

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Liberals and Tories trading blows like 'heavyweights' with dueling ads

[Adam Radwanski](#)

The Globe and Mail

Published Sunday, Sep. 06, 2015 7:30PM EDT

Last updated Monday, Sep. 07, 2015 8:24AM EDT

New research suggests that the Liberals' unusual new television advertisement featuring Justin Trudeau stuck trying to go up a down escalator is scoring with voters who see it – but so is a recent and more familiar Conservative ad questioning Mr. Trudeau's readiness to manage the economy.

“Watching the Tories' and Liberals' ads is like watching a classic heavyweight fight,” said Greg Lyle, whose polling company Innovative Research Group is testing the impact of party advertising leading up to the Oct. 19 federal election. “They're both landing punches that are doing real damage.”

The latest in Innovative Research's series of surveys, conducted last week with 1,000 randomly selected participants in an online panel, found that with their recent TV spots, those two parties are capable of drawing support away from each other. And in the Liberals' case, they may also be improving perceptions of Mr. Trudeau compared with Thomas Mulcair, whose New Democrats are now launching an ambitious ad campaign of their own but were relatively quiet leading up to Labour Day.

After an earlier Innovative Research survey found that the Liberals' pre-writ advertising fell flat, the new one – which makes the case that it's hard for all but the wealthy to get ahead under Mr. Harper and that Mr. Trudeau would make it easier – is their second straight spot to test well. (The other one, which ran through much of August, had Mr. Trudeau directly rebutting the Tories' “not ready” charge against him.)

Among survey participants who were shown the “escalator” ad and asked a series of questions both before and after viewing it, watching it caused Liberal support to go up by seven percentage points among those who said they hadn't seen it previously, mostly at the expense of the Conservatives. (In the surveys, the ads are rotated so that each participant focuses primarily on one of them. Detailed methodology, including how Innovative Research gauges statistical significance, is available at innovativeresearch.ca.)

While the newer Liberal ad did not cause significant movement in support from the NDP, it did cause changes in relative impressions of Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Mulcair that could yet influence votes. On the questions of which leader most “cares about people like me” and will best “stand up for the middle class,” Mr. Trudeau went up by double digits in percentage points – drawing evenly from the

other two leaders on the former, and primarily from Mr. Mulcair on the latter.

But if Mr. Trudeau's ads serve to help him improve both his image and his party's support, the Conservatives' ongoing efforts to brand him as a lightweight continue to have the opposite effect. The latest one tested by Innovative Research, which follows the same "job interview" format as previous ones and has one of the interviewers scaring herself by thinking about Mr. Trudeau trying to manage the economy, caused support for the Liberals to go down by 10 percentage points among respondents who hadn't seen it before, and support for the Tories to go up by nearly a corresponding amount.

The Conservative ad also put a dent in perceptions of Mr. Trudeau's leadership attributes. The most significant impact in that regard was on the question of who will stand up for the middle class, rather than on perceived competence, possibly because previous ads have already done as much damage as possible to the Liberal Leader on the latter front.

There may in fact be some cause for concern for the Tories about their attacks on Mr. Trudeau's readiness for the job – or at least the format they have been using to make them – approaching a saturation point. In an interview, Mr. Lyle flagged that roughly three-quarters of respondents said they had seen it before. Considering that the ad has only recently been in circulation, that suggests viewers are failing to distinguish it from previous "job interview" spots.

"The potential of new information is important to hold people's attention," said Mr. Lyle, a former political strategist for parties that include the Ontario Progressive Conservatives and British Columbia Liberals. "If people think the ad coming on is one they have already seen, they may stop paying attention."

Meanwhile, having largely held fire so far, the New Democrats now appear poised to try to capitalize on the ubiquity of the Conservative "not ready" messaging against Mr. Trudeau.

They did not appear to invest heavily in placement for their main spot in August, which attacks the Conservatives' economic record, and Innovative Research found that even when voters were shown it, the ad only marginally moved support from Mr. Harper's party to Mr. Mulcair's. But the NDP is now rolling out a new ad, slated to appear more prominently and not yet tested by Innovative Research, in which Mr. Mulcair shares his family and professional history before professing himself "ready" to bring change.

It remains to be seen how the ads will influence an electorate that slowly takes them all in. But insofar as public-opinion research can measure each ad's impact when voters watch it, the NDP will have a fairly high bar to clear.

Follow Adam Radwanski on Twitter: [@aradwanski](https://twitter.com/@aradwanski) [<https://twitter.com/@aradwanski>]

More Related to this Story

- [ANALYSIS Chilly persona could hurt Harper in midst of humanitarian crisis](#)
- [Tories' campaign strategy: Staying mum to avoid gaffes](#)
- [It could backfire, but at least Liberals finally have a message to sell](#)
- [Conservatives have reason to fear NDP in Southwestern Ontario](#)

Topics:

- [Federal Election 2015](#)
- [Stephen Harper](#)
- [Justin Trudeau](#)

Share this selection

- [Tweet](#)
- [Tweet](#)
-

Log in

Don't have an account? [Create one here.](#)

We did not find an account associated with the account below:

With your social account
OR with your email and password

Keep me logged in

[Trouble logging in?](#)