Converso

RESEARCH BRIEF

Telephone town halls change minds at scale

What 220 Calgary voters told us after Alberta's October 19, 2026 referendum, read against two decades of persuasion research.

CONVERSO · POST-EVENT RESEARCH · OCTOBER 2026

More than one in four voters moved

27%

Moved on the nine questions

Changed a vote or settled an open question

10%

Moved on separation

The hardest question, with positions set long ago

60%

Said it shaped their vote

Changed, settled or confirmed, on the nine

~800

Voters moved, estimated

On the nine, if rates held across all 3,672 lines

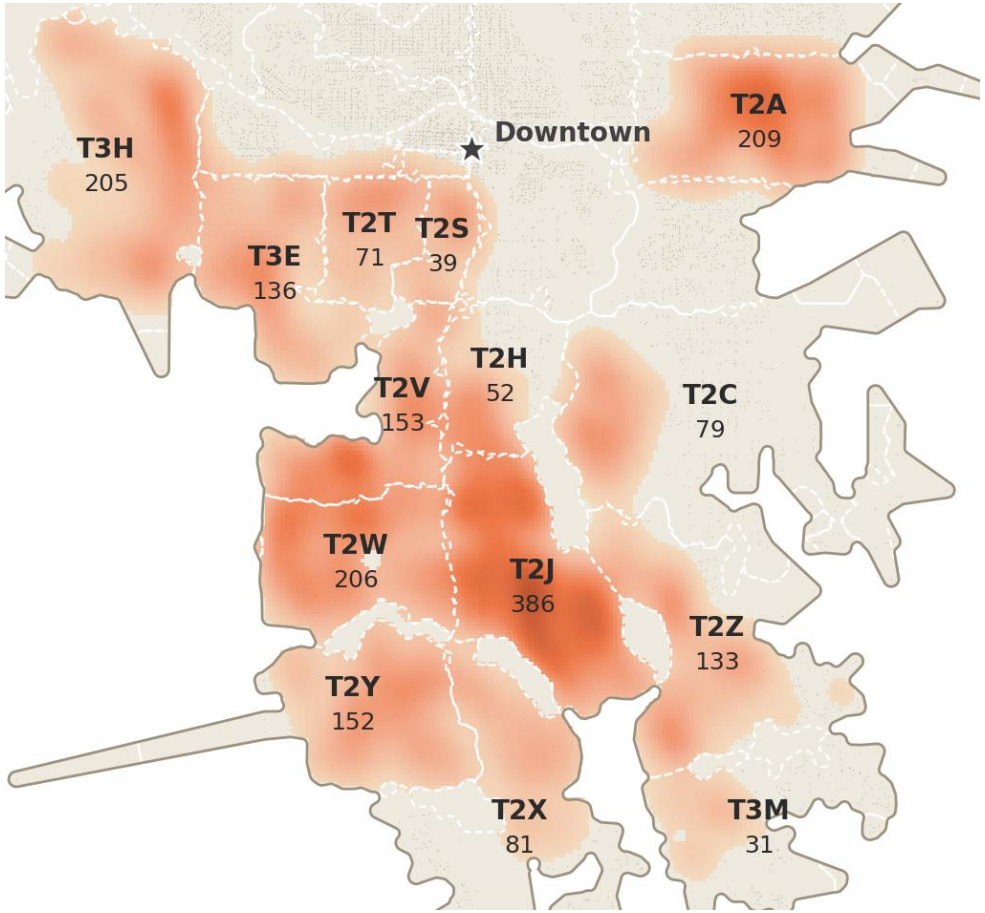
220 Calgarians surveyed after the October 19, 2026 referendum · ±6.6 points, 19 times in 20

A real referendum

3,672 phone lines joined the town hall: 53% landlines, 47% mobiles

220 completed the follow-up survey, and 82% of them said they voted

3 days after the vote, so every answer describes a ballot already cast



Map: landline attendees by postal area, shaded by count. One area, T2J (Lake Bonavista, Willow Park, Queensland), supplied 386.

What the town hall did to the vote

27% moved



Changed how they voted
12 of 143 voters

Helped them decide
27 of 143 voters

Confirmed their choice
47 of 143 voters

No effect
57 of 143 voters

Deciding is persuasion

A voter who walks in unsure and walks out decided has been persuaded as surely as one who switches. In all, 39 of 143 moved.

Confirmation counts too

A third felt surer of a choice already made. That is not a changed mind, but surer voters turn out and repeat the argument.

Even on separation, one in ten moved

NINE QUESTIONS

27%

moved

In August, 16% of likely voters were still unsure on these questions, so there was room to move.

SEPARATION

10%

moved

Only 4% were unsure. Still, 14 of 138 voters moved, close to a ten-minute doorstep conversation in a randomized trial.

THE PATTERN **Movement tracked how open people were, not how strong the effect was.**

Conversation moves votes, ads don’t

≈ 0

Average effect of ads, mail and brief contact to persuade in 49 experiments.

Kalla & Broockman, 2018

1 in 10

Changed attitudes after one ten-minute, two-way doorstep conversation. It lasted three months or more.

Broockman & Kalla, 2016

3.1

Votes added per 100 completed phone conversations, about 100 times a typical persuasion program.

Broockman & Kalla, 2020

2-300%

Larger gain in how a town hall host was rated, among those who started out unfavourable.

Abernathy et al., 2019

Same conversation, far more people

ONE CANVASSER

Has one conversation at a time. The 2020 phone experiment needed a team of trained volunteers to complete about 700.

ONE TOWN HALL

3,672 lines on one call. Everyone hears each question asked and answered, with the objection raised and dealt with in front of them.

~800 voters moved on the nine questions

~300 voters moved on separation

145% more people reached later, as attendees talked it over with others (Lazer et al., 2015)

Estimates assume survey rates hold across all 3,672 lines. Respondents may lean toward the more engaged.

07 · WHO IT'S FOR

What it means for your organization

GOVERNMENT

Consult beyond the room

Hear from far more residents than a hall holds. Everyone hears each question and answer, and you get a record of who took part.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Persuade where voters are still open

Ballot measures and primaries are where contact moves votes. Gains were largest among those who started out unfavourable.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Explain change to everyone at once

Leaders take live questions from members, employees or shareholders, and each objection is answered in front of all.

WE RUN IT Outreach · live host and producer · recording and transcript · engagement report

How to read these numbers

Attendees report what the town hall did. There is no control group.

Respondents chose to attend and to answer. The margin of error is ±6.6 points, 19 times in 20, and wider on the effect questions.

Controlled studies show two-way conversation causes change. Calgary shows the same pattern at a similar size.

NEXT STEPS

1. Tell us who you need to reach
2. We design the town hall and the outreach
3. You get the recording and an engagement report

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