

Executive Summary

Elections Canada (EC) is the independent, non-partisan agency responsible for conducting Canadian federal elections. In the context of the 44th federal general election (GE), held on September 20, 2021, EC conducted the 2021 National Electors Study (NES). 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 public opinion survey of electors, and 2) a series of post-election focus groups and interviews. The target population for both components of the NES was eligible electors (Canadian citizens who were at least 18 years of age on polling day).

The survey component was conducted by telephone (via live interviewers) and internet (via an online survey platform) between August and October 2021, in two waves. Respondents to each survey were as follows: n=53,731 for the election period survey and n=39,568 for the post-election survey. The survey samples were achieved primarily through probability sampling; however, a small number of respondents (n=111) were drawn from a non-probability web panel. The inclusion of this non-random sample means no estimate of sampling error can be calculated for the entire sample. If the panel completions are excluded and only the random samples are considered, all samples would have had a margin of sampling error less than $\pm 1\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The qualitative component included 14 virtual focus groups and 5 in-depth telephone interviews which were conducted between October 18 and 27, 2021, with 133 eligible electors. This included students; youth who are not in education, employment or training; electors living with a physical or cognitive disability or a mental health condition; new Canadians; and Indigenous electors. Qualitative research 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 44th GE and electors' awareness of when, where and the ways to register and vote 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. A report on the findings from the NES related to electors' experience of the voting process during the 44th GE is available under separate cover.

Recall of EC advertising and communications

Over the course of the voter information campaign, surveyed electors increasingly recalled having seen or heard Elections Canada advertising or communications about where, when and the ways to register and vote in the Canadian federal election.

- During the early election phase of the election period survey, one-quarter (24%) of electors had read, seen or heard EC communications; this increased to 85% post-election. This is generally consistent with the pattern of increasing awareness recorded as part of the 2019 NES election period survey, from 21% early in the election up to 81% by the end of the election day phase.
- Electors who recalled seeing EC advertising or communications mainly recalled them from television (56%) and a postcard or brochure in the mail (48%). Television and direct mail were also the main

sources of unaided recall of EC advertising or communications about the voting process in 2019 (TV, 56%; direct mail, 38%). Notably, in 2021, the increase in recall of ads on social media platforms observed in 2019 continued—specifically, 42% of those who recalled EC advertising or communications in 2021 mentioned seeing it on one of the social media platforms, up from 29% in 2019.¹

- One-third of surveyed electors who recalled EC advertising or communications thought “get out and vote” was the main message of the ads. The proportion of respondents who said the main point of the ads was to remind electors to “get out and vote” steadily increased through the information campaign, from 17% in the early election phase, to 28% by the end of the election day phase, to 37% post-election.

Aided recall of key Elections Canada communications and specific advertisements generally increased with each phase of the voter information campaign.

- Aided recall of the campaign slogan “It’s Our Vote” increased over the course of the election period, from 15% during the early election phase to 24% in the week leading to election day. Recall of the slogan is virtually identical to the 2019 GE (18% recalled the slogan during the VIC phase, 21% during early voting and 24% by election day).
- The proportions of electors who recalled receiving a voter information card (VIC) increased from 26% during the VIC phase of the election period survey, to 69% during the early voting phase, to 87% in the week leading to election day. Consistent with 2019, post-election, most surveyed electors aware of the federal election recalled receiving their VIC (92% in 2021 versus 93% in 2019).
- A majority (56%) of those aware of the federal election recalled receiving a brochure in the mail by the post-election survey, up from 37% who recalled the brochure during the VIC phase of the election period survey. Post-election recall in 2021 was higher than in 2019, when 48% of electors reported receiving the brochure.
- Aided recall of the recruitment and main campaign ads increased over time: 13% of survey respondents presented with recruitment ads recalled at least one of the ads during the registration phase. Recall of these ads increased to 25% by the early voting phase before peaking at 31% by election day. Recall of the main campaign ads was higher and increased more significantly over the election period: 18% of respondents recalled at least one of the ads they were presented with during the registration phase, 39% during the VIC phase and 55% during the election day phase.
- Across all ad campaigns, the largest proportions of survey respondents indicated that a main point of the ads they were presented with was the September 20 date of the federal election (results range from 49% to 57%). This was followed by mentions of the general messages “get out and vote” (40% to 48%) and “it’s important to vote” (36% to 42%).

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, survey respondents offered generally positive feedback. Specifically, the vast majority somewhat or strongly agreed that the presented ads were clear (85%) and provided useful information (85%), while smaller majorities agreed that they were

¹ Derived from respondents who recalled EC ads from one or more of the following: Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat.

relevant (71%) and attention catching (63%). Assessments of the ads for each separate campaign and phase were also positive overall, although electors were generally more positive in their assessments of ads related to the VIC, early voting options and election day compared with ads related to recruitment and registration.

- The ads presented as part of the qualitative research were also routinely described as clear as well as easy to understand across all phases of the ad campaign. Participants had no difficulty identifying a main message or messages they felt the ads were trying to communicate. Overall, participants identified relatively little in the way of additional types of information that would have been useful or helpful to include in specific ad campaigns or phases. There was near unanimity among qualitative participants that the campaign materials work well together and complement each other.
- The TV and radio ads tended to elicit the most consistently positive reactions from electors who took part in the qualitative research, with participants routinely noting the friendly voiceover and upbeat music as engaging. Ads produced in other media that did not include these elements (print ads, static social media posts, social media video ads, animated web banner ads) were more likely to elicit mixed reactions.
- There was a widespread impression that the target audience for the information campaign was electors in general, although participants also routinely suggested that the focus might be more on new electors voting for the first time. Some suggested that the ads might also be targeting electors who are unsure/undecided about voting, for two reasons: 1) the emphasis on health and safety measures adopted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was seen not only as a way of informing all electors but also as a way of reassuring those who might have concerns about voting during the pandemic, and 2) the impression that there is an implicit call to action in some of the ads, specifically an encouragement to vote associated with reminders about registration and information about different options for voting.

Satisfaction with electoral information

Satisfaction with the information electors received from Elections Canada on the voting process increased over the course of the voter information campaign, and most felt informed about when, where and how to vote and about the health and safety measures for COVID-19 that were in place at the polls for this election.

- During the early election phase at the start of the election period survey, 69% of electors were satisfied (26% very satisfied) with the information they had received thus far from Elections Canada. By post-election, this had risen to 94% of electors being satisfied (71% very satisfied) with the information received from Elections Canada on the voting process. This outcome is consistent with the results of the 2019 NES, where 95% of post-election survey respondents were satisfied with the information received from Elections Canada on the voting process.
- Most electors felt informed about when, where and how to vote in the election. In the early election phase, 56% felt very informed; post-election, nearly three-quarters (74%) felt very well informed. Overall, 96% ended up feeling at least somewhat informed about when, where and how to vote in the federal election, consistent with the results of the 2019 NES.
- Respondents also felt informed about health and safety measures for COVID-19 that were in place at the polls for this election. Early in the election period, two-thirds (68%) of electors said they felt at least somewhat informed about the COVID-19 safety measures at the polls, including a third (35%)

who felt *very* informed. Post-election, nine in 10 (89%) electors said they felt at least somewhat informed about these measures, including six in 10 (60%) who felt *very* well informed.

Electors' knowledge of voter registration, ID requirements and voting methods

Many electors were aware that voter registration information must be updated, most were aware that proof of identity and address are required to vote, and majorities knew that electors could vote on election day, by mail and at advance polls.

- Two-thirds (67%) of electors in the early election phase knew of the need to update their voter registration if their information changes. This remained stable through the registration phase before increasing to three-quarters (76%) of respondents in the post-election survey. This is down from 87% during the 2019 NES post-election survey, when the fixed election date allowed advertising about registration to begin before the start of the election period.
- Throughout the campaign, most electors were aware that a proof of identity is required to vote in the GE. During the early election phase, 93% of surveyed electors were aware of the need to present a proof of identity, and by post-election this had increased to 97%. Similarly, post-election, 89% of electors were aware that one must present a proof of address to vote (compared to 83% during the early election phase).
- Most surveyed electors knew, without prompting, that electors can vote on election day (88%), by mail (70%) or at an advance polling station (61%). Compared to results from the 2019 NES and 2015 Survey of Electors, knowledge of the option to vote at an advance poll declined slightly (from 71% in 2019 and 64% in 2015). On the other hand, knowledge of the option to vote by mail recorded a historic high for Elections Canada's post-election surveys, having increased significantly amid heavy promotion of this option due to the COVID-19 pandemic from the previous high of 23% in 2019 and from 13% in 2015.
- Among electors who participated in the qualitative research, most said they were aware of the option to vote by mail. Few, however, said they looked into this option for casting their vote. Asked why they did not consider voting by mail, two reasons were identified most often: habit and ease of voting in person.

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.

- Elections Canada was the top-of-mind source of electoral information for electors in both the election period and the post-election surveys, with recognition being higher after the election. During the election period, 42% of electors identified EC as the organization that first comes to mind when looking for information on when, where and how to vote; by the post-election survey this had climbed to 66%. This represents a small increase from the 2019 election, when 62% of electors in the post-election survey said Elections Canada first comes to mind.
- Post-election, 93% agreed that Elections Canada is the most trusted source for information regarding the elector process. A significant proportion of these respondents (72%) strongly agreed with the statement (up from 57% during the 2019 NES post-election survey).