

National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election

Report on Policy and Civic Engagement Issues *Executive Summary*

Prepared for: Elections Canada

October 2020

Supplier name: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. / Advanis

Contract number: 05005-18-0735

Contract value: \$804,353.60 (incl. applicable sales tax)

Award date: April 12, 2019

Delivery date: October 20, 2020

For more information on this report, contact Elections Canada at rop-por@elections.ca.

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.

1678 Bank Street, Ste. 2

Ottawa, ON K1V 7Y6

www.phoenixspi.ca

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 using 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' views on election-related policy issues. Presented below is a summary of the findings, following the same thematic organization as the detailed findings.

Two other reports present the findings of the NES on other topics: a report on electors' perspectives on the administration of the 43rd GE and a report on the voter information campaign and elector awareness during the 43rd GE.

Political Financing and Government Advertising

- More than two thirds (68%) of electors indicated, correctly, that there is a limit on the amount of money an individual may donate to a federal political party or candidate.
- Nearly all (98%) agreed that the public has a right to know where political parties and candidates get their money, with a substantial majority (85%) saying they strongly agree.
- More than 9 in 10 (92%) respondents during the election period said it is a good thing that there are limits on how much political parties can spend during elections.
- A majority considered it inappropriate for either the federal or the provincial level of government to run advertising about issues related to an election taking place at another level. Specifically, 58% thought it would be inappropriate for a federal government to run ads about provincial election issues during a provincial election, and 54% thought it would be inappropriate for a provincial government to run ads about federal election issues during a federal election.
- Respondents were divided on whether it would be appropriate for provincial government officials to campaign about federal election issues during a federal election, with 43% considering it inappropriate and 42% appropriate. However, when it came to whether it would be appropriate for federal government officials to campaign about provincial election issues during a provincial election,

half (50%) of respondents considered this inappropriate, while just over one third (36%) considered it appropriate.

Civic Engagement and Participation in Politics

- Respondents were most likely to identify schools (32%) and parents (32%) as those who should be most responsible for encouraging young people to learn about elections, while 18% thought EC should be responsible.
- When it came to who should be most responsible for encouraging young people to vote, respondents were most likely to identify parents (39%), followed at a distance by EC (20%) and schools (19%).
- Seven in 10 (72%) respondents disagreed that the voting age in federal elections should be lowered from 18 to 16 years of age, with more than 4 in 10 (46%) disagreeing strongly.
- A majority (58%) agreed that political parties should be required to have more women candidates, although respondents were more likely to somewhat agree (35%) than strongly agree (23%). In contrast, 6 in 10 (59%) disagreed that political parties should receive a financial incentive for having more women candidates, including 3 in 10 (32%) who strongly disagreed.
- Nearly half (48%) of respondents agreed that political parties should be required to have more Indigenous candidates, although respondents were twice as likely to somewhat agree (32%) than strongly agree (16%). In contrast, a majority (58%) of respondents disagreed that political parties should receive a financial incentive for having more Indigenous candidates, including one third (33%) who strongly disagreed.

Voting Technology

- Electors' views were mixed on whether they prefer to have paper ballots counted by hand or instead scanned into a machine that counts the votes. In the election period survey, nearly identical proportions said that they prefer machine counting (33%) and hand counting (32%). However, in the post-election survey, the proportion who preferred hand counting increased to 37%, while those who preferred machine counting decreased to 27% of electors. Another 3 in 10 electors had no preferred vote-counting method in either survey.
- Electors' views were also mixed on whether they prefer paper or computers for the lists used to keep track of electors who voted at the polls. In the election period survey, the largest proportion (39%) said they have no preference, compared with 31% who said they prefer paper lists and 28% who prefer computer lists. However, in the post-election survey, the plurality (42%) said that they prefer paper lists, while the proportion who had no preference decreased to 35%, and those who preferred computer lists decreased to 20% of electors.
- Nearly half (49%) said they view voting on the Internet as risky, 29% view voting on the Internet as safe, and 21% said they were unsure whether they view it as risky or safe.
- A majority (53%) agreed that Canadians should have the option to vote over the Internet in federal elections, while being divided between those who strongly agreed (26%) and those who somewhat agreed (27%). A sizable minority still disagreed, either somewhat (18%) or, more often, strongly (25%).

Protection of Personal Information

- More than 8 in 10 (83%) respondents agreed that EC can be trusted to protect the personal information of Canadians, including one third (33%) who strongly agreed.
- More than 9 in 10 (93%) respondents agreed that laws should regulate how political parties collect and use Canadians' personal information, including 70% who strongly agreed.

- Smaller majorities agreed that it is important for political parties to collect and use personal information about Canadians in order to communicate with them (56% agreed, 15% strongly agreed) and agreed that political parties can be trusted to collect and use the personal information of Canadians responsibly (52% agreed, 9% strongly agreed).

Political Communication

- Six in 10 (59%) electors said they consider it appropriate for parties and candidates to contact them in person (such as door-to-door campaigning); half (50%) think it appropriate to be contacted by mail. Phone contact was much more likely to be considered appropriate if the call were to come from a live person (40%) rather than a recorded message (15%) or a text message (15%).
- In the post-election survey, over half (54%) of respondents said that they had been directly contacted by a political party or candidate during the 2019 GE. Among those who had been contacted, electors most often (44%) said they had been contacted in person (e.g. door-to-door), followed by a telephone call, either from a live person (35%) or with a recorded message (34%).

Concerns about Electoral Integrity Issues

- More than 8 in 10 (85%) respondents said that it would be at least a moderate problem if one person who was eligible to vote was prevented from voting in their riding, with two-thirds (67%) saying it would be a major problem. By comparison, three quarters indicated that it would be at least a moderate problem if one person ineligible to vote in a riding was able to do so, with 56% saying it would be a major problem.
- Nearly three quarters (73%) of respondents in the pre-election survey indicated that they trust news information from traditional sources of journalism, although respondents were three times more likely to say they have a fair amount of trust (55%) than a great deal of trust (18%). Only one third (32%) said they trust social media for news information, more often a fair amount (29%) than a great deal (3%).
- Relatively few respondents said they recalled hearing or seeing false information related to the voting process throughout the election. By the end of the election period, 11% of electors said they recalled false information about who is eligible to vote, 9% recalled false information about when to vote and about where to vote, and 7% recalled seeing or hearing false information about how to register.
- Across the election period, 8 in 10 (82%) electors were concerned that the spread of false information online could potentially have a moderate or greater impact on the outcome of the election, including 54% who thought it could have a major impact. Three quarters of electors thought that there could be a moderate or greater impact on the election outcome from foreign hacking into election systems (74%, including 54% who thought it could have a major impact), and from foreign efforts to influence the political opinions of Canadians (75%, including 46% who thought it could have a major impact).
- In the post-election survey, half (50%) of all electors thought the spread of false information online had been a problem in the 2019 GE. Three in 10 (31%) electors thought foreign influence efforts had been a problem in the election. A little more than 1 in 10 (12%) electors thought foreign hacking into election systems had been a problem in the election.
- Overall, one in 10 (10%) electors thought problems of false information had a major impact on the outcome of the election and 20% thought it had a moderate impact. Another 17% of electors said that while they thought that false information had been a problem in the election, it had only a minor impact or no impact on the outcome.
- In comparison, only 5% of all electors thought problems of foreign influence had a major impact on the outcome of the election, 10% thought it had a moderate impact, and 14% thought foreign influence had been a problem, but it had only a minor impact or no impact.

- Only 3% of all electors thought problems of foreign hacking had a major impact on the outcome of the election, 4% thought it had a moderate impact, and 5% thought foreign hacking had been a problem, but it had only a minor impact or no impact.