



Survey of Electors Following the May 6, 2019, By-election in Nanaimo– Ladysmith (British Columbia)

Executive Summary

Prepared for Elections Canada

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This public opinion research report presents the results of a telephone survey conducted to help evaluate the May 6, 2019, federal by-election in the electoral district of Nanaimo–Ladysmith (British Columbia).

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Executive Summary

Elections Canada commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) to conduct research to help evaluate the May 6, 2019, federal by-election in the electoral district of Nanaimo–Ladysmith (British Columbia).

Background and Objectives

Elections Canada is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. The agency is mandated to conduct federal general elections, by-elections and referendums; administer the political financing provisions of the *Canada Elections Act*; monitor compliance; and enforce electoral legislation.

As part of its evaluation program, the agency wanted to conduct a survey of eligible electors in the electoral district of Nanaimo–Ladysmith (British Columbia), where a by-election was held on May 6, 2019. The purpose of the survey was to obtain reliable survey data to evaluate electors' opinions, attitudes and knowledge of the agency's services and various aspects of their experience.

The research objectives were to measure electors' opinions on various election-related issues and to assist in evaluating and refining Elections Canada's programs and services to the electorate. More specifically, the survey aimed to assess the following aspects:

- Awareness of the election and of the different methods of voting.
- Sources of information about the election.
- Experiences with registration, including the voter information card (VIC).
- Experiences with communications from Elections Canada.
- Experiences with voting in the by-election.
- Attitudes toward Elections Canada and election results.

The results will be used to assist in evaluating and refining Elections Canada's programs and services to the electorate. They may also help in developing the Chief Electoral Officer's reports to Parliament.

Methodology

A 13-minute, random digit dialling telephone survey was conducted with 400 eligible electors. Eligible electors were Canadian citizens, at least 18 years of age on polling day (May 6, 2019), who were residents of the electoral district – that is, they had an address of ordinary residence in the electoral district – from the first day of the by-election period until election day. Given the low proportion of French-speaking electors in the riding, all respondents completed the survey in English.

An overlapping, dual-frame (landline and cellphone) sample was used to minimize coverage error. The sample frame was composed of 50% wireless and 50% landline telephone numbers. Those who declined to participate in the survey when contacted by telephone were offered the possibility of completing the survey through an online, self-administered questionnaire instead of a telephone interview. Five respondents agreed to participate using the online questionnaire;

however, none of these electors completed the online survey. As a result, all completed surveys were conducted over the telephone.

The survey data was weighted to accurately reflect the age and gender distribution of eligible electors. The data collection was conducted from May 7 to May 17, 2019. Based on a sample of this size, the overall results can be considered accurate to within $\pm 4.9\%$, 19 times out of 20. (For a more complete description of the methodology, refer to Annex 1.)

Key Findings

Awareness of By-election and Voter Information

- Almost everyone surveyed (98%) said that they were aware of the May 6, 2019, federal by-election that took place in the riding of Nanaimo–Ladysmith, British Columbia.
- In order to improve data about recall of Elections Canada advertising, a split-sample technique was used to test a new question (this was first introduced as part of the survey following the December 3, 2018, by-election). One-half of respondents were asked the standard question about whether they recalled any advertising or communications from Elections Canada about how, when, and where to vote, and if so, where they saw, heard or read this. The other half was asked four closed-ended questions about whether they recalled any advertising or communications from Elections Canada on social media, when browsing or on a mobile application, on the radio or in a local newspaper. This was followed by an open-ended question asking whether they recalled Elections Canada advertising or communications in any other formats. In both samples, a majority of electors recalled Elections Canada advertising or communications (62% and 73%, respectively). However, the second formulation resulted in a higher proportion of respondents claiming recall of Elections Canada advertising or communications.
- Those who recalled advertisements or communications about the by-election in the first split sample were most likely to point to their VIC (32%), newspaper (31%) or the Elections Canada householder (20%). Electors aware of the by-election in the second split sample were most likely to recall advertising from Elections Canada in a local newspaper (34%) or on the radio (31%). Following this, approximately one-quarter each recalled advertising when they were browsing or on a mobile application (24%) or on social media (25%).
- The majority of respondents (89%) felt informed about when, where and the ways to vote for the May 6, 2019, by-election, with two-thirds (67%) saying that they felt very informed.
- Fifteen percent of electors said they visited the Elections Canada website during the campaign, and 5% said they contacted Elections Canada during the campaign.
- Among those who contacted Elections Canada, there was widespread satisfaction with the information they received: 88% were satisfied with the information they received from the Elections Canada website, and 88% were satisfied with the information they received when they contacted Elections Canada.

Voter Information Card and Registration

- Approximately 9 in 10 (87%) of those who were aware of the federal by-election said that they received their VIC, and 87% of those who received their VIC brought it to the polling station.

- Nearly all electors who received a VIC reported that it had the correct name (98%) and address (99%).
- Six in 10 electors (61%) knew that voters need to be registered to vote in a federal by-election, and slightly more (68%) were aware that electors can register at the polling place and then vote immediately after.
- A split-sample technique was used to confirm the impact of question formulation on measures of awareness of online registration, as has been done since October 2017. Half the respondents were asked the question as it was formulated in previous surveys, and the other half was asked a simplified version of the question. The simplified formulation resulted in a higher proportion of respondents who said that they were aware of online registration (64%) compared to the original formulation (52%) and a lower proportion of respondents who indicated that they did not know the answer (33% compared to 43%).

Voting and Voter Participation

- Sixty-nine percent of those who were aware of the by-election reported voting in it.
- Among respondents who did not vote in the election, approximately half (49%) said that they did not vote due to everyday life and health reasons. One-quarter (24%) did not vote due to political reasons, and 6% did not vote due to electoral process–related reasons.
- A split sample was used to test questions designed to measure electors' knowledge of current voting methods. One sample of respondents (n=209; split sample 1) was asked, in an open-ended manner, to identify the current ways that electors can vote in a federal election. The other sample (n=191; split sample 2) was asked a set of two questions. First, they were asked how someone can vote in a federal election, and then they were asked whether there are ways to cast a ballot ahead of time. Both formulations yielded similar results. When the split samples were merged, the majority of electors (81%) were aware that they can vote in person on polling day and at an advance polling station (63%). One-quarter (24%) were aware that they could vote by mail, and 5% were aware that they could vote at a local Elections Canada office.
- Three-quarters (74%) of respondents who voted in the by-election reported voting at a polling station on election day.

Voter Identification

- Similar to findings from previous post-electoral surveys, a question about voter identification found that 96% of respondents were aware that voters have to provide proof of identity, and 88% were aware that voters have to provide proof of address.
- In a split-sample experiment, a second approach was tested and found fewer respondents who were fully aware of voter identification requirements: 86% correctly answered that electors must provide proof of both identity and address to vote at a federal election; 13% answered incorrectly or did not know.
- Virtually all respondents (97%) found it easy to meet the identification requirements, with 92% saying that it was very easy.

Voter Experience

- The vast majority (95%) of those who voted during the May 6, 2019, federal by-election reported that it was easy to vote, with 88% saying that it was *very easy*.
- Nearly everyone (96%) who voted in the by-election was satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff (with 90% saying that they were *very satisfied*).
- Virtually all those who voted (98%) were satisfied with their overall voting experience, with 81% saying that they were *very satisfied*.

Fairness and Trust

- Respondents were asked two variations of a question about their perception of the fairness of election administration by Elections Canada. Half the respondents were asked specifically about the May 6, 2019, federal by-election, while the other half were asked about federal by-elections in general. The more specific formulation (i.e. focusing on the May 6, 2019, by-election) found the majority of respondents (87%) thought that Elections Canada ran the election fairly (with 76% saying *very fairly*). The more general formulation yielded similar results overall, with the majority (89%) saying that Elections Canada runs elections fairly. Fewer respondents, however, reported that Elections Canada runs elections *very fairly* (66% versus 76% of those who responded to the specific formulation). This is the first time this effect has been evident.
- A split-sample approach was also used to survey electors about their level of trust in the accuracy of the by-election results. One subset of respondents was asked about their level of trust in the accuracy of the election results in their riding. The other subset was asked a similar question, but the question was prefaced by the following preamble: “At the end of a federal election, poll workers in each riding count ballots by hand and report the results to Elections Canada.” In addition, the question asked generally about trust in election results, not specifically about trust in the election results in their riding. Both question formulations yielded similar results. However, respondents who were asked the question without the preamble, and with “your riding” explicitly identified, were more likely to express a *very high* level of trust (65%) than those who were asked the version prefaced by the preamble but without “your riding” explicitly identified (58%).

Notes to Readers

- For editorial purposes, the terms *electors* and *respondents* are used interchangeably to denote survey participants. The term *voters* denotes survey participants who reported having voted.
- All results in the report are expressed as percentages, unless otherwise noted. Percentages may not always add up to 100% due to rounding or multiple mentions.
- The number of respondents changes throughout the report because questions were often asked of sub-samples of the survey population. Accordingly, readers should be aware of this and exercise caution when interpreting results based on smaller numbers of respondents.
- Demographic and other subgroup differences are identified in the report. When reporting subgroup variations, only differences that are significant at the 95% confidence level and that pertain to a subgroup sample size of more than n=30 are discussed.

- If one or more categories in a subgroup are not mentioned in a discussion of subgroup differences (e.g. if one out of three age segments are compared), it can be assumed that significant differences were found only among the categories reported.

The contract value was \$36,458.32 (including HST).

Political Neutrality Certification

I hereby certify, as a senior officer of Phoenix Strategic Perspectives, that the deliverables fully comply with the government of Canada's political neutrality requirements outlined in the Policy on Communications and Federal Identity of the government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not contain any reference to electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leader.

Signed:



Alethea Woods, President
Phoenix Strategic Perspectives