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Exploring the Use of Nodality Based Information PolicyTools by Canadian Electoral Agencies
Explorer le recours aux instruments de politiques de type informatif par les organismes électoraux canadiens

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Article abstract

Despite a healthy number of studies examining the motivations or voting practices of Canadians, little comparative work examines communications activities of electoral agencies. The following article maps out such activities through an assessment of nodality (information-based) policy tools use by four Canadian electoral agencies (Elections Canada, Elections Ontario, Elections BC, Elections Quebec). The paper begins by situating information-based policy tools within the broader policy tools literature. Subsequently, such tools are then classified with respect to their relationship to policy making activities at the 'front-end' (agenda setting and policy formulation) and 'backend' (policy implementation and evaluation) of the policy cycle. Upon analysis, a variety of instrument mixes are detected with an overall shift from broad sweeping substantive instruments, such as mass information campaigns towards targeted approaches, to increased partnerships aimed at reaching specific cohorts with historically lower levels of voter participation. Furthermore, instrument mixes are found to vary jurisdictionally with respect to the adoption of newer Internet based tools versus traditional tools. In general, all four cases are found to frequently rely on both procedural and substantive information-based policy tools related to 'back-end' policy-making activities.

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Exploring the Use of Nodality Based Information Policy Tools by Canadian Electoral Agencies

By Jonathan M. Craft

Introduction

As with many advanced western democracies, there has been a trend towards lower voter participation levels in Canada. A snapshot of federal electoral cycles saw participation rates decline from 75.3 to 58.8 percent between 1988 and 2008 (Elections Canada 2009c). The 2008 electoral participation rate represents the lowest since Confederation and confirms previously identified trends of particularly low participation by certain cohorts, notably youth (Elections Canada 2010). Such trends also extend to most provincial and municipal levels in Canada (LeDuc and Pammett 2003; Stewart and Carty 2006). In the context of such decreasing participation rates, electoral agencies across Canada have sought, to varying degrees, to reach out to the general voting public with information about the voting process and the importance of electoral participation. Electoral agencies and commissions have gradually seen their mandates extended beyond the administration of election related mechanics to include information campaigns and education activities related to electoral participation. Furthermore, electoral agencies have also partnered with community organizations, academics and other organizations in hopes of leveraging networked resources.

The following article maps out such attempts and activities regarding Elections Canada and three provincial electoral agencies (Ontario, Quebec, British Columbia) in the context of the tools or instruments of public policy. The article begins with a brief review of the policy tools literature, followed by an application of Howlett's (Howlett 2009) modified version of the well known Hood 'NATO' taxonomy (Hood 1986; Hood 2007; Hood and Margetts 2007) for the evaluation of government communication activities and information-based policy tools. Electoral agencies are found to employ a spectrum of information policy tools ranging from 'substantive' policy tools aimed at altering policy outcomes (voting) and 'procedural' policy instruments aimed at altering the usage, structure and processes of actors that can be understood to be involved in policy networks related to electoral activities. Subsequent to comparative assessment and categorization, such tools can then be classified with respect to their relationship to policy making activities at the 'front-end' (agenda setting and policy formulation) and 'back-end' (policy implementation and evaluation) activities. Electoral agencies are shown to frequently use procedural and substantive information-based policy tools related to 'back-end' policy making activities.

Studying policy tools

A well-developed literature has emerged that tackles public policy making and the policy sciences from the perspective of the tools used by governments to achieve desired goals.

Verdung (1998: 21) defines policy instruments as the "set of techniques by which governmental authorities wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect or prevent social change." As Hood (2006, 2007) outlines, the last twenty years of public policy literature can roughly be understood to fall within three general approaches to the study of policy instruments: (1) institutions-as-tools, (2) politics-of-instrumentality; and (3) generic policy tools approaches. The first approach to the tools of governments sees instruments as institutions available to government including, but not limited to, public corporations, a gamut of public-private partnerships, or private social contractors (Salamon and Lund 1989; Salamon 2002). A second approach to the tools of government is axed on the politics of instrument choice. As Hood (2006: 470) elaborates, "for this approach it is not crucial whether government instruments are viewed as institutions or other forms of action: the key question concerns what political, ideological, or cognitive processes lead to the choice of one policy instrument rather than another." Peters and Linder (Linder and Peters 1989, 1992, 1998) are well known proponents of this approach which explore the linkages between instrument selection and policy problems. A large body of literature has also evolved within a third set of non-institutional instrument-based approaches aimed at cataloguing and exploring generic tool kits. Building on early works by Dahl and Lindblom (1953), subtypes of this approach range from those working from broad organizational and managerial perspectives (see for example Elmore 1987; Schneider and Ingram 1990), those focused on tools related to overarching types of organizational control (Bertelmans-Videc, Rist and Vedung 1998), and Hood's well known NATO approach related to the tools "available to government for gathering information and affecting behavior at the point where government comes into contact with citizens" (Hood 2006: 471).

Within these broad overarching analytical frameworks much ink has been spilled to assess common tool usage, and relate such usage directly to policy design and formulation activities. Most notably producing:

- Various taxonomies of instruments (Howlett 1991; Linder and Peters 1998; Lowi 1972; Salisbury 1968; Tupper and Doern 1981; Vedung 1998; Wilson 1980);
- Theorizing on the political contexts of instrument use related to degrees of coercion (Doern and Phidd 1992; Howlett 2009; Pal 2006; Prince 2010; Tupper and Doern 1981);
- The relationship of instrument mixes and national or sectoral policy tool styles (Howlett 1991; Howlett and Lindquist 2004; Richardson, Gustafsson and Jordan 1982); and
- Theorizing and testing the impacts of a shift towards 'governance' on tools use, selection and mixes (Eliadis, Hill and Howlett 2005; Salamon 2002).

Nodality-based information policy tools

Within the tools literature, some work has been done on exploring the use, mixes and effectiveness of information-based policy tools (Adler and Pittle 1984; Bennett and Raab 2003; Salmon 1989; Stanbury and Fulton 1984; Weiss and Tschirhart 1994). Information as a policy tool, as Vedung and van der Doelen (1998: 103) explain, "[C]overs government-directed attempts at influencing people through transfer of knowledge

communication of reasoned argument, and moral suasion in order to achieve a policy result." A variety of information-based techniques are available to governments ranging from general information campaigns, information or data collection, government advertising, commissions of inquiry, access to information and privacy acts all fall within the rubric of information-based policy instruments. The well known Hood's (1986) typology allows for further investigation of what types of information-based policy instruments are typically used and how they relate to policy-making processes. As per Figure 1, Hood's taxonomy groups policy tools under four distinct groups, depending on their reliance on 'nodality' (information), 'authority', 'treasure (or organizational resources of government and whether the instruments are designed to be 'effectors' of change), or 'detectors' of change. Hood (2007:129) explains that nodality-based tools relate to the "capacity of government to operate as a node in information networks – a central point of contact." Thus, with respect to information tools, governments are nodal in the sense that they provide, collect and broker information resources.

Figure 1: Examples of Policy Instruments, Classified by Principal Governing Resource Used

Nodality/Information	Authority	Treasure	Organization
Information collection and release	Command and control regulation	Grants and loans	Direct provision of goods and services and public enterprises
Advice and exhortation	Self-regulation	User charges	Use of family, community, and voluntary organizations
Advertising	Standard setting and delegated regulation	Taxes and tax expenditures	Market creation
Commissions and inquiries	Advisory committees and consultations	Interest group creation and funding	Government reorganization

Source: Hood (1986)

Beyond classification of policy tools based on the governing resource used, policy tools can further be analytically applied to policy making via differentiation between the aforementioned subtypes of 'substantive' and 'procedural' policy tools. The former refer specifically to instruments "intended to directly affect the nature, types, qualities and distribution of goods and services provided in society" (Howlett 2000: 415) whereas procedural tools are aimed at altering policy processes rather than substance or "intended to manage state-societal interactions in order to assure general support for government aims and initiatives" (Ibid.: 412). Application of substantive and procedural tool categories to nodality-based information tools results in one set of substantive tools, "which rely on the use of information to directly or indirectly affect the behavior of those involved in the production, consumption and distribution of different kinds of goods and services in society" (Howlett 2009: 25). While procedural nodality related tools, can be considered to be "based on government information resources in order to attempt to alter the behavior of policy network members involved in policy making processes" (Ibid.: 26). As per Figure 2, Howlett's (2009) framework for the analysis of communication-

related policy tools provides for substantive and procedural policy tools classification and further allows classification based on their relationship to various stages of policy-making activity; and the 'production processes' or production and/or consumption activities related to nodality-based information instruments. Policy tools of both a substantive and procedural nature can be seen to affect either 'front-end' (agenda setting and policy formulation activities), or 'back-end' (policy processes namely implementation and evaluation) activities.

Figure 2: Four Categories of Government Communications Tools

		Policy Purpose	
		Substantive	*Procedural*
Stage of Policy Cycle/Production Process Primarily Targeted	*Front-end (Agenda-Setting and Policy Formulation/ Goods and Service Production)*	Notification Instruments/Moral Suasion E,g, Consumer Product Labeling, Prospectus disclosure laws, Government e-health and e-government portals appeals to producers with or without the threat of regulation.	General Information Disclosure or Prevention e.g. Freedom of information & Privacy Laws, Performance Measures , Censorship,
	Back-end (Policy Implementation and Policy Evaluation/ Goods and Service Distribution and Consumption)	Exhortation and Information Campaigns e.g. Moral Suasion and Government Advertizing	Data Collection and Release e.g. Censuses Compulsory Reporting, Press Releases, Media Relations, government websites

Source: Howlett, 2009.

Electoral agencies and nodality-based information policy instruments

Electoral agencies offer another means by which nodality based tools can be assessed related to policy-making activities. At both the federal and provincial levels, such organizations have seen their mandates broadened to include a range of information provision and educational activities related to electoral participation (See for example: Elections Canada 2009a; Elections Ontario 2008). A review of nodality-based procedural and substantive information policy tools indicates that, as expected, substantive nodality-based tools aimed at general, and targeted communication campaigns remain the most utilized policy tool. With respect to procedural nodality-based policy tools, electoral agencies, particularly Elections Canada, engage in frequent partnership and collaborative activities with other organizations in their policy community. Moreover, several electoral agencies frequently are required through legislation to report to Parliament or respective

legislatures and are also increasingly conducting surveys and evaluations on their communication based activities which are then in turn made available to the public.

Elections Canada: Substantive nodality-based information tools

Elections Canada has traditionally used radio, television and print advertisements in order to make citizens aware of their rights and of the means through which they could exercise their franchise, but has also increasingly explored new technologies and communications vehicles. The mass information campaigns are delivered in the run up to and during electoral periods and are designed to encourage the voting public to exercise their franchise. As per Figure 2, this type of activity can be categorized as a substantive nodality-based information policy tool under the rubric of exhortation and moral suasion.

The agency has also expanded its campaigns from broad voter based communications to targeted communications aimed at marginalized groups such as youth, Aboriginal and minority communities (Howlett, Craft and Zibrik 2010). As per Table 1 Elections Canada runs multi-million dollar communications campaigns which continue to rely on standards mechanisms such as television and radio advertisements, but also appears to be shifting towards newer technologies involving internet and on-site communication activities.

Table 1.* Communications Based Advertising by Federal Election Cycle in Canada (Percentages represent shares of total budget by election cycle)

Type of Communication Based Activity	1993 35th General Election	1997 36th General Election	2000 37th General Election	2004 38th General Election	2006 39th General Election	2008 40th General Election
Total Advertising Cost (Millions)	7.6	6.1	9.5	11.0	9.9	9.4
TV	38%	40%	37%	34%	35%	15%
Print	40%	40%	28%	31%	28%	39%
Radio	19%	16%	19%	18%	17%	28%
Students	1%		1%	4%	1%	2%
International	2%	4%	3%	n/a	3%	n/a
Internet	n/a	n/a	3%	4%	5%	7%
Aboriginal/Ethnocultural	n/a	n/a	9%	9%	9%	7%
Cinema	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2%	2%

* provided by Elections Canada in correspondence with author. N/A = not applicable

Table 1 provides a snapshot of various communications vehicles used by the agency and from the available data, a clear shift towards increases in the usage of non-traditional online and Internet-based substantive nodality tools can be gleaned. Moreover,

while the share of print, radio and Internet based substantive nodality tools is on the rise, the use of television for information-based policy tools is in decline. The 2008 electoral cycle included the use of various nodality-based communication tools by Elections Canada. The agency reports that in the lead up to, and during the 40th Canadian general elections held October 14, 2008, "Ads were carried on 144 television and 629 radio stations, and in 145 daily newspapers, 1,114 community newspapers, 22 cultural publications and 97 student papers. Ads also ran on 1977 movie screens, while banner ads appeared on 280 Internet sites. Based on industry standards, the campaign potentially reached 99.9 percent of electors" (Elections Canada 2009b: 21). Such advertising activities indicate a current emphasis on utilizing non-traditional communications techniques to ensure high levels of public information. These advertising tools were used to highlight the date of the election, provide information on how to register to vote, and provide additional contact information for voters requiring further assistance. Significant efforts were made to provide information in a variety of formats and languages to meet the diverse needs of potential Canadian voters. For the 40th general election, written communications products continued to be available in both Canadian official languages, 27 heritage languages, 8 Aboriginal languages and Braille (Elections Canada 2009b: 22).

When these types of communications activities are assessed using Howlett's (2009) framework, they are found to fall within what he terms the *Consumer-Directed Nodality Tools*. That is, the mass communication and information campaigns conducted by Elections Canada to promote electoral participation by eligible voters are aimed at "providing social actors with more information about aspects of their behavior and its advantageous or deleterious quality, urging enhancements of the former and diminishments of the latter" (Howlett 2009: 29). These consumer-directed nodality tools, when assessed with respect to their usage in the stages of policy making, relate to the 'back-end' of policy-making processes (implementation and evaluation). The use of exhortation and suasion communication tools by Elections Canada are designed, at their core, to overcome information asymmetries in the voting public and promote electoral participation.

Elections Canada and procedural nodality-based information policy tools

On the procedural sides of nodality-based information tools, Elections Canada has utilized collaborative instruments through partnerships with various civic organizations to deliver programs to students, and community based programming such as the Aboriginal elders and youth programs. Such collaborative endeavors highlight the agency's attempts to partner with social organizations to further leverage the dissemination of information to targeted communities. Moreover, as is explored below, these procedural policy tools are aimed at collecting data on how the agency's information is received and what can be done to improve the quality, accessibility and effectiveness of information and communication products used in particular settings. Elections Canada remains active in partnerships with the academic community for various research programs aimed at assessing opportunities to encourage electoral participation, share best practices, and take the pulse of electoral participation rates in Canada. Funding and resources are provided, resulting in several reports completed through partnership activities with academics, focus groups with organizations, and community outreach programs (Elections Canada

2009a). Such procedural policy tools are designed to generate improvements with respect to implementation of future information-based activity.

A second main procedural nodality-based information tool used by Elections Canada relates to its data collection and dissemination. On a very basic level, the agency is required, through legislation, to report to Parliament on its yearly activities. These annual reports provide a gamut of information related to the budgeting, operations and strategic planning for the respective year. Furthermore, Elections Canada has also increasingly commissioned reports from various consultants aimed at assessing the agencies communications effectiveness and the experiences of other community organizations and agencies in their dealings with Elections Canada.

In a 2009 report commissioned by the agency Impact Research, a marketing and communication firm, conducted a study of eligible voters on behalf of Elections Canada to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of their communication activities surrounding the 40th general election. The survey (N = 1,011) assessed the various communications tools employed by the agency and found that overall, respondents cited general media coverage from traditional media and Internet sources and direct marking initiatives including voter information cards (VIC) and reminders about voting and general brochures as the means by which they became aware of voting procedures. The report (Impact Research 2009:29) notes that:

- For the four elements of the voting process measured in the survey (advanced voting, date of the vote, when and where to vote, and voter ID requirements), advertising was key. In all four cases, more than 50 percent of all mentions referred to advertising under various forms.
- Media coverage (which excludes word of mouth) was also important, although to a lesser extent. Between 14 percent (when and where to vote) and 41 percent (date of the vote) of all mentions referred to media coverage. Hence, media coverage was most successful in communicating the date of the vote.
- Amongst the different advertising elements mentioned, direct marketing (which includes VIC, reminder card, brochures in general) was clearly the strongest. direct marketing scores ranging from 26 percent of all mentions (date of the vote) to 57 percent (when and where to vote).

A similar type of report completed by Environics Research in 2009 assessed the usefulness of information provided to associations and community-based organizations. Their final report indicated that overall organizations were pleased with the service provision from the agency, and found the majority of their product and services effective in informing voters and encouraging electoral participation (Environics Research Group 2009). While Elections Canada interacts with over 1000 organizations related to elections and electoral participation, the Environics' report was quick to note that its study was of a small sample of 109 such organizations, and did not include any Aboriginal organizations as none had responded to their request.

As the Elections Canada 2008 five-year strategic plan makes very clear, the use of procedural policy tools by the agency will continue if not expand. Under the third key priority of *Public Education, Information and Support for Stakeholders,* the agency lists continued voter education and outreach (with an emphasis on youth), continued corporate research including post election studies, and support for stakeholders (Elections Canada

2008). However the plan also calls for the development of an advertising communications framework to review existing practices and seek out means to gain efficiency and effectiveness through better integrated communications. Thus, 'back-end' procedural nodality-based tools used to evaluate the processes and implementation mechanisms of the agency's communications activities were by and large geared around partnerships and collaboration, and involved frequent use of data collection and dissemination.

A review of the policy tools used by Elections Canada underscores the frequent use of general information campaigns, but also highlights an increasing shift towards targeted campaigns aimed at reaching potential voters deemed 'at risk' of not voting, specifically Aboriginal Canadians, youth and members of special needs groups. Elections Canada relies heavily on substantive nodality-based policy tools, most commonly the mass communication campaign aimed at providing information on voting processes and on encouraging the voting public to exercise their franchise. While such campaigns continue to rely on traditional vehicles, such as voter information cards and television and radio ads, newer communication vehicles such as the Internet are broadening the 'tool-box' available to the agency. In addition to their educational media campaigns, however, Elections Canada has also used a variety of procedural nodality-based tools including consultative and collaborative processes in order to attempt to engage groups at higher risk of not voting, and survey and consultation mechanisms designed to assess the effectiveness of its information-based services and products. Both substantive and procedural nodality-based policy tools are found to be used by elections Canada with respect to 'back-end' policy making activities.

Provincial electoral agencies

At the provincial level, as with Elections Canada, traditional substantive nodality-based information policy tools aimed at information provision, exhortation, and suasion are the most common. As Table 3 below makes clear, provincial electoral agencies rely heavily on mail outs to individual voters, and a spectrum of traditional mass communication activities via community newspapers and, to varying degrees, television and radio mechanisms. The following analysis examines the three most populated subnational jurisdictions in Canada, who also represent the provinces which have most recently undergone provincial elections: Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. All employed procedural nodality-based survey instruments (data collection and dissemination) related to better understanding their electorate and gauging the civic literacy of their eligible voters. In the case of Ontario, surveys of electors' experiences with the voting process are mandated under Section 67.1 of the *Ontario Elections Act*.

Of the three provincial electoral agencies contacted, Elections Ontario provided a detailed media breakdown for the 1999 and 2003 elections which as per Table 2, highlighting a plethora of media outlets and languages used for the dissemination of electoral information.

Table 2. Elections Ontario Media Advertising By Media Type, Number of Outlet, and Language *(Table 2 provided From Elections Ontario in correspondence with the author)*		
Media	**# of languages in 1999**	**# of languages in 2003**
Print	33	26
Television	24	33
Radio	35	N/A
Media	**# of media outlets in 2003**	**# of media outlets in 1999**
Daily Newspapers	43	44
Weekly Newspapers	290 (including 18 French/Bilingual, 9 urban weeklies, and 3 Aboriginal weeklies)	326
Bi-weeklies/Monthlies	N/A	40
Ethnic Newspapers – Dailies	9	8
Ethnic Newspapers – Weeklies	104	33
Ethnic Newspapers – Biweeklies/Monthlies	N/A	23
Television Stations / Markets	16 television markets.	All English markets, and Ottawa French (through Hull).
Television Stations – Ethnic	OMNI 1, OMNI 2, Fairchild TV	5 stations
Radio Stations	All available Ontario radio stations – 300+	175

As per Table 3 below, all three provincial cases demonstrate a visible shift towards greater use of online communication instruments. Most striking are the 2005 to 2009 figures for online communications activities in the case of British Columbia. Drastic increases in online communication activities have been theorized to represent attempts by governments to capitalize on the growing use of information technology by citizens, and the reduced cost associated with information technology related advertising as compared to traditional advertising through television or radio (Hood and Margetts 2007).

While the available data lend itself to a preliminary assessment at best, it does provide a baseline against which future communications activities can be assessed. As electoral agencies undertake more robust reporting of information and communication-related expenses, greater assessment of potential trends towards online or other communications tools may be gleaned. While present electoral agency data collection is

Table 3: Provincial Electoral Agencies Spending on Advertising and Communications
(Dollars)[1]

Provincial Electoral Agency	**Quebec**			**Ontario**			**British Columbia**[2]		
				General Election Year					
Media Type	2003	2007	2008	1999	2003	2007	2001	2005	2009
Television	1,183,169	1,139,400	1,251,089	793,882.22	1,495,000	2,515,278	n/a	207,184.48	475,974.60
Radio	189,606	161,634	371,740	457,658.52	500,000	636,333	n/a	40,555.00	241,240.52
Print & Newspaper	737,431	682,781	639,186	2,547.252.90	2,187,400	3,135,595	n/a	479,957.95	754,640.53
Internet-based	n/a	201,980	264,184	*	n/a	827,821	n/a	640	79,909.20
Targeted sub-group spending	63,812	89,880	82,914	208,302.56	525,558.56	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other	179,836	196,720	202,354	413214.52*	684,569.11[3]	n/a	n/a	221,090.80[4] 81,503.00[5]	152,020.80[6] 16,658.20[7]
Total	**2,353,854**	**2,472,395**	**2,811,467**	**4,420,310.94***	**8,023,000**	**7,115,027**	**1,412,301**	**1,059,724**	**2,425,228**

1 All figures from correspondence from Office of the Quebec Electoral Officer, Elections Ontario, and Elections BC.
2 Elections BC did not have records relating to the advertising breakdown for the 2001 election, the total advertising budget was taken from the 2001 Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 37th Provincial General Election – May 16, 2001; accessed June 20th, 2010.
http://www.elections.bc.ca/docs/rpt/ceofin2001.pdf
The 2005 and 2009 figures are combined totals for the general election, and referendum advertising expenses as per the organizations invoicing and accounting for those years.
*1999 Advertising Budget included an "Other Initiatives" section for charges for the web site, posters and two guides for voters and candidates. Cost for the
component, which is not reflected above, was $678,780.20. The bulk of that cost ($591,780) was for the "Guide to Changes for Ontario Voters".
3 Costs listed as related to 'production' of advertising materials.
4 Advertising through pre-movie theatre ads.
5 Advertising conducted via local cable television listings service.
6 Advertising through pre-movie theatre ads.
7 Advertising conducted via local cable television listings service.

limited, most of the agencies examined here have attempted some form of assessment of their advertising and communications activities.

Information-based nodality tools effectiveness

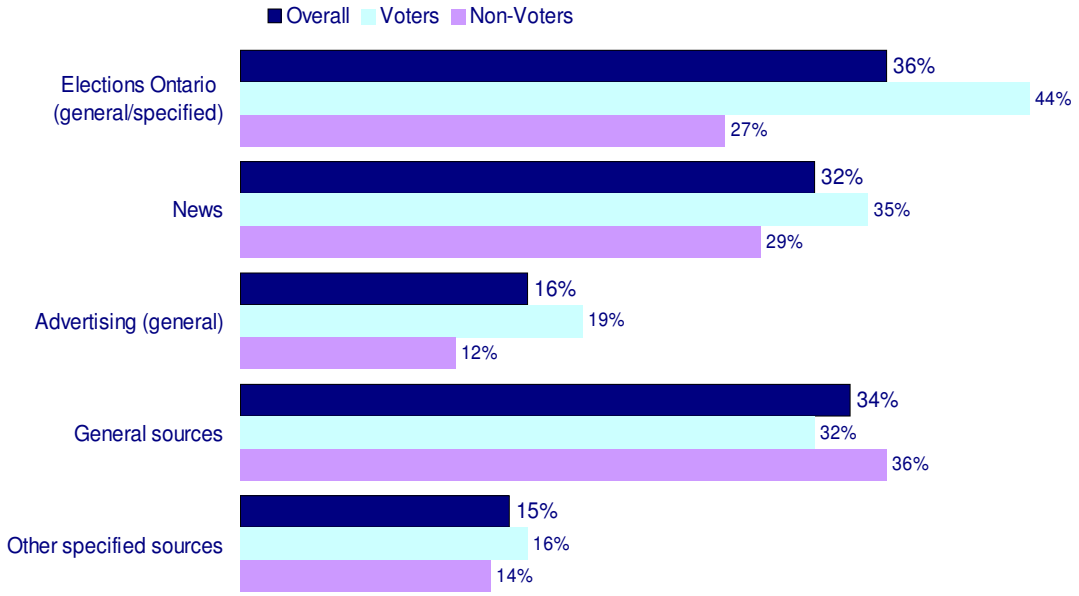
Elections BC commissioned a survey of electors prior to their most recent 2009 election to gauge awareness of voters regarding basic voting information and processes. The survey (N=765) found that almost all eligible voters were aware of Elections BC advertising (96 percent). The report (Elections BC 2009:5) further noted that:

About 9-out of-10 eligible voters (86 percent) saw or heard Elections BC advertising from two or more sources. Over 50 percent reported that they had seen or heard Elections BC advertising from four or more sources. Most frequently, eligible voters saw or heard Elections BC advertising via the:

- television (70 percent),
- newspaper (67 percent),
- Elections BC information flyer (55 percent),
- radio (55 percent), and
- Elections BC enumeration notice (54 percent).

In Ontario, as aforementioned, a survey of electors is mandated by the *Ontario Elections Act*. The most recent 2007 post election survey (N = 1500) is instructive as it provides findings regarding how voters and non-voters are informed about the electoral process in general. The report also provides information pertaining to the level of 'recall' among voters and non-voters with respect to particular advertising and communication tools. As per Graph 1, both Elections Ontario, in general, and electoral advertising, in particular, were key sources of information about voting procedures for both voters and non-voters alike.

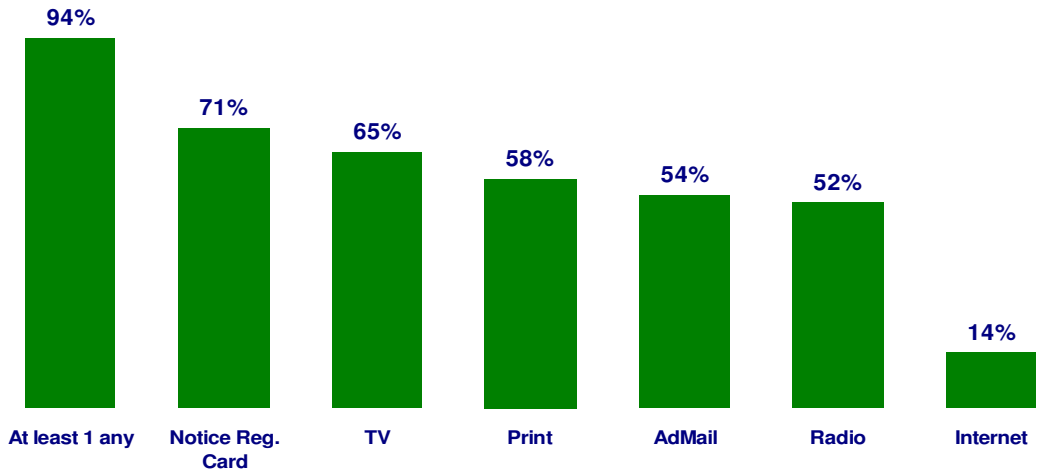
Graph 1.* Main Source of Information About Voting Procedures – Unaided



*provided by Elections Ontario in correspondence with author.

The report's evaluation of Elections Ontario's advertising practices and their effectiveness found that a majority of eligible voters were exposed to at least one of the six main components of their information campaign. As per Graph 2, two-thirds or more of respondents recalled advertising/information on TV or through the Notice of Registration Cards (NRC), while over half recall advertising/information through print, radio and ad mail (home pamphlets). In total, a full 94 percent report seeing, reading, or hearing election information/advertising through at least one of the six sources. Moreover, the report reveals that advertisement recall increased among voters and non voters alike compared to the 2003 Ontario Post Election Survey.

Graph 2.* Aided Recall of Elections Ontario Advertising 2007 General Election



*provided by Elections Ontario in correspondence with author.

While Elections Canada, Elections Ontario and Elections BC have commissioned surveys to assess the effectiveness of their recent advertising and communications activities, the office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Québec (CEQ) has not. The procedural nodality-based information tools used by CEQ (data collection and release) were designed to capture feedback on elector's satisfaction with voting processes in general; questions focus on the quality of information provided, ease of voting on election day and the like. The survey does however highlight that, 87 percent of eligible electors did receive a notice of election prior to election day and 80 percent of those surveyed have received a reminder card in the mail (Jolicoeur et Associés 2009). The survey also found that 5 percent of those respondents had sought out information from the chief electoral officer's website (Ibid). The survey did not however assess the effectiveness of the advertising activities.

Conclusion

Woodside (1986: 775) writing in the 1980s went as far as to state "the most distinctive theoretical contribution that has emerged from the study of public policy in Canada can be found in the literature relating to the choice and use of policy or governing instruments." The above review applies the advances made in the policy tools literature to the information-based policy tools employed by Canada's four largest electoral agencies, at both the federal and provincial levels.

Substantive consumer-based policy instruments are the most frequently used nodality-based information tools amongst all four cases. All electoral agencies conduct mass information campaigns designed to overcome information asymmetries and

encourage electoral participation. Furthermore, as their use becomes more institutionalized, electoral agencies are more often designing targeted campaigns aimed at certain cohorts and segments of the voting public. Such targeted campaigns often use various linguistic products to match specific cohorts of eligible voters with traditionally low participation rates. Overall, as the above makes clear, these campaigns generally employ a wide range of communication vehicles and instrument mixes. However, all electoral agencies examined continue to rely heavily on direct mail voter information cards sent to eligible voters. These traditional policy tools, based on studies commissioned by the respective electoral agencies, remain the most effective information based instruments for all four cases. Additionally, each continues to employ a mix of television, radio, and increasingly, online advertisements. These substantive consumer-based nodality instruments are related to 'back-end' policy-making processes, such as implementation and evaluation. Classifying the above substantive and procedural nodality-based tools via Howlett's (2009) framework reveals that both sets of substantive and procedural tools are related to 'back-end' policy making activities (see Figure 2). Substantively, nodality-based information is aimed at exhortation and persuasion, while procedurally, collaboration, partnership and data collection and release are the principle goals.

All four cases include procedural nodality-based information tools, but these tools vary with respect to specificity of advertising evaluation and timing of deployment. While Ontario, British Columbia and Elections Canada all assess their advertising practices with survey-based instruments, the Office of Chief Electoral Officer of Québec does not appear to, or at least make them publicly available. Moreover, while several reports for the three former agencies elaborate partnership and collaborative-based procedural policy tool usage, little information exists with respect to such tool usage in Quebec. The latter however, has an established relationship with academia involving a formalized research chair created in conjunction with other offices of the National Assembly of Québec.

While this review makes clear the limits of analysis due to the availability of detailed data and budget breakdowns, it does provide a reasonable assessment of the frequency and patterns of tool use by the four electoral agencies. As an initial mapping of the information-based policy-tool usage by Canadian electoral agencies, it provides an opening for further analysis as such agencies adjust both the tools and strategies by which they disseminate information to eligible voters, and manage policy networks related to electoral issues.

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