



Report on the Survey of Registered Third Parties for the 43rd General Election:

Wave 1

Summary

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Prepared by Forum Research



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This public opinion research report presents the results of research on the electoral experience of registered third parties conducted to help evaluate the October 21, 2019, federal election.

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Executive Summary

Purpose of Research

In 2018, Bill C-76 introduced new rules for third parties that expanded the types of activities that are regulated, as well as the time frame during which they are regulated. As part of its post-mortems following the 2019 federal general election, Elections Canada sought to obtain reliable survey data for the following purposes:

- to understand registered third parties' experiences, opinions and attitudes about the third-party political financing regime under the *Canada Elections Act*
- to provide information to support the evaluation of Elections Canada's programs and services and identify opportunities for improvement
- to provide input for the agency's performance indicators, reports and recommendations to Parliament

Methodology

Forum Research administered a quantitative survey¹ to the 2019 financial agents of registered third parties, as these individuals were well situated to answer questions that relate to the third-party political financing regime. The survey was available in both official languages by telephone as well as online, and a total of 55 responses² were received. These responses are equivalent to a 37% response rate.³

This survey is the first of two waves to gauge the public opinion of the financial agents of registered third parties.

Key Findings

The first wave of the *Elections Canada Survey of Registered Third Parties for the 43rd General Election* offers insights about the strengths of the third-party regime as well as opportunities for further refinement.

Generally, financial agents found the processes in place for third parties during the 2019 election easy to access but more difficult to implement. Steps seen as being particularly easy included figuring out how to register and finding registration forms. Notable concerns included the amount of work required to open a separate bank account and maintain separate financial records for regulated activities, and the ease of the interim return process, but overall, the results lean more positively than negatively.

¹ A print version of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

² Due to the small sample size, figures throughout the report are stated as frequencies and proportions, as opposed to percentages.

³ Response rate was calculated by dividing the total amount of responses to the survey (55) by the total population who could have participated (147).

The majority of financial agents were responding on behalf of a registered non-profit or membership-based organization, and about two in ten were responding on behalf of a union. About eight in ten respondents said it was likely that their organization would register for future elections.

Nearly two thirds of respondents said it was easy to determine whether their organization needed to register with Elections Canada. However, only four in ten said it was easy to figure out when they needed to register.

Although the vast majority⁴ of financial agents said it was easy to figure out how to register, and over eight in ten said finding the registration form was easy, only about half said it was easy for them to register. So, while finding the forms and other resources required to register was generally seen as easy, the registration process overall was seen as less so.

Despite this, just over two thirds of financial agents agreed that registering as a third party did not require much work, suggesting that while the process of registering was not always easy, it was not necessarily overly burdensome. Conversely, only a third of financial agents agreed that opening a separate bank account and maintaining separate financial records for regulated activities did not require much work.

About half of financial agents said it was easy to figure out whether they needed to submit interim returns. Similar to registering, fewer found the process of completing interim returns to be easy; in fact, three quarters of financial agents said the overall interim return process was difficult. Only two in ten financial agents agreed that completing and submitting the interim returns did not require very much work, which may indicate that the process was seen as burdensome.

Of the tools and services Elections Canada provides to third parties, the *Political Financing Handbook for Third Parties, Financial Agents and Auditors* was the most commonly used product, followed by the “New Requirements for Third Parties” document, the Third Party Roadmap, and the Political Entities Support Network. The majority⁵ of financial agents did not use, or were not aware of, the Webex information session for third parties and the political financing videos. The most commonly used products also tended to be seen as being the most helpful.

While eight in ten financial agents agreed that the reporting time periods were clear, about six in ten financial agents disagreed that it was clear which activities were regulated under the Act, and just over half disagreed that reporting regulated spending was easy. This suggests some confusion about both the requirements of and the processes for reporting on regulated activities for third parties. To clarify the requirements, six in ten financial agents consulted another source aside from Elections Canada: in most cases, legal counsel.

Prior to the 2019 election, Bill C-76 introduced changes to the *Canada Elections Act*, aiming to enhance transparency and level the playing field for those wishing to engage in election advertising. When asked if these changes succeeded, four in ten financial agents agreed that they enhanced transparency, while a quarter agreed that they created a more level playing field.

⁴ The term “vast majority” is used whenever percentages equal 85% or more.

⁵ The term “majority” is used when percentages equal 51% or more.

Financial agents were asked about the various types of advocacy activities their third party undertook during the election period. The most common advocacy activity reportedly undertaken by third parties during the election was posting about election issues on social media, followed by providing information about election issues on a website and advertising about election issues.

Over half of financial agents said it was difficult to figure out whether the issues they wanted to advertise about were election issues; four in ten said it was very difficult. The most common reason cited for this difficulty was that the rules for advertising about election issues were not clear, followed by the perception that the issues they work on regularly were disallowed (e.g. climate change, women's issues, etc.).

One concern worth noting is that among the pool of respondents who contacted Elections Canada with questions about advertising, about half said they were unsatisfied with the help they received. The majority of those who were unsatisfied said it was because their questions were not answered. This and some other subjects—such as ease of registration as a third party, the process for submitting interim returns, Elections Canada's advertising to third parties, and best practices for the Webex presentation—may merit deeper exploration in future phases of this research.

Statement of Political Neutrality

I hereby certify as a Senior Officer of Forum Research 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 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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