



# Who is our audience and how are they getting their facts?

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The case of the Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office

# **BACKGROUND**

# The Canadian Parliamentary Budget Office

- A legislative budget office accountable to the Canadian Parliament
- PBO\* mandate includes independent analysis into the economy, nation's finances, appropriations and costing
- Supports four parliamentary committees (HoC Finance, HoC Public Accounts, Senate Finance, *HoC Estimates*)
- 12-15 staff and CAD2.8 million annual budget
- Kevin Page, Canada first PBO, and I now run a think tank at the intersection of money and politics at the University of Ottawa

\*Under Kevin Page, the PBO was considered, by some, to be among the most media savvy organizations in Canada

# Objectives of the presentation

1. Examining public **confidence** in institutions
2. Understanding your institutional and political **context**
3. **Strategies** for effective communications

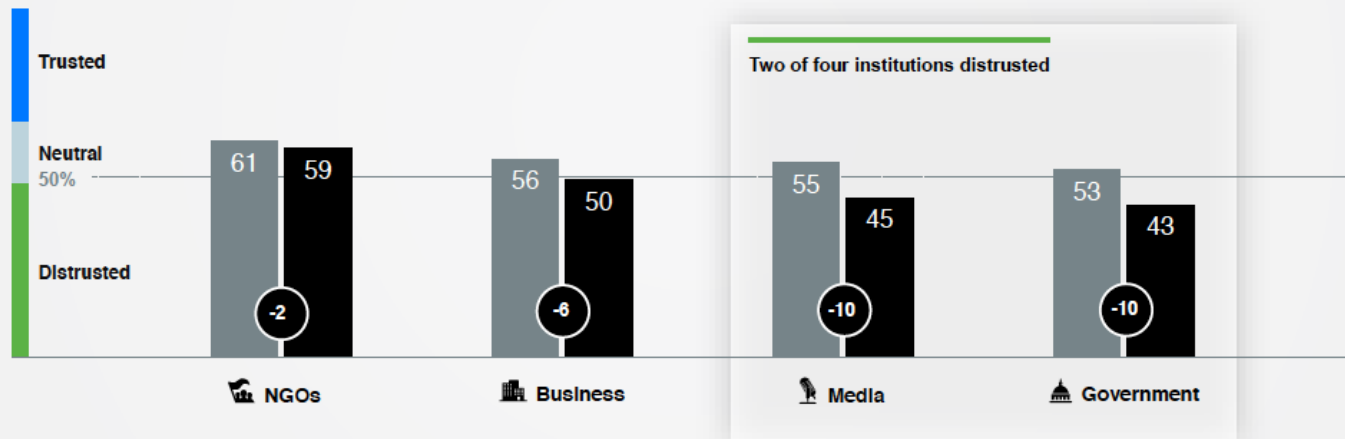
Declining trust in institutions – the Canadian context

# **CONFIDENCE**

## Trust in all four institutions declines in 2017

Per cent trust in the four institutions of government, business, media and NGOs, 2016 vs. 2017

2016 2017

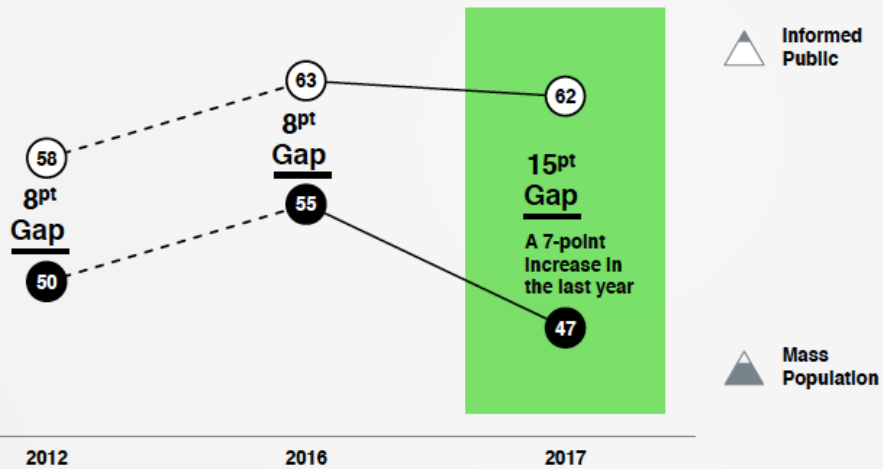


Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. Q11-620. Below is a list of institutions. For each one, please indicate how much you trust that institution to do what is right using a nine-point scale, where one means that you "do not trust them at all" and nine means that you "trust them a great deal." (Top 4 Box, Trust) General Population, Canada.



## Gap between Informed Public and Mass largest yet

Per cent trust in the four institutions of government, business, media and NGOs, 2012 to 2017



### Largest Gaps in 2017

 21 pts

 19 pts

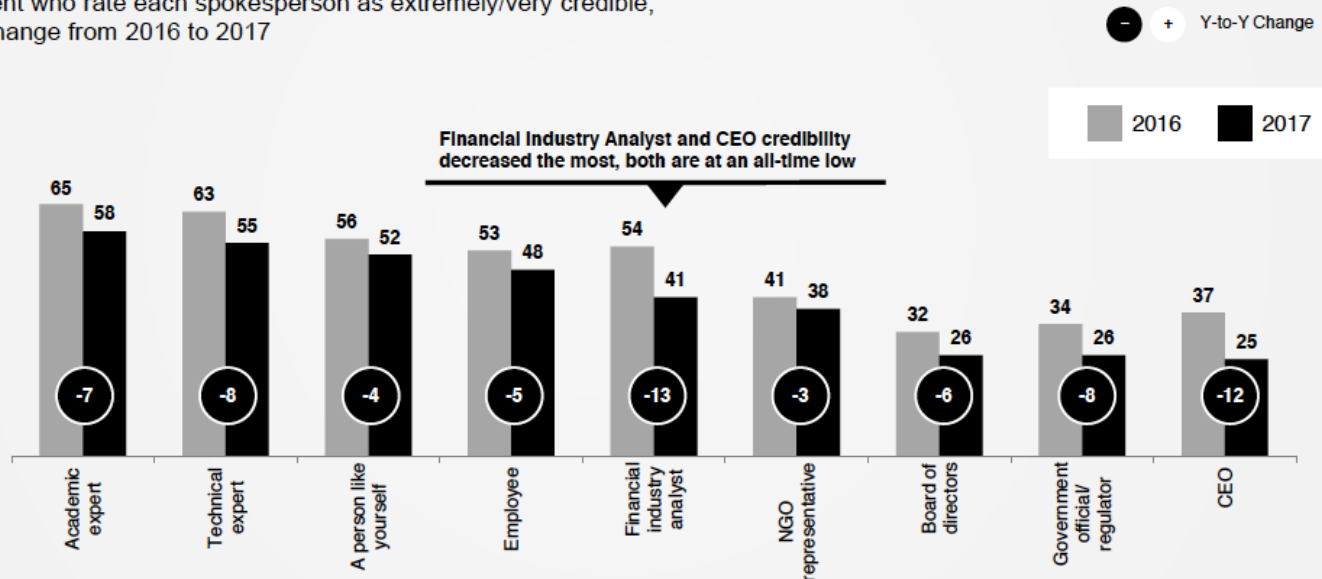
 18 pts

Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. The Trust Index is an average of a country's trust in the institutions of government, business, media and NGOs. Informed Public and Mass Population, Canada.



## Credibility of leadership slipping fast

Per cent who rate each spokesperson as extremely/very credible, and change from 2016 to 2017

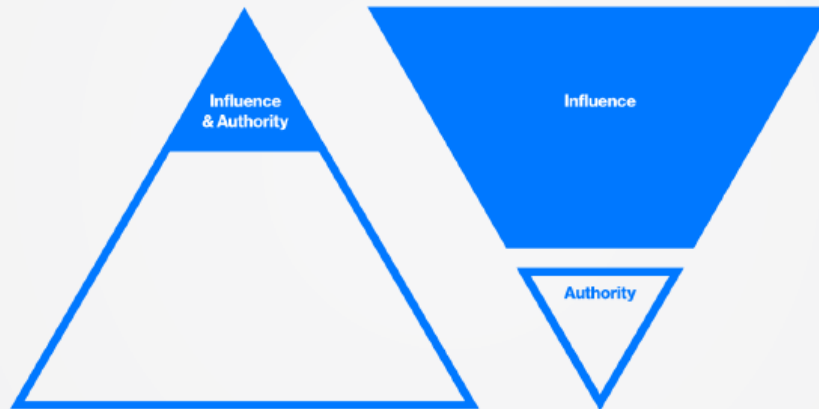


Source: 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer. Q130-747 Below is a list of people. In general, when forming an opinion of a company, if you heard information about a company from each person, how credible would the information be—extremely credible, very credible, somewhat credible, or not credible at all? (Top 2 Box, Very/Extremely Credible) General Population, Canada, question asked of half the sample.





## 2016: The Inversion of Influence



Source: 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer. The Trust Index is an average of a country's trust in the institutions of government, business, media and NGOs. Informed Public and Mass Population, Canada.

Understanding the political environment

# CONTEXT

# Context – the UK environment



News

**Boris Johnson accuses statistics regulator of 'wilfully distorting' his words in spat over claim Britain will gain £350m a week from Brexit**



**Johnson's Brexit claim riles UK statistics chief**

...ove told MPs that £350m-a-week figure was worst abuse of campaign



**Boris Johnson 'misused' figures with £350m Brexit claim, UK statistics chief says**

# Context – the PBO environment



# Context - diversity of topics posed challenges...

The collage consists of several elements:

- Top Left:** A fighter jet flying in a blue sky.
- Top Center:** A pyramid chart titled "Canada - 2010" showing population distribution by gender (Male/Female) and age group (1 to 100).
- Top Right:** The cover of the "ECONOMIC ACTION PLAN 2012" titled "JOBS GROWTH AND LONG-TERM PROSPERITY".
- Middle Left:** A Canadian flag and a graduation cap on a pedestal.
- Middle Right:** A photograph of a soldier in full combat gear shaking hands with a young child in a dusty environment.
- Bottom Left:** The coat of arms of the Federal Court of Canada, with the motto "FIDELITY BRAVERY INTEGRITY".
- Bottom Center:** A line graph titled "Imports and exports: per cent of GDP" showing data from 1965 to 2006. The graph tracks four metrics: Real exports (solid blue), Nominal exports (dotted blue), Real imports (solid red), and Nominal imports (dotted red). All metrics show a general upward trend over the period.
- Bottom Right:** The cover of a government document titled "ESTIMATES 2010-11" and "Part II - Report on Plans and Priorities".

...so our strategy had to reflect this reality

# The stakeholder universe



The Canadian PBO Case: balancing rigor and accessibility

# STRATEGY

# Roland Barthes - Wrestling vs boxing

- This public knows that boxing is a sport, based on a demonstration of excellence.
- A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time
- In wrestling, the logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future.
- Wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone, without ever extending to the crowning moment of a result.

Thinkprogress.org – “This French philosopher is the only one who can explain the Donald Trump phenomenon”  
September, 2015

Some actors have turned politics into **wrestling** and have found a receptive constituency, while the institutions that make up our democracy are still **boxing**



# Strategy

- **Know your clients** – go **to** them and be proactive
- **Leadership** – no substitute for creating political space
- **Credibility** – must be established broadly and defended
- **Technology** – get out of the bunker. Social media may have saved the PBO

Both product and strategy must adjust to the realities of the environment

# Thank-you

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