DIGITAL DEMOCRACY PROJECT

Research Memo #1
Media, Knowledge and Misinformation

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found that Canadians are more likely to receive their political news from traditional mainstream media outlets. Furthermore, news media preferences are fairly homogeneous regardless of which party people support, with the CBC, CTV and Huffington Post appearing in the Top 5 print/online news sources for supporters of all three major parties. Alternative media sources that cover politics from an ideological perspective (e.g. The Rebel, Post-Millennial, Rabble) do not crack the Top 20 news sources in the survey. However, they enjoy more prominence on Twitter among users of the top Canadian political hashtags who share links to news sites, which is an indication that the conversation on Twitter does not necessarily reflect the perspectives of the Canadian population at large.

Canadians also remain relatively trusting of mainstream news outlets in comparison with other sources of information. On a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest level of trust, Canadians trust political information from mainstream news organizations (5.8) at similar levels as their friends and family (6.0). They are comparatively much less trusting of the information provided by the major political parties (4.8), and in what they read on social media (3.3 for all respondents, 4.2 for respondents who indicated they used social media for political news in the past week).

When it comes to political knowledge, despite being only modestly well

and similar issues) more than the general public, and were less likely to tweet links to stories about health care and the economy. Journalists, meanwhile, focused more heavily on ethical issues and foreign affairs.

The report is based on the findings from two distinct sources of data. The first is a survey of 1,003 Canadians conducted in the last week of July, in which respondents were asked questions related to basic demographics, as well as their partisan, ideological and issue preferences. They were also asked to identify their recent exposure to the news media and to answer a series of fact-based policy questions to appraise their level of knowledge of basic political and policy issues and to what extent they may be misinformed on those topics.

The second source is data gathered from approximately one million tweets from June 3 to July 26 collected from the Twitter accounts of major party candidates; a set of approximately 300 political journalists; a range of politically relevant third parties; and a sampling of the general online population through their political hashtag use.

METHODOLOGY

The Digital Democracy Project draws from two primary data sources. First, our survey data team conducted an online panel survey of 1,003 Canadian citizens 18 years and older using the Qualtrics survey platform. The sample was gathered from July 24 to July 31. Data was weighted within each region of Canada by gender and age to ensure it adequately represented the Canadian public. Survey respondents were asked questions related

Canadians, especially compared to the media environment in the United States. M

FIGURE 3. PROPORTION OF MEDIA SOURCES CITED FROM SAMPLE OF SHARES ON

Having a well-informed electorate requires levels of correct information to be higher than levels of incorrect information—in other words, we want Canadians to have high net levels of correct information. This matters because political parties develop policy in line with the beliefs of the electorate. If these beliefs are systematically informed by incorrect information, bad public policy may result.

Our results above show that Canadians have a modestly high net level of correct information, with respondents providing 1.6 more correct than incorrect answers to our eight questions, on average.

More troubling is how media exposure relates to information and misinformation. Both traditional and social media exposure are associated with higher levels of misinformation.

We constructed a scale that measures respondents' consumption of political news from traditional media formats and from social media. We consider those respondents who scored in the top third of news consumption to be highly exposed to political news, while those in the bottom third have low exposure.

Respondents with high levels of

- We asked respondents a series of questions based on their general knowledge of politics (i.e. the unemployment rate, who placed second in seats in the 2015 election, and the relative ideological placement of the Liberal Party, the Conservative Party, and the NDP). Those who scored high on this scale reported a correct answer 1.3 more times than those with lower levels of knowledge. They also gave 0.1 fewer incorrect responses. High levels of general political knowledge are associated with an additional 1.4 net correct responses.

- We asked respondents to rate their confidence that they knew enough to make a good decision in the

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FINDINGS: TOP ISSUES

Our survey respondents were asked to select the most important issue to them in the upcoming election. They ranked the environment first (19%), just barely edging out health care and the economy (both 18%). Immigration (10%) and taxes (8%) trail further behind. There are differences in the rankings across the supporters of the three main parties. Conservative Party supporters are much less likely to rank the environment as their most important issue (6%) than Liberal Party (20%) and NDP supporters (26%). They are more likely to rank immigration (12%) and taxes (13%) highly, compared to Liberal (5%, 8%) and NDP supporters (6%, 5%).

FIGURE 5. MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE BY PARTISAN SUPPORTERS IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC

The public's perception of the most important issues in this election are not entirely reflected in the emphasis journalists and political candidates place on those issues in their conversations on Twitter. The chart below shows how frequently links pertaining to eight issues from the public survey were shared on Twitter by candidates and journalists. Candidates and journalists reflect the public's interest in the environment, but beyond that their topics of focus diverge. Candidates stressed infrastructure, foreign affairs and ethics (including topics related to the SNC Lavalin scandal, the public statements of former ambassadors to China, and similar issues) more than the general public, and were less likely to tweet about healthcare and the economy. Meanwhile the journalists examined here have focused more heavily on ethics and foreign affairs over the past two months.

FIGURE 6. MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC (LEFT); ISSUES EMPHASIZED BY CANDIDATES (CENTRE) AND JOURNALISTS (RIGHT) ON TWITTER
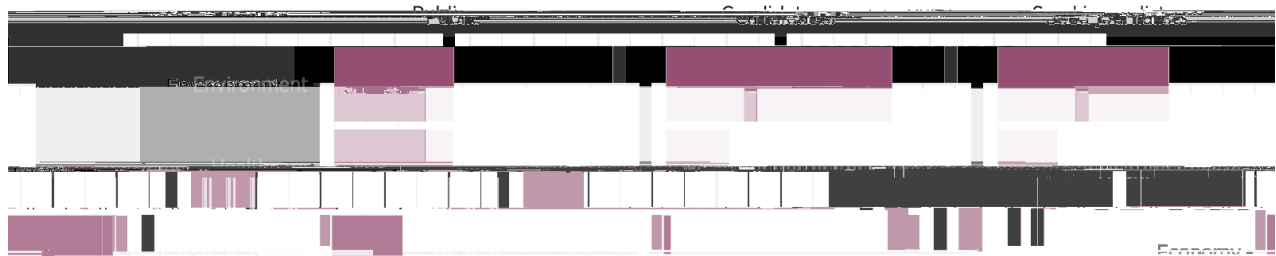
We can further break down the candidate emphasis on Twitter by political party. Here there are interesting divergences, with the Conservatives more interested in stories about ethics and the Liberals sharing information about healthcare and focusing on the policy moves they have taken on the environment, such as a ban on single-use plastics and the climate emergency declared in early June. The NDP has been tackling the broadest range of issues, ND intnr o n

APPENDIX: METHODS DETAIL

Our survey data team conducted an online panel survey of 1,003 Canadian citizens 18 years and older using the Qualtrics survey platform. The sample was gathered from July 24-31. Data was weighted within each region of Canada by gender and age based on data from the 2016 Canadian census. We used an iterative proportional fitting algorithm for our weighting procedure with a minimum weight of 0.09 (N=16) and a maximum weight of 5.06 (N=3).

Survey respondents were asked questions related to basic demographics, as well as their partisan, ideological and issue preferences. They were also asked to identify their recent exposure to the news media and to answer a series of fact-based policy questions to appraise their knowledge of basic political and policy issues and to what extent they may be misinformed on those topics. The median time it took respondents to complete the survey was 19 minutes. The survey instrument is available upon request.

The results of our news exposure q(r)-8.4 (e)7.9 (s)- 8 (e)-w 31.012 0 r[numee5 (e)- o (t)3.6 (i)9.8 (s)-lil r4plae ee0.7 (ur)8.

The journalist seed list consists of approximately 300 journalists drawn from across the political spectrum. We invite outlets to submit their journalists and handles for inclusion in subsequent reports. Additionally, we will be adding all journalists who