

Executive summary

Background and objectives

Elections Canada (EC) is an independent, non-partisan agency that exercises general direction and supervision over the conduct of elections and referendums at the federal level. One key undertaking toward delivering on EC's mandate is the Voter Information Campaign, a multi-media communications and information campaign, implemented before and during a federal general election. EC develops advertising and communications campaigns to provide Canadian electors with key information on when, where and the ways to register and vote, including eligibility criteria and identification requirements. The campaign is comprised of several communications tactics, including direct mail products, an advertising campaign, national and local outreach initiatives, a dedicated general election website, social media initiatives, media relations, and a public enquiries service.

There is a need to pilot EC's new digital campaign, specifically targeting youth, as a complement to the established Voter Information Campaign. This research is intended to test the effectiveness of several potential improvements to the current campaign among young Canadian electors, ages 18 to 24, as well as to help develop future Campaigns. This research project was completed in the form of focus groups representing young electors across Canada, assessing the following areas:

- Comprehension and impression of the messages
- Perceived strengths and weaknesses of visual components of the campaign aimed at youth, specifically related to whether the content is engaging and attention-grabbing
- Usefulness of the information provided

This research aims to verify that the proposed concepts meet communications objectives, that the selected messages resonate with young electors, and that the visuals are clear and engaging and meet electors' information needs about where, when and the ways to vote. Out of the two concepts presented to participants, concept A will be used as part of the Voter Information Campaign for the next general election (GE45); Concept B is meant to validate if other types of messaging resonate with young electors, which will help EC develop engaging campaigns for future elections.

Methodology

A total of nine focus groups (eight in-person and one virtual) were conducted in October 2023, with young electors aged 18–24. Two in-person sessions were conducted from each of the following regions: Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, and Halifax, at dedicated focus group facilities. In Montréal, focus groups were held in French with French-speaking participants to ensure representation from both official languages.

The virtual group was conducted using the Zoom platform with participants mainly from rural communities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. To further represent the diversity of Canada's young electors, each group included a mix of different genders, students/non-students, and those who previously voted/did not vote in a federal election. Each in-person session consisted of 10 to 12 participants, while the virtual session had seven participants. Each group lasted about 90 minutes.

Environics Research recruited participants via industry-standard methods to ensure participation in all regions. People with experience working for EC or as an election officer in the September 20, 2021, federal election were excluded from the study. More details on methodology can be found in Appendix A.

In the focus groups, participants were shown two concepts: A (voting is easy) and B (every small X has a huge impact). The objective was to gather feedback on the concepts to determine their efficacy and suitability for the intended audience (electors aged 18–24). All formats, i.e. video, radio spot, web banner, and social media post were presented to gather feedback on the intended target audience, tone, message clarity, interest level, likes and dislikes, and format-specific design elements. The participants were then asked to assess and compare the effectiveness of the concepts at informing young Canadians about voting. Throughout the discussions, the participants' broad perceptions on voting-related issues such as eligibility, likelihood of voting, perceived challenges, and preferences for voting on election day vs. advance polls were also discussed. The focus groups were concluded with final comments on reaching and engaging youth about voting.

Statement of limitations: Qualitative research provides insight into the range of opinions held within a population rather than the weights of the opinions held as measured in a quantitative study. The results of this type of research should be viewed as indicative rather than projectable to the population.

Contract value

The contract value was \$108,576.00 (including HST).

Key findings

General perceptions on voting

Positive reactions/Reasons to vote

- To begin each group session, participants were asked about their eligibility during the 2021 federal election. Most of those who were eligible voted, while most of the newly eligible participants were excited to vote for the first time in the upcoming elections.
- A vast majority of participants saw voting as important, including those who did not vote or were ambivalent about voting.

Negative reactions/Reasons not to vote

- Carving time out of a busy day and not believing their vote matters were two of the main barriers which prevented young Canadians from voting. This was especially true for the Prairies group due to the longer travel distances common in rural ridings and the perception that election outcomes are extremely predictable: participants stated that in many areas, particular political parties and candidates tend to dominate the political landscape and are widely expected to win regardless of what happens during campaigning.
- Furthermore, lack of knowledge about political parties and platforms and uncertainty about voting while living away from home also held back some participants from voting.

Reactions to Concept A, Voting Is Easy

Video

- **Positive:** Some participants, particularly those who had cats, tended to enjoy the comparison between “bathing a cat is hard” vs. “voting is easy.” The idea of funny comparisons was generally seen as intriguing, and some found the colours and graphics to be appealing.
- **Neutral/Indifferent:** The comparison was unrelatable to those who were not cat owners and those who do not perceive voting to be hard. These participants often felt it would be better to get straight to the point with details about voting.
- **Negative:** Some participants found the video too text-heavy to maintain their attention. A few indicated that even for a young audience, the bright colour and light-hearted tone were not serious enough for the subject matter of voting.

Radio spot

- **Positive:** Most participants praised the radio spot for being more straightforward and conveying voting information more clearly compared to the video. This was true for both English and French groups.
- **Negative:** The participants often found the glitches at the beginning confusing and annoying. They didn’t understand that it was meant to be like that on purpose. The idea of waiting for audio ads to finish being something hard didn’t resonate well because many participants have premium subscriptions to music platforms. Participants frequently mentioned that their first reaction to this ad would be to check for a problem with the sound on their phone or headphones/earbuds.

Web banner

- **Positive:** The moving couch comparison landed better than bathing a cat for many participants. Many found the couch comparison more relatable and attention-grabbing. The design is simple and will require less bandwidth, which can be a positive in rural areas.
- **Neutral/Indifferent:** The moving couch comparison was confusing and unrelatable to voting for some; often, participants did not immediately realize the graphic was a couch.
- **Negative:** Some participants thought the banner was visually unappealing and text-heavy, and often noted that they would just scroll over or not read all the way through. It was also mentioned that youth often use ad-blocking software, which would prevent them from seeing a web banner while browsing.

Social media post

- **Positive:** Many found the comparison between writing a paper last-minute and voting more relatable than the comparisons used in the other formats. Several participants thought this social ad felt authentic and similar to other social media content they interacted with as opposed to a paid social media ad/post.

- **Negative:** Some participants said writing a paper last-minute and voting is unrelatable. Moreover, many found the social ad amateurish and lacking credibility, mainly due to the coffee animation and font choices.

Overall impression

- The participants often found the comparisons interesting and attention-grabbing, and generally liked the concept of comparing difficult tasks with the voting process but had mixed reactions to the specific comparisons in the ad executions. For urban voters, it was felt to be self-evident that voting is easy while, for rural voters and voters who live away from home, voting really is hard due to accessibility issues and other barriers.
- From a design perspective, the “x” element tying different formats together usually went unnoticed. Moreover, the animations and bright colours were attention-grabbing for some but were also seen as lacking authenticity or trying too hard to be youthful.

Reactions to Concept B, Every Small X Has a Huge Impact

Video

- **Positive:** The participants often found the video to be motivating and informative. Many also liked the colour and the turning windmill effect for being visually captivating and in keeping with the seriousness of the subject matter.
- **Neutral/Indifferent:** The “x” did not immediately connect with voting for some, especially those who had never voted before. The “x” could also be easily mistaken as something else, such as recent rebranding of the Twitter platform.
- **Negative:** Some participants thought the text was too wordy and moved too quickly, and some did not like the fonts.

Radio spot

- **Positive:** Many found the radio spot clear, direct, and informative. The tone was also serious enough for voting for many participants. Including the election date was seen as an important element.
- **Negative:** Many participants found the phrase “all the official information” ambiguous and did not really help them prepare to vote. Some also felt the tone of the ad was somewhat daunting because it implied a complicated registration process. One interesting point raised by a participant was that the hook for the spot does not signal the importance of the subject matter.

Web banner

- **Positive:** The participants often found the design attention-grabbing and intriguing. Both the turning windmill and the bright green were seen as captivating by some.
- **Negative:** The use of bright green was controversial, as many strongly disliked it, though others found it appealing. Several participants thought the last message was too wordy and did not like how it appeared

twice on the screen. Some francophone participants in the Montréal groups felt that relatability of some terms may have been lost in translation.

Social media post

- **Positive:** Many participants thought the structure and design of the Concept B post worked better than Concept A. They appreciated that the main message and election date were stated clearly while the windmill tied all formats together cohesively.
- **Neutral/Indifferent:** The use of pink was controversial because many participants said it is inconsistent with the other Concept B ads, and they often associated this ad with breast cancer awareness campaigns.
- **Negative:** Some participants did not like the font of the sentence announcing the election date. “It’s our vote” looked ill-fitted on the post for some. Moreover, many thought the post might not be taken seriously because of the light-hearted tone.

Overall impression

- Overall, Concept B was seen as motivating, direct, cohesive, visually appealing and tone-appropriate. The message of “your vote matters” came across as inspiring to the audience. The “x” element in Concept B ads received positive feedback in general, as it drew attention effectively and tied all formats together. Lastly, many participants found the colours and fonts appealing and felt the concept conveyed a duly respectful tone toward the topic of voting.

Overall findings across concepts

- While Concept B was the preferred concept between the two, reactions to both were generally positive or neutral. The participants tended to see the messages as more effective when they were direct with clear facts regardless of their concept preference.
- There was a consensus that both concepts could be improved by unifying elements like colour and imagery. Many felt that overtly bright colours were not serious enough for voting. Lastly, the text being wordy was often mentioned across concepts and formats.

Political neutrality statement and contact information

I hereby certify, as Senior Officer of Environics Research, that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements that are outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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