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Survey of Electors Following the February 25, 2019, By-elections in Outremont (Quebec), York–Simcoe (Ontario) and Burnaby South (British Columbia)

Executive Summary

Prepared for Elections Canada

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

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Executive Summary

Elections Canada commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) to conduct research to help evaluate the February 25, 2019, federal by-elections in the electoral districts of Outremont (Quebec), York–Simcoe (Ontario) and Burnaby South (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 districts of Outremont (Quebec), York–Simcoe (Ontario) and Burnaby South (British Columbia), where by-elections were held on February 25, 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-dial telephone survey was conducted with 1,202 eligible electors. Eligible electors were Canadian citizens, at least 18 years of age on polling day (February 25, 2019), who were residents of the electoral district (i.e., had an address of ordinary residence in the electoral district) from the first day of the by-election period until election day. Of the sample of 1,202 surveys, 882 were completed in English, and 320 were completed in French.

An overlapping dual-frame (landline and cellphone) sample was used to minimize coverage error. The ratio of landline to cellphone numbers varied by federal riding. 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. Twelve 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 February 26 to March 12, 2019. Based on a sample of this size, the overall results can be considered accurate to within $\pm 2.8\%$, 19 times out of 20. The results for each electoral riding 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

- The vast majority of respondents (95%) said they were aware of the February 25, 2019, federal by-election that took place in their riding of Outremont (Quebec), York–Simcoe (Ontario) or Burnaby South (British Columbia).
- In order to improve the data about recall of Elections Canada advertising, a split-sample technique was used to test a question about recall (this was first introduced as part of the survey following the December 3, 2018, by-election). One-half of respondents was 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 radio or in a local newspaper. This was followed by an open-ended question asking whether or not they recalled Elections Canada advertising or communications in any other formats. In both samples, a majority of electors recalled Elections Canada advertising or communications (54% and 76%, respectively). However, the second formulation resulted in a significantly 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 the Elections Canada householder (29%) or their VIC (24%) or recall reading about it in a newspaper (24%). Those electors who were aware of the by-election in the second split sample were most likely to recall advertising from Elections Canada in a local newspaper (33%) or on the radio (31%). Following this, approximately one-quarter each recalled advertising on social media (24%) or when they were browsing or on a mobile application (24%).
- The vast majority of respondents (92%) felt informed about when, where and the ways to vote for the February 25, 2019, by-election, with nearly three-quarters (73%) saying they felt *very informed*.

- A total of 12% of electors said they visited the Elections Canada website during the campaign, and 4% said they contacted Elections Canada during the campaign.
- Among those who contacted Elections Canada, there was widespread satisfaction with the information they received: 86% were satisfied with the information they received from the Elections Canada website, and 77% were satisfied with the information they received when they contacted Elections Canada.

Voter Information Card and Registration

- Approximately 9 in 10 (89%) of those who were aware of the federal by-election said they received their VIC, and 90% of those who received their VIC brought it to the polling station.
- Nearly all electors who received a VIC reported it had the correct name (97%) and address (99%).
- Three-quarters of electors (76%) knew that voters need to be registered to vote in the federal by-election, and 61% were aware that electors can register at the polling station 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 they are aware of online registration (66%) compared to the original formulation (54%) and a lower proportion of respondents who indicated that they did not know the answer (29% compared to 40%).

Voting and Voter Participation

- Two-thirds (66%) of those who were aware of the by-election reported voting in it.
- Among respondents who did not vote in the election, 4 in 10 (41%) said they did not vote due to everyday life and health reasons. One in three (29%) did not vote due to political reasons, and 5% did not vote for reasons related to the electoral process.
- Three-quarters (75%) of respondents who voted in the by-election reported voting at a polling station on election day.
- A split-sample technique was used to test questions designed to measure electors' knowledge of current voting methods. One sample of respondents ($n = 615$; 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 ($n = 587$; 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 are merged, the majority of electors (86%) were aware they can vote in person on polling day and at an advance polling station (61%). Only 5% were aware they could vote at an Elections Canada office, and 17% were aware they could vote by mail.

Voter Identification

- Similar to findings from previous post-electoral surveys, a question about voter identification found that 95% of respondents were aware that voters had to provide proof of identity, and 92% were aware that voters had to provide proof of address.
- In a split-sample experiment, a second approach was tested and found lower numbers of respondents who were fully aware of identification requirements: 79% of respondents correctly answered that electors must provide proof of both identity and address to vote at a federal election; 20% answered incorrectly or did not know.
- Virtually all respondents (99%) found it easy to meet the identification requirements, with 92% saying it was *very easy*.

Voter Experience

- The vast majority (96%) of those who voted during the February 25, 2019, federal by-election reported that it was easy to vote, with 84% saying it was *very easy*.
- Nearly everyone (99%) who voted in the by-election was satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff (with 87% saying they were *very satisfied*).
- Virtually all those who voted (97%) were satisfied with their overall voting experience, with 80% saying they were *very satisfied*.

Fairness and Trust

- Two variations on a question about electors' perception of the fairness of election administration by Elections Canada were asked of respondents. Half the respondents were asked specifically about the *February 25, 2019, federal by-election*, while the other half were asked about federal by-elections in general. The general formulation resulted in a larger majority (93%) saying that Elections Canada runs elections fairly compared to 85% of respondents who were asked the more specific formulation. The general formulation also led to a smaller proportion of "Don't know" answers (6%) compared to the specific question (12%).
- A split-sample approach was also used to survey respondents about their level of trust in the accuracy of the by-election results. Respondents were asked about their level of trust in the accuracy of the election results in their riding. Before answering the question, a subset of respondents ($n = 589$) was read 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." 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* (63%) than those who were asked the version prefaced by the preamble but without "your riding" explicitly identified (55%).

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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 in the report.
- If one or more categories in a subgroup are not mentioned in a discussion of subgroup differences (for example, if two out of three surveyed electoral districts are compared), it can be assumed that significant differences were found only among the categories reported.

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I hereby certify, as a Senior Officer of Phoenix SPI, that the deliverables fully comply with the government of Canada's political neutrality requirements, outlined in the *Communications Policy* of the government of Canada and the *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.



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