

National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election

Report on the Voter Information Campaign and Elector Awareness

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Executive Summary

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**43rd General Election: National Electors Study
Report on the Voter Information Campaign and Elector Awareness**

Executive Summary

Elections Canada (EC) is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting Canadian federal elections. In the context of the 43rd federal general election (GE) held on October 21, 2019, EC conducted the 2019 National Electors Study (NES), the largest public opinion study of electors ever conducted by EC for a federal election. This study measures electors' attitudes and experiences of the GE to inform evaluation and development of EC policy, programs, and services to electors.

The NES consisted of two components: 1) a national longitudinal survey of electors and 2) a series of post-election focus groups and interviews.

The survey component was conducted between June and December 2019 by telephone and online with eligible electors (i.e. Canadian citizens at least 18 years of age on election day), and involved three waves of surveys conducted before, during, and after the election period. Respondents to each survey were as follows: n=49,993 for the pre-election survey; n=23,880 for the election period survey; and n=21,435 for the post-election survey.

Two-thirds of initial respondents were obtained via random sampling; the remainder were sourced from an online panel of volunteer participants. The inclusion of this non-random sample means no estimate of sampling error can be calculated for the entire sample. When only the random samples are considered, all samples are of a size such that overall results across all waves would have a margin of sampling error less than $\pm 1\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The qualitative component included 13 in-person focus groups, two online focus groups, and 10 in-depth telephone interviews conducted in November and December 2019 with voters, non-voters, youth electors, new Canadians, Indigenous electors, and electors with disabilities. Qualitative findings are not statistically projectable but offer detailed opinions that complement the broader quantitative findings.

This report presents results from the survey and focus groups on electors' recall and evaluation of EC's voter information campaign for the 43rd GE and electors' awareness of when, where, and the ways to register and vote before, during, and after the election.

Presented below is an integrated summary of the quantitative and qualitative results found in the detailed findings, organized by theme.

Two other reports present the findings of the NES on other topics, including a report on electors' experience of the voting process during the 43rd GE and a report on electors' views on election-related policy issues.

Recall of Elections Canada Advertising and Communications

Over the course of the voter information campaign, respondents increasingly recalled, without prompting, that they had seen or heard Elections Canada advertising or communications about where, when, and the ways to register and vote in the election. Most often, respondents recalled television as the source of the advertising or communications, followed by a postcard or brochure in the mail. Electors who recalled seeing or hearing Elections Canada advertising or communications were most likely to say that the main point of what they saw or heard was to "get out and vote."

- Unaided recall of advertising or communications from Elections Canada increased over the election period, from 21% of respondents early in the election up to 81% by the early voting phase and through to the end of the election day phase. Post-election, when ads were no longer being shown, unaided recall receded to 66%.
- Through the election period and post-election surveys, electors increasingly mentioned that they knew the advertising or communications they saw was from Elections Canada because it said Elections Canada (from 27% early in the election period up to 47% post-election) or they recognized the logo or branding (from 17% up to 25%).
- Among post-election respondents who recalled seeing EC advertising or communications, the top sources of recall were television (56%) and a postcard or brochure in the mail (38%). These were followed by radio (34%), newspaper (25%), Facebook (21%), and internet websites in general (20%).
- Electors who recalled seeing or hearing Elections Canada advertising or communications were most likely to say that the main point of what they saw or heard was to “get out and vote”: half (50%) of post-election respondents said this was the main point of the ads.

Aided recall of key Elections Canada communications and specific advertisements generally increased with each phase of the voter information campaign. When presented with specific ads, respondents most often recalled the radio ads, followed by the video ads, compared to other ad formats.

- Aided recall of the slogan “It’s Our Vote” doubled from 12% of electors during the early election phase to 24% of electors in the week leading to election day. Post-election, recall of the slogan jumped to 42%.
- Post-election, approximately nine in 10 (93%) of those aware of the federal election said they received a voter information card (VIC) in the mail (compared to 80% during the VIC phase of the election period). Almost half (48%) of electors aware of the federal election said they received the brochure titled *Guide to the federal election* (compared to 23% during the VIC phase).
- Across all ad formats, aided recall of specific ads generally increased with each phase of the voter information campaign. Aided recall of radio ads was higher than other formats: Between one-quarter and nearly half of surveyed electors recalled a radio ad about registration (25%), the VIC (42%), early voting options (41%), and election day (49%). Video ads had the second highest levels of aided recall overall, with 7% of electors recalling a video ad early in the election, 22% a registration ad, 32% a VIC ad, 37% an early voting options ad, and 36% an election day ad.

Evaluation of Advertising and Communications

The ads and communications products were generally well-received by electors, in particular for being clear and useful. The television and radio ads received the most positive reactions.

- When presented with a selection of advertisements, the vast majority of survey respondents somewhat or strongly agreed that the presented ads were clear (87%) and provided useful information (86%), while smaller majorities agreed that they were relevant (71%) and attention-catching (67%).
- According to electors who took part in the qualitative research, the stories of the TV ads made them relatable and easy to understand. The radio ads were clear and easy to understand, mainly as a result of captivating voiceovers that delivered short, to the point messages, while the style of the animated

social media ads made them attention-grabbing and appealing to younger voters. The web banner ads were clear, but not attention-grabbing. Similarly, the print ads tested well in terms of content, but were viewed as boring or unattractive from the perspective of presentation.

- Among electors who took part in the qualitative research, overall impressions of the *Guide to the federal election* tended to be positive or very positive, characterizing the guide as “comprehensive,” “informative,” “detailed,” “attention-grabbing,” and “useful.”
- Among qualitative research participants, overall impressions of Elections Canada’s voter information campaign were positive and sometimes very positive across all groups, with participants routinely describing it as a good effort, comprehensive, inclusive, well thought out, and informative. Youth participants and new Canadians in particular emphasized the relevance of the campaign to themselves personally as new voters.

Satisfaction with Electoral Information

By the end of the voter information campaign, the vast majority of surveyed electors were satisfied with the information they had received from Elections Canada on the voting process, and most felt very informed about where, when, and the ways to vote.

- Satisfaction with the information electors received from Elections Canada on the voting process increased over the course of the voter information campaign, from 68% who were satisfied (25% very satisfied) during the early election phase of the election period survey up to 95% who were satisfied (70% very satisfied) with the information they received on the voting process by the post-election survey.
- Electors increasingly reported that they felt informed about where to vote in the election. Early in the election period, most (81%) electors said they felt at least somewhat informed, including 41% who felt very informed. By the post-election survey, 96% of electors reported feeling informed, including 78% who said very informed.
- Throughout the election, strong majorities of electors felt at least somewhat informed about when to vote in the federal election, including half or more who felt very informed. The proportion of electors who felt informed steadily increased from a baseline of 88% early in the election period, including 58% who felt very informed, up to 98% who felt informed in the post-election survey, including 86% who felt very informed.
- Most surveyed electors also felt somewhat or very informed about the ways to vote in the federal election. During the election period, the proportion of electors who felt very informed increased significantly between the registration (57%) and voter information card (71%) phases, followed by a smaller increase at the early voting (75%) and election day (76%) phases. This receded in the post-election survey to two-thirds (65%) of electors feeling very informed, while more than a quarter (28%) reported feeling somewhat informed about the ways to vote in the federal election. Overall, 93% of post-election respondents said they felt informed about the ways to vote in the end.

Knowledge of Voter Registration

Stable majorities of electors knew that they needed to be registered on the list of electors to vote and that they would need to update their voter registration information if it changes.

- Throughout the study, at least seven in 10 electors knew that they need to be registered on the list of electors to vote in a Canadian federal election. Knowledge fluctuated only slightly over the course of the election campaign, from 74% of electors in the pre-election survey to 72% during the early election phase, 70% during the registration phase in the election period, and 73% post-election.
- Higher proportions of electors knew of the need to update their voter registration if their information changes. This knowledge remained effectively stable throughout the research period, from 87% of respondents at the pre-campaign baseline to 82% during the early election phase, 84% during the registration phase in the election period, and back to 87% following the October 21, 2019, election.
- When asked, on an unaided basis, how someone could register or update their voter registration information, post-election respondents most often mentioned contacting Elections Canada through its website (22%), at the polling station before voting (14%), and online in general (12%).
- The proportion of electors who did not know how someone can register or update their information declined over the course of the election period, from 38% during the early election phase to 34% during the registration phase and 21% post-election.
- When asked directly about the main registration methods, over two-thirds (68%) of post-election survey respondents said they had knowledge of Elections Canada's online voter registration service (a significant increase from 51% of electors during the 2015 GE), while seven in 10 (71%) respondents were aware that electors can register at the polling place on election day.

Knowledge of Identification Requirements

There was widespread awareness of the need to provide proof of identity and address in order to vote in a Canadian federal election, although knowledge of the proof of address requirement was lower depending on how the question was asked.

- The vast majority (97%) of electors in the post-election survey said they were aware that voters have to present proof of identity in order to vote in a Canadian federal election, the same as the result from the 2015 Survey of Electors. The proportion of electors who were aware of the proof of identity requirement increased over the election period, up from a baseline of 93% pre-election.
- Electors' awareness of the need to provide proof of address was slightly lower but still very high at 91% in the post-election survey, a slight increase from the 2015 Survey of Electors (88%). Awareness of the need to provide proof of address in the 2019 GE generally increased throughout the research period, ending eight percentage points higher than the baseline of 83% from the pre-election survey.
- When a split sample of electors were asked a single question about whether electors need to provide proof of identity, proof of address, both, or neither in order to vote in a federal election, this resulted in lower overall knowledge of the proof of address requirement in particular: In the post-election survey, just over one-half (55%) correctly responded that both proof of identity and address are required. Another 41% thought that only proof of identity was required (meaning 96% in total were aware of at least this requirement). In comparison, only 2% said that only proof of address was required (meaning only 57% in total were aware of at least this requirement).

Knowledge of Voting Methods

After the election, the majority of electors knew without prompting that they could vote at a polling place on election day and at advance polls. In addition, most electors recognized the main early voting options when aided.

- Post-election, unaided knowledge of the main voting methods was high and had increased from the pre-election survey: Post-election, nine in 10 (91%) telephone survey respondents said electors can vote in person at a polling station on election day (up from 84% pre-election) and 71% mentioned that electors can vote at an advance polling station (up considerably from 42%). Another 23% identified the option to vote by mail (up from 19%).
- When aided by a list of potential ways to vote besides at the polling station on election day, nearly all (92%) online survey respondents in the post-election survey knew it is possible to vote at an advance polling station, followed by 50% who identified voting at a local Elections Canada office and another 39% who identified voting by mail. Aided knowledge of each of these main early voting options increased over the course of the 2019 study, and during the early voting phase of the voter information campaign in particular, where awareness nearly matched post-election levels.

Awareness and Perceptions of Elections Canada as a Source of Electoral Information

Top-of-mind awareness of Elections Canada as a source for electoral information increased during the campaign. Moreover, there was widespread agreement that Elections Canada is the most trusted source of information about the electoral process.

- When asked in an open-ended manner, approximately six in 10 (62%) post-election respondents identified Elections Canada as the organization that first comes to mind when they think about sources of information on when and where to vote, or how to identify themselves at the polls. This represents a significant increase in awareness of Elections Canada from the pre-election baseline survey, when four in 10 (40%) said Elections Canada first comes to mind.
- Nine in 10 (91%) electors in the post-election survey agreed with the view that Elections Canada is the most trusted source of information about the electoral process, including over half (57%) who strongly agreed. This represents a small increase in the proportion who agreed during the pre-election survey (up from 88%), and a significant increase in those who strongly agreed (up from 42%).