree	40.19	43
Strongly agree	37.38	40
DK	6.54	7
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 114: English debate: The moderators asked good questions. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	28.05	124
Somewhat disagree	22.17	98
Somewhat agree	34.16	151
Strongly agree	14.03	62
DK	1.58	7
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 115: French debate: The moderators asked good questions. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	8.41	9
Somewhat disagree	7.48	8
Somewhat agree	43.93	47
Strongly agree	36.45	39
DK	3.74	4
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 116: English debate: The moderators gave the leaders enough time to answer the questions. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	40.95	181
Somewhat disagree	24.89	110
Somewhat agree	25.57	113
Strongly agree	7.01	31
DK	1.58	7
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 117: French debate: The moderators gave the leaders enough time to answer the questions. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	10.28	11
Somewhat disagree	13.08	14
Somewhat agree	52.34	56
Strongly agree	18.69	20
DK	5.61	6
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 118: English debate: The moderators didn't give the leaders enough time to debate each other directly. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	6.79	30
Somewhat disagree	18.33	81
Somewhat agree	23.30	103
Strongly agree	49.55	219
DK	2.04	9
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 119: French debate: The moderators didn't give the leaders enough time to debate each other directly. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	9.35	10
Somewhat disagree	46.73	50
Somewhat agree	23.36	25
Strongly agree	14.02	15
DK	6.54	7
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 120: English debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who avoided answering the question. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	4.07	18
Somewhat disagree	5.20	23
Somewhat agree	22.62	100
Strongly agree	66.74	295
DK	1.36	6
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 121: French debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who avoided answering the question. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	3.74	4
Somewhat disagree	26.17	28
Somewhat agree	37.38	40
Strongly agree	27.10	29
DK	5.61	6
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 122: English debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who gave factually inaccurate answers. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	8.37	37
Somewhat disagree	10.18	45
Somewhat agree	19.23	85
Strongly agree	58.60	259
DK	3.62	16
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 123: French debate: The moderators should have done more to push leaders who gave factually inaccurate answers. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	12.15	13
Somewhat disagree	21.50	23
Somewhat agree	37.38	40
Strongly agree	24.30	26
DK	4.67	5
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.6.2 Evaluations of the party leaders

Table 124: English debate: The leaders' answers were clear. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	32.81	145
Somewhat disagree	42.08	186
Somewhat agree	21.49	95
Strongly agree	2.94	13
DK	0.68	3
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 125: French debate: The leaders' answers were clear. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	11.21	12
Somewhat disagree	22.43	24
Somewhat agree	57.01	61
Strongly agree	3.74	4
DK	5.61	6
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 126: English debate: The leaders were respectful of each other. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	31.67	140
Somewhat disagree	34.16	151
Somewhat agree	30.32	134
Strongly agree	2.71	12
DK	1.13	5
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 127: French debate: The leaders were respectful of each other. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	14.02	15
Somewhat disagree	21.50	23
Somewhat agree	49.53	53
Strongly agree	8.41	9
DK	6.54	7
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 128: English debate: The leaders interrupted each other too much. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	0.90	4
Somewhat disagree	6.11	27
Somewhat agree	23.98	106
Strongly agree	68.55	303
DK	0.45	2
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 129: French debate: The leaders interrupted each other too much. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	7.48	8
Somewhat disagree	37.38	40
Somewhat agree	31.78	34
Strongly agree	16.82	18
DK	6.54	7
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 130: English debate: The leaders' answers felt scripted and rehearsed. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.71	12
Somewhat disagree	11.99	53
Somewhat agree	45.02	199
Strongly agree	38.69	171
DK	1.58	7
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 131: French debate: The leaders' answers felt scripted and rehearsed. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	2.80	3
Somewhat disagree	16.82	18
Somewhat agree	49.53	53
Strongly agree	23.36	25
DK	7.48	8
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 132: English debate: The leaders often avoided answering the question. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Strongly disagree	0.45	2
Somewhat disagree	6.56	29
Somewhat agree	37.10	164
Strongly agree	53.85	238
DK	2.04	9
Total	100.00	442

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

Table 133: French debate: The leaders often avoided answering the question. (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Somewhat disagree	12.15	13
Somewhat agree	57.01	61
Strongly agree	22.43	24
DK	8.41	9
Total	100.00	107

Question administered to debate watchers only. Survey responses are unweighted.

A.7 How to select which leaders to invite to participate in debates

Table 134: Mean rank of selection criteria for parties in future debates (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Mean Rank
Number of ridings with candidates	2.51
Number of MPs	2.63
Support in polls	2.76
Size of membership	3.28
Judgments of debate organizers	4.72
Number of donors	5.11
Observations	457

Survey responses are unweighted.

A.8 Requirement for broadcasters to carry debates

Table 135: TV broadcasters should be required by law to broadcast the debate (Responses from survey administered through Commission website)

	Percent	N
Yes	70.46	322
No	15.75	72
Not sure	13.79	63
Total	100.00	457

Survey responses are unweighted.