

National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election

Report on Voter Experience *Executive Summary*

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Executive Summary

Elections Canada (EC) is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting Canadian federal elections. In the context of the 43rd federal general election (GE) held on October 21, 2019, EC conducted the 2019 National Electors Study (NES), the largest public opinion study of electors ever conducted by EC for a federal election. This study measures electors' attitudes and experiences of the GE to inform evaluation and development of EC policy, programs and services to electors.

The NES consisted of two components: 1) a national longitudinal survey of electors conducted between June and December 2019, and 2) a series of post-election focus groups and interviews. The survey component was conducted by telephone and online with eligible electors (i.e. Canadian citizens at least 18 years of age on election day), and involved three waves of surveys conducted before, during, and after the election period. Respondents to each survey were as follows: n=49,993 for the pre-election survey; n=23,880 for the election period survey; and n=21,435 for the post-election survey.

Two-thirds of initial respondents were obtained via random sampling; the remainder were sourced from an online panel of volunteer participants. The inclusion of this non-random sample means no estimate of sampling error can be calculated for the entire sample. When only the random samples are considered, all samples are of a size such that overall results across all waves would have a margin of sampling error less than $\pm 1\%$, 19 times out of 20.

This report presents the survey results on electors' perspectives on the administration of the 43rd GE and their experience of the voting process. Presented below is a summary of the findings, following the same thematic organization of the [detailed findings](#).

Two other reports present the findings of the NES on other topics, including a report on the voter information campaign and elector awareness during the 43rd GE and a report on electors' views on election-related policy issues.

Attitudes and Past Voting Behaviour

- Among respondents to the pre-election survey, a substantial majority (80%) said they are at least somewhat interested in politics, with just over one-third (35%) saying they are very interested.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of electors said they view voting primarily as a duty, while one-quarter (25%) said they view it primarily as a choice.
- Approximately half (52%) of electors surveyed reported voting in all elections since they have been eligible to vote, compared to three in 10 (30%) who said they voted in most elections they have been eligible to vote in, and approximately one in 10 (12%) who said they voted in some elections.
- Just over eight in 10 (83%) respondents said they had voted in the previous (42nd) federal general election held on October 19, 2015.¹

Voter Registration

- Nine in 10 (89%) electors in the pre-election survey said they were already registered to vote in a Canadian federal election.
- Most often, registered electors in the pre-election survey said they knew they were registered based on their experience in the 42nd GE: Two-thirds (66%) said they knew they were registered from

¹ See [Notes to Readers](#) for a discussion on historical over-reporting of voter turnout in public opinion surveys.

voting in the last federal election; nearly half (48%) said their information had not changed since the last election; four in 10 (40%) said they knew because they had received a voter information card (VIC) before.

- Post-election, approximately nine in 10 (93%) of those aware of the 43rd GE said they received a VIC in the mail addressed to them personally, which serves to notify electors of their registration. This represents a slight increase from the 2015 Survey of Electors when 90% recalled receiving a VIC. Virtually everyone who recalled receiving a VIC said their name (98%) and address (98%) on the card were correct.
- Regardless of whether or not they received a VIC, electors were asked what, if anything, they did during the election period to make sure they were registered to vote in the 43rd GE. Half (50%) said they checked and made sure that they were already registered to vote. Other actions were identified infrequently: 7% said they updated their registration information; 3% said they registered to vote. In all, 38% reported taking none of these actions.
- A majority (57%) of respondents who made sure they were registered to vote in the 43rd GE said they did this by checking that the information on their VIC was correct. Just over one in five (22%) used the online voter registration system, while one in 10 (10%) said they contacted Elections Canada through the agency's website.
- Among those who were not registered as of the pre-election survey, three-quarters (75%) expected that it would be easy for them to register, although only about a quarter (28%) expected it would be very easy. In actual experience, electors found it easier than expected to register: In the post-election survey, 92% of those who registered to vote during the election said they found the experience to be easy, with two-thirds (67%) saying it was very easy.

Contact with Elections Canada

- Just over one in 10 (12%) electors said they contacted Elections Canada during the election period, an increase from the 7% who said this in the 2015 Survey of Electors following the 42nd GE.
- Electors who contacted Elections Canada during the election period were most likely to do so through a form on the agency's website (39%) or by phone (36%). Approximately one in five (21%) visited a local Elections Canada office, while just over one in 10 (11%) used email. Smaller numbers used social media (5%) and mail (4%).
- The vast majority (89%) of those who contacted Elections Canada said they were at least somewhat satisfied with the service they received (two-thirds or 66% said they were *very* satisfied).
- Just over one-third of electors (35%) said they visited Elections Canada's website during the election period, up from 23% in the 2015 Survey of Electors. Most of those who visited Elections Canada's website said they were somewhat (40%) or very (52%) satisfied with their experience using it.

Voter Participation

- In the post-election survey, nine in 10 (90%) electors aware of the 43rd federal general election held on October 21, 2019 said they voted in the election.²
- Electors aware of the election who said they did not vote most often pointed to political reasons to explain why (43%; up from 37% in 2015), followed at a distance by everyday life or health reasons (29%; down from 45%) and reasons related to the electoral process (12%).
- The majority (57%) of electors who said they voted in the recent federal election reported doing so at a polling station on election day, while nearly four in 10 (37%) reported going to an advance

² See [Notes to Readers](#) for a discussion on historical over-reporting of voter turnout in public opinion surveys.

polling station to vote. This represents a considerable decrease in self-reported election-day voting and an increase in advance voting compared to the 2015 Survey of Electors, where 73% reported voting on election day compared to 25% who voted at an advance poll. This is consistent with the trend, if not the degree, of increasing advance voting that has been observed across previous surveys and official results through multiple past elections.

Getting to the Polling Place

- Among those who voted at an advance poll, over one-third (37%) took advantage of the new extended advance voting hours for the 43rd GE and reported that they went to vote before noon.
- In the post-election survey, over half (54%) of in-person voters said it took them five minutes or less to get to the polling station, better than electors expected: Only 28% of electors expected it would take this long when asked in the pre-election survey.
- Nearly everyone (98%) said the voting place was located a reasonable distance from their home, with 88% saying the distance was very reasonable. This is similar to 2015 results, when 97% said the polling place was a convenient distance from their home.
- Nearly all (93%) of those who voted in person said the polling place was in a location that was at least somewhat familiar to them, with three-quarters (73%) saying the location was very familiar to them.
- In the beginning phases of the election period, two-thirds (67%) of electors with a disability said they expected it would be very easy for them to enter and access the polling place. In the post-election survey, the actual experience of voters with a disability exceeded their expectations: 85% of those who voted in person found it very easy to access the polling place. An additional 12% said it was somewhat easy.
- Virtually all voters (98%) said the building where they voted was at least somewhat suitable for holding an election, with a substantial majority (83%) describing it as very suitable. This represents no change from 2015, when 97% said suitable and 82% said very suitable.

Experience at the Polling Place

- Nine in 10 (91%) electors who received a VIC and voted in person said they brought their VIC with them to the polling place, which could allow them to bypass the registration desk and proceed directly to the polling station in a streamlined voting process for the 43rd GE. A similar proportion (89%) of voters brought their VIC to the polls in 2015.
- Voters said it took less time to cast their ballot than they had expected: During the pre-election survey, only about a third (35%) of electors said they expected it would take five minutes or less to vote. In the post-election survey, nearly two-thirds (63%) of voters said it took them no more than five minutes to vote once they arrived at the polling place.
- Voters in the 2019 election reported taking an overall average of eight minutes to cast their ballot, a four-minute improvement from the 12-minute average reported for the 2015 election.
- Differences in the time it took to vote across voting methods narrowed considerably in 2019 compared to those reported in 2015: The average time to vote was eight minutes for both advance polls and local EC offices, versus averages of 21 and 19 minutes in 2015, respectively.
- Ninety-five percent (up from 92% in 2015) of in-person voters said the time it took for them to vote was reasonable. Among advance voters, 93% said the time it took to vote was reasonable, up from 80% of advance voters who said the same in 2015.

Voter Identification

- Nearly all voters (94%) reported using one piece of government-issued photo ID to prove their identity and address when they voted: 89% used their driver's licence, while 5% used a general provincial or territorial photo identification card.³ Another 4% used two authorized pieces of ID that together could establish identity and address for the purposes of voting. Less than 1% had to declare their identity and address in writing and have another elector from their polling station vouch for them in order to vote. Overall, the distribution of voters who used each option for meeting the identification requirements was similar to 2015.
- Among voters who presented two pieces of ID to meet the identification requirements for voting, the health card was the most common piece of ID used that could satisfy the proof of identity requirement (used by 53% of voters who used two pieces). The VIC was the most common piece used to satisfy proof of address (used by 43% of voters who used two pieces), which is notable, considering this was the first general election in which the VIC was authorized as an acceptable proof of address for the purposes of voting.
- During the election period survey, nearly nine in 10 (87%) electors expected it would be very easy for them to prove their identity and address if they were to vote; 10% expected it would be somewhat easy. In the post-election survey, an even greater proportion (94%) of voters reported that they found it actually very easy to prove their identity and address when they voted, and another 5% said it was somewhat easy. These proportions are similar to 2015.

Accessible Voting Services

- Half (50%) of electors with a disability said they were aware of the voting tools and services Elections Canada offers to make voting more accessible, an increase in awareness from 2015, when 43% said they were aware.
- Seven percent of electors with a disability who voted in person said someone assisted them in marking their ballot. Among these, more than eight in 10 (85%) indicated that Elections Canada staff assisted them, while one in 10 (10%) said they were assisted by someone they knew, such as a family member, friend, or personal support worker.
- Approximately eight in 10 (82%) voters with a disability indicated that Elections Canada staff were at least somewhat sensitive to their needs when voting, with a majority (56%) indicating that staff were very sensitive to their needs.

Satisfaction with the Voting Process

- Of those who voted in person, nearly everyone (98%) said they were at least somewhat satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff, and a substantial majority (85%) said they were very satisfied. These proportions are similar to 2015, when 97% were satisfied and 86% were very satisfied.
- Nearly everyone said they found it was overall easy for them to vote: 85% of voters found it very easy to vote, while another 13% found voting to be somewhat easy.
- Most voters (97%) said they were at least somewhat satisfied with their voting experience, with a substantial majority (80%) expressing strong satisfaction with the experience. These proportions are similar to 2015, when 96% were satisfied and 81% very satisfied.

³ For simplicity, this proportion includes use of the BC Services card, which also includes photo, name, and address.

Overall Satisfaction with Elections Canada and the Election

- Nine in 10 (90%) respondents felt that Elections Canada ran the election at least somewhat fairly (with 70% saying very fairly). These proportions are effectively the same as results from 2015, when 92% said EC ran the election fairly and 67% said very fairly.
- There was also widespread trust in the accuracy of the election results in respondents' respective ridings: 89% had at least some level of trust in the accuracy of the results, with 61% saying their trust was very high. This represents a slight decrease from the 2015 Survey of Electors, when 92% had at least some trust and 65% had a very high level of trust in the accuracy of the results.
- Over the course of the election, the proportion of electors who had confidence in Elections Canada increased measurably from the pre-election baseline of 85% up to 92% in the post-election survey. Most notably, the proportion who said they have a great deal of confidence increased from a third (35%) of electors to more than half (58%) following the 43rd general election.
- Satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada increased among electors from the election period survey to the post-election survey: Just over three-quarters (78%) of post-election respondents indicated that they are at least somewhat satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada, including one-third (33%) who are very satisfied (up from 71% and 23% of election period respondents, respectively).