

# **National Electors Study following the 44th Canadian Federal Election**

## **Report on Voter Experience**

**Prepared for Elections Canada**

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**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français**

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**National Electors Study following the 44th Canadian Federal Election  
Report on Voter Experience  
Final Report**

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This public opinion research report presents the results of the voter information campaign research conducted to help evaluate the September 20, 2021, federal election.

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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 44th federal general election (GE), held on September 20, 2021, EC conducted the 2021 National Electors Study (NES). 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 public opinion survey of electors, and 2) a series of post-election focus groups and interviews. The target population for both components of the NES was eligible electors (Canadian citizens who were at least 18 years of age on polling day).

The survey component was conducted by telephone (via live interviewers) and Internet (via an online survey platform) between August and October 2021, in two waves. Respondents to each survey were as follows: n=53,731 for the election period survey, and n=39,568 for the post-election survey. The survey samples were achieved

primarily through probability sampling; however, a small number of respondents (n=111) were drawn from a non-probability web panel. The inclusion of this non-random sample means no estimate of sampling error can be calculated for the entire sample. If the panel completions are excluded and only the random samples are considered, all samples would have had 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 44th GE, their experience of the voting process and their views on election-related policy issues. Below is a summary of the [detailed findings](#), organized by theme. Results from the survey and focus groups on electors' recall and evaluation of EC's voter information campaign for the 44th GE and their awareness of when, where and the ways to register and vote during and after the election are presented in a [separate report](#).

### **Attitudes and past voting behaviour**

- Among respondents to the election period survey, the vast majority (90%) said they were at least somewhat interested in politics, with nearly half (49%) saying they are very interested.
- Eight in 10 (79%) electors said they view voting primarily as a duty, while nearly two in 10 (20%) said they view it primarily as a choice.
- Just over nine in 10 (92%) respondents said they had voted in the previous (43rd) federal election, held on October 21, 2019. [footnote 1](#)

### **Voter registration**

- Post-election, nine in 10 (92%) electors aware of the 44th GE said they received a voter information card (VIC) in the mail addressed to them personally, similar to the 2019 NES, when 93% recalled receiving a VIC.
- Regardless of whether 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 44th GE. Thirty-six percent said they checked that they were already registered to vote (down from 50% who reported doing this during the 43rd GE). Other actions were identified infrequently: 8% said they updated their registration information, and 6% said they registered to vote. In all, 48% reported taking none of these actions.
- Over nine in 10 (94%) found it at least somewhat easy to make sure they were registered, with three-quarters (76%) saying it was very easy.

### **Contact with Elections Canada**

- One in 10 (11%) electors said they contacted Elections Canada during the election period. Electors who contacted Elections Canada during the election period were most likely to do so through a web form on the agency's website (51%; up from 39% in 2019) or by phone (36%). Only 14% visited a local Elections Canada office, while 8% used email. Two percent each used social media and mail to contact EC.
- The majority (86%) of those who contacted Elections Canada during the election period said they were at least somewhat satisfied with the service they received (two-thirds or 67% said they were very satisfied).
- Nearly four in 10 (38%) electors visited Elections Canada's website during the election period. Most of those who visited the website said they were somewhat (35%) or very (56%) satisfied with their experience using it.

### **Voter participation**

- In the post-election survey, 92% of electors aware of the 44th federal general election held on September 20, 2021, said they voted in the election. [footnote 2](#)
- Electors aware of the election who said they did not vote most often pointed to political reasons as the main reason why (35%; down from 43% in 2019), followed at a distance by everyday life or health reasons (24%; down from 29% in 2019), reasons related to the electoral process (19%; up from 12% in 2019) and, new this election, COVID-19 reasons (6%).
- Most electors who said they voted in the federal election reported doing so at a polling station on election day (43%) or going to an advance polling station to vote (42%). This represents a moderate decrease in self-reported election day voting and an increase in advance voting compared to the 2019 NES, where 57% reported voting on election day compared to 37% who voted at an advance poll.

### **Getting to the polling place**

- Just over one-third (36%) of those who voted on election day reported going to vote in the evening between 4 p.m. and the closing of the polls. Among those who voted at an advance poll, a similar proportion (35%) reported doing so in the afternoon between noon and 4 p.m.
- In the post-election survey, half (51%) of in-person voters said it took them five minutes or less to get to the polling place, which was less time than they had expected: in the election period survey, only 28% of electors expected it would take five minutes or less to get to the polling place.

- The vast majority (90%) of those who voted in person said the polling place was in a location that was at least somewhat familiar to them; seven in 10 (70%) voters said the location was very familiar to them.
- In the election period survey, over half (54%) 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: 86% of those who voted in person found it very easy to access the polling place.
- Virtually all voters (97%) said the building where they voted was at least somewhat suitable for holding an election, with a majority (81%) describing it as very suitable.
- Most voters said the polling place offered enough space to practise physical distancing (94%) and reported feeling safe at the polling site with regards to the health and safety measures for COVID-19 (95%, including 78% who felt very safe).

### **Experience at the polling place**

- As was the case during the 42nd and 43rd GEs, the majority of electors who received a VIC and voted in person said they brought their VIC with them to the polling place (92% in 2021 versus 91% in 2019 and 89% in 2015).
- Voters said it took less time to cast their ballot than they had expected: during the election period survey, three in 10 (30%) electors said they expected it would take five minutes or less to vote. In the post-election survey, 44% of voters said it took them no more than five minutes to vote once they arrived at the polling place (compared to 63% in 2019). Longer voting times are likely due to changes made in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including health and safety measures at the polls and fewer polling locations being available in some electoral districts compared with previous elections.

### **Voter identification**

- Consistent with the results from the 42nd and 43rd GEs, 94% of voters reported using one piece of government-issued photo ID to prove their identity and address when they voted: 90% used their driver's licence, while 3% used a general provincial or territorial photo identification card. Another 4% used two authorized pieces of ID that together could establish identity and address for the purposes of voting.
- 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 48% of voters who used two pieces). The VIC was the most common piece used to satisfy proof of

address (used by 53% of voters who used two pieces, up from 43% of voters during the 43rd GE).

- During the election period survey, 88% of electors expected it would be very easy for them to prove their identity and address if they were to vote (similar to 87% in 2019). In the post-election survey, an even greater proportion of voters (95%) reported that they found it very easy to prove their identity and address when they voted, and another 5% said it was somewhat easy. The proportion of voters who found it very easy to prove their identity and address is virtually identical to 2019, when 94% of voters reported this.

### **Vote-by-mail experience**

- Among electors who received their ballot in the mail, nearly all (94%) said it was easy to apply for their special ballot, with three-quarters (76%) saying it was very easy.
- Two-thirds of electors who received their ballot in the mail said it took less than a week to receive the ballot, with 31% saying it took 1 to 3 days and 36% saying it took 4 to 6 days. Eighty-nine percent of electors who received their ballot in the mail said the amount of time it took to receive their ballot was reasonable.
- The majority of electors who received their ballot in the mail (87%) said it was easy to complete their ballot using the special ballot kit, with seven in 10 (70%) saying it was very easy.

### **Accessible voting services**

- Half (51%) of electors with a disability said they were aware of the voting tools and services Elections Canada offers to make voting more accessible. Awareness is unchanged since 2019, when 50% said they were aware of such tools and services.
- Four percent of electors with a disability who voted in person said someone assisted them in marking their ballot (compared to 7% in 2019). Among these, 87% indicated that Elections Canada staff assisted them, while less than one in 10 (7%) 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 (59%) indicating that staff were very sensitive to their needs.

### **Satisfaction with Elections Canada and the voting process**

- Consistent with the results from 2015 and 2019, nearly everyone (97%) who voted in person said they were at least somewhat satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff, with a substantial majority (85%) saying they were very satisfied.
- Nearly everyone said they found it was overall easy for them to vote: 88% of voters found it very easy to vote (up from 85% in 2019), while another 9% found voting to be somewhat easy.
- Most voters (96%) said they were at least somewhat satisfied with their voting experience, including 80% who expressed strong satisfaction with the experience. Satisfaction levels are unchanged over time: in 2019, 97% were satisfied and 80% very satisfied and, in 2015, 96% were satisfied and 81% very satisfied.

### **Trust in Elections Canada and the election results**

- Eighty-seven percent of respondents said that Elections Canada ran the election at least somewhat fairly (with 70% saying very fairly). The proportion who said Elections Canada ran the election at least somewhat fairly is slightly lower than the level obtained in 2019 (90%), but the proportion who said very fairly remained the same (70%).
- During the election period, over half (54%) expected the results of the election would be known on election night, followed by 30% who expected it would take one or two days after the election to know the results.
- There was widespread trust in the accuracy of the election results in respondents' respective ridings: 91% had at least some level of trust in the accuracy of the results, with 72% saying their trust was very high. This represents a considerable increase in the proportion of electors who have a very high level of trust: 72% in 2021 compared to 61% in 2019 and 65% in 2015.
- Over the course of the election, the proportion of electors who had confidence in Elections Canada increased marginally from the election period baseline of 87% to 91% in the post-election survey. More notably, the proportion who said they have a great deal of confidence increased from 46% during the election period to two-thirds (66%) following the 44th GE. In addition, more electors reported having a great deal of confidence in EC post-election compared with following the 43rd general election (58%).
- Overall satisfaction with the way democracy works in Canada did not change among electors from the election period survey to the post-election survey: seven in 10 (70%) respondents to both surveys said they were at least somewhat satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada. Strong satisfaction increased, however, from 29% in the election period to 36% in the

post-election survey. Overall satisfaction post-election was lower in 2021 (70%) than in 2019 (78%).

### **Opinions on election-related technology, privacy and political communications**

- Electors' views were mixed on whether they prefer to have paper ballots counted by hand or scanned into a machine that counts the votes. One-third (34%) said they preferred hand counting, whereas one-quarter (26%) preferred machine counting. A further 37% said they had no preference.
- Electors also had mixed views on whether they prefer paper or computers for the lists used to keep track of electors who voted at the polls. Four in 10 (41%) said they had no preference, while 35% said they prefer paper lists, and nearly one-quarter (23%) said they prefer computer lists.
- Just over half (53%) of respondents said that voting on the Internet is risky, while one-quarter (25%) said voting on the Internet is safe, and 22% were unsure. The proportion of electors who view voting on the Internet as risky has increased modestly since 2019: 53% in 2021 compared to 49% during the 43rd GE.
- A minority (43%, down from 53% during the 43rd GE) agreed that Canadians should have the option to vote over the Internet in federal elections, with two in 10 (20%) strongly agreeing and close to one-quarter (23%) somewhat agreeing. In contrast, a majority of 51% disagreed, most of whom disagreed strongly (31%) as opposed to somewhat (21%).
- More than eight in 10 (84%; unchanged from 83% in 2019) respondents agreed that Elections Canada can be trusted to protect the personal information of Canadians, with equal proportions distributed between strongly agree and somewhat agree at 42% respectively.
- Nearly all (96%; up from 93% in 2019) electors agreed that laws should regulate how political parties collect and use Canadians' personal information, with over three-quarters (78%, up from 70% in 2019) saying they strongly agreed.
- Just over half (53%, compared to 50% in 2019) of electors said they consider it appropriate for parties and candidates to contact them by mail, and 49% (down from 59% in 2019) consider it is appropriate to be contacted in person, such as through door-to-door campaigning. The decline in the proportion of electors viewing in-person campaigning as appropriate can most likely be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Concerns about electoral integrity issues**

- During the election period, 12% of electors had the opinion that the voting system in Canada is prone to fraud, compared with 82% who said the voting



system is safe. Opinions on the integrity of voting by mail were more negative: 28% of electors had the opinion that voting by mail is prone to fraud, while 55% said voting by mail is safe and reliable. These opinions generally improved in the aftermath of the election: in the post-election survey, the proportion who said the voting system is prone to fraud decreased slightly, by 2 points, to 10%, while the proportion who said voting by mail is prone to fraud decreased by 5 points to 23%.

- The proportions of electors who recalled hearing or seeing false information related to the voting process were small but generally increased by a few points over the course of the election period. Recall of false information about voting by mail was higher than for other aspects of the voting process, increasing from 11% at the beginning to 14% at the end of the election period.
- During the election period, seven in 10 (71%) electors were concerned that the spread of false information online could potentially have a moderate or major impact on the outcome of the election, with 37% saying it could have a major impact. This represents a decrease since the 43rd GE, when 82% thought false information could have at least a moderate impact, including 54% who thought it could have a major impact. Half (50%) of electors thought there could be a moderate or more impact on the election outcome from foreign countries or groups trying to interfere with the election or political opinions of Canadians, with two in 10 (22%) saying it could have a major impact.
- Post-election, half (52%) of all electors thought the spread of false information online was a problem during the 44th GE. Views on the impact of false information online are virtually unchanged over time, as 50% expressed the view that this was a problem during the 43rd GE. In addition, one-quarter (25%) thought foreign countries or groups trying to interfere with the election or political opinions of Canadians was a problem during the GE (lower than 31% in 2019).
- Close to one in 10 (9%) electors overall thought problems of false information had a major impact on the outcome of the 44th GE, while 20% said these problems had a moderate impact (similar to 2019 results). Only 4% of electors thought that problems of foreign interference had a major impact on the outcome of the election, whereas 10% said they had a moderate impact.

## Footnotes

1 See [Notes to the Reader](#) for a discussion on historical overreporting of voter turnout in public opinion surveys.

2 See [Notes to the Reader](#) for a discussion on historical overreporting of voter turnout in public opinion surveys.