Survey of Candidates of the 43rd Federal General Election

Executive Summary

Prepared for Elections Canada

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Ce rapport est également offert en français.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A.   BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Headed by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Elections Canada (EC) is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. Elections Canada periodically commissions public opinion research to evaluate its performance during electoral events.

On October 21, 2019, the 43rd general election was held in Canada. Elections Canada commissioned EKOS Research Associates to conduct a census survey of candidates who ran in the election. The research objectives were to measure candidates' levels of satisfaction with Elections Canada's services during the 43rd general election and to learn about their experiences with the electoral process in general, particularly in light of the recent changes to the *Canada Elections Act*. The questionnaire has also been updated from 2015 to reflect the development of new products and services, as well as emerging issues related to the administration of elections. Where relevant and possible, the results from this survey are compared with the results from the Survey of Candidates following the 42nd federal general election.

B.   METHODOLOGY

A hybrid telephone-online survey was conducted using a list of the 2,146 running candidates provided by Elections Canada. A total of 1,172 interviews were completed (396 by phone and 776 online).

A few weeks prior to the survey collection, candidates were sent an information letter from the Chief Electoral Officer informing them about the objectives and timing of the survey. This letter appears in Appendix A.

The questionnaire was first tested in both English and French with a total of 26 candidates. The test included a review of the results and a thorough vetting of the audio recordings of the interviews, resulting in some minor modifications to the questionnaire. The pretest report appears in Appendix B.

The interview was administered by trained, bilingual interviewers and required an average of 27 minutes to complete. The final questionnaire appears in Appendix C.

The survey was fielded from October 25 to November 27, 2019. Out of 2,146 cases attempted, 2,109 were found to be valid. Cases were found to be invalid if the phone number was incorrect and the correct number could not be found. A response rate of 55.6% was obtained on the 2,109 valid cases in the population, with 1,172 completing the survey either by telephone or online. Details of the methods used to collect the survey appear in Appendix D.

Survey results were weighted by candidate age and party, as well as whether the candidate was an incumbent and whether or not they were elected, to reflect population characteristics of all candidates. No segment of the population was undersampled by more than three percent relative to the population. Open-ended responses were reviewed and coded and banner tables were created to explore results by key characteristics (e.g. region, age, gender, language, parties represented in the House of Commons versus those not represented, election outcome, and incumbency status).

C. KEY FINDINGS

Overall Experiences

Overall satisfaction with the administration of the 43rd general election was high among candidates at 74% (69% in 2015). Satisfaction with the overall quality of service received from Elections Canada increased from 74% in 2015 to 82% in 2019. Satisfaction with the way the returning officer ran the election was high at 83%, compared to 78% in 2015. Satisfaction with interactions with the returning officer was also high at 85% (84% in 2015). This includes 72% who were very satisfied (62% in 2015).

Most candidates perceived Elections Canada to have run the federal election fairly (81%), and have a high level of trust in the accuracy of the election results (86%).

Nomination Process and Sources of Difficulty

Four in five candidates (78%) felt it was easy to comply with the nomination requirements (80% in 2015). The main reasons cited for difficulties include issues with the requirement for a specific volume of signatures, the level of paperwork, its complexity, and that procedures were not clearly explained. Satisfaction with the timeliness of processing the nomination papers was at 88% (89% in 2015). Nine in ten candidates felt informed about Elections Canada's nomination process.

The Portal

In 2019, Elections Canada introduced the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC), commonly known as the portal, providing candidates the opportunity to file their nomination papers and financial reports electronically. Less than half of the candidates said that they used the portal, either personally, through their official agent, or their delegate. Overall, satisfaction with the portal was moderately high at 65%. Over half of the candidates who reportedly used the portal said that they primarily used it to download election materials. Other uses included submitting nomination papers electronically, accessing post-election results or materials, or maintaining the account and contact profile. Most candidates (over four in five) who said that they used the portal agreed that it contained useful information, made submitting nomination papers convenient or that it was easy to create an account. About three in four candidates agreed that the portal made it easy to access documents.

Elections Canada Products and Services

Most candidates found Elections Canada's products to be useful in running their campaign. Over half found the products somewhat useful, and three in ten found the products very useful. Of the products offered by Elections Canada, candidates primarily used the maps of polling place service areas, the lists of polling stations, and the Political Financing Handbook for Candidates and Official Agents. Almost half of the candidates stated that having both formats (paper and electronic) of the polling station lists was useful for them (up from 32% in 2015). In considering the quality of the list of electors, satisfaction was modest at 48% (down from 58% in 2015). Satisfaction with the Event Map Viewer was moderately high at 48%. Of the tools to communicate with electors, over two in five candidates found the Guide to the Federal Election (also known as the Booklet) most useful.

Returning officers organized an all candidates briefing in their riding before the 43rd general election. Three in four candidates attended the briefing or sent someone else to attend (up from 62% in 2015). Just less than half of candidates indicated that they personally attended the briefing, while others had a campaign delegate, manager, or official agent attend. Of those attending or represented at the briefing, four in five found it useful.

There was moderate use reported for the 1-800 support line for candidates, with 39% candidates reporting that they or their representatives contacted Elections Canada using this method (42% in 2015). Among those who used the support line, satisfaction was moderately high at 74%. Most candidates, or their representatives, contacted or visited their local Elections

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Canada office during the election (86% in 2019, up from 80% in 2015). Satisfaction was high at 88% when considering services provided by the local Elections Canada office.

The Campaign

One in five candidates reported that they provided the returning officer with a list of names of election staff to work at polling stations. The majority (60%) did not, with nearly half of those candidates stating that they did not have anyone interested or available to work at the polling stations.

Of those who reported that they used a voters list (72% of the candidates), 94% said that they took measures to ensure the protection of personal information contained in it. Two in five candidates said they took measures to ensure that their campaign's materials, events or website were accessible to electors with a disability. These measures mainly included (by about one in five) wheelchair-accessible venues, campaign offices that were accessible to those with mobility issues, or websites that were accessible to electors using a screen reader.

The financial incentives provided by the *Canada Elections Act* were not well known, with just over one-third of candidates stating they were aware the Act provides for partial reimbursement of elections expenses as well as some personal expenses like childcare costs and expenses related to a disability. For candidates aware of these incentives, most said they had no impact at all on their decision to run in the last federal general election.

Voting Process

Nearly two in three candidates (64%) were satisfied with how the voting process went at advance polls or election day (up from 56% in 2015). One-quarter of those who said they were dissatisfied listed inadequately trained staff as the reason.

Candidates reported moderate satisfaction with the location of polling sites at 64% (the same proportion as in 2015). Of those dissatisfied, main reasons included that the polling locations were too far, problems with accessibility, or that there was insufficient space at the locations. Among the candidates who were present or had staff present at the polling location, four in five candidates said neither they nor their representatives witnessed any problems related to the voter identification requirements (up from 72% in 2015). The majority (84%) of candidates, or their representatives, did not witness any problems related to the use of the voter information card (VIC) as a piece of identification.

Technology and Elections

Based on what candidates had recently heard, nearly two in three felt that there was a problem in this election with the spread of false information online. Over two in five felt that foreign countries or groups were using social media and other means to influence the political opinions of Canadians. Relatively few (8%) perceived that there was hacking by foreign countries or groups into the computer systems that supported this election. Among those who perceived that the spread of false information was a problem during the election, 30% perceived that it had a major impact on the outcome of the election. The proportion was slightly lower (21%) among those who expressed concern about foreign countries or groups using social media and other means to influence the political opinions of Canadians.

When asked whether they prefer that poll workers use paper or computer lists to find a voter's name and keep track of those who voted, 41% of candidates indicated a preference for paper lists, while 33% preferred computer lists. When it came to the method for counting ballots, just less than half (46%) of candidates indicated a preference for hand counting, while 31% preferred machine counting.

Support for online voting among candidates was low, with just over one-third believing that electors should be able to vote by using the Internet (down from 54% in 2015); the majority of candidates felt that voting online is risky.

Canadian Democracy

Satisfaction with the way that democracy works in Canada was 50%. The two most frequently cited reasons for dissatisfaction in the way democracy works in Canada include the lack of proportional representation and that the first-past-the-post system does not reflect voters' preferences.

Just less than half of the candidates (46%) agreed that the voting age in the federal election should be lowered from 18 to 16 years old. Candidates' opinions were also divided on whether and how women's participation in politics should be encouraged, with 47% agreeing that political parties should be required to have more women candidates and 36% thinking that political parties should receive a financial incentive for having more women candidates.

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D. NOTE TO READERS

Overall results are presented in text, charts and tables. Bulleted text is used to describe specific segments of the sample if they are statistically and substantively different from the overall results for the entire sample. If differences are not noted in the report, it can be assumed that they are either not statistically significant in their variation from the overall result at the .05 level or that the difference was deemed to be substantively too small (i.e., 5% or less) to be noteworthy.

Results for the proportion of respondents in the sample who either said "don't know" or did not provide a response are typically not presented in the chart or table of results, but described with the base of responses below the chart/table. Results may also not total to 100 percent due to rounding.

When relevant and possible, the results from this survey are compared with previous results from the 42nd general election, as a point of reference.

E. POLITICAL NEUTRALITY CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify as Senior Officer of EKOS Research Associates Inc. that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research.

Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

Signed by:

Susan Galley (Vice President)