



# **Survey of Electors Following the October 26, 2020, By-election in Toronto Centre and York Centre (Ontario)**

## **Executive Summary**

### **Prepared for Elections Canada**

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**Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.**

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Prepared for Elections Canada  
Supplier name: Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc.  
December 2020

This public opinion research report presents the results of a telephone survey conducted to help evaluate the October 26, 2020, federal by-elections in the electoral districts of Toronto Centre and York Centre (Ontario).

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## Executive Summary

Elections Canada (EC) commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspectives Inc. (Phoenix SPI) to conduct research to help evaluate the October 26, 2020, federal by-election in the electoral districts of Toronto Centre and York Centre (Ontario).

## 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, Elections Canada seeks to obtain reliable survey data to evaluate electors' opinions, attitudes, and knowledge of the agency's services and electors' experience with the electoral process for the federal by-elections held on October 26, 2020, in Toronto Centre and York Centre (Ontario).

The objectives of this research were to measure public 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 aims to assess the following aspects:

- Awareness of the election and 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 federal general election.
- Attitudes towards Elections Canada and trust in 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 15-minute, dual-frame random-digit dialling telephone survey was conducted with 804 eligible electors. The sample frames used were as follows:

- Toronto Centre: 50:50 split, with approximately 50% of the numbers being cell phones and 50% being landlines.
- York Centre: 25:75 split, with approximately 25% of the numbers being cell phones and 75% being landlines.

Eligible electors were Canadian citizens, at least 18 years of age on polling day (October 26, 2020), who were residents of one of the two electoral districts – 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. For the landline sample, interviewers asked to speak to the youngest person in the household who was eligible to vote in the recent by-election, in order to help maximize the representation of younger electors in the survey sample. No selection procedures were used for the cell phone sample.

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. Those who opted to complete the survey online were sent a password-protected link via email or text message in order to complete the self-administered questionnaire.

The survey data were weighted in order to reflect the distribution of electors by age and gender according to Statistics Canada 2016 census data for each riding. The data collection was conducted from October 27 to November 9, 2020. Based on a sample of this size, the overall results can be considered accurate to within  $\pm 3.5\%$ , 19 times out of 20. The results for each of the electoral districts can be considered accurate to within  $\pm 4.9\%$ , 19 times out of 20.

For a more detailed discussion of the methodology, refer to the [Methodological Details](#).

## Key Findings

### ***Awareness of the By-election and Voter Information***

- A majority (89%) of electors surveyed were aware that a federal by-election took place in their riding on October 26, 2020. Awareness among electors in the York Centre riding (93%) was higher than awareness in the Toronto Centre riding (85%).
- Nine in 10 (91%) electors recalled some form of Elections Canada advertising during the by-election campaign. Fewer, but still a strong majority at 85%, recalled Elections Canada COVID-19-specific advertising.
- Most electors were at least *somewhat* informed (88%) about how, when, and where to vote in the by-election, including two-thirds (66%) who said they were *very* informed.
- One in five (20%) electors visited EC's website during the campaign. Among those who did, the majority (92%) were satisfied with the information found on the site.
- Few (5%) electors contacted Elections Canada during the campaign. More than eight in 10 (84%) of those who did were satisfied with the information provided to them.

### ***Voter Information Card and Voter Registration***

- Most electors (88%) aware of the federal by-election said they received their VIC, and 95% of those who received their VIC brought it to the polling station. Electors in the York Centre riding (93%) were significantly more likely to report receiving a VIC than electors in the Toronto Centre riding (83%).
- Virtually everyone who received a VIC reported that their name (97%) and address (100%) on the card were correct.
- Approximately seven in 10 (69%) electors knew that voters must first register in order to vote in a Canadian federal election. Slightly more (74%) were aware that electors can register at the polling place and vote immediately after. Electors in the Toronto Centre riding (83%) were significantly more likely than those in York Centre (66%) to know that eligible voters can register at the polling place.
- Six in 10 (62%) electors said they were aware that voter registration can be checked, updated, or completed on Elections Canada's website.

### ***Voting and Voter Participation***

- Seven in 10 (70%) of those who were aware of the by-election reported voting in it.<sup>1</sup>
- Among respondents who did not vote in the election, one-third (34%) said they did not vote due to everyday life and health reasons. Nearly one-quarter (23%) did not vote due to political reasons, and 17% did not vote due to electoral process-related reasons. Fifteen percent (15%) did not vote due to pandemic-related reasons.
- A split sample was used to test questions designed to measure electors' knowledge of current voting methods. One sample of respondents (n=394) was asked, in an open-ended manner, to identify the current ways that electors can vote in a federal election. The other sample (n=406) was asked a set of two questions. First, they were asked how someone can vote in a federal election, and then they were asked if there are ways electors can cast a vote ahead of time. Both formulations yielded similar results. When the split samples are merged, the majority of electors were aware they could vote in person on polling day (86%) and at an advance polling station (61%). Forty-one percent (41%) were aware they could vote by mail and 5% were aware they could vote at a local Elections Canada office.
- Over half (55%) 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 89% were aware that voters have to provide proof of address.
- In a split sample experiment, a second approach was tested. This approach found fewer respondents who were fully aware of voter identification requirements: 84% correctly answered that electors must provide proof of both identity and address to vote at a federal election and 16% answered incorrectly or did not know.
- Virtually all (99%) respondents found it easy to meet the identification requirements, with 94% saying it was *very* easy.

### ***Voter Experience***

Results were very positive and consistent when it came to the experience of those who voted during the during the October 26, 2020, federal by-election:

- 98% found it easy to vote, with 89% saying it was *very* easy.
- 97% were satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff, with 88% saying they were *very* satisfied.
- 97% were satisfied with their overall voting experience, including 81% who said they were *very* satisfied.
- 98% of those who voted at a polling station or at a local Elections Canada office said the

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<sup>1</sup> The official turnout rate was 25.6% in York Centre and 30.9% in Toronto Centre. There is often a discrepancy between the official turnout rate and the self-reported rate in post-election surveys. Two factors may be responsible for the over-representation of voters: 1) people who vote may be more likely than non-voters to participate in a study about voting (response bias); and 2) people who did not vote may report doing so because they think to present themselves in a more positive light (social desirability bias).

COVID-19 safety measures in place made them feel safe, with 78% saying the measures in place made them feel *very* safe.

### ***Fairness and Trust***

- A split sample method was used to test two variations of a question about the fairness with which Elections Canada runs federal by-elections. Half of survey respondents (n=408) were asked the following question: “Thinking about the *October 26, 2020*, federal by-election, would you say that Elections Canada ran the election ...?” The other half (n=396) was asked, “Thinking about federal by-elections *in general*, would you say that Elections Canada runs elections ...?” The general formulation resulted in a larger majority (93%) saying that Elections Canada runs elections fairly, compared to 82% of respondents who were asked the more specific formulation. The general formulation also led to a smaller proportion of “Don’t know” answers (4%) compared to the specific question (12%). This result is consistent with the findings from the surveys administered after the by-elections held on December 3, 2018, and February 25, 2019.<sup>2</sup>
- A split-sample approach was also used to survey electors about trust in the accuracy of the by-election results. As in previous waves of the survey, half of survey respondents (n=397) were asked, “What level of trust do you have in the accuracy of the election results in your riding?” The other half of survey respondents (n=407) was asked a similar question: “What level of trust do you have in the accuracy of the election results?” but it 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 previous waves of the survey, respondents who were asked the second formulation of the question yielded higher proportions saying they have a *very* high level of trust in the elections results. However, this wave of the post by-election survey yielded similar results regardless of the question’s formulation.

### **Notes to Readers**

- This research relies on self-reported voter turnout, which historically is over-reported in public opinion surveys: In this survey, self-reported turnout was 70% (75% among residents of York Centre and 65% among residents of Toronto Centre), while the official turnout rate was 25.6% in York Centre and 30.9% in Toronto Centre. A limitation of this current research, therefore, is that it over-represents voters in the survey sample. Two factors may be responsible for the over-representation of voters: 1) people who vote may be more likely than non-voters to participate in a study about voting (response bias); and 2) people who did not vote may report doing so because they think to present themselves in a more positive light (social desirability bias).
- 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.

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<sup>2</sup> This test was also included in the survey conducted following the by-election held on May 6, 2019. The finding from this test differed from the previous and current survey findings. With the general formulation, fewer respondents reported that Elections Canada runs elections *very* fairly as compared to the specific formulation.

- The number of respondents changes throughout the report because questions were often asked of sub-samples of the survey population. 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.

## 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

The contract value was: \$54,821.93 (including HST).