



Office of the
Chief Electoral Officer
of Canada

Retrospective Report on the 43rd General Election of October 21, 2019



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Erratum

Note: The following revision to the report is current as of January 11, 2022.

This erratum is being published to correct a data error on page 12:

- **Before correction:** The number of polling stations on First Nations reserves increased for the 43rd general election by more than 20% over the previous general election held in 2015.
- **After correction:** The number of polling stations on First Nations reserves increased for the 43rd general election by more than **6%** over the previous general election held in 2015.

Assessing Elections Canada's performance in the administration of the 43rd general election

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament and is composed of two entities: Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections. This report focuses on the activities of Elections Canada in administering the 43rd general election, held on October 21, 2019.

A new legislative landscape was created under Bill C-76, the *Elections Modernization Act*, which amended the *Canada Elections Act*. These amendments had to be implemented by the Chief Electoral Officer in a very short time frame ahead of the 43rd general election.

One of the bill's focuses was on ensuring a level playing field for political entities and enhancing the transparency of third-party activities. Relevant changes include:

- a new regulated pre-election period
- an expanded third-party regime to capture a broader range of activities
- a requirement for political parties to adopt and publish a privacy policy
- a requirement for digital platforms to maintain a registry for political advertising

Other changes affected services to electors, including:

- modified rules for members of the Canadian Armed Forces
- modified voter identification rules, such as the use of the voter information card as proof of address
- modified requirements for Canadians living abroad, such as allowing them to vote regardless of how long they have been living outside Canada

More information about the legislative changes for the 43rd general election is available in the *Report on the 43rd General Election of October 21, 2019* (statutory report).

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer's Departmental Results Framework sets out the core responsibilities, expected outcomes and performance measures for the work conducted by Elections Canada. The present report summarizes Election's Canada's success in delivering the 43rd general election, as measured against established performance indicators, and identifies areas for improvement going forward.

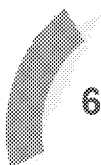
Departmental Results Framework: Elections Canada's Results

- Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate
- Canadians receive electoral information and services that meet their needs
- Canada maintains a fair, secure and transparent electoral process free of undue influence

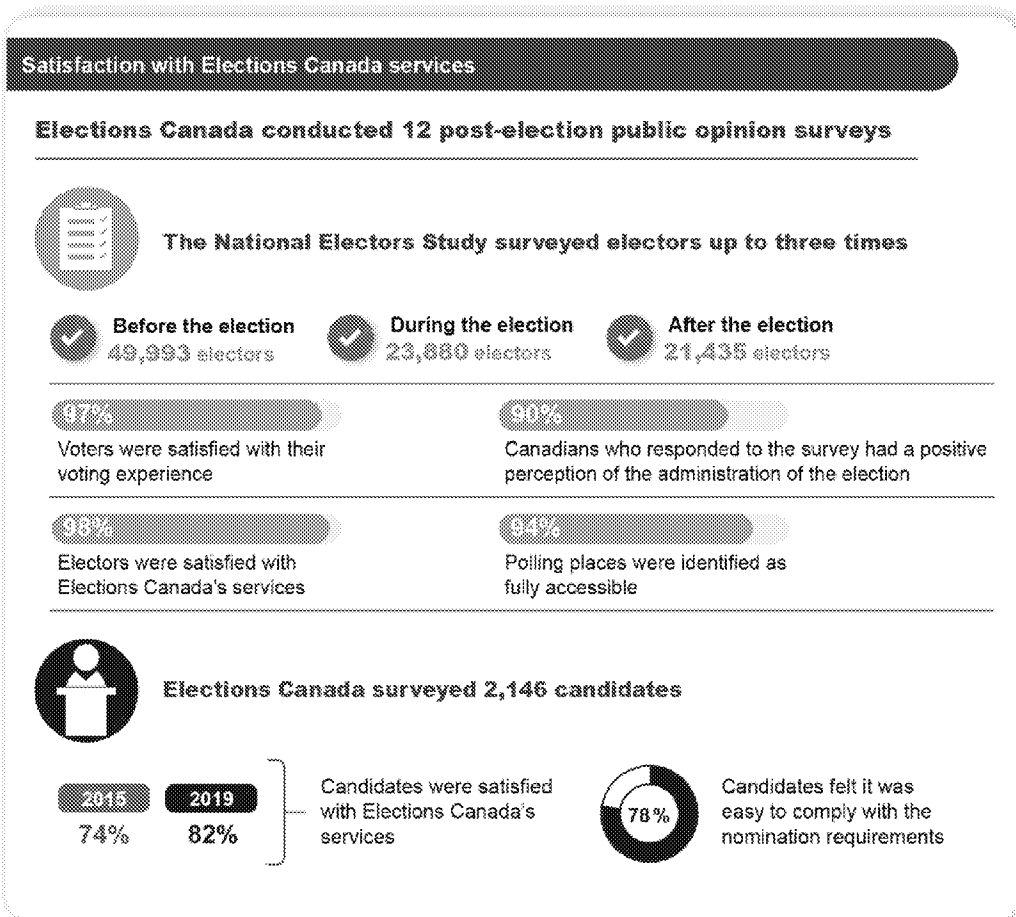
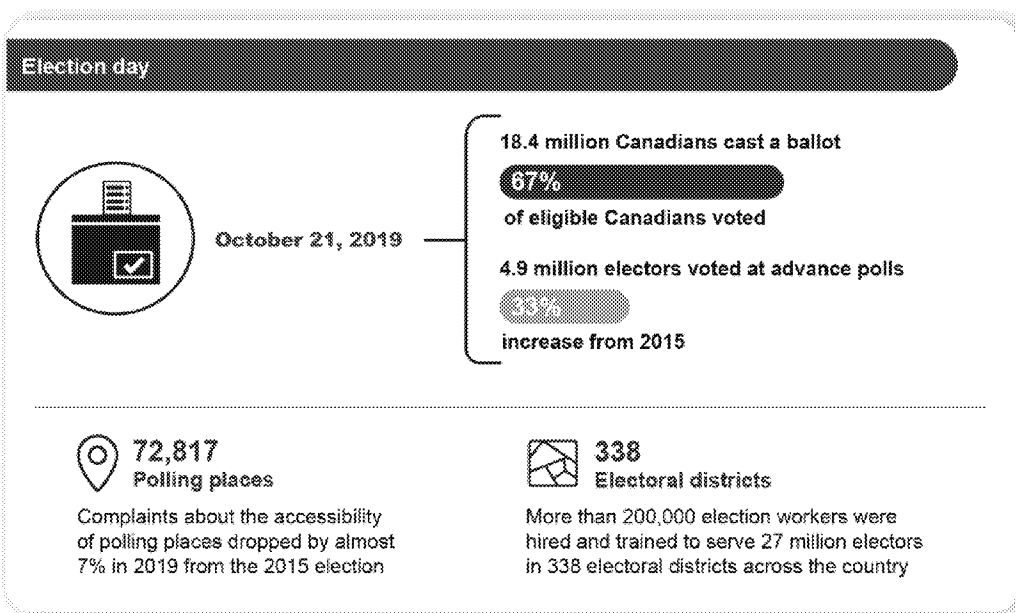
The scope of this report spans mainly from June 30, 2019—the day that marked the beginning of the new pre-election period—to election day (October 21, 2019). Certain preparatory and closing activities are also covered. The report evaluates the performance of specific election activities using information and data collected from:

- program documentation and post-election analyses
- the *Returning Officers' Report of Proceedings Summary*
- research and surveys on the experience of electors, candidates, campus administrators and election officers
- feedback from key stakeholder groups

The report also reflects findings from the *Independent audit report on the performance of the duties and functions of election officers*, completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP.



SNAPSHOT OF ELECTIONS CANADA'S PERFORMANCE ADMINISTERING THE 43RD GENERAL ELECTION



Reducing barriers to voting

Elections Canada's Inspire Democracy Program increased its network by 256% since 2015

▶ **120+ stakeholders**
 Helping to reduce barriers to participate in elections for:

- Indigenous electors
- Youth
- People with disabilities
- New Canadians

Elections Canada's Student Vote Program ran parallel to the 43rd general election

1.2 million
Young Canadians participated

▶ **75%** Students felt more prepared to vote in the future

99%

Teachers agreed that Elections Canada's resources equipped them to teach about elections and democracy and increased students' knowledge of elections

12%

More educators ordered learning resources in 2019 than in 2015

Election security and integrity

Most electors trust that the election was run fairly and the results were accurate

How fairly electors thought Elections Canada ran the election:

90% fairly

70% very fairly

Level of trust electors had in the accuracy of the election results in their riding:

89% high

61% very high

Workforce satisfaction with Elections Canada

231,599
Election workers were hired

338 Returning Officers
31 Field Liaison Officers

96%

Poll workers agreed that the voter information card facilitated the identification of electors

97%

Returning officers reported that the new integrated service model worked well

83%

Poll workers were satisfied with the training they received

87%

Returning officers were satisfied with the timely delivery of election materials to facilitate their duties



Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate

The rights to vote and be a candidate in a federal election are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Elections Canada is mandated with ensuring that Canadians can exercise these rights. A key indicator of Elections Canada's success in this area is the low number of people who reported not being able to exercise their right to vote because of issues with the electoral process.

For the third time following a general election, Elections Canada partnered with Statistics Canada to ask questions about voter participation in the Labour Force Survey. In the November 2019 Labour Force Survey Supplement, respondents were asked whether they voted and, if not, their main reason for not voting. According to the results of the Survey, only 5.4% of non-voters identified issues with the electoral process as the main reason they did not vote, a decrease of 2.1 percentage points from the 42nd general election.

Electors who did not vote for reasons related to the electoral process most often reported that they could not prove their identity or address. In the Labour Force Survey Supplement, approximately 104,100 electors mentioned this as the reason they did not vote in the 43rd general election—a 40% decrease from the 42nd general election. More information is available in *Turnout and Reasons for Not Voting: October 21, 2019, Federal Election: Results from the Labour Force Survey Supplement*.

To better understand candidates' satisfaction, Elections Canada commissioned a survey to assess whether the nomination process met candidates' needs. Findings in the report demonstrate that candidates' overall satisfaction was high at 74% (69% in 2015). In particular, candidates' satisfaction with the quality of service they received from the agency increased from 74% in 2015 to 82% in 2019. These high levels of satisfaction reflect that candidates felt supported in exercising their democratic right to be a candidate. The *full report on the Survey of Candidates* can be found on elections.ca.

Key areas of accomplishment

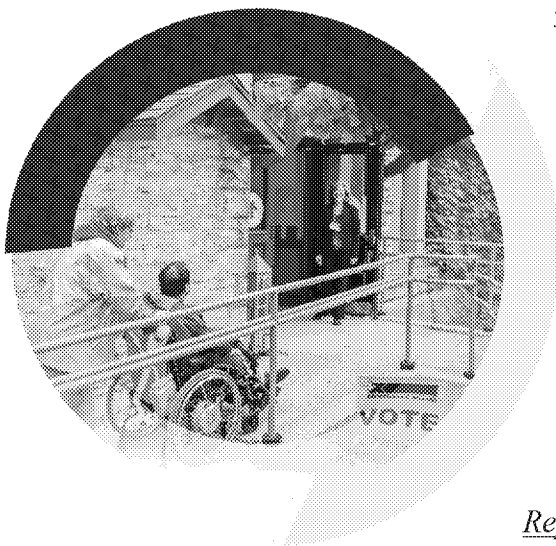
As part of the agency's ongoing work to improve the voting experience, Elections Canada worked to ensure that Canadians could more easily and efficiently exercise their right to vote. The agency also implemented legislative changes that removed barriers to becoming a candidate and improved the nomination process.

In preparation for the 43rd general election, the agency endeavoured to reduce barriers for voters and candidates, including by:

- Increasing accessibility of the electoral process
- Facilitating participation of Indigenous electors
- Ensuring voting services and information were available in both official languages
- Accepting the voter information card as proof of address
- Simplifying in-person voting procedures and products at advance polls and on election day for poll workers
- Making it easier for Canadians to present themselves as candidates

Increasing accessibility of the electoral process

People with disabilities face barriers to participating in elections. Building on initiatives already in place, Elections Canada set out to improve the electoral process and make voting as accessible as possible.



The agency sought expertise from the Advisory Group for Disability Issues to update the Polling Place Suitability Checklist. Changes to this checklist meant that for the first time, returning officers assessed whether a polling place was near a public transit stop, whether there was a defined pathway from the parking lot and whether polling places had automatic doors. Ultimately, the new checklist contributed to ensuring the polling places selected for this election were more accessible than ever before.

In addition, Elections Canada consulted persons with disabilities and other stakeholders on the redesign of the ballot, which improved readability, including for those with visual impairments who use screen readers. Details are available in the Ballot Redesign Focus Groups Final Report.

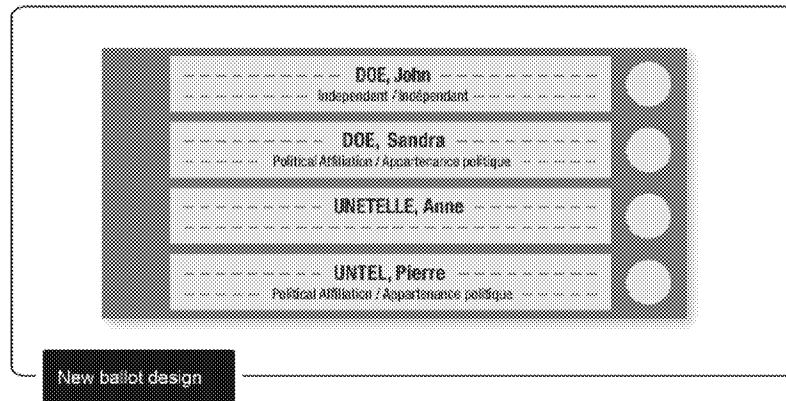
Findings

Results from post-election analysis indicate that Elections Canada achieved some success in reducing barriers to voting for persons with disabilities:

- Fewer complaints related to accessibility.** Overall, the total number of complaints related to the accessibility of polling places dropped from 3,085 in 2015 to 2,878 in 2019. There were fewer complaints regarding exterior pathways, protruding obstacles, doors and door thresholds, and hallways. While Elections Canada was successful in reducing the number of complaints in these areas, the number of complaints related to parking, signage and the location of the voting room (level access) rose slightly from 316 to 335. According to the *National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election: Report on Voter Experience*, 85% of voters with a disability who voted in person found it very easy to access the polling place. The Advisory Group for Disability Issues identified gaps in accessibility training for poll workers and issues with the incorrect use and placement of signage.
- Polling places met a new, more complete accessibility standard.** Elections Canada sought expertise from the Advisory Group for Disability Issues on ways to increase the accessibility of polling places. As previously noted, 85% of voters with a disability who voted in person found it very easy to access their polling place. For the 43rd general election, returning officers were asked to secure polling places that met new minimum standards in the updated *Polling Place Suitability Checklist*. Following the use of more rigorous mandatory criteria, 94% of polling places were identified as fully accessible. As a result, fewer polling places were identified as accessible than in the 2015 general election (96%). The reduced accessibility rate is attributed to infrastructure issues in rural and semi-rural electoral districts, where returning officers identified a shortage of accessible buildings. In areas where selecting an inaccessible polling place was unavoidable, some electors with disabilities chose to use alternative voting options, such as voting by special ballot or obtaining a transfer certificate to vote in another more accessible polling place.

The *Polling Place Suitability Checklist* is used by returning officers to evaluate the accessibility of potential polling places ahead of a general election. The checklist contains 37 accessibility criteria, 15 of which are mandatory and must be met before a potential site is considered accessible. Returning officers also evaluate whether a potential polling place meets security and technology requirements.

- **More accessible ballot.** Elections Canada leveraged its ballot redesign initiative to improve the ballot's readability, including for those with visual impairments who use screen readers. This new design, first launched during the December 2018 by-election in Leeds–Grenville–Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, was used successfully in the 43rd general election. The background is now grey instead of black, the font sizes are larger and dashes have replaced the dots. The new ballot is also two inches wider than the previous one to improve handling.



Going forward

Elections Canada strives to increase the accessibility of the electoral process so that people with disabilities who face barriers to participating in elections will have an equal opportunity to vote. Going forward Elections Canada will:

- Simplify poll worker training on the mandatory accessibility criteria and the correct use and placement of signage.
- Enhance partnerships with provincial governments to use schools as polling places. Using schools, which have relatively high accessibility standards, will help address infrastructure issues in rural areas, where fewer accessible spaces are available. This activity may be postponed or require adjustment to meet health and safety requirements if the next general election is delivered during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Facilitating participation of Indigenous electors

Since 1990, the agency has worked to make the federal electoral process more accessible to First Nations, Métis and Inuit electors. Improving elector services in remote Indigenous communities remains a priority for Elections Canada.

Ahead of the 43rd general election, Elections Canada made voting and registration information available to Indigenous communities in multiple languages and formats.

The number of polling stations on First Nations reserves increased for the 43rd general election by more than 6% over the previous general election held in 2015. The Assembly of First Nations worked with Elections Canada to set up a call centre to reach out to band administrators about setting up polling stations. As a result, all 365 First Nations that requested polling stations for the 43rd general election had at least one. This represents an increase to 389 polling stations in 2019 from 366 in 2015.

Findings

While Indigenous electors continue to face barriers to participating in federal elections, analysis shows that Elections Canada made progress in addressing this issue:

- **Better electoral services in remote Indigenous communities.** As outlined in the [statutory report](#), Elections Canada carried out the Elector Services in Remote Indigenous Communities pilot ahead of the 43rd general election. It targeted remote Indigenous communities in 27 electoral districts and focused on early and sustained outreach as a means of providing improved electoral services. There were no reports of significant wait times owing to polling day registration or issues such as the ballot shortages witnessed in these communities in the 2015 election. The agency also worked with 8 national and regional Indigenous organizations and offered election information products and services in 16 Indigenous languages—up from 12 in the previous general election held in 2015. These languages were Atikamekw, Blackfoot, Denesuline, Gwich'in, Inuktitut, Innu (Montagnais), Michif, Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Moose-Cree, Nisga'a, Ojibway, Oji-Cree, Plains Cree, Salteaux, Stoney.
- **Online Voter Registration Service enhanced for electors at non-standard addresses.** For the 42nd general election, the Online Voter Registration Service was not accessible for many Indigenous electors living on reserves at non-standard address types (about 25%). For the 43rd general election, Elections Canada added the “I have another address type” option to the Online Voter Registration Service, which successfully assigned the correct electoral district and polling division in 94% of cases. This change allowed electors living at non-standard addresses to confirm their registration status online; however, they are still unable to add themselves to the list of electors or update their address information online.

Non-standard addresses are those that are incomplete such as those with only a place or a street name.

Going forward

Elections Canada recognizes the importance of ensuring that Indigenous electors can exercise their right to vote in a federal election and is committed to delivering inclusive electoral services. Going forward, Elections Canada will:

- Look for new ways to reduce barriers to Indigenous electors' participation in federal elections.
- Update the Online Voter Registration Service to allow electors with non-standard address types to add themselves to the list of electors and update their address.
- Promote the Online Voter Registration Service at events directed toward Indigenous electors and in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations.

Ensuring voting services and information were available in both official languages

Ahead of the 43rd general election, Elections Canada implemented measures in response to the July 2015 and May 2019 audit reports completed by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The agency also used the 2016 census data to improve its understanding of the linguistic realities in each electoral district.

As well, the agency implemented a rapid response mechanism that allowed returning officers to quickly adjust services and respond to official languages complaints filed with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and Elections Canada.

Findings

As was the case in the 42nd general election, virtually all (99%) voters in the 43rd general election were satisfied with the official language in which they were served. According to the National Electors Study, over three quarters of survey respondents who voted in person (76%) said they were served in English, 20% said they were served in French and 3% said they were served in both of Canada's official languages.

With a well-trained workforce at the ready, returning officers successfully reinforced policies and procedures, adjusted and corrected situations and quickly resolved complaints.

While successful in providing voting services in English and French, Elections Canada faced certain challenges:

- **Shortfalls in the recruitment and retention of bilingual staff.** According to the Survey of Election Officers, about two thirds (68%) of recruitment officers surveyed said they had needed to hire poll staff who were bilingual or spoke the minority language in their electoral district. Among these, 31% had difficulties finding and recruiting individuals who spoke the second official language. In post-election analyses, returning officers also reported that absenteeism was a recurring problem and had an impact on the quality of services offered in both official languages at some polling locations.
- **Services not always available in both official languages.** According to the Survey of Election Officers, 96% of poll staff did not encounter any difficulties providing services to electors in English or French. Though returning officers were able to meet their bilingual recruitment and training objectives in the majority of electoral districts, in some cases election workers were unable to provide the quality of services expected by the public.
- **Inconsistencies in application of official languages procedures.** During and after the election period, Elections Canada received 238 official languages complaints from electors. Of these, 116 were received through the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages' new online complaint form, which allowed the public to report problems as they occurred.

The agency requires returning officers to provide services of equal quality in both official languages in the polling divisions where at least 5% of the population speaks the minority official language.

The remaining 122 complaints were submitted through Elections Canada’s online complaint form and incident reports from election officers. The majority of the complaints came from areas in Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick. The nature of these complaints involved a partial or complete lack of service in the elector’s official language, or the incorrect or inconsistent application of official languages policies and directives.

Going forward

Elections Canada recognizes the challenges it faces in providing services to voters in the official language of their choice at polling places across the country and is committed to improving its services. Specifically, Elections Canada will:

- Continue working with key stakeholders to implement outreach activities with official language minority communities to promote Elections Canada activities and job opportunities.
- Work to improve and diversify tools to better support returning officers in planning and carrying out official languages activities.
- Collect more data on absenteeism and resource reallocation of bilingual staff to better understand and address recruitment and retention issues.
- Optimize the complaint process to obtain better data and ensure continuous improvement and faster resolution of issues.

Accepting the voter information card as proof of address

By law, eligible voters must be 18 years of age or older and be a Canadian citizen. Voters must prove their identity and address in order to vote. However, meeting the identification requirements can be difficult for some, creating significant barriers to voting and impacting the most vulnerable citizens in society.

To reduce the proof-of-address barrier, amendments were made to voter identification requirements in the *Canada Elections Act* in 2018, which allowed the Chief Electoral Officer to authorize the voter information card as proof of address when presented with another piece of accepted identification.

The voter information card is issued using information from the National Register of Electors. The Register gets updated regularly using data from driver’s licence bureaus, the Canada Revenue Agency and Immigration, Citizenship and Refugees Canada.

Findings

The voter information card is likely the most accurate and widely available government document and is one of the only documents issued by the federal government that includes address information.

Elections Canada successfully leveraged the voter information card to improve the accessibility of voting services for Canadians by reducing the proof-of-address barrier:

- **Majority of electors aware of the voter identification requirements.** Elections Canada used its national Voter Information Campaign to provide Canadians with information about

the identification required to vote. According to the *National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election: Report on the Voter Information Campaign and Elector Awareness*, almost all electors were aware of the identification requirements: 97% were aware that voters have to present proof of identity and 91% were aware that voters have to present proof of address.

- **Voter information card used with another piece of identification to establish proof of address.** The independent audit report noted that the voter information card was used as proof of address in combination with a second piece of identification in 10% of the sample of 10,000 voter interactions observed. According to the National Electors Study, voters who used two documents to meet the identification requirements most often used the voter information card to establish proof of address. Based on the Survey of Election Officers, most poll workers (96%) agreed that the voter information card facilitated the identification of electors.



- **Even when not used as identification, voter information card facilitated voting.** While the vast majority of voters presented a single piece of government-issued identification with their name, photo and address as proof of eligibility, a significant portion (91%) of electors who received the voter information card and voted in person brought their voter information card to the polling place, according to the National Electors Study. This facilitated the voting process even when it was not presented as identification. Across all in-person voting methods, electors with a voter information card reported spending less time casting their ballot than those who did not bring their card with them. Those who brought their voter information card to the polling place took 7 minutes to vote on average, compared to 8 minutes for those who received a voter information card but did not bring it. Those who did not receive a voter information card reported an above average voting time of 11 minutes.

Going forward

To ensure that Canadians can exercise their democratic right to vote, Elections Canada will continue to leverage the use of the voter information card as proof of address when the elector has another piece of identification.

Simplifying in-person voting procedures and products at advance polls and on election day for poll workers

Despite the increased uptake in special ballot voting options, in-person voting at both advance polls and on election day remains the most popular voting method.

While the majority of voters continue to vote in person on election day, Canadians increasingly took advantage of early voting services: more than 4.9 million electors voted at advance polls, an increase of 33% from the 42nd general election.

Findings

The agency achieved success in its efforts to refine voting processes and enable a faster and smoother in-person voting experience. However, evidence suggests that Elections Canada's service model at polling stations, while currently meeting the needs of Canadians, remains labour intensive and complex to administer for election day workers.

- **Satisfaction with in-person voting remained high.** In the National Electors Study, results show that of those who voted in person, 98% said they were satisfied with the services provided. This proportion is similar to the 42nd general election, when 97% were satisfied.
- **Average voting times considerably reduced.** According to the National Electors Study, voters reported that it took on average 8 minutes to cast their ballot in the 43rd general election, representing a 4-minute improvement from the 12-minute average reported for the 42nd general election. More specifically, on election day, the average reported time to vote was 7 minutes, versus 9 minutes in the 42nd general election. Improvements to processes were most effective at advance polls, where the average reported time was 8 minutes, versus 21 minutes in the 42nd general election. Ultimately, 95% of voters said the time it took for them to vote was reasonable, up slightly from the 42nd general election (92%). Voting at advance polls improved the most in this regard, with 93% of those who voted at advance polls in the 43rd general election saying the time it took to vote was reasonable, up from 80% in the 42nd general election. Note that all times are as reported by electors in the survey rather than independently measured times for voting.
- **Voters satisfied with the distance to their polling places.** Nearly everyone (98%) said the polling place was located at a reasonable distance from their home, with 88% saying the distance was very reasonable. This is similar to 2015, when 97% said the polling place was a convenient distance from their home. In the post-election survey of the National Electors Study, over half (54%) of in-person voters said it took them only 5 minutes or less to get to the polling place. One quarter (25%) of voters said their travel time was 6 to 10 minutes, and 19% said it took them more than 10 minutes. For both election day and advance polls, the average time voters spent travelling to the polling place was 9 minutes.

Table 1: Percentage of electors' residences that are within a given road distance of their assigned polling place

Type of polling division	Distance	(%) objective	(%) outcome
Urban	Within 3 km on election day	95	93.2
Urban	Within 6 km for advance polls	95	95.6
Rural	Within 15 km on election day	95	95.7
Rural	Within 30 km for advance polls	95	94.2

- **Election worker absenteeism led to late opening of some polls.** A number of changes were introduced between the 42nd and the 43rd general elections to enhance services to electors and candidates. Some of the changes negatively impacted recruitment and the working environment for poll workers. While 70% of returning officers were able to recruit the required number of poll workers, approximately 10,000 poll workers failed to show up for work. As a result of so many unexpected dropouts, 83 polls opened late on election day, and

adjustments were required in the 97 electoral districts that experienced absenteeism rates exceeding the recommended 10% contingency of standby poll workers. Despite this, in the *Returning Officers' Report of Proceedings Summary*, 81% of returning officers reported timely and proper opening and closing of the polls. More details on recruitment and retention challenges are available in the recruitment and retention section of the present report.

Going forward

To ensure that Elections Canada is able to provide satisfactory services at advance and ordinary polls Elections Canada will:

- Improve training and processes within the framework imposed by the *Canada Elections Act*.
- Review and refine polling station operations and staffing models, including implementing a single poll worker model.
- Look for opportunities to leverage technology to streamline registration and voting procedures.
- Ensure better information sharing and coordination with stakeholders to facilitate staffing:
 - Share applicant information, where possible, between electoral districts that had sufficient and insufficient staffing at different milestones.
 - Improve recruitment by leveraging best practices from provincial electoral management agencies and coordinating to share lists of potential workers, where possible.
 - Support returning officers' outreach to school boards to recruit 16- and 17-year-old workers, where appropriate.

The agency has also proposed a number of temporary legislative measures related to delivering an election in a pandemic. Information on the [impact of COVID-19](#) is available on [elections.ca](#).

Making it easier for Canadians to present themselves as candidates

The right to run in a federal election is protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Through multiple communication channels, Elections Canada worked to provide Canadians with authoritative information on how to become a candidate and ensured that the nomination process met their needs.

Substantial changes were made to the nomination process for candidates and the Candidate Services program, including:

- the option to submit nominations electronically through the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC) portal
- a redesigned *Nomination Paper*
- the option to appoint a campaign delegate
- a new requirement for candidates to present identification documents

These changes were made to comply with new legislation following the passage of the *Elections Modernization Act* and to enhance existing processes.

Findings

Through these changes, Elections Canada was able to make even more candidate transactions accessible and easy to use. Key findings also reveal that Elections Canada had moderate success with its electronic service offerings to candidates.

- **Majority of candidates found it easy to comply with nomination requirements.** The agency's Inspire Democracy program launched *Your Step-by-Step Guide to Running in a Federal Election* to support potential candidates. According to the Survey of Candidates, 78% of candidates felt it was easy to comply with the nomination requirements. Candidates who were the incumbent, elected or from a party represented in the House of Commons were more likely to say the process was very easy compared to others. Criticisms among those dissatisfied with the process included issues with obtaining the required number of elector support signatures, the complexity of the paperwork and unclear procedures.
- **Lower than expected uptake of the PESC portal.** Elections Canada launched its PESC nationally for the 43rd general election. This secure online portal offered political entities and candidates the option of accessing electoral products and submitting candidate nomination papers electronically. Over 2,600 unique users representing 67% of campaigns logged into the portal. Of the candidates who were elected, 91% of their campaigns had a PESC account. However, most candidates (over 90%) still preferred to submit their nomination by paper rather than through the portal for this election. Of the 2,146 confirmed candidates, only 183 used the portal's e-nomination process. In the Survey of Candidates, over half of the candidates who reportedly used the portal said that they primarily used it to download election materials. Most candidates who used the portal agreed that it was easy to create an account and that the portal contained useful information and made submitting nomination papers convenient. Satisfaction with the portal by those who used it was moderately high at 65%. Of those candidates who did not use the portal, 11% felt it was not easy to use, 10% simply preferred dealing with Elections Canada in person, 9% preferred working with paper and 9% did not know about the portal or how to use it.

Going forward

Elections Canada's work ensures that the electoral process is inclusive so that Canadians can exercise their democratic right to be a candidate. Moving forward Elections Canada will:

- Continue to offer both paper and electronic options to accommodate the needs of candidates.
- Provide more information to potential candidates, as well as to electors who may wish to become candidates, on the nomination process and the legislative requirements and challenges of running in an election.
- Seek input from stakeholders and subject matter experts to increase the number of tools available through the portal and continually improve on those currently available.

The logistical challenge of recruitment and retention

The recruitment and retention of election workers is the biggest logistical challenge Elections Canada faces each election. No simple solutions exist for this complex endeavour.

More than 200,000 election workers need to be hired and trained to serve 27 million electors in 338 electoral districts across the country. This large number of workers is required to provide adequate services at the polls, maintain compliance with voting day procedures, meet accessibility and official languages requirements, and accommodate growth of the electoral population.

In this report, *dropouts* is defined as poll workers who did not show up to work at the designated time and day for their shift on advance or ordinary polling days.

In 2019, to meet its commitment to reducing wait times for voting, Elections Canada increased the number of advance polling stations to 6,166 from 4,946 in 2015. However, the total number of polling stations (advance and ordinary) fell slightly to 72,817 from 72,858. The number of workers hired for the 43rd general election was 231,599, up from 221,826 hired for the 42nd general election.

Despite its best efforts, the agency faced several recruitment and retention challenges that eventually led to delays at several polling places, including 83 polls that opened late on election day.

Applicants versus workers

In 2019, the agency launched its first national digital recruitment campaign. A series of ads was created to increase awareness about job opportunities and encourage people to apply online. Communications tools were also developed to help returning officers and stakeholders effectively recruit election workers and encourage the hiring of people with disabilities, new Canadians, Indigenous people, linguistic minorities and young people.

As a result, over 550,000 online applications were submitted through the Elections Canada website, compared with 243,934 for the 2015 election and 130,427 for the 2011 election, when people were first able to apply online. Political parties also referred nearly 30,000 potential workers to returning officers; however, these applicants were not evenly distributed across all electoral districts.

Despite receiving such a large number of applications, returning officers in 89 of the 338 electoral districts were unable to hire enough workers to fill the positions needed. In addition, the recruitment of bilingual staff for polling divisions where at least 5% of the population speak the minority official language was sometimes difficult, affecting the agency's ability to meet the official language requirements in certain electoral districts.

High level of dropouts

With such large numbers of people being hired to work at the election, there is always a percentage of workers who simply do not show up to work their shift.

For the 43rd general election, the dropout rate unexpectedly increased nearly four-fold from the 2015 general election. Approximately 10,470 poll workers (about 5%) failed to show up for work at advance polls and ordinary polls. This would not have been a problem if dropouts were evenly spread across all electoral districts; however, 53% of all dropouts occurred in 97 electoral districts. In 20 electoral districts in particular, the percentage of trained workers who did not show up for work was about 15%. If no replacement staff were available, election officers had to merge polls, which meant one team of election officers and one ballot box serving two polling divisions. This type of adjustment was needed in the 97 electoral districts mentioned above.

Complex training

Following the previous general election held in 2015, the *Independent audit report on the performance of the duties and functions of election officials – 42nd General Election* noted some deficiencies in training tools and practices. To address this finding, Elections Canada implemented a revised training strategy that combined in-class and hands-on practice using the Elections Canada guidebooks, allowing trainees to become more and more self-reliant as the training progressed.

Despite Elections Canada's efforts to improve poll worker training and materials for the 43rd general election, the majority of returning officers who completed the *Report of Proceedings* believe that even more can be done to improve them. They also recommend dividing more complicated poll worker tasks among newly trained and more experienced poll workers—which would be especially helpful when handling complex situations. In particular, poll opening and closing procedures were identified as being too complicated. It is worth noting that in the *Survey of Election Officers*, 83% of the poll workers surveyed reported being satisfied with their training.

Long working hours

Amendments brought to the *Canada Elections Act* ahead of the 43rd general election increased voting hours at advance polls, giving electors 12 hours per day to cast their votes—instead of the previous 8 hours—on each of the 4 days of advance polling. This meant that employees were required to work several 13-hour shifts in a row over the Thanksgiving weekend. This had a significant impact on workers' interest and ability to fulfill their employment commitment. In the *Returning Officers' Report on Proceedings Summary*, returning officers reported that, as a result of extended hours during advance polls, election workers were exhausted. According to the *Survey of Election Officers*, among workers who said the working conditions were poor (7% of respondents), the majority listed the lack of breaks (60%) or the number of hours of work (41%) as a reason for their dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

The recruitment and retention of the large number of workers required to deliver a general election poses a significant logistical challenge that cannot be solved by simple adjustments to processes. Elections Canada is working on a strategy to address the issues outlined above, including enhancing the poll worker recruitment campaign. The agency is committed to supporting returning officers with training, recruitment and capacity planning tools to enable an efficient and effective workforce in each electoral district.



Canadians receive electoral information and services that meet their needs

To ensure a positive voting experience for Canadians, Elections Canada must provide the right information and services at the right time. A key indicator of Elections Canada's success for this result is the overall level of satisfaction voters expressed with the voting experience.

The National Electors Study measured electors' values, opinions and attitudes toward various election-related issues; their knowledge, expectations and experience of the electoral process; and their satisfaction with the agency's communications, services and programs. Most voters (97%) said they were at least somewhat satisfied with their voting experience, with a substantial majority (80%) expressing strong satisfaction. These proportions are similar to the 42nd general election, when 96% were satisfied and 81% very satisfied.

Key areas of accomplishment

The agency implemented service improvements, building on established practices and leveraging some of the flexibility provided in the *Elections Modernization Act*.

Significant preparatory work ensured electors were well served once the election was called. This work included:

- Delivering the national multimedia Voter Information Campaign
- Streamlining services in local Elections Canada offices
- Providing other special service offerings
- Supporting returning officers and election officers effectively
- Educating young Canadians

Delivering the national multimedia Voter Information Campaign

Designed to reach the widest possible audience, Elections Canada's Voter Information Campaign is a national multimedia information campaign that provides Canadians with information on when, where and the ways to register and vote.

For the first time, the agency launched its Voter Information Campaign prior to the election call (during the pre-election period) to increase awareness of the 43rd general election and to encourage eligible Canadians to register to vote and to apply to work in the election. The campaign included messages to position Elections Canada as the official source of information on the electoral process. The pre-election component of the campaign focused primarily on new voters and other groups with lower electoral participation rates.

Findings

The *National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election: Report on the Voter Information Campaign and Elector Awareness* indicates that Elections Canada was successful in reaching audiences and ensuring that Canadians had the necessary information to vote.

- **Most electors satisfied with the information provided by Elections Canada.** The vast majority of survey respondents were satisfied with the information they had received from Elections Canada on the voting process. Satisfaction with electoral information increased over the course of the Voter Information Campaign from 68% at the beginning of the election period to 95% at the end. Over the course of the Voter Information Campaign, respondents increasingly recalled seeing ads from Elections Canada. In the post-election survey, most respondents felt very informed about where (78%), when (86%) and the ways to vote (65%).
- **Voter Information Campaign contributed to electors' awareness of identification requirements.** The majority of electors stated that they were aware that voters are required to present proof of identity in order to vote in a Canadian federal election. In the 2019 *National Electors Study*, knowledge of proof of identity was surveyed at 93% pre-election and 97% post-election, results similar to those in the 2015 *Survey of Electors*. Electors' awareness of the need to provide proof of address was slightly lower but still very high at 83% pre-election and 91% post-election. This represents a slight increase from 2015 (88%).
- **Canadians felt Elections Canada's ads were clear and useful.** When presented with a selection of Elections Canada advertisements, the vast majority of survey respondents agreed that ads were clear (87%) and provided useful information (86%), while smaller majorities agreed that they were relevant (71%) and attention-catching (67%).

Going forward

Elections Canada will enhance the Voter Information Campaign in order to keep pace with the information environment and respond to the needs of Canadians.

Streamlining services in local Elections Canada offices

Canadians have the option to register and vote in person at any local Elections Canada office across the country until the sixth day before election day. This is known as voting by special ballot. In order to enhance the voter experience for the 43rd general election, functions related to registration and special ballot voting services were integrated. This was a first for a general election.

Findings

According to the *National Electors Study*, 84% of voters were very satisfied with the voting experience in an Elections Canada office.

Post-election analyses also indicate that the new integrated service model provided a number of other benefits:

- **Integrated service model enabled faster voting.** Integrating the registration and special voting services reduced the average elector service time by 11 minutes, which translated

into smoother, faster and more convenient voting experience. According to the National Electors Study, voters reported an average time to vote at a local Elections Canada office of 8 minutes, versus 19 minutes in the 42nd general election.

- **Integrated service model proved to be cost-effective.** Comparisons with the cost per transaction in the 42nd general election demonstrated a cost savings of approximately \$1.33 per elector transaction (or approximately \$3.4 million in total) with the implementation of the new integrated model for the 43rd general election.
- **Integrated service model well received by election workers.** Overall, 97% of returning officers reported that the new model worked well and that election workers liked it better. Their feedback in the Returning Officers' Report on Proceedings Summary, also confirmed that the integration of the services was very useful and should be maintained for future elections.

Going forward

Elections Canada will maintain the integrated service model and continue to look for ways to improve elector services in local offices.

Providing other special service offerings

Canadians have several options for registering and voting by special ballot. These service offerings were expanded for the 43rd general election, including more on-campus voting locations, expanded eligibility for international electors, and additional service points to address exceptional circumstances. Elector demand for these services was higher than ever before.

Findings

The agency successfully delivered a variety of special ballot voting options to meet the needs of Canadians.

- **Special ballot voters satisfied with Elections Canada's services.** Findings from the Survey of Special Ballot Voters¹ suggest that nearly all respondents (98%) who had interacted with Elections Canada staff indicated that they were satisfied with the services provided. National mail-in voters were more likely to say that they would not have voted at all (55%) if they had not had the option to vote by special ballot, compared with Elections Canada office voters (38%) and campus voters (14%).
- **Alternative voting options used when election day coincided with religious holidays.** Jewish communities raised concerns that polling day coincided with Jewish High Holy Days, creating a barrier to voting for observant Jewish electors. In response, Elections Canada worked directly with community leaders in 54 of 338 federal ridings—where adjusted 2016 census data showed the Jewish population to be over 1%—to design solutions to facilitate voting during times that observant Jewish electors were not restricted from voting.

¹ The survey sample in the Survey of Special Ballot Voters consisted of national mail-in voters, international mail-in voters, Elections Canada office voters and campus voters. It did not include electors who voted by special ballot at an acute care facility, during a home visit or at a Canadian Forces base.

The agency set up 27 special voting kiosks, invited residents of 19 long-term care facilities with primarily Jewish residents to vote earlier by special ballot, and increased capacity and service hours in some Elections Canada offices. The resulting initiatives enhanced services and provided voting options for observant members of the Jewish community.

- **Special ballot voting allowed flexibility to respond to storms in Manitoba.**

In response to storms in Manitoba during the election period, Elections Canada implemented a series of extraordinary measures to accommodate affected electors. The agency set up an additional polling place at the University of Winnipeg's Convocation Hall for evacuees from 14 communities in four affected electoral districts. About 270 electors used this voting option. The agency also opened special voting kiosks in two communities, Lundar and Portage la Prairie, for emergency workers—mostly from Ontario, Saskatchewan and Manitoba—who had been deployed in Manitoba to restore power and telecommunications services and who were unable to make it to their assigned polling station on election day. Elections Canada closely collaborated with Manitoba Hydro, coordinating voting times to prevent long lines and accommodate workers' schedules. In all, 592 workers used these additional service points. More information is available in the [statutory report](#).





- Expanded Vote on Campus program well received by electors.** After the success of the on-campus voting pilot during the 42nd general election, Elections Canada made Vote on Campus a national program. For the 43rd general election, the agency opened 119 satellite offices at 98 post-secondary institutions, a more than 200% increase over the 39 locations in 2015. These offices were predominantly used by electors requesting to vote from outside their home electoral district. According to the Survey of Special Ballot Voters, a majority (62%) of campus voters chose to vote by special ballot because the location of the Vote on Campus office was convenient for them. This continued the trend observed during the 42nd general election pilot and suggests that Vote on Campus services are particularly well suited to the needs of students and other electors who cannot easily vote at their assigned polling stations. For the 43rd general election, the days of operation were also increased to five days (October 5–9, 2019). The vast majority (91%) of campus voters were very satisfied with their overall voting experience and nearly all (98%) were either somewhat or very satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff. In fact, satisfaction with the overall voting experience was higher when compared to national and international mail-in voters. However, voting on campus did reportedly take longer than voting in a local Elections Canada office (8.6 minutes and to 6.7 minutes, respectively).

- Mail-in voting met expectations despite an increase in demand.** Demand for mail-in voting (national and international electors) increased in the 43rd general election by 66% over the 42nd general election. This was due to a significant increase (210%) in international voters for this election over the 42nd general election. Certain provisions in the *Canada Elections Act* that prevented Canadians living abroad for more than five years from voting by special ballot were repealed ahead of the election. The repeal led to a surge in Canadians registering on the International Register of Electors—55,000 compared to 16,000 in the 42nd general election—and a surge in ballots received from electors living abroad, with 34,000 international electors casting ballots compared to 11,000 in the 42nd general election. Findings from the Survey of Special Ballot Voters reveal that it took national mail-in voters an average of 7.8 days to receive their ballot in the mail after their application had been submitted to Elections Canada and another 4.5 days to return it by mail (12.3 days total). This process reportedly took longer for international mail-in voters, at 17 days total. Overall, 94% of international mail-in voters and 92% of national mail-in voters were satisfied with their voting experience.

Going forward

Special ballot voting offers several options to address voting needs during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Elections Canada will:

- Leverage the experience and the lessons learned from the 43rd general election and previous elections to identify ways to deliver an accessible, safe and secure federal general election should one be called before the pandemic is over.
- Review and improve processes in order to be in a position to accommodate larger numbers of mail-in ballots at the next general election.
- Pause vote on campus services for the 44th general election given the time needed to prepare, the uncertainty as to when the election will take place and the current pandemic situation.
- Examine options for establishing a sustainable solution to ensure faith-based communities are supported when a general election falls on a religious holiday. The Chief Electoral Officer may provide recommendations to Parliament for legislative change to enable possible solutions.

Supporting returning officers and election officers effectively

It is the returning officer who has the primary responsibility to deliver the federal election within their electoral district according to the Chief Electoral Officer's instructions. Strong support of returning officers is key to enabling effective services to Canadians.

The independent audit on the performance of election officers concluded that election officers properly exercised the powers conferred on them and appropriately performed the duties imposed on them under the *Canada Elections Act*. The auditors further noted that the manuals, training material, forms and certificates developed by Elections Canada effectively supported election officers.

Findings

While overall, Canadians reported high satisfaction rates with the voting services they received, Elections Canada had only moderate success in meeting the expectations of returning officers and election officer for support.

- **Returning officers reported a significant decline in satisfaction with poll worker training tools.** While 83% of returning officers reported that their training satisfactorily prepared them for the 43rd general election, according to the *Returning Officers' Report of Proceedings Summary*, 61% of returning officers felt that the training tools for poll workers were insufficient. This is a decline from the 42nd general election, when 70% of returning officers reported satisfaction with the training tools. Those dissatisfied with the training were primarily concerned with the quality, and those dissatisfied with the training tools were primarily dissatisfied with the guidebook. The summary of findings in the Survey of Election Officers explains that, although the training was targeted to support each position, the complexity of the tasks was hard to grasp for several roles. This was confirmed by the survey data, with 4 in 10 poll workers (39%) reporting that election instructions were too complex to understand quickly and easily. Details are available in the Survey of Election Officers.

- **Elections workers satisfied with election materials.** Elections Canada provided election officers with materials to facilitate their duties, including guidebooks of instructions, checklists, training guides and information sheets. Eighty-seven percent of returning officers reported satisfaction with the timely delivery of these materials. Additionally, 72% of returning officers appreciated the new self-service options available through the support website for field staff. Returning officers noted that they appreciated the overall quality of information available, including instructions concerning revision procedures and guidelines for conducting meetings with confirmed candidates. Nine in 10 poll workers (92%) also reported being satisfied with the election materials that were provided to them.
- **Simplified forms improved recordkeeping.** Following audit findings and recommendations from the 42nd general election, a number of forms and certificates were reviewed and simplified. The independent audit on the performance of election officers found that some recordkeeping errors that were an issue in the 42nd general election were no longer an issue in the 43rd general election, and recordkeeping improvements were observed. Additionally, 87% of poll workers found the updated forms easy to complete.

Going forward

Elections Canada strives to support returning officers and poll workers to ensure that they are prepared to deliver services and information to Canadians in each electoral district. Elections Canada will continue to examine the causes of poll worker dropouts and training concerns to ensure the best supports are provided to returning officers. The agency will implement the following measures to address these issues and improve working conditions:

- Continue to offer shifts and breaks while increasing flexibility and opportunities for returning officers to adapt work schedules to their worker pool and operational reality.
- Adapt poll worker wages to ensure they are competitive with those offered by similar employers.
- Improve the poll worker staffing model and communications to provide returning officers with more flexible staffing options during long voting hours and days.
- Review and improve the content and delivery of training programs and tools and identify opportunities to simplify and clarify procedures and practices.
- Allow returning officers and trainers more time to become familiar with the training material, including before the writs are issued.
- Simplify training and duties, including by reducing the length of training and the complexity of the closing procedures.
- Enhance the information that is shared at each stage of recruitment and provide all relevant information to workers as early as possible.

In the medium term, Elections Canada is looking to implement an integrated personnel management system that supports all stages, from hiring to compensation, and meets the operational needs of staff in the regions.



Educating young Canadians

Elections Canada’s mandate includes implementing education programs for elementary and secondary students with the goal of preparing them to participate in Canada’s electoral democracy when they are eligible.

Findings

During the 43rd general election, Elections Canada engaged a contractor, CIVIX, to deliver a student election program called Student Vote Canada 2019. The program ran parallel to the 43rd general election and reached 1.2 million young Canadians. This is the highest participation rate for a student vote program to date.

- Student Vote Canada program had a substantial impact on students’ civic literacy.** Elections Canada’s contractor, CIVIX, commissioned Abacus Data to conduct an external evaluation of the Student Vote Canada 2019 program. The evaluation, which was based on 12,922 survey responses, as well as on observations and interviews, found a 20-percentage-point increase overall in the self-reported understanding of politics and elections, and a comparable increase in the number of students who answered the knowledge questions correctly. Three quarters of students said they felt more prepared to vote in the future after participating in the program. Students who said they would “definitely” vote in the future increased by 14 percentage points.
- Educational resources well received.** Elections Canada made available its new [Elections and Democracy website](#), which offers a suite of civic education resources for teachers. This improved civic education offering led to 12% more educators ordering a record number of learning resources during the 2019 election period relative to 2015. Surveys of teachers who ordered Elections Canada’s educational resources showed that not only were unprecedented numbers of students reached, but also the satisfaction with the educational offerings was extremely high. Of the teachers surveyed, 99% agreed that the resources increased their students’ knowledge of elections and 98% agreed that it equipped them to teach about elections and democracy.



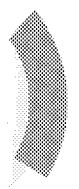
Going forward

Elections Canada will continue to leverage the real-life learning opportunities offered by a general election.

In a minority Parliament context, when an election can take place at any time, it will be more difficult for schools and teachers to prepare for election learning, and it is anticipated that participation levels for the 44th general election will be lower than for the 43rd general election.

To facilitate civic education during the 44th general election, Elections Canada will build on its strong base of existing programming and focus on the following:

- Prepare earlier for the delivery of Student Vote Canada, including shipping and storing election supplies in advance.
- Streamline lesson plans and activities so they can be taught in a shorter time frame.
- Make only minor revisions and updates to educational resources.



Voter turnout facts

A total of 18.4 million Canadians cast a ballot in the 43rd general election, compared to 17.7 million in the 2015 general election.

Canadians continued to increasingly take advantage of early voting services: more than 4.9 million electors voted at advance polls, an increase of 33% from the 2015 general election.

Participation by age group

A slightly higher proportion of eligible Canadians voted in the 43rd general election (67.0%) compared to the 2015 general election (66.1%).

In 2019, the highest increase in turnout was among electors between the ages of 35 and 44, up 2.7%, to 64.6% from 61.9% in 2015. Electors aged 65 to 74 had the highest participation rate, with 79.1% casting a ballot in 2019, up from 78.8% in 2015.

While overall turnout was up, participation among electors aged 18 to 24 was down by 3.2%, from a record 57.1% in 2015 to 53.9%.

Details on [voter turnout by sex and age, both nationally and across each province and territory](#), are available on [elections.ca](#).

Electors who live on reserves

Indigenous electors include First Nations, Métis and Inuit electors, aged 18 and older who live on and off reserve. They each have their own history and experience with voting in federal elections.

As demographic information is not captured at the polls, Elections Canada does not have complete data on the turnout of Indigenous electors. However, in 2004 Elections Canada began calculating turnout at polling places primarily dedicated to on-reserve voters.

In the 43rd general election, voter turnout for registered electors living on reserves was 51.8%, compared to 61.5% in 2015. This turnout was significantly lower than that of the general population (67.0%), for a total difference of 15.2 percentage points. By contrast, the smallest gap in voter participation between the two groups was observed in the 42nd general election (61.5% on reserves compared to 66.0% for the general population).

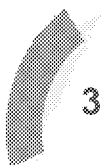
See the [On-Reserve Voter Turnout infographic](#) on [elections.ca](#) for more details and statistics.

Looking back

Voter turnout rates based on the number of registered electors vary over time owing to changes in elector participation. They may also vary as a result of changes to coverage of the list of electors. Although turnout based on registered electors may have some limitations, it can be calculated for a longer period.

- The highest voter turnouts, based on the number of registered electors, were in 1958, 1962 and 1963, when voter turnout was over 79%.
- The lowest voter turnout on record was in 2008, when voter turnout fell to only 58.8%.
- Voter turnout rose sharply in the 2015 federal election to 68.3%, the highest turnout since 1993.

Read more about voter turnout and changes over the last 100 years in *[A History of the Vote in Canada.](#)*





Canada maintains a fair, secure and transparent electoral process free of undue influence

A trusted election is one that is fair, secure and transparent. Elections Canada's 100 years of expertise in electoral management has ensured the highest standards of accountability, integrity and security in the electoral process. A key indicator of Elections Canada's success in this area is the percentage of electors who had a positive perception of the agency's administration of the election.

Overall, 90% of survey respondents in the National Electors Study felt that Elections Canada ran the election fairly. This result is similar to previous general elections.

Key areas of accomplishment

As part of its efforts to uphold trust in the electoral process, Elections Canada worked to ensure electoral processes were both fair and secure. Additionally, the agency implemented legislative changes relating to the new pre-election period, candidate and party expenses, privacy policies for political parties, and the regulation of third parties.

During preparations for the 43rd general election, the agency endeavoured to ensure trust in the electoral process, including by:

- Modernizing and strengthening Elections Canada's security posture
- Ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and its outcomes
- Providing support and guidance for political parties and candidates on their political financing obligations
- Implementing new requirements for third parties

Modernizing and strengthening Elections Canada's security posture

For the 43rd general election, Elections Canada put in place a comprehensive security strategy and was prepared to identify and address false or misleading information about where, when and the ways to register and vote.

As part of efforts to integrate security safeguards into the agency's day-to-day business, all Elections Canada employees and field staff received training on how to safeguard information and practise good cyber hygiene. Elections Canada also collaborated with key partners and the Government of Canada's lead security agencies to modernize and secure its information technology infrastructure, protect electoral services and systems and improve its overall security posture.

In addition, the agency established a dedicated Social Media Monitoring Unit, enhancing its capacity to detect and respond to incidents and developments across the country that might have interfered with electors' ability to vote.

Elections Canada provided reliable information on the electoral process through the national Voter Information Campaign and developed an online repository of its official advertising and communication products. Electors could verify the authenticity of information about the election by checking the repository.

Findings

As outlined in the [statutory report](#), the integrity of the vote was maintained from a cybersecurity perspective. The following findings were identified in Elections Canada's review of its security performance:

- **No security incidents detected.** Elections Canada did not detect any security incidents that affected the administration of the electoral process.
- **Polling location choice supported security.** According to the [Survey of Election Officers](#), 91% of poll staff felt the building where they worked was suitable for holding an election. Of those poll workers who felt the building was not suitable, 3% identified that the building was poorly secured to protect election materials and 4% identified the location itself as unsafe.

Going forward

Elections Canada pays close attention to the security environment and will adapt as required to address new and emerging threats. The agency supports the security of the electoral process and will continue to:

- Maintain partnerships with lead security agencies to protect the agency's digital assets and monitor the information environment for threats and incidents that could affect the administration of the election.
- Strengthen our cybersecurity posture to remain well positioned to anticipate, detect and respond to emerging security concerns related to the administration of elections.
- Monitor the environment for integrity threats and refine mitigation and response activities.

Ensuring the integrity of the electoral process and its outcomes

There are many safeguards in place to protect the secrecy of the vote and the integrity of Canada's federal electoral process. For example, electors vote using paper ballots that are later counted by pairs of trained election officers in the presence of observers. Canadians trust the electoral process and have confidence that they can rely on Elections Canada to conduct fair and secure elections with accurate and reliable results.

Findings

Elections Canada implements guidelines and procedures, aligned with the *Canada Elections Act*, to support electoral integrity and maintain Canadians' trust in the electoral process and the results of the election.

- **Procedures at the polls followed.** The [independent audit on the performance of election officers](#) concluded that on all days of advance polling and on election day, election officers

properly exercised the powers conferred on them and properly performed the duties and functions imposed on them under the relevant sections of the *Canada Elections Act*.

- **List of electors was the most up to date ever.** The National Register of Electors contains records for close to 27 million Canadians who are at least 18 years old and eligible to vote. In anticipation of the 43rd general election, the agency's efforts to improve the Register placed a particular focus on identifying and removing non-citizens from the list of electors and increasing registration rates among youth and Indigenous electors. Elections Canada staff conducted face-to-face outreach events across the country focusing on early registration and closing registration gaps for youth. These efforts enabled the agency to achieve the highest proportion of registered voters since the Registry's inception in 1997. Coverage of preliminary lists increased from 92.7% to 96.4% between 2015 and 2019, and from 71.9% to 78.9% for 18–24-year-olds.
- **Elections Canada viewed as the official source of information.** Elections Canada has a wealth of authoritative information that is of great value and benefit to Canadians. Ninety-one percent of electors in the post-election survey of the National Electors Study agreed that Elections Canada is the most trusted source of information about the electoral process.
- **Special ballot process perceived as secret.** Virtually all (99%) of respondents to the Survey of Special Ballot Voters agreed that the secrecy of their ballot was protected during the voting process, with 94% stating that they strongly agreed. Only 1% of respondents disagreed that the secrecy of their ballot was protected during the voting process.

Going forward

To maintain integrity in the electoral process, Elections Canada will build on established practices, and will continue to:

- Refer potential contraventions of the *Canada Elections Act* to the Commissioner of Canada Elections for investigation.
- Establish a more robust regulatory policy function, including an electoral integrity policy framework.
- Maintain the National Register of Electors and refine its processes, and collaborate with various electoral management bodies, federal departments and agencies, and other key partners with the goal to have elector information that is as current and accurate as possible in advance of an election.
- Implement and optimize processes for the Register of Future Electors in order to provide more opportunities to reduce the registration gap in the National Register of Electors for 18–24-year-olds—the group with the lowest registration rates.

Providing support and guidance for political parties and candidates on their political financing obligations

The *Canada Elections Act* imposes financial and reporting requirements on political entities to ensure a level playing field among political participants and accountability and transparency for Canadians. These requirements contribute to a fair and transparent electoral process free of undue influence.

As in every election, the agency provided support to political entities to facilitate their compliance with the Act.

Findings

Elections Canada had moderate success in supporting political parties and candidates before, during and after the election.

- **Elections Canada’s guidance and training sessions well received.** According to the Survey of Candidates, most candidates (85%) found the agency’s products to be useful in running their campaign. The Political Financing Handbook for Candidates and Official Agents was one of the most used products. Elections Canada also delivered training sessions across Canada on how to start and close a campaign. The training sessions on starting an electoral campaign addressed topics such as roles and responsibilities, financial administration, and fundraising and reporting requirements, while those on the closing of campaigns focused on how to fill and submit electoral campaign returns to Elections Canada. Overall, the vast majority (95%) of participants found the sessions to be very good or excellent.
- **New method for filing electoral campaign returns successfully implemented.** Elections Canada launched its Political Entities Service Centre nationally. This secure online portal offered candidates and political parties an alternative way of securely filing their electoral campaign returns and other financial documents. Overall, 44% of candidates used the portal to file all or part of their documentation, while 16% of registered parties used the portal to file their electoral campaign returns.
- **Online publication of electoral campaign returns was delayed as a result of the pandemic.** As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the timely publication of returns on Elections Canada’s website was delayed. Among the reasons contributing to the delay was the extension granted to candidates for filing their returns until the end of June 2020. Close to 95% of candidate returns submitted to Elections Canada are now posted online.
- **New process for reimbursing electoral expenses successfully implemented.** To expedite the reimbursement of electoral expenses to eligible candidate campaigns prior to the completion of an audit, the agency put in place a new review process that allowed for those reimbursements to be issued within a year following the 43rd general election. As a result, the majority of eligible campaigns were reimbursed by October 31, 2020. Some campaigns did not receive accelerated reimbursements because their files were incomplete or required an in-depth review by an auditor.
- **New privacy rules successfully implemented.** As of April 1, 2019, federal political parties are required to adopt and publish on their website a privacy policy and to submit it to Elections Canada as a condition of registration. In addition to the minimum statutory requirements for the policy, the Chief Electoral Officer invited all parties to adopt more robust policies in line with recognized privacy standards. Leading into the 43rd general election, Elections Canada reviewed the privacy policies of 23 political parties. The agency asked parties to clarify one or more statements in about 75% of policies. Parties rarely exceeded the minimum standards set out by the Act.

Going forward

Elections Canada works with political parties and candidates to ensure transparency and accountability, and will continue to:

- Deliver training and guidance material for parties and candidates to help political entities comply with the *Canada Elections Act*. This includes focusing on the ease of use of the new portal and providing information on how to file documentation electronically.
- Complete post-election audits of the campaign returns of the political parties and candidates that participated in the 43rd general election.

Implementing new requirements for third parties

Third parties are those that want to participate in an election by promoting or opposing a party, candidate or nomination contestant. In 2018, various changes were introduced to the provisions of the *Canada Elections Act* as they relate to third parties. New rules put into force for the 43rd general election covered a broader array of activities over a greater period of time than previous rules, including the establishment of new spending limits during the pre-election period and interim reporting requirements.

Findings

After the 43rd general election, Elections Canada sought to obtain data by introducing the Survey of Registered Third Parties to understand their experiences, opinions and attitudes about the political financing regime. However, the survey had a very low response rate of only 37% (55 responses).

- **Complexity of new rules for third parties created challenges.** Amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* increased the complexity of the legal framework, which now encompasses a broader range of third-party activities. Prior to these amendments, only advertising activities were regulated, but canvassing, electoral surveys and communicating with electors in formats other than advertising are also now regulated under the Act. Between December 2018 and November 2019, the agency received 425 enquiries seeking clarification on the correct application of the new rules. And although Elections Canada provided guidance to support third parties, in the Survey of Registered Third Parties, only 4 in 10 reported that it was clear which activities were regulated under the Act. Also, when asked about ease of reporting on regulated spending, only 4 in 10 surveyed agreed that it was easy to report correctly. Financial agents also reported that, despite contacting Elections Canada for assistance, it was still difficult to determine whether or not the new rules applied to their activities. A majority of respondents indicated consulting sources other than Elections Canada—in particular external legal counsel—to help them understand the correct application of the new rules.
- **New reporting requirements improved transparency but placed additional burden on third parties.** An important change for third parties came with the implementation of new interim reporting requirements. Depending on their situation, some third parties had up to four interim reports to file on specific dates prior to election day. According to the Survey of Registered Third Parties, the majority of respondents found the processes to prepare and file reports and electoral campaign returns to be burdensome and complex.

- **Political financing tools and resources were helpful.** In advance of the 43rd general election, the agency developed tools to increase awareness about the new third-party rules. The vast majority of respondents to the Survey of Registered Third Parties stated they were able to find the information they needed to comply with the rules. Several tools—such as the Political Financing Handbook for Third Parties, Financial Agents and Auditors and the related frequently asked questions—were popular and helpful. Other products, such as online training and videos, were less used.
- **Challenges with issue advertising.** Although issue advertising during the election period has been regulated by the *Canada Elections Act* the same way for nearly 20 years, determining what constitutes issue advertising remains a common area of confusion. Outreach efforts during the campaign period aimed to alleviate confusion. According to the Survey of Registered Third Parties, about 60% of respondents undertook issue advertising during the 43rd general election and found it difficult to understand whether or not their ads were compliant with provisions of the Act. When asked if they had contacted Elections Canada for clarification about issue advertising, about half of financial agents indicated that they had. Most financial agents stated that they relied on external legal assistance to better understand the provisions of the Act. Among the pool of respondents who contacted Elections Canada with questions about advertising, half stated that they were satisfied and the other half said they were unsatisfied with assistance they received. The majority of those who were unsatisfied said it was because their questions were not adequately answered. It is important to note that Elections Canada’s mandate towards third parties is a regulatory function and does not include providing detailed legal advice on how to conduct their activities.

Issue advertising:
 advertisements that take a position on an issue that is clearly associated with a candidate or registered party without identifying the candidate or party in any way.

Going forward

Elections Canada supports transparency and fairness in the electoral process, and will continue to:

- Complete the post-election audits of the financial returns of third parties that participated in the 43rd general election.
- Enable third parties and their financial agents to meet their obligations under the political financing regime, including by updating the handbook with examples of questions posed during the 43rd general election.



The 44th general election and beyond

This report summarized Elections Canada's success in delivering the 43rd general election in an environment that presented complex challenges. The agency will support the allocation of efforts and resources in areas requiring improvement.

Given that a minority government was elected, the next general election could take place at any time. In addition to its regular readiness activities, Elections Canada is closely monitoring the evolving COVID-19 situation and has developed a plan for delivering an accessible, safe and secure election should one be called during the pandemic. Protecting the health and safety of all participants—including electors, election workers, and candidates and other political entities—will be the top priority. Details about the [impact of COVID-19 on election readiness planning](#) are outlined on elections.ca.

Appendix A: Consolidated list of findings and action items

Departmental Result 1: Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate

Findings	Action items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer complaints related to accessibility • Polling places met a new, more complete accessibility standard • More accessible ballot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify poll worker training on the mandatory accessibility criteria and the correct use and placement of signage. • Enhance partnerships with provincial governments to use schools as polling places.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better electoral services in remote Indigenous communities • Online Voter Registration Service enhanced for electors at non-standard addresses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for new ways to reduce barriers to Indigenous electors' participation in federal elections. • Update the Online Voter Registration Service to allow electors with non-standard address types to add themselves to the list of electors and update their non-standard address types. • Promote the Online Voter Registration Service at events directed toward Indigenous electors and in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortfalls in the recruitment and retention of bilingual staff • Services not always available in both official languages • Inconsistencies in application of official languages procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue working with key stakeholders to implement outreach activities with official language minority communities to promote Elections Canada activities and job opportunities. • Work to improve and diversify tools to better support returning officers in planning and carrying out official languages activities. • Collect more data on absenteeism and resource reallocation of bilingual staff to better understand and address recruitment and retention issues. • Optimize the complaint process to obtain better data and ensure continuous improvement and faster resolution of issues.

Departmental Result 1: Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate

Findings	Action items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of electors aware of the voter identification requirements • Voter information card used with another piece of identification to establish proof of address • Even when not used as identification, voter information card facilitated voting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to leverage the use of the voter information card as proof of address when the elector has another piece of identification.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Satisfaction with in-person voting remained high • Average voting times considerably reduced • Voters satisfied with the distance to their polling places • Election worker absenteeism led to late opening of some polls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve training and processes within the framework imposed by the <i>Canada Elections Act</i>. • Review and refine polling station operations and staffing models, including implementing a single poll worker model. • Look for opportunities to leverage technology to streamline registration and voting procedures. • Ensure better information sharing and coordination with stakeholders to facilitate staffing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Share applicant information, where possible, between electoral districts that had sufficient and insufficient staffing at different milestones. – Improve recruitment by leveraging best practices from provincial electoral management agencies and coordinating to share lists of potential workers, where possible. – Support returning officers' outreach to school boards to recruit 16- and 17-year-old workers, where appropriate. • The agency has also proposed a number of temporary legislative measures related to delivering an election in a pandemic. Information on the impact of COVID-19 is available on elections.ca.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of candidates found it easy to comply with nomination requirements • Lower than expected uptake of the PESC portal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to offer both paper and electronic options to accommodate the needs of candidates. • Provide more information to potential candidates, as well as to electors who may wish to become candidates, on the nomination process and the legislative requirements and challenges of running in an election. • Seek input from stakeholders and subject matter experts to increase the number of tools available through the portal and continually improve on those currently available.

Departmental Result 2: Canadians receive electoral information and services that meet their needs

Findings	Action items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most electors satisfied with the information provided by Elections Canada • Voter Information Campaign contributed to electors' awareness of identification requirements • Canadians felt Elections Canada's ads were clear and useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the Voter Information Campaign in order to keep pace with the information environment and respond to the needs of Canadians.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated service model enabled faster voting • Integrated service model proved to be cost-effective • Integrated service model well received by election workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain the integrated service model and continue to look for ways to improve elector services in local offices. • Leverage the experience and the lessons learned from the 43rd general election and previous elections to identify ways to deliver an accessible, safe and secure federal general election should one be called before the pandemic is over.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special ballot voters satisfied with Elections Canada's services • Alternative voting options used when election day coincided with religious holidays • Special ballot voting allowed flexibility to respond to storms in Manitoba • Expanded Vote on Campus program well received by electors • Mail-in voting met expectations despite an increase in demand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and improve processes in order to be in a position to accommodate larger numbers of mail-in ballots at the next general election. • Pause the use of vote on campus services for the 44thth general election given the time needed to prepare and the current status of the pandemic situation. • Examine options for establishing a sustainable solution to ensure faith-based communities are supported when a general election falls on a religious holiday. The Chief Electoral Officer may provide recommendations to Parliament for legislative change to enable possible solutions.

Departmental Result 2: Canadians receive electoral information and services that meet their needs

Findings	Action items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Returning officers reported a significant decline in satisfaction with poll worker training tools • Election workers satisfied with election materials • Simplified forms improved recordkeeping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to offer shifts and breaks while increasing flexibility and opportunities for returning officers to adapt work schedules to their worker pool and operational reality. • Adapt poll worker wages to ensure they are competitive with those offered by similar employers. • Improve the poll worker staffing model and communications to provide returning officers with more flexible staffing options during long voting hours and days. • Review and improve the content and delivery of training programs and tools and identify opportunities to simplify and clarify procedures and practices. • Allow returning officers and trainers more time to become familiar with the training material, including before the writs are issued. • Simplify training and duties, including by reducing the length of training and the complexity of the closing procedures. • Enhance the information that is shared at each stage of recruitment and provide all relevant information to workers as early as possible. • Implement an integrated personnel management system that supports all stages, from hiring to compensation, and meets the operational needs of staff in the regions. (medium term)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Vote Canada program had a substantial impact on students' civic literacy • Educational resources well received 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare earlier for the delivery of Student Vote Canada, including shipping and storing election supplies in advance. • Streamline lesson plans and activities so they can be taught in a shorter time frame. • Make only minor revisions and updates to educational resources.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most electors satisfied with the information provided by Elections Canada • Voter Information Campaign contributed to electors' awareness of identification requirements • Canadians felt Elections Canada's ads were clear and useful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance the Voter Information Campaign in order to keep pace with the information environment and respond to the needs of Canadians.

Departmental Result 3: Canada maintains a fair, secure, and transparent electoral process free of undue influence

Findings	Action items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No security incidents detected • Polling location choice supported security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain partnerships with lead security agencies to protect the agency’s digital assets and monitor the information environment for threats and incidents that could affect the administration of the election. • Strengthen our cybersecurity posture to remain well positioned to anticipate, detect and respond to emerging security concerns related to the administration of elections. • Monitor the environment for integrity threats and refine mitigation and response activities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procedures at the polls followed • List of electors was the most up to date ever • Elections Canada viewed as the official source of information • Special ballot process perceived as secret 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer potential contraventions of the <i>Canada Elections Act</i> to the Commissioner of Canada Elections for investigation. • Establish a more robust regulatory policy function, including an electoral integrity policy framework. • Maintain the National Register of Electors and refine its processes, and collaborate with various electoral management bodies, other federal departments and agencies, and other key partners with the goal to have elector information that is as current and accurate as possible in advance of an election. • Implement and optimize processes for the Register of Future Electors in order to provide more opportunities to reduce the registration gap in the National Register of Electors for 18–24-year-olds—the group with the lowest registration rates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections Canada’s guidance and training sessions well received • New method for filing electoral campaigns returns successfully implemented • Online publication of electoral campaign returns delayed as a result of the pandemic • New process for reimbursing electoral expenses successfully implemented • New privacy rules successfully implemented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver training and guidance material for parties and candidates to help political entities comply with the <i>Canada Elections Act</i>. This includes focusing on the ease of use of the new portal and providing information on how to file documentation electronically. • Complete post-election audits of the campaign returns of the political parties and candidates that participated in the 43rd general election.

Departmental Result 3: Canada maintains a fair, secure, and transparent electoral process free of undue influence

Findings	Action items
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity of new rules for third parties created challenges • New reporting requirements improved transparency but placed additional burden on third parties • Political financing tools and resources were helpful • Challenges with issue advertising 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete the post-election audits of the financial returns of third parties that participated in the 43rd general election. • Enable third parties and their financial agents to meet their obligations under the political financing regime, including by updating the handbook with examples of questions posed during the 43rd general election.