

Election 44: Two-thirds of debate watchers say exercise was informative, will help them make their choice

Majority (54%) who watched say the debate was engaging, women more likely to say this than men

September 15, 2021 – With only one English language and two French language debates during the 44th federal election campaign, the leaders of the federal parties had limited opportunity to impress Canadians on the same national stage as their opponents.

New data from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds that among those who watched last week's English and French debates, Conservative Party leader Erin O'Toole and Green Party leader Annamie Paul impressed the most. Approximately three-in-ten viewers say they were impressed with each. One-in-five viewers were not impressed with any of the candidates (21%).

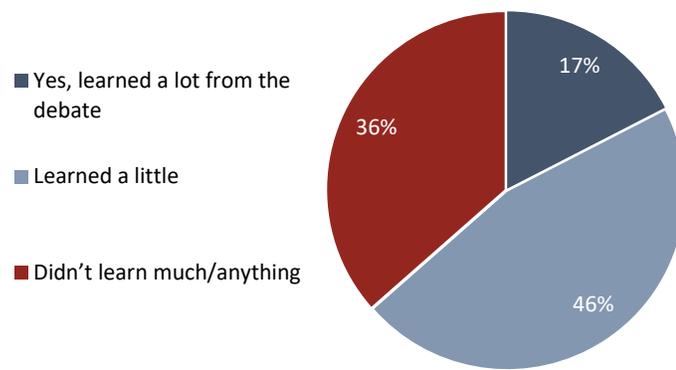
Overall, a majority say that they not only found the debates engaging (54%), but that they also learned new information that will help them in their decision-making on Election Day (63%). Notably, this proportion is identical among both English and French speakers.

More Key Findings:

- Green Party leader Annamie Paul punched above her weight, with 30 per cent of Conservatives, 26 per cent of Liberals, and 37 per cent of New Democrats qualifying her debate performance as impressive.
- Three-quarters of CPC voters were impressed by Erin O'Toole – an advantage over his competitors within their own parties. Three-in-five NDP voters (62%) were impressed with Jagmeet Singh, and 54 per cent of Liberal voters were impressed with Justin Trudeau
- Those who watched the debates closely were more impressed with O'Toole and Paul, while those who watched only portions were more likely to say that no one was impressive.

And would you say you learned much about the candidates and issues to help to inform your vote?

(Watched debate n=878)



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Sept. 9 - 12, 2021 among a sample of 878 Canadian adults who watched all or some of one or more of the federal election debates and who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: 604.505.2229 angus@angusreid.org

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

About ARI

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

INDEX

Part One: Engagement:

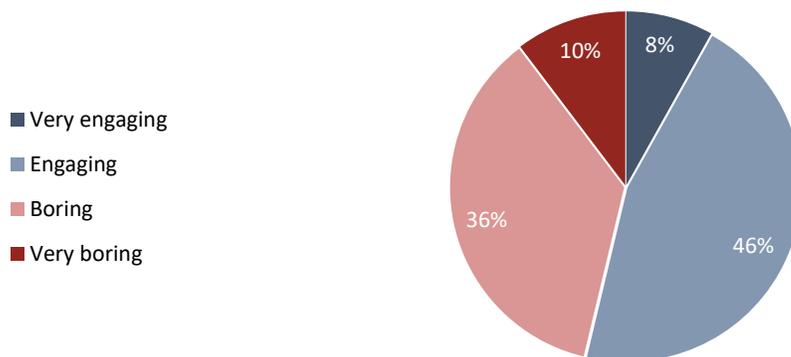
Part Two: Leader impressions

Part Three: Two-thirds say they learned something from debates

Part One: Engagement

While the French language debates failed to provoke much drama, the English debates more than compensated, with the [aftershocks still being felt](#). Viewers, for their part, are split on whether they found the verbal sparring between the party leaders compelling or not. A majority (54%) found the debates “engaging,” including eight per cent who found them to be “very engaging.” One-in-ten, on the other hand, were very bored:

**Overall, did you find the format of the debate engaging?
(Watched debate, n=878)**



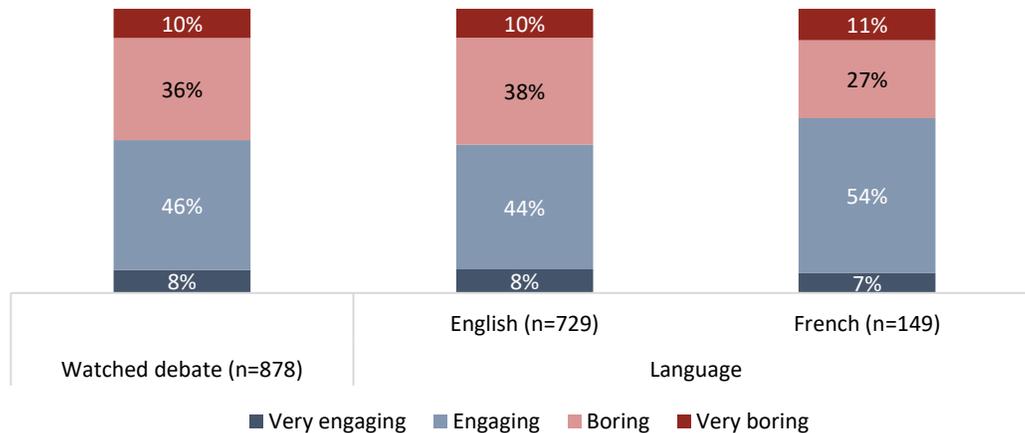
Notably, French speakers are more likely to say that they found the debates engaging overall than English speakers. That said, a majority of both groups lean toward being interested by them:

CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: 604.505.2229 angus@angusreid.org

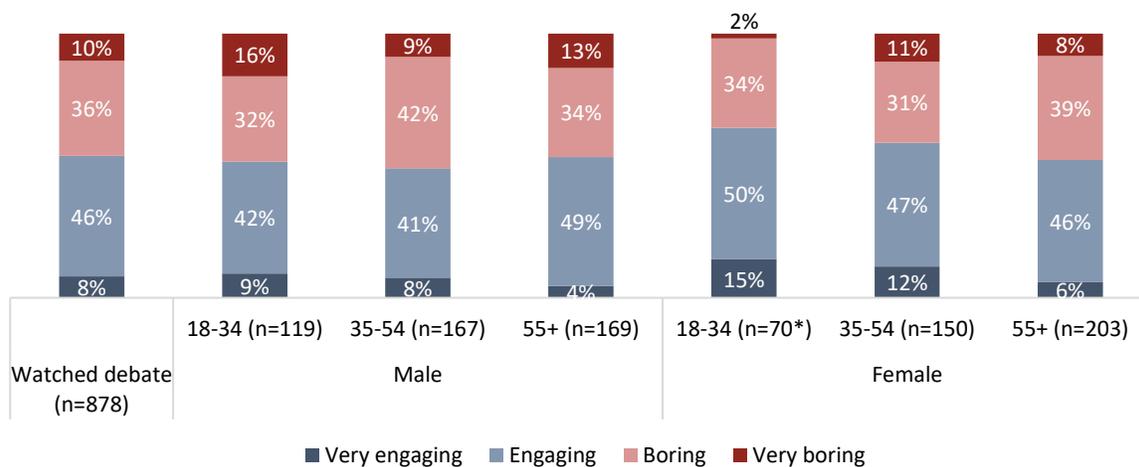
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Overall, did you find the format of the debate engaging?



Young women are most likely to find the debates engaging with two-thirds saying so. In fact, a majority of women across all age groups say they viewed them this way:

Overall, did you find the format of the debate engaging?



**Small sample size, interpret with caution.*

Part Two: Leader impressions

High visibility events where party leaders have a chance to speak directly to Canadians, debates are moments in which the public has a chance to assess the competency of those vying for the nation's top job. The [archives](#) are full of instances in which debate performances either made or broke a campaign, ranging from then-NDP leader Jack Layton's 2011 takedown of then-Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff over

CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: 604.505.2229 angus@angusreid.org

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

his attendance record in Parliament to Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day's [infamous handmade "no 2-tier healthcare" sign](#).

Turning to this year's debates it seems that, for one-in-five (21%) Canadians, no one leader managed to distinguish themselves – a number which rises to three-in-ten (28%) among those who only caught some of the coverage.

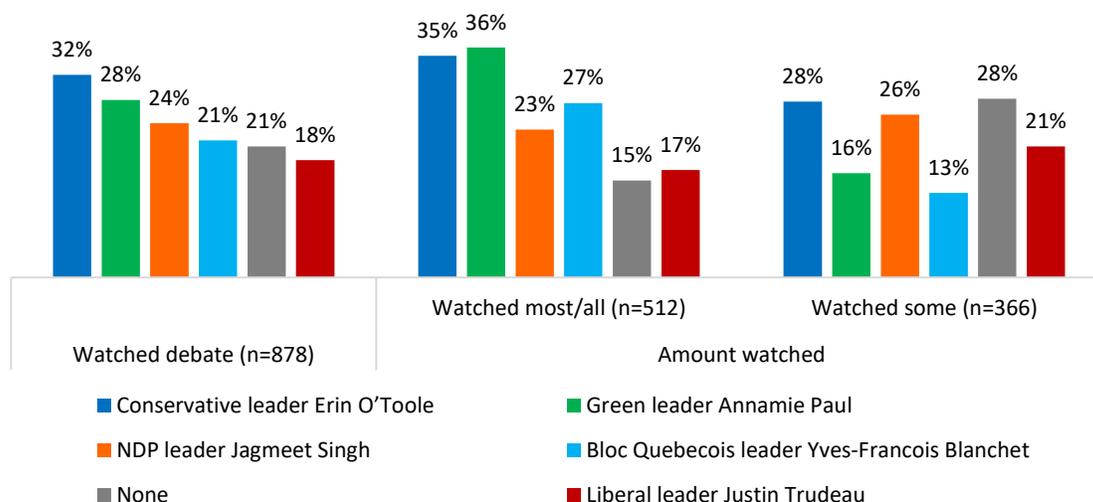
Which leader came out on top also varies depending on how much of the debates one watched. While suffering from a [faltering French language debate](#), Conservative leader Erin O'Toole appears to have had the strongest showing overall, with one-third of Canadians (32%) saying that he impressed them with his debate performances – an opinion [echoed](#) in the commentariat.

When asking only those who watched all or most of at least one of the debates, O'Toole is locked in a statistical tie with Green Party leader Annamie Paul for the most impressive debate at 35 and 36 per cent respectively. Of note, those who only saw part of the debate were less impressed with Paul's performance with only 16 per cent saying it impressed them.

Garnering a favourable impression from one-quarter (24%) of Canadians, NDP leader Jagmeet Singh used much of his debate time to critique Liberal Party leader Justin Trudeau. Notably Singh questioned how a prime minister could "take the knee" one day and then take Indigenous children to court the next – an allegation Trudeau immediately denied (for the context of this remark, see [here](#)).

Coming out of a [strong performance](#) during the French debates, when not defending his record as prime minister, Trudeau managed to get some ripostes in at his adversaries – including [chiding O'Toole](#) on his inability to get his party to believe in climate change. Despite this it appears that Trudeau fared poorly overall with only 18 per cent of those who saw at least some of the debate saying they were impressed by his performance.

And based on what you have seen, read, or heard, who, if anyone, impressed you during the debate?



CONTACT:

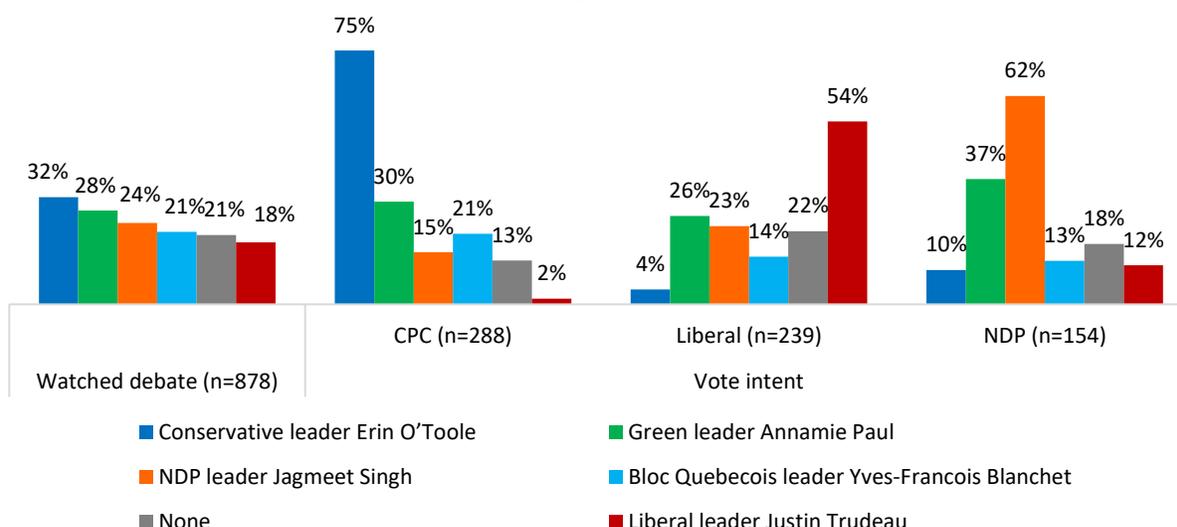
Angus Reid, Chairman: 604.505.2229 angus@angusreid.org

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

After noting that she'd had to "[crawl over a lot of broken glass](#)" to participate, it appears that Paul punched far above her weight during the debates. In addition to pushing back on Trudeau's handling of Afghanistan, many focused on [her invitation](#) to educate Bloc leader Yves-Francois Blanchet about systemic racism. It appears this approach paid off as Paul managed to impress across partisan divides: 30 per cent of Conservatives, 26 per cent of Liberals, and 37 per cent of New Democrats all qualified her performance as impressive.

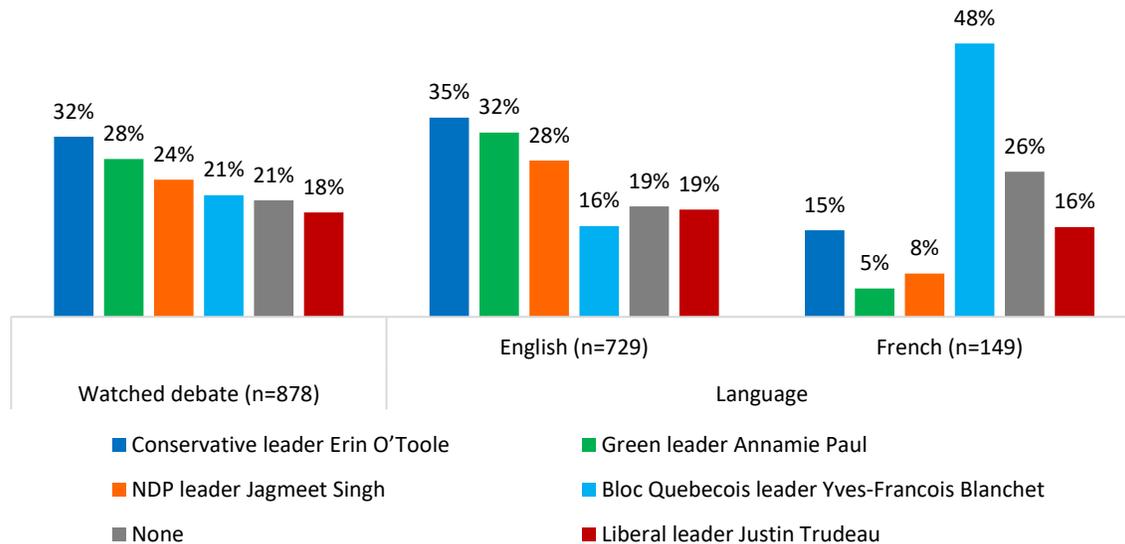
If Paul's performance helped propel her across party lines, Conservative and NDP supporters were the most likely to rank the performance of their candidate as the strongest. Three-quarters (75%) of Conservatives and three-in-five (62%) NDP supporters said O'Toole and Singh were the most impressive respectively.

And based on what you have seen, read, or heard, who, if anyone, impressed you during the debate?



French speakers largely saw one leader during the debates who impressed them – Blanchet. Half (48%) say this, while not offering much enthusiasm to any other leader. For English speakers, Blanchet is least likely to be viewed impressively (16%), just behind Trudeau (19%):

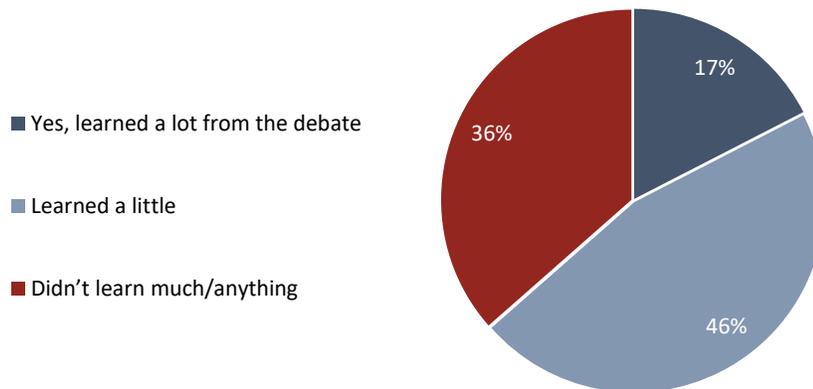
And based on what you have seen, read, or heard, who, if anyone, impressed you during the debate?



Part Three: Two-thirds say they learned something from debates

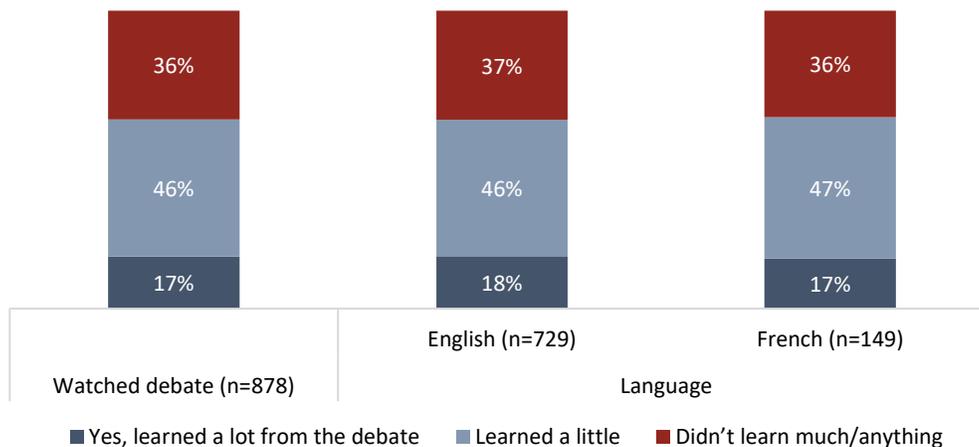
Watching the debates was an overall productive experience for Canadians. Two-thirds (63%) say they learned something that will help inform their vote from the debates, including one-in-five (17%) who learned a lot. One-third (36%), by contrast, say they were left wanting more:

**And would you say you learned much about the candidates and issues to help to inform your vote?
(Watched debate n=878)**



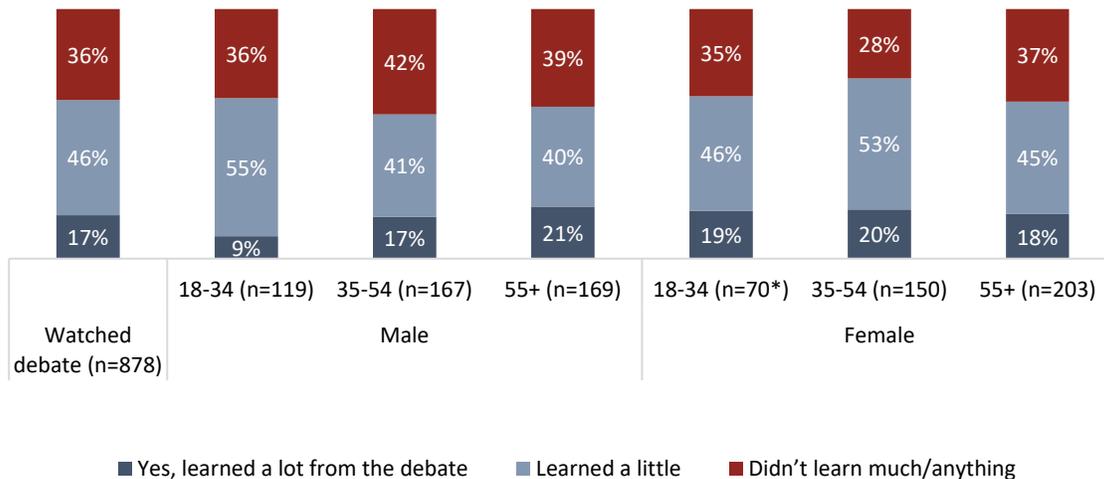
Regardless of which language they speak, Canadians are equally likely to say that they drew valuable information from the debate process. Two-thirds of English and French speakers say this:

And would you say you learned much about the candidates and issues to help to inform your vote?



A majority of all age groups feel they learned something from the debates to help them make a decision on Sept. 20, but men aged 35 to 54 are the most likely to say they didn't take away much. Conversely, women of the same age are the demographic who feel they learned the most:

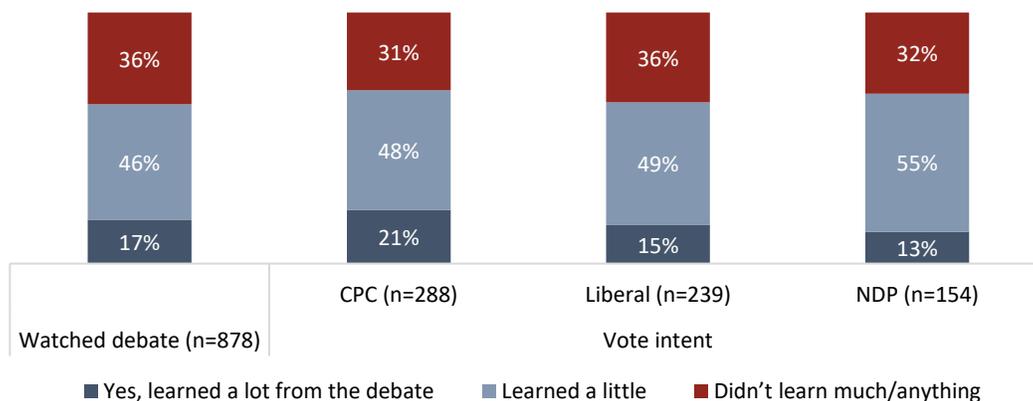
And would you say you learned much about the candidates and issues to help to inform your vote?



**Small sample size, interpret with caution.*

Two-thirds of supporters of the three major parties say they learned something from the debates, but one-in-five (21%) CPC supporters say they learned a lot to help inform their vote, the most of the three groups:

And would you say you learned much about the candidates and issues to help to inform your vote?



CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: 604.505.2229 angus@angusreid.org

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here.](#)

For detailed results by English and French, [click here.](#)

For detailed results by the amount of the debate that was watched, [click here.](#)

DRAFT

CONTACT:

Angus Reid, Chairman: 604.505.2229 angus@angusreid.org

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org