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Information Incident – Featured – Kirkland Lake Bot Campaign   Aug 23

Incident Update 5 | Survey Findings : Kirkland Lake Bot Incident

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Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre's rally in Kirkland Lake on July 31st drew subsequent attention from bot posts on 𝕏 praising the event with variations of similar phrasing. To learn more about public opinion of the event, and of how online bot activity interacts with democracy in Canada, we fielded a survey of 1437 Canadians from August 16th to 21st. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/-2.59%, 19 times out of 20.

Key takeaways:

- Low levels of awareness in general public

- Conservative Party is perceived beneficiary

- Higher levels of concern towards impact of foreign interference and generative AI

- Support for investigation and increased transparency

Awareness

We asked about a broad range of news stories and found that awareness of the Kirkland Lake Bot Incident was quite low but increased when details of the event were provided.

Awareness Levels of News Stories

Kirkland Lake Bot Incident — 7% — After details provided: 19.9%

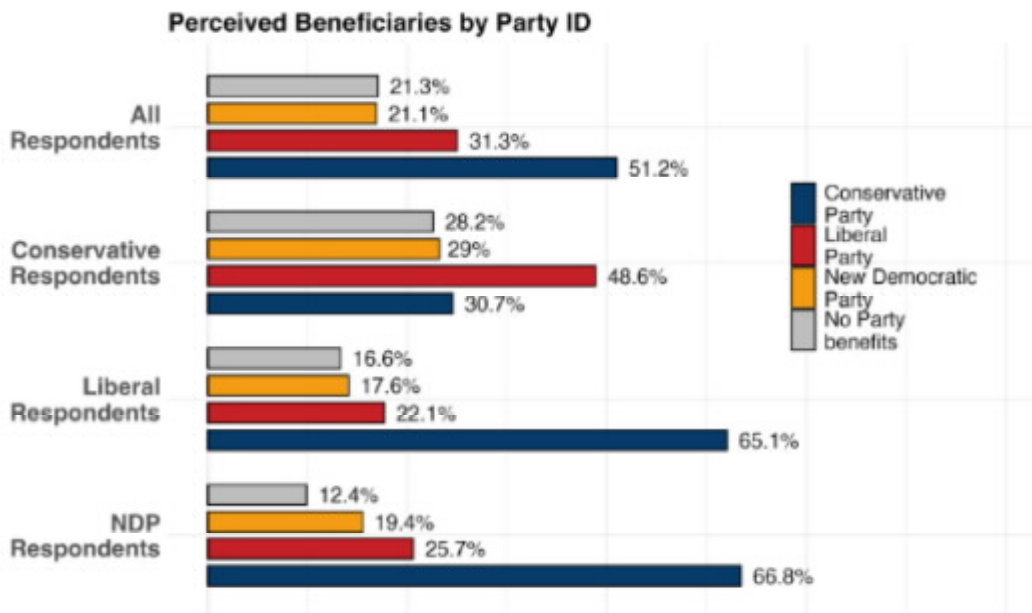0%   25%   50%   75%   100%
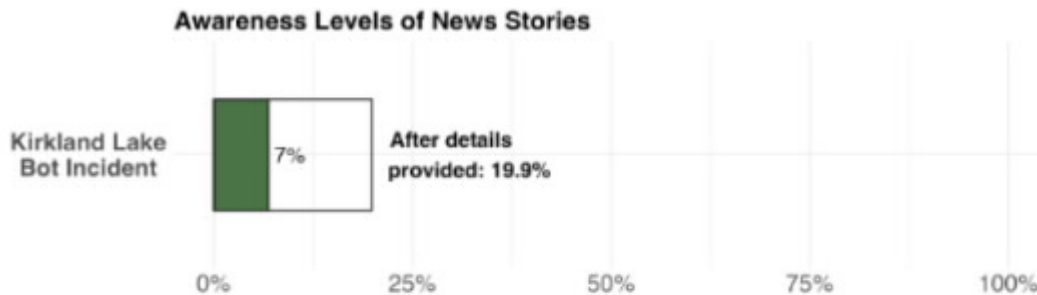
Attribution

To better understand how people made sense of the event, we asked if people thought the posts were actually made by bots. 59% thought that yes, this is the most likely option.

When asked about the actor responsible for the bots, respondents were split, 45% believe a political party or an individual were possibly responsible. Of those thinking it was a political party, 79% believe it was the Conservative Party, 18% believe it was the Liberals, and 11% think it was the NDP.

Since there is currently no real evidence of the source, it is difficult to know any motivations. It might seem logical that the bots were meant to show increased support for the Conservative Party. However, since the event has also been taken up by prominent NDP members as a source for investigation, it could also be seen as a tool to discredit support for the Conservative Party as inauthentic. These events are messy, which may very well be the intent of the bot creator. We asked respondents which political parties benefit from the posts (respondents could select multiple parties so percentages will not add up to 100). When looking at all respondents, 51% think the Conservative Party benefits, followed by

31% for the liberal Party. The NDP is tied at 21% as a perceived beneficiary with an equivalent amount thinking no party benefits.

However, digging into perceived beneficiaries by partisanship reveals strong differences. Two thirds of NDP and Liberal Partisans think the Conservative Party benefits from the bot incident while Conservative partisans think the Liberal party benefits the most.
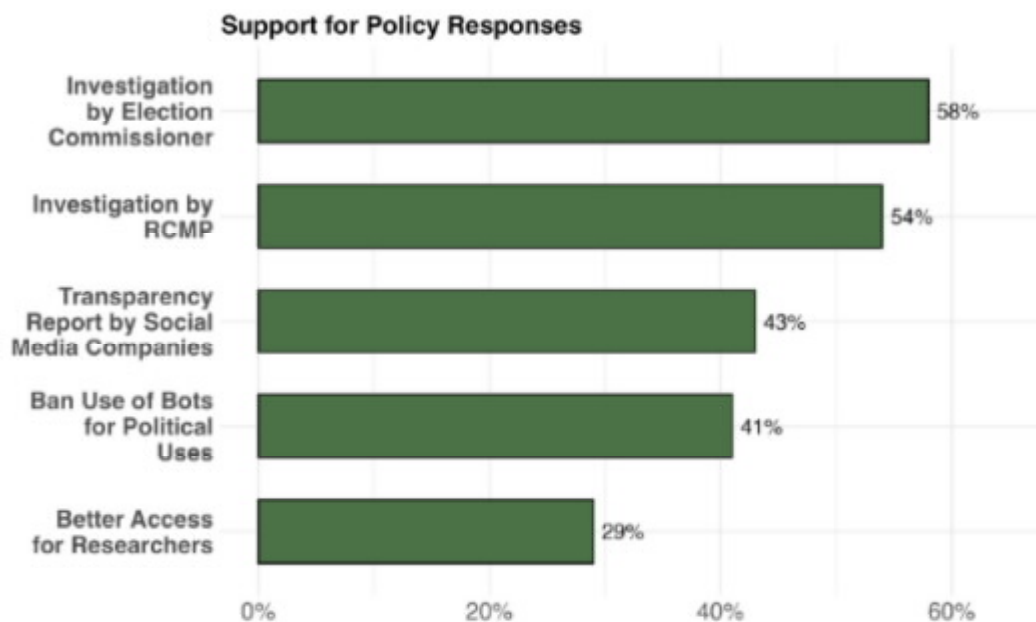
Perceived Beneficiaries by Party ID

All Respondents
- No Party benefits: 21.3%
- New Democratic Party: 21.1%
- Liberal Party: 31.3%
- Conservative Party: 51.2%

Conservative Respondents
- No Party benefits: 28.2%
- New Democratic Party: 29%
- Liberal Party: 48.6%
- Conservative Party: 30.7%

Liberal Respondents
- No Party benefits: 16.6%
- New Democratic Party: 17.6%
- Liberal Party: 22.1%
- Conservative Party: 65.1%

NDP Respondents
- No Party benefits: 12.4%
- New Democratic Party: 19.4%
- Liberal Party: 25.7%
- Conservative Party: 66.8%

Legend:
- Conservative Party
- Liberal Party
- New Democratic Party
- No Party benefits

Threat Assessment

61% of Canadians think bots are an effective tool to mislead Canadians and impact public opinion. When asked out of 10 how large of a threat bots pose in future elections, people ranked them 6.1/10, lower than AI technology (6.6/10) and foreign interference (7.1/10). Unfortunately, these potential threats to democracy are often combined and used together.

Response

What policy responses do people prefer? 58% think the Kirkland Lake Bot Incident justifies an investigation by the election commissioner and 54% think the RCMP should investigate.

43% would like a transparency report form social media companies for events such as the Kirkland Lake Bot Incident. 41% would like to see these companies also ban the use of bots for political uses. Lastly, only 29% of people think this event calls for better access to social media data for researchers - a critical tool for more independent analysis.

Support for Policy Responses

Policy Response	Percentage
Investigation by Election Commissioner	58%
Investigation by RCMP	54%
Transparency Report by Social Media Companies	43%
Ban Use of Bots for Political Uses	41%
Better Access for Researchers	29%

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