

## The role of “third-party validators”

Posted by **Steven** – January 27, 2010



Independent research organizations can play an important role in campaigns. In a contest between two sides arguing for public support, an impartial well-informed observer can provide a useful contribution to “the conversation.”

The Rideau Institute frequently plays this role in public policy debates. Most recently it was on the matter of prorogation, and whether the Facebook group, Canadians Opposed to Prorogation of Parliament, and its 200,000 endorsers ought to be taken seriously or not.

Supporters of the Prime Minister’s decision to prorogue Parliament were dismissing the Facebook group as an inconsequential group of serial petition-signers. We were curious about who these people were, and why had they joined the group.

Collaborating with our friend Pierre Killeen, an online public engagement strategist, we did our best to survey the membership of the Facebook group (not an easy task). While the results were not completely scientific, the nearly 400 responses gave us insight into the group. The report was titled, “[Facebook and Prorogation: Why did more than 200,000 people join the Facebook group ‘Canadians Against Proroguing Parliament,’ and why should anybody care?](#)”

(If 400 of 200,000 people seems too small a sample, consider this: national polls that are considered an accurate reflection of Canada’s population of 33 million typically only comprise telephone interviews with 1000 people).

Pierre’s results were surprising: half of the Facebook group was composed of people over the age of 45, and most of them considered themselves politically engaged and voted in the last election.

When our study hit the media, it put forward a new way of considering the potential political implications of this growing Facebook group. It was covered in the [Globe and Mail](#) and on [CTV.ca](#), on blogs by columnists [Jane Taber](#) and [Susan Delacourt](#), in an editorial by the [Halifax Chronicle Herald](#), [Canwest news stores](#), and discussed on [CBC.ca](#), CBC television and [CBC radio](#).

The report contributed to “the conversation” about Facebook and Canadians’ concerns about prorogation.

Category: Working with the media  
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