

Prepay up to 20% of your mortgage balance annually



THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

September 13, 2015

Parties see mixed results on most recent round of election ads

By ADAM RADWANSKI

While the Liberals' 'escalator' ad drove up the party's support with viewers, a recent spot from the Conservatives did not make any significant impression on vote intentions

The Globe and Mail is hosting a debate on the economy among the leaders of the three main political parties on Thursday at 8 pm (ET). [Click here](#)¹ for more details.

While their attacks against Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau continue to be effective, the federal Conservatives appear to be having limited success with a television advertisement that acknowledges Stephen Harper is "not perfect" but makes the case for him anyway.

Meanwhile, the New Democrats seem to be scoring with an ad in which Thomas Mulcair tells his personal story, but getting little value out of a more negative spot that ties Mr. Harper to Mike Duffy and other scandal-plagued Tories.

The latest in an ongoing series of surveys by Innovative Research Group gauging viewers' reactions to campaign ads found that even the stronger of the recent NDP and Conservative spots may not be working as well as those parties' earlier ones. Nor do they score quite as well as a recent Liberal ad, tested previously by the polling company and currently in heavy rotation on TV broadcasts, which features Mr. Trudeau walking up a down escalator to make a point about Canadians' difficulty getting ahead.

Among the two NDP and two Conservative spots tested last week with an online panel of 1,000 randomly selected voters, the New Democrats' more positive one – in which Mr. Mulcair shares his family and professional background before pronouncing himself "ready," an obvious play on the Tories' "not ready" branding of Mr. Trudeau – seemed to have the strongest impact in shaping perceptions of the party leaders.

Among survey participants who had not previously seen that ad and were asked a series of questions, both before and after viewing it, identification of Mr. Mulcair as the leader who most "cares about people like me" went up by 13 percentage points, and selection of him as the most competent leader rose by nine points. The immediate effect in moving support to the NDP, though, was marginal. (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.)

The NDP's attack on Mr. Harper, which pairs a clip of the Conservative Leader performing the Beatles' *With a Little Help from My Friends* with images of Tories who have gotten into ethical trouble, appeared to have almost no statistically significant impact on either relative perceptions of the leaders or support for their parties.

As for the Conservatives, one of the latest variations of their ads showing a job-interview panel tearing apart Mr. Trudeau's credentials – in this case with an elderly woman thinking aloud about the dangers of his policy on tax-free savings accounts – continued to do some damage. Support for the Liberals went down by eight points among those who said they were seeing it for the first time, although the effect on relative perceptions of the leader was limited.

Innovative Research's Greg Lyle flagged that a strong majority of respondents said they had seen the ad before – which is improbable, given that it has not been on air long, but suggests saturation with the "job-interview" format that could lead to diminishing returns.

The Tories' ad making the case for Mr. Harper, which features supporters talking about why he's more dependable than the alternatives, did not make any significant impression on vote intentions. It did affect a couple of underlying perceptions – bumping up by six percentage points the share of voters who said Mr. Harper would best stand up for the middle class, seemingly at Mr. Trudeau's expense, and driving down by five points the share of voters who believe it's "time for a change." But for an ad viewed in isolation, that's a relatively small impact. By comparison, the Liberals' "escalator" ad (like their previous one in which Mr. Trudeau rebutted the "not ready" charge) drove up the party's support and significantly improved Mr. Trudeau's standing on every leadership metric tested. And a prewritten NDP ad helping introduce Mr. Mulcair was nearly as effective.

The Tories may currently be struggling with the challenge of reshaping perceptions of Mr. Harper, who after nearly a decade in power is a known entity. That may also explain why straight attack ads such as the one the NDP recently launched are falling flat. But Mr. Lyle, a former strategist for parties that included the Ontario Progressive Conservatives and British Columbia Liberals, cautioned that it might be increasingly tough for any party's paid communication to have an impact as the Oct. 19 election draws closer.

"Every week that goes by, ads face a tougher challenge," he said on Sunday. "Fewer people are open to new information and leader images are firmer."

References

1. gam.ca/debate

The Globe and Mail, Inc.



The Globe and Mail Inc. All Rights Reserved.. Permission granted for up to 5 copies. All rights reserved.

You may forward this article or get additional permissions by typing http://license.icopyright.net/3.8425?icx_id=26350209 into any web browser. The Globe and Mail, Inc. and The Globe and Mail logos are registered trademarks of The Globe and Mail, Inc. The iCopyright logo is a registered trademark of iCopyright, Inc.