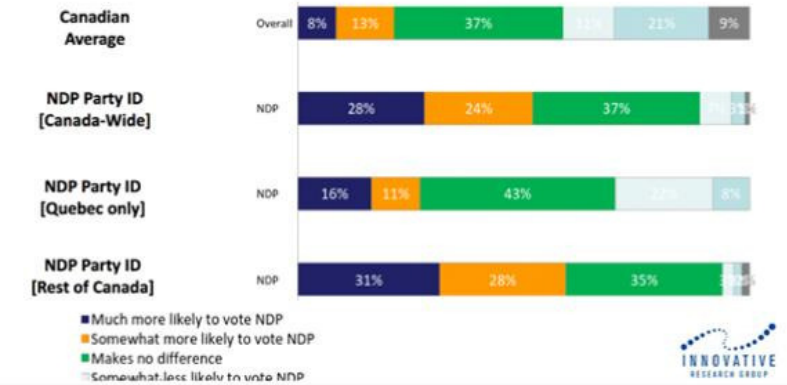


## Parties play with dynamite to break electoral logjam

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## Mulcair on Niqab: NDPers rally more strong outside Quebec than within Quebec

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By GREG LYLE | Oct. 2, 2015

TORONTO—Over eight weeks of debates, trials and advertising, Canada's three major parties have been locked in an electoral logjam. Each party enjoys its own pockets of support but none has been within reach of a majority. With the finish line in sight, parties desperate for an advantage are now playing with explosive issues. In this week's poll we look at the impact of the recent debates, the niqab issue and the new potential trade deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

The past week has been eventful with two more leader debates, one in French last Thursday and the Munk foreign policy debate on Monday. While there was no clear winner of the French debate, among those who paid attention Trudeau clearly won the Munk debate.

However, the most striking thing about those debates is that as the election nears, it appears Canadians are paying less attention to the election, not more. Roughly four in 10 Canadians heard something about or saw at least some of the *Maclean's* and *The Globe and Mail* debates. That dropped to one in four for the French debate and the Munk debate.

In a similar development, all three main parties registered their lowest level of awareness so far in this campaign in response to our read, seen or heard anything about that party question. It looks like Canadians are tiring of campaign rhetoric.

However, while there are fewer voters paying active attention to the campaign, we still see four in 10 open to new information ... if the parties can capture their attention.

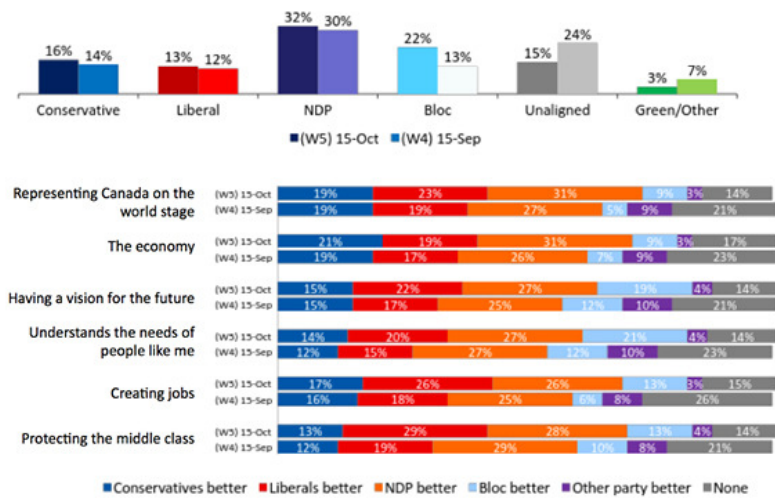
The niqab issue did capture the attention of Canadians. While the issue is narrow, it draws upon a larger conflict of values. Both a year ago and this week we asked respondents whether they feel new immigrants should preserve their culture as much as possible, or whether new immigrants should adapt to our culture as much as possible. In both surveys (74 per cent a year ago, 69 per cent now), the vast majority of Canadians want new immigrants to adapt.

The niqab issue needs to be understood in the context of that larger cultural issue of immigrants adapting to Canadian norms. That is why (50 per cent) of our respondents say this issue is at least somewhat important to their vote. In Quebec, this rises to 65 per cent and among Bloc identifiers it rises to 76 per cent.

When asked if women wearing a niqab or any other face covering should be required to remove that covering in a citizenship ceremony, seven in 10 (72 per cent) agree, reflecting the general desire to see new immigrants adapt. New Democrat identifiers both outside Quebec (62 per cent) and particularly inside Quebec (86 per cent) agree women should remove face coverings.

Despite their personal views on the issue, New Democrats outside Quebec rally to their leader's conflicting position. When informed that Mulcair recently said "if some of these women are being oppressed, we have to reach out to them, and it is not by depriving them of their Canadian citizenship and their rights that we can help them," 59 per cent of New Democrats outside Quebec said they were more likely to vote NDP while just five per cent said less likely. In Quebec, New Democrats are more divided by the statement: 27 per cent said they were more likely to vote NDP, 30 per cent said less and 43 per cent said it made no difference.

## Spotlight on Francophone Quebec: Support shifting from Unaligned to Bloc on vote and performance on key issues



Meanwhile, Stephen Harper's statement that "it is offensive that someone would hide their identity at the very moment where they are committing to join the Canadian family" has left 36 per cent more likely to vote Conservative and just 16 per cent less likely. Albertans (46 per cent) strongly rally to Harper's position as do CPC loyalists (77 per cent) and Bloc loyalists (40 per cent).

So what has the impact of all this controversy been on the vote? Reputable pollsters are showing very different results, with Nanos showing a small increase in Bloc support and Leger showing an explosion in Bloc support. With a relatively small overall national sample of 1,000 this week, we continue to see a three-horse race. However this week, for the first time since the Spring, we have the Liberals in the lead with 31 per cent, the Conservatives and NDP tied at 29 per cent.

Our numbers show the Conservatives continuing to struggle with time for a change. The good news for the Conservatives is that the intensity of time for a change feelings are declining and are at the lowest we have seen in the campaign so far. However, the number who agrees, "the Conservatives may have their problems but they are still the best party to form government" is stuck at 33 per cent. Moreover, the Conservatives lost some ground among Time for a Change Tories (35 per cent support this week compared to 43 per cent last week).

The key question this week is what is happening in Quebec. As I have noted before, in our electoral system we count seats, not votes. Quebec francophone seats have provided the foundation for the NDP's electoral success. If the Bloc is gaining seats at the NDP's expense, it would fundamentally alter the nature of this election and the parliamentary negotiations that follow if we see a minority government.

To help understand the impact of the niqab issue on those seats, we conducted an oversample bringing the total sample in Quebec to 500 and did some additional analysis on change among francophone voters. The best way to understand the dynamic of change is to compare the raw vote from last week to this week among Quebec francophones. That way we can see whether gains are coming from another party or from the large pool of unaligned voters we saw growing in earlier polls.

Last week if you stopped 100 francophone voters on the streets of Quebec, you would have found 13 Bloc supporters. This week that number has grown to 22, moving the Bloc from fourth place to second. Those gains appear to have come primarily from the undecided, which has dropped from 24 per cent to 15 per cent. It appears that the niqab issue was a character test for the undecided. It answered the question of "who understands people like me." On that question the Bloc has grown from 12 per cent to 21 per cent.

How about the NDP? They have dropped, but only slightly, declining two points from 32 per cent to 30 per cent. The NDP has actually gained ground week over week on representing Canada on the world stage (+4) and the economy (+5).

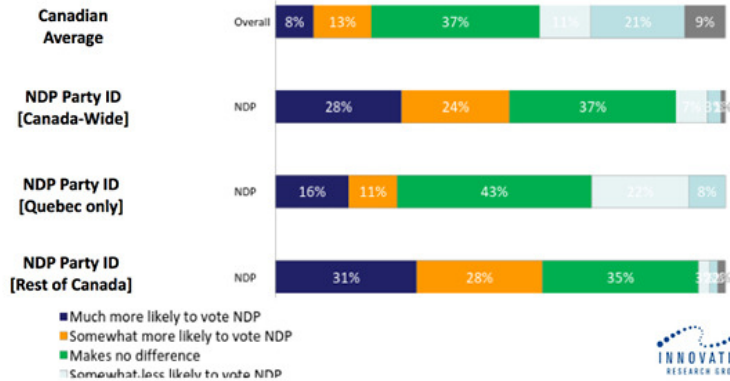
There is another party also on the move among Quebec francophones but it hasn't turned into votes, at least not yet. The Liberal Party gained 10 points in a single week on protecting the middle class and eight points on creating jobs. These are core messages of the Liberal ads playing in Quebec. These gains suggest the Liberals have either increased their buy or hit a critical point in terms of the cumulative reach of those ads.

Those Liberal gains may yet turn into votes if the Conservatives succeed in securing a deal on the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

In theory Canadians like free trade. Half of our respondents say they generally support Free Trade agreements. While almost no one (four per cent) is very familiar with the TPP, another 26 per cent say they are somewhat familiar. Among those who are familiar with the deal, 40 per cent support it and 18 per cent oppose it.

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But if there is a deal, there will be winners and losers. For winners, the gains are in the future. For losers, the losses are immediate.

We anticipated the debate between winners and losers by asking Canadians which priority is more important to them:

Securing long term trade access to the large number of Pacific countries participating in the TPP even if there are some job losses in specific sectors in the short term impacts, or protecting jobs in sectors such as dairy and auto manufacturing even if it means not being able to join the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement.

More Canadians (45 per cent) choose protecting jobs over securing trade access (27 per cent). Critically 39 per cent of CPC identifiers choose protecting jobs as their top priority.

As explosive as the niqab has been over the past week, signing the TPP could ignite an even bigger firestorm. The Conservatives may find it more advantageous to continue to seek a trade deal than to actually secure one and deal with the issue of job losses.

*Greg Lyle is the founder and president of Innovative Research Group Inc., a national public opinion research firm with offices in Vancouver and Toronto.*

[news@hilltimes.com](mailto:news@hilltimes.com)

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