



Office of the  
Chief Electoral Officer  
of Canada

# Retrospective Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021



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## Executive Summary

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament; it is composed of two entities: Elections Canada and the Commissioner of Canada Elections. This report evaluates Elections Canada's performance in the administration of the 44th general election, held on September 20, 2021. The report summarizes Elections Canada's success in delivering an election, as measured against established expected outcomes and performance indicators, and identifies areas for improvement going forward.

For over 100 years, Elections Canada has delivered free and fair federal elections, providing opportunities for Canadians to take part in an electoral democracy. The agency is committed to listening to and engaging with Canadians, broadly sharing information, collaborating to expand its capacity and effectively managing its resources. Elections Canada focuses on maximizing the impact of its efforts and strives to continually modernize and improve its services.

### Assessment of Elections Canada's performance

Logistically, the general election of 2021 was the most complex election ever, marked by regional and local challenges that required a high level of adaptability. This included planning a general election not only during a pandemic but also during major wildfires in British Columbia and a hurricane in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a result, the Chief Electoral Officer used his authority to adapt provisions of the *Canada Elections Act* during the election period, or within 30 days after the election, due to unusual, unforeseen circumstances or emergencies. Examples of the adaptations to the Act include locating offices outside electoral districts, developing alternative options for voting in long-term care (LTC) facilities, correcting issues of erroneous information, and issuing transfer certificates so that electors could vote at other polling places. A detailed report of the adaptations can be found in the Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021.

Elections Canada was able to adapt its voting services by:

- Preparing for an increase in voting by special ballot.
- Adjusting training and manuals to support a single-poll-worker model for in-person services.
- Providing options for electors in seniors' homes and LTC facilities.
- Preparing for large quantities of personal protective equipment and materials.

Public health measures varied across regions and posed one of the greatest challenges for planning the election. Elections Canada's pandemic task force allowed the agency to coordinate with authorities across the country and adjust measures to meet local requirements. As a result, Elections Canada demonstrated adaptability in the 44th general election, and it is committed to continually evolving and improving its services based on the experience of each election.

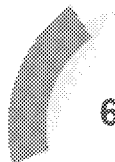
In the 44th general election, Elections Canada safely served 17.2 million Canadians in 338 electoral districts. According to the results of the National Electors Study carried out for this

election, published in the fall of 2022, 95% of electors said they felt safe voting in person at a polling place when considering the health and safety measures for COVID-19 that were in place at the polls. Most electors (89%) also thought they were well informed about the health and safety measures for COVID-19 that were in place at the polls for the election. According to results from the [Labour Force Survey](#) released in February 2022, only 2% of non-voters reported that they did not vote due to reasons related to COVID-19. Of these responses, approximately two thirds were related to being worried about contracting the virus. The remaining one third was made up of people who were either sick with COVID-19 and/or self-isolating, people who disagreed with holding an election during the pandemic and people who were dissatisfied with the protocols put in place to allow for safe voting.

Overall, 97% of electors were satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff in the 44th general election, and 96% of electors were satisfied with their overall voting experience. Despite the challenges in this general election, these results are comparable to those from the 43rd general election. However, some electors previously known to face barriers to the electoral process continue to face some challenges.

Elections Canada met expectations and successfully delivered the 44th general election. The agency will continue to improve its services to meet the expectations of Canadians. The agency will also continue to explore innovative approaches to delivering electoral services to Canadians. Specific commitments are included in response to the detailed findings of this performance assessment.

More information on the agency's activities to prepare for, deliver and close the 44th general election is provided in the [Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021](#).



# Election at a Glance

## Election Day



September 20, 2021

17.2 million Canadians cast a ballot

**62.6%**

voter turnout

5.9 million Canadians voted at the advance polls

**20.8%**

increase over 2019

**10.2** million Canadians voted on election day



**71,610**

polling stations

**94%** of polling places were identified as being fully accessible



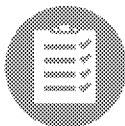
**338**

Electoral districts held elections

Involving 338 returning officers and 31 field liaison officers, and more than 195,000 election workers (18,000 office staff and 177,000 poll workers) were hired and trained

## Satisfaction with Elections Canada's Services

Elections Canada conducted seven public opinion research projects for this election



The National Electors Study surveyed electors twice:



**During the election**

53,731 electors



**After the election**

39,568 electors

**96%**

Voters were satisfied with their voting experience

**98%**

Electors who responded to the survey had a positive perception of the administration of the election

**87%**

In-person voters were satisfied with the services provided by Elections Canada staff



Elections Canada surveyed 1,075 candidates

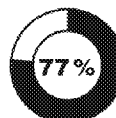
**2019**

**89%**

**2021**

**86%**

Candidates were satisfied with Elections Canada's services



Candidates thought that it was easy to comply with the nomination requirements

### Election Security and Integrity



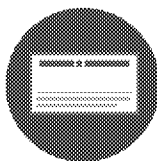
87%

Electors thought Elections Canada ran the election fairly

91%

Electors had a high level of trust in the accuracy of the election results in their riding

### Special Ballot



**1,275,226**

electors requested a special ballot



This represents an increase of

82%

over 2019, when 700,642 special ballots were requested

### Health and Safety



89%



Electors felt well informed about the health and safety measures for COVID-19 that were in place at the polls

95%



Electors who voted in person said they felt safe during their visit to the polling place

2%



Non-voters reported that they did not vote for reasons related to COVID-19

Due to process changes to accommodate the pandemic, voters reported that it took an average of 13 minutes to vote in person in 2021:

At polling places on election day



At the advance polls



At local Elections Canada offices



This is five minutes longer than in 2019, when the average time was eight minutes.





## Methodology

Elections Canada developed a framework to guide the assessment of its performance in delivering the 44th general election. This framework builds on the agency's departmental results and identifies the expected outcomes it aims to achieve for Canadians.

The agency's performance was assessed against the following expected outcomes identified before the election:

- The health and safety of Canadians is protected when voting.
- Electors have access to a variety of inclusive voting options that meet their needs.
- Political entities receive the support and information they need to meet the requirements of the *Canada Elections Act*.
- Canadians have confidence in the integrity and security of the electoral process.
- Returning officers are adequately supported in the administration and delivery of the election.

In assessing its performance, the agency considered public opinion research with additional post-election analyses, official reports and audit findings, stakeholder feedback and research. This report is also informed by qualitative information and quantitative data from more than 40 subject matter experts across the agency. Findings and action items were derived from:

- Feedback from subject matter experts, including post-election analyses.
- Feedback from key stakeholder groups.
- The Returning Officers' Report of Proceedings Summary for the 44th general election.
- Action items from the 43rd general election.
- The independent audit report on the performance of the duties and functions of election officers, completed by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The assessment and related findings are divided into three sections: Electoral Services, Electoral Integrity and Support for Returning Officers. Each section includes specific commitments to address the findings of this report and ensure continuous improvement overall.

This retrospective report supports Elections Canada's commitment to results-based management and the capacity to identify areas for improvement going forward.







## Electoral Services

Elections Canada's mandate is to ensure that Canadians can exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate. To provide a positive voting experience for Canadians, Elections Canada must deliver the right information and services at the right time.

A key indicator of Elections Canada's success is the overall level of satisfaction that voters expressed with the voting experience. The agency also considers, as a key measure, the percentage of non-voters who reported not being able to exercise their right to vote because of issues with the electoral process.

Based on the results from the [National Electors Study for the 44th Canadian federal election](#), which focuses on electors' perspectives on the administration of the 44th general election, the percentage of electors who were satisfied with their voting experience remains high, at 96%. This is similar to the level obtained in 2019 for the 43rd general election, when 97% of electors were satisfied.

Among electors who did not vote, issues with the electoral process accounted for 7% of the reasons that electors did not cast a ballot. This was one of the findings of the [Labour Force Survey](#), carried out by Statistics Canada in October 2021 and released in February 2022, which included questions supplied by Elections Canada. This marks a two-point increase over the 2019 election, when electoral process-related reasons were cited by 5% of non-voters, and is similar to the 2015 result (8%). Similar to 2019, two reasons together accounted for more than half of all the reasons cited for not voting: not interested in politics (32%) and being too busy (24%).

As part of the preparations for the 44th general election, Elections Canada identified three specific outcomes that it expected to achieve for Canadians:

1. The health and safety of Canadians is protected when voting.
2. Electors have access to a variety of inclusive voting options that meet their needs.
3. Political entities receive the support and information they need to meet the requirements of the *Canada Elections Act*.

### **Objective 1: The health and safety of Canadians is protected when voting**

Sensitive to the fact that, for Canadians to feel safe exercising their right to vote, they would require details regarding the additional health and safety measures that would exist at the polls, Elections Canada developed and implemented a health and safety information campaign. Using a variety of platforms, the campaign aimed to inform Canadians of the measures the agency was putting in place to ensure the health and safety of both electors and election workers.



Elections Canada also developed a repository of pandemic information that was tailored to particular regions or electoral districts. These pandemic election toolkits enabled election workers to keep track of changes and protocols—for example, by including:

- Updates to polling place layout requirements so that physical distancing among election workers, electors, candidates and observers at the polls could be maintained.
- Information on the use of protective barriers and face shields for election workers.
- Information on the cleaning of frequently touched surfaces.
- Letters of support from chief medical officers.

As well, all training materials and procedures for election workers were updated to include COVID-19-specific instructions. The materials continued to be updated, as required, so that returning officers could be confident that they were following the latest public health guidelines in their areas. This approach helped maintain the health and safety of workers and minimized disruptions in the electoral districts.

Elections Canada made it a priority to conduct health and safety analyses to ensure that polling places met the [federal guidelines on indoor ventilation](#). The agency provided protective equipment, health and safety materials and self-administered COVID-19 rapid tests to election workers. Due to supply chain challenges and the need for very large quantities, extensive coordination of logistics and procurement was required with the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) and suppliers. Elections Canada sought to work with health officials, landlords, returning officers and candidates to ensure that candidates were not present in such numbers as to violate public health measures, while at the same time ensuring that the transparency of the process was maintained.

The agency's focus on masking, ventilation and physical distancing ensured that the 44th general election was conducted as safely as possible for electors and election workers alike. According to the [Survey of Election Officers](#), 95% of election officers reported that the measures that had been put in place for COVID-19 made them feel safe while working at the polls. The 2021 [National Electors Study](#) showed that 95% of electors felt safe voting in person at a polling place, given the health and safety measures that were in place.

### **Finding: The changes to Elections Canada's procedures and communications products ensured that electors and election workers felt safe**

Due to the changing nature of the pandemic, Elections Canada had to adapt its plans and processes to the different health and safety requirements in provinces and territories across the country. To that end, Elections Canada established direct contact with provincial and territorial public health authorities before the election and communicated with them regularly until election day to ensure that health measures could be adjusted and updated as required. Elections Canada collaborated with PHAC and local health authorities to remain agile and flexible in the face of constant change.

Elections Canada established a COVID-19 task force to coordinate communications with external partners and make policy recommendations about pre-screening, mask wearing,

physical distancing, entry registers, vaccine passport requirements and curfew application. Through this work, the agency developed, monitored and adjusted, as required, a range of measures that would significantly reduce the risk of COVID-19 exposure at local Elections Canada offices and polling places. Effective collaboration ensured that these measures were implemented and that instructions were clear, were up to date and aligned with public health guidelines. Based on feedback from a majority of election administrators, election workers and electors followed the COVID-19 guidelines during the event, thereby confirming the relevance and clarity of the instructions.

Elections Canada also paid careful attention to threats to election security. Working within the bounds of its legal mandate, the agency collaborated with government departments and agencies that are charged with protecting public security as well as with local law enforcement. Security experts within the agency worked closely with these external security partners to ensure the safety and security of the Canadians who participated in the election. The agency maintained open channels of communication, which ensured that plans for all polling places across Canada included rigorous physical safety requirements.

During the event, returning officers in 111 of the 338 electoral districts requested and received an increase in their budgets for security at polling places. Elections Canada recorded 102 security incidents, 78 of which required police intervention. The agency ensured that there were appropriate security and safety measures and plans in place to enable returning officers to manage these incidents effectively and that impacts on voters and voting operations were minimized. Many incidents at the polls involved electors refusing to wear a mask, and most protests were related to either mask mandates or vaccination policies. Election workers were able to resolve most situations at polling places by respecting an elector's medical exemption or explaining the local public health requirements. Previous general elections had not had a significant number of security incidents; thus, tracking had not generally been performed.

### **Finding: Collaboration was key to planning a safe election**

### **Going forward**

Elections Canada will continue to build relationships with key partners to protect the health and safety of all participants in the electoral process—including all electors, election workers and candidates. The agency will also maintain the pandemic task force to help prepare for the next election, should it also be conducted under pandemic circumstances. Building on the lessons learned in the 44th general election, the agency specifically commits to:

- Review and update health, safety and security procedures and tools—including protocols, instructions and comprehensive training packages—for field and Elections Canada headquarters (ECHQ) staff.
- Communicate early on about the convenience of voting by special ballot and provide more information on how to submit these ballots.
- Leverage existing procurement vehicles through PHAC and PSPC to secure sufficient protective equipment and safety materials.



## Objective 2: Electors have access to a variety of inclusive voting options that meet their needs

The Voter Information Campaign for the 44th general election was a national, multimedia advertising campaign that provided information on when, where and ways to register and vote. This campaign was designed to reach the widest possible audience and position Elections Canada as the official source of information on the electoral process. According to the 2021 [National Electors Study](#), communications products for the 44th general election reached their intended audiences and were clear and concise, despite the changing environment caused by the pandemic. After the election, 85% of electors recalled, unaided, that they had seen or heard Elections Canada advertising communications during the election. When presented with a selection of advertisements, the vast majority of survey respondents agreed that the ads were clear (85%) and provided useful information (85%).

### Advertising campaign included:

Print, radio and TV ads in Inuktitut

Print ads in nine ethnocultural languages

Radio and TV ads in 30 ethnocultural languages

Digital ads in seven ethnocultural languages

Print ads in accessibility publications

The results also indicated that the agency is recognized by Canadians as the authoritative source of information on the electoral process. According to the [National Electors Study](#), 66% of electors mentioned Elections Canada as the organization that first came to mind for information about the voting process; this represents a four-point improvement over 2019. In the post-election survey, 96% of electors who completed the post-election survey reported feeling informed about when, where and how to vote, including 74% who said they felt very informed.

Elections Canada uses the voter information card (VIC) as its primary means of communicating with Canadians about where and when they can vote. The deadline to have all the VICs in the mail was August 27, 2021, as mandated by the [Canada Elections Act](#). As a result of the challenges involved in finding polling places because of COVID-19, Elections Canada was not able to meet this deadline. However, it mailed approximately 85% of all VICs by September 6, 2021, just 10 days later; the remaining 4.7 million were mailed by September 15, 2021. In total, Elections Canada mailed approximately 27.7 million VICs to electors whose names appeared on the preliminary lists of electors. Despite the delays, the vast majority of Canadians received a timely and accurate VIC. More information on VICs and VIC delays is described in the [Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021](#).

### Voter Information Card

During an election campaign, Elections Canada sends out a voter information card to every elector whose name appears on the preliminary lists of electors. It tells electors when and where they can cast their ballot on election day or at the advance polls. A card is also sent to every elector who is added to the list of electors during the revision period.

According to the [National Electors Study](#), 92% of electors recalled receiving a VIC in the 44th general election; this is similar to the level obtained in 2019 (93%). Among those who had received a VIC and voted in person in 2021, 92% brought their VIC with them to their polling place.

In tandem with sending the VICs, Elections Canada distributed the [Guide to the federal election](#). This guide provided information about voter eligibility, registration, ways to vote, identification requirements (including information about accepted pieces of identification), accessibility of polling places and the voting assistance tools and services available on election day. It also prompted electors to contact Elections Canada if they had not received a VIC. In total, the agency distributed 15,806,012 bilingual guides across Canada and an additional 10,159 trilingual guides in Nunavut. Elections Canada also published a version of the guide in 49 different languages, including 16 Indigenous languages, on its website.

### **Finding: Canadians had access to information on when, where and ways to vote during the pandemic**

More than 17.2 million ballots were cast in the 44th general election, including approximately 5.9 million during the four days of advance voting. The agency's efforts to refine the voting processes and enable a positive in-person voting experience appeared successful: according to the 2021 [National Electors Study](#), 96% of electors were satisfied with their overall voting experience, including 80% who were very satisfied. This finding is similar to the level of satisfaction obtained following the 43rd general election, when 97% of electors were satisfied and 80% very satisfied with their overall voting experience. For the 44th general election, the agency introduced a new, single-poll-worker model for servicing electors in person because changes to the health and safety protocols, as well as anticipated recruitment challenges, required replacing the two-person model it had traditionally used. While service time to electors increased in some electoral districts, particularly at the advance polls, there appeared to be little impact on overall elector satisfaction.

In the [National Electors Study](#), voters reported that it took an average of 13 minutes to vote in person in 2021: 12 minutes at polling places on election day, 14 minutes at the advance polls and 14 minutes at local Elections Canada offices. On average, it took five minutes longer to vote in person in 2021 than in 2019, when the average time was eight minutes. Many electors reported longer-than-usual wait times during the 44th general election due to the reduced number of polling places in some electoral districts. Long lineups were notable in Toronto, Vancouver, Montréal and Ottawa. The agency recorded approximately 190 instances of long lineups; 20 minutes was the average wait time in these queues, and one hour was the longest. More information on wait times can be found in the [Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021](#).

### **Finding: Despite delays in some locations, Canadians remained satisfied with their voter experience**

Due to the pandemic, Elections Canada anticipated a significant increase in the number of requests to vote by special ballot, especially from electors wishing to receive and return their ballot by mail. To prepare, the agency assessed its capacity to handle a large number of requests for special ballots and subsequently adjusted its policies and procedures to be able to manage up to five million



requests. More than 1.2 million electors requested a special ballot during the 44th general election, compared with more than 700,000 during the 43rd general election; this represented an increase of 82%. The agency received, verified and counted more than one million special ballots received by mail, a significant increase from the 55,000 ballots received by mail in the 43rd general election.

For Canadians living abroad, submitting a special ballot by mail is their only voting option. As in past elections, verification notices were proactively sent to all electors appearing on the International Register of Electors to validate the information the agency had on file, including whether the electors were still abroad and, if so, at what address. Failure to respond resulted in the electors being removed from the Register; this avoided ballot kits being sent to electors who were no longer residing outside Canada or who had changed their address abroad and failed to advise Elections Canada.

To provide better service to electors living abroad, special ballot kits were pre-assembled. This meant that Elections Canada was able to start shipping out kits to international electors on August 16, 2021, the day after the writs were issued, to some 29,000 electors on the International Register of Electors. The unpredictability of international postal services has always impacted the number of ballots returned on time, but this situation was only exacerbated by the pandemic. Of the 55,696 special ballots issued to international electors, 38,955 were returned, of which only 27,035 were valid. As per the *Canada Elections Act*, 11,920 were set aside, including 11,699 that arrived after the legal deadlines.<sup>1</sup>

Elections Canada developed additional tools, procedures and communications products to serve those choosing to vote by special ballot. New functionality was added to the Online Voter Registration Service to allow electors to register to vote by special ballot from within their electoral district as well as to view the status of their special ballot request. Elections Canada also partnered with Canada Post to make applications to vote by special ballot available in 63 postal outlets; approximately 920 electors used this service. In addition, election administrators deployed designated ballot boxes (one per polling place on polling day) to provide an additional option for electors to return their completed special ballot if they had not had time to mail it in.

The agency also conducted workflow simulations to determine the workforce and space required for local Elections Canada offices to manage special ballot requests in a timely manner. As a result, approximately 1,500 computers were repurposed and installed in local offices to support the processing of applications. The agency also undertook daily monitoring of requests across the country and provided advice to returning officers on managing the number. Where and when numbers warranted, Elections Canada encouraged and supported returning officers in establishing extended shifts to help manage the increase in workload.

### Special Ballot

A special ballot can be sent by mail, or filled in at a local Elections Canada office, by electors who cannot go to their polling places. An elector must first apply to Elections Canada for registration before 6:00 p.m. local time on the sixth day before polling day. The special ballot differs from a regular ballot in that the elector writes in the name of his or her preferred candidate.

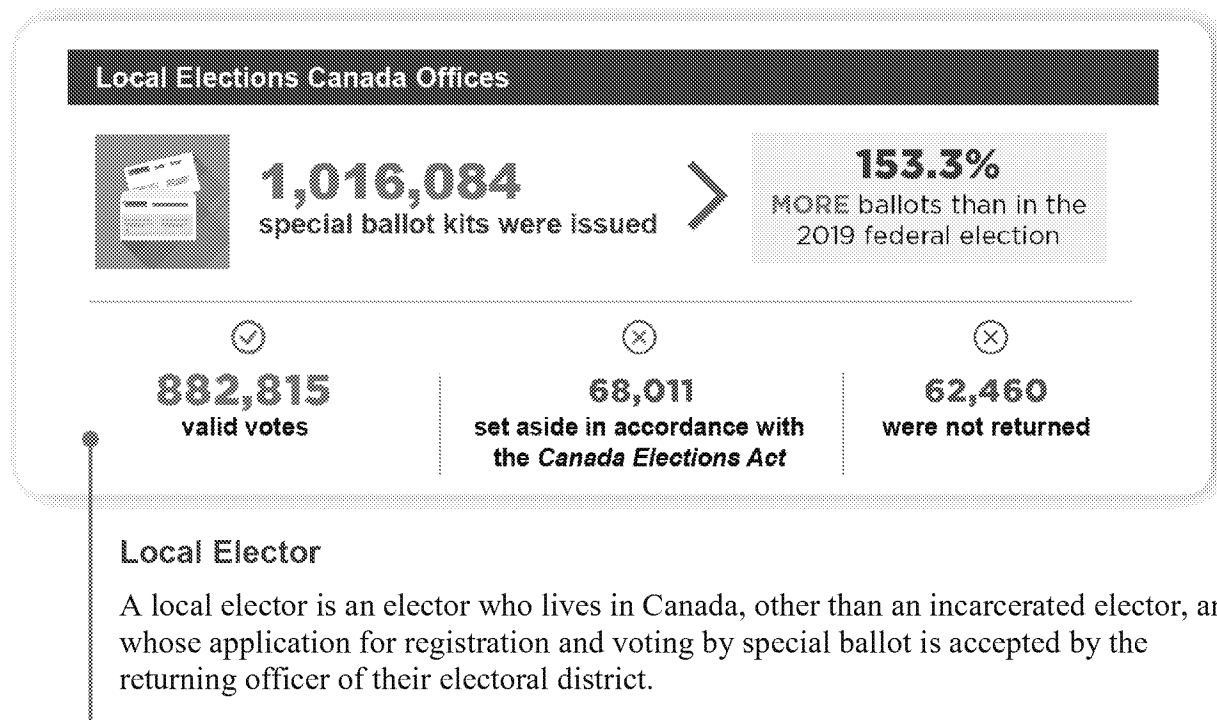
<sup>1</sup> Further detail on special ballots is available in the [Special Ballot Report: 44th General Election](#).

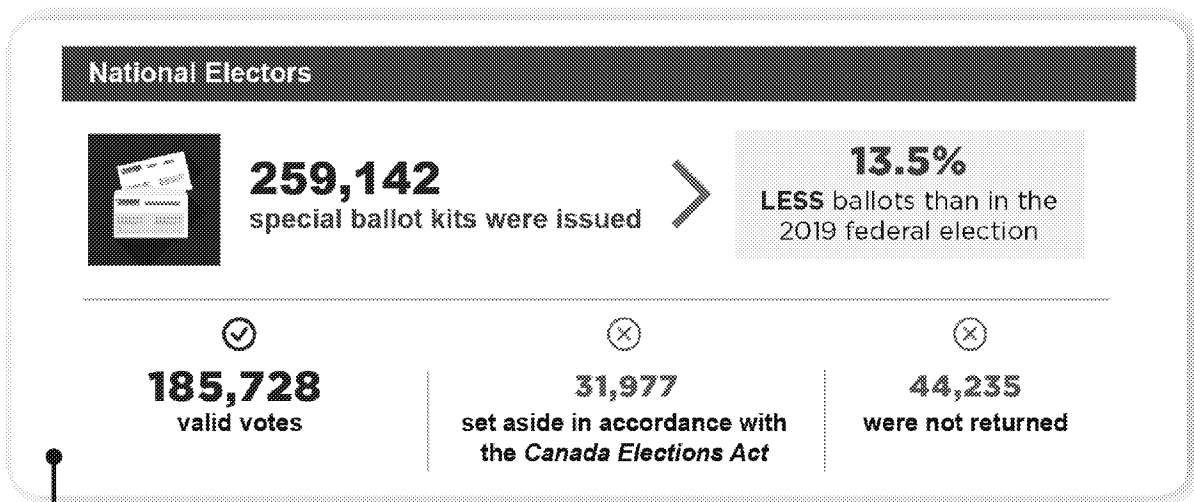


Electors who wanted to vote by special ballot were required to make an application for registration after the issue of writ, but before 6:00 p.m. local time on the 6th day before polling day, as required by the *Canada Elections Act*. This rule is in place to preserve the integrity of the process: it provides enough time for returning officers to prepare, produce and print the lists in time for polling day; these include printed lists in remote areas. Electors were responsible for returning their special ballot by mail, in person at their local Elections Canada office or in person in the boxes designated to receive special ballots at election day polling places. Special ballots that were received after the relevant deadlines had to be set aside.

For the 44th general election, a total of 99,988 outer envelopes were received by Elections Canada but had to be set aside and left unopened in accordance with the Act. Of these, 92,542 were set aside because they were received after the legal deadlines; they represent nearly 93% of all outer envelopes set aside. An additional 106,695 special ballots were never returned to Elections Canada. More information can be found in the [Special Ballot Report: 44th General Election](#).

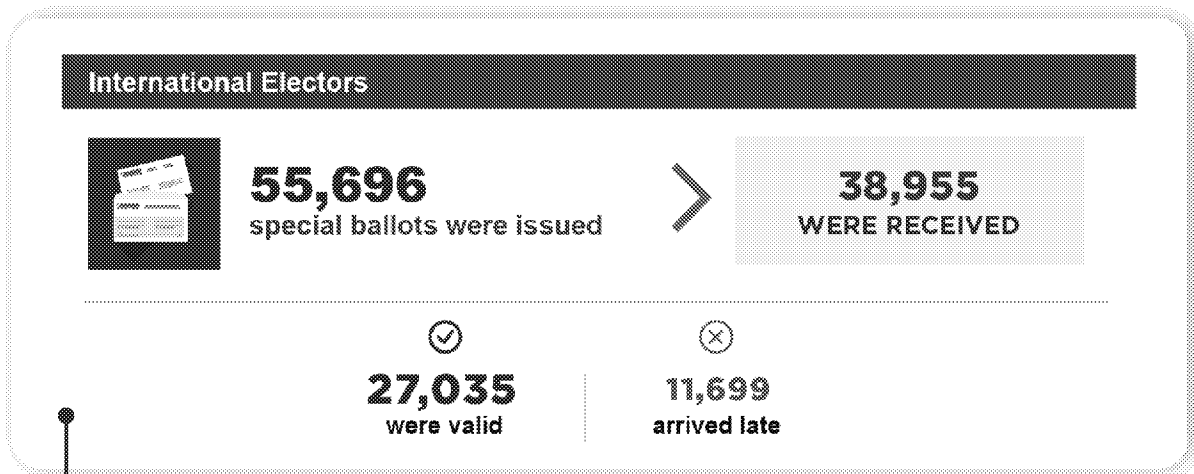
Following the election, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada proposed a series of recommendations for Parliament that would improve some of the limitations of the special ballot. These recommendations can be found in [Meeting New Challenges: Recommendations from the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada following the 43rd and 44th General Elections](#).





**National Elector**

A national elector is an elector who resides in Canada, other than an incarcerated elector, and whose application for registration and voting by special ballot is accepted at ECHQ and at local Elections Canada offices<sup>2</sup> other than in the electoral district where they are registered.



**International Elector**

An international elector is an elector who resides outside Canada.

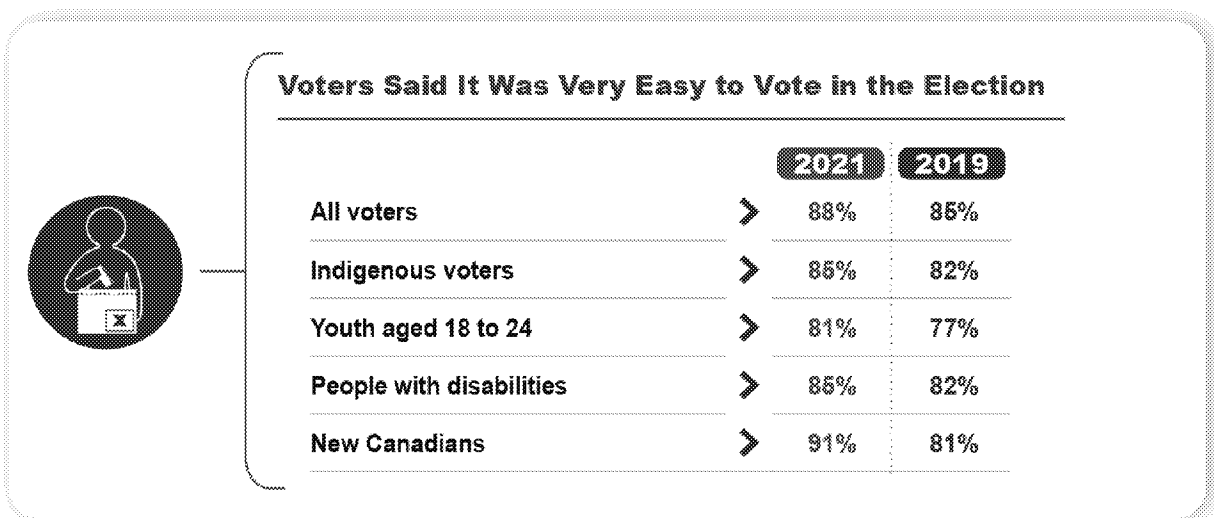
**Finding: Although Elections Canada was prepared to meet the increased demand for special ballot voting, electors who voted by mail had difficulties returning their ballot before the deadline**

<sup>2</sup> Offices managed by a returning officer or additional assistant returning officer. In large electoral districts, there may be other satellite offices where applications for special ballots are not accepted.

Elections Canada’s research has shown that certain groups of Canadians experience barriers to participating in elections. These barriers can take the form of informational barriers—such as not knowing what the different voting methods are or not knowing how to work in an election—and access barriers—such as not being able to vote in their first language or having to vote at a polling station that does not have an access ramp. Building on initiatives already in place to reach these target groups, Elections Canada continues to make the electoral process accessible for people with disabilities; First Nations, Métis and Inuit electors; electors in LTC facilities; students and youth; and new Canadians.

## Outreach

The pandemic brought new challenges to communities already facing barriers to electoral participation and, in some instances, required the development of new health and safety protocols. National, provincial and territorial public health agencies identified Indigenous Canadians as a high-risk population, with even more concern for persons living on First Nations reserves.



Elections Canada mobilized a whole-of-agency operational response to the risks and challenges stemming from the pandemic. Health and safety guidelines were developed for Indigenous communities, along with specific guidelines for elections held on First Nations reserves. A very similar approach was taken with LTC facilities to protect the health of residents. To support both communities, targeted messaging was developed and shared with stakeholder organizations from the early spring of 2021 until mid-October 2021. Affected communities were offered other “no contact” options, such as voting by mail and coordinated special ballot voting, where kits were dropped off from the local returning officers. To support these alternative voting methods, remote training was also provided for individuals already in the community or facility.

The agency developed dedicated web pages and communications products that provided customized information for electors with disabilities and students as well as communications products for stakeholders to share with their communities on where, when and ways to register and vote. The agency’s [Inspire Democracy program](#) was used to increase the capacity to reach and disseminate information; over 65,000 information products were shared, including outreach materials in Indigenous (16) and other (33) ethnocultural languages. This effort minimized language barriers and supported the distribution of learning materials and Voter Information

Campaign materials in print, digital and alternative formats through community organizations and other stakeholder groups.

## Electors with disabilities

### Polling Place Suitability Checklist

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 site is considered accessible. Returning officers also evaluate whether a potential polling place meets security and technology requirements.

As at every election, Elections Canada worked to find polling places that were accessible to electors with disabilities. Due to the pandemic, schools and other usual polling places were generally unavailable. Leading up to the election, returning officers identified and confirmed alternative polling places and local Elections Canada offices in their electoral district. Once the election was called, there were added difficulties confirming polling places, and some landlords reversed their decision to rent spaces due to the emerging fourth wave of COVID-19. In some cases, returning officers were forced to lease commercial spaces to mitigate the loss of these traditional polling places.

On September 20, returning officers set up 61,197 polls,<sup>3</sup> representing a decrease of 3,474 polls (5.37%) over the 43rd general election. Despite using non-traditional polling places, they remained

accessible overall, with 94% meeting all 15 mandatory accessibility criteria.<sup>4</sup> In areas where selecting an inaccessible polling place was unavoidable, other voting options were made available to electors, such as voting by special ballot. Despite the pandemic challenges, the 2021 National Electors Study found that 97% of in-person voters with a disability found it easy to enter and access a polling place, the same result obtained in 2019.

Elections Canada also worked to improve its accessibility by distributing learning materials in print and digital format, videos in American Sign Language and Langue des signes du Québec and alternative formats, such as braille and large print. Elections Canada provided a variety of tools and services that made voting accessible throughout the voting process, such as magnifiers with a light; tactile, braille voting templates; and signature guides. According to the National Electors Study, 51% of electors with a disability in 2021 were aware of the tools and services available; this is similar to the level obtained in 2019, when 50% of electors with a disability were aware of the tools and services available.

<sup>3</sup> The numbers of ordinary polls were adjusted following the official voting results process, which occurred after the publishing of the Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021; therefore, these are the final numbers of ordinary polls (which may include some of the LTC facilities served on polling day).

<sup>4</sup> Accessibility data are validated, tracked and maintained by returning officers and monitored for quality assurance purposes by staff at ECHQ. Newly identified polling places are evaluated in person using the Polling Place Suitability Checklist, and existing polling places for which the checklist has already been completed are revalidated regularly with landlords in case of changes. During events, polling places are visited one week before polling day to ensure that there have been no changes that might adversely affect accessibility. Accessibility is also monitored on polling days; verifications are completed by poll workers before the polls open and throughout the day.

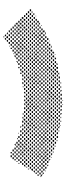
Notwithstanding these efforts, Elections Canada is aware that some electors who are blind or with visual impairments continue to experience challenges at the polls and that not all voting channels are equally accessible. In this regard, Elections Canada was made aware by an elector who is blind that the special ballot voting process presents specific challenges for electors with visual impairments, including navigating the online application process, difficulty in differentiating the inner and outer envelopes and the need to write the candidate's name on the special ballot. Electors who are blind or with visual impairments have also consistently highlighted the barriers that exist to the independent verification of the elector's mark on their ballot. While respecting the provisions of the *Canada Elections Act*, Elections Canada continues to work to address barriers to voting by special ballot and other voting options.

### **First Nations electors**

First Nations electors continue to face unique barriers to participating in federal elections including geographic complexities of remote and low-population-density communities. As outlined in the *Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021*, First Nations faced two additional barriers to voting in the 44th general election: forest fires, which displaced, or threatened to displace, several First Nations communities for most of the summer, and the pandemic, which forced certain communities to restrict access to non-residents.

Many outreach activities in First Nations communities were also disproportionately affected by the pandemic during the 44th general election, when compared with non-indigenous populations. This is especially true in northern regions, where communities are dispersed over large geographic areas or can be reached only by plane. Elections Canada contracted outreach activities to several Indigenous stakeholder organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). Outreach began in March 2021, with fax broadcasts to over 700 band offices and chiefs. Messaging encouraged early discussions with returning officers about suitable voting options and ensured that First Nations were aware of Elections Canada's new health and safety protocols. The AFN also made four rounds of telephone calls (two before the writs were issued and two afterwards) to band administrators on over 450 First Nations across Canada. Each call was supported by an email message containing links to the relevant information on the Elections Canada website. Messaging was also shared over social media and on over 75 Indigenous radio stations.

Polling places were set up on 351 First Nations reserves for the 44th general election. While this is a decrease from 389 in the 43rd general election, health and safety concerns related to the pandemic are seen as a contributing factor. Many First Nations restricted access to non-residents, and a number of stakeholder organizations, including the AFN, actively encouraged their membership to vote by mail.



In three fly-in communities in the riding of Kenora in northwestern Ontario—Cat Lake, Poplar Hill and Pikangikum—the election day polling place was cancelled and replaced by an advance poll to accommodate traditional hunting dates. This happened despite the fact that election day polls had been planned and advertised on the VICs that had been sent to electors, and it resulted in compromised service for electors in these communities. More information is available in the [Report on the delivery of voting services in Cat Lake, Poplar Hill and Pikangikum, Ontario, during the 44th general election.](#)

### **Electors residing in a long-term care facility**

In response to the pandemic, Elections Canada reviewed and updated the voting options for LTC facilities and seniors' residences. Targeted messages with information about health and safety precautions and alternative voting options were sent to facility administrators before and during the election period. In addition to the traditional, single-building election day polling station alternative voting options included:

- An adapted, early on-site polling station between Day 13 and Day 0 (for a maximum of 12 hours).
- Assisted special ballot voting.
- Voting by special ballot returned by mail.
- Voting at a local Elections Canada office.

Elections Canada also extended the voting period for mobile polls in LTC facilities; this made planning and recruitment easier for returning officers. This approach allowed returning officers to use staff or volunteers at the facilities themselves or advance or ordinary polling day staff on a different day. Using facility volunteers or staff reduced the risk of exposure to COVID-19.

Overall, 71% of facilities, representing 80% of electors in LTC facilities, opted to have on-site polls. In addition, 18% of LTC facilities (representing 13% of electors) were served by coordinated special ballot voting. In some cases, an LTC facility declined, or was not able, to host on-site services due to pandemic conditions; 11% of LTC facilities had their electors apply to vote by mail. A total 439 facilities<sup>5</sup> refused service, and this is estimated to have affected 15,875 electors. Electors residing in these facilities were merged into the nearest ordinary polls and received VICs advising them of their assigned advance and ordinary polls as well as providing information about their nearest local office.

### **Young electors**

Learning from previous elections, Elections Canada has explored a variety of initiatives to help increase access to voting for youth electors (electors between the ages of 18 and 24). Youth have historically had rates of electoral participation below the average; reasons relate to interest and motivation; life circumstances, such as living away from home; and barriers to accessing the vote, such as a lack of awareness of the voting process.

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<sup>5</sup> Facilities that were listed as having been permanently closed, or that no longer offered LTC services (e.g. because they had been converted to a hospital), have been excluded from these numbers.

In the previous two elections of 2015 and 2019, the agency opened temporary polling places in locations regularly frequented by youth, including on post-secondary campuses across Canada. Due to the lack of a fixed-date election, the pandemic and the uncertainty around student presence on campus, Elections Canada could not offer Vote on Campus for the 44th general election. Elections Canada communicated this information to key partners from the 43rd general election and published it on its website in September 2020 and in the [Retrospective Report on the 43rd General Election of October 21, 2019](#) in April 2021.

In addition to voting at their advance and election day polling places, students living away from home were able to use special ballots to vote in their ridings at a local Elections Canada office or by registering online to vote by mail. To inform students of these options, Elections Canada's Voter Information Campaign included promotional activities targeted to this group, including digital ads on screens in 141 campuses across Canada, as well as ad banners on various social media platforms and websites.

Despite efforts to inform national student associations about the suspension of the Vote on Campus initiative for this election, many students were surprised and upset that Elections Canada was unable to offer the service. Lessons learned suggest that students should be informed about major changes to the program earlier in the election cycle. Also, a more comprehensive communications and outreach approach—using national and provincial student associations and post-secondary organizations—would reach more students.

### Vote on Campus

Vote on Campus was an initiative piloted in 2015 on 39 post-secondary campuses as part of the agency's drive to enhance services to Canadians, and it was deployed more broadly in 2019. The aim was to offer additional options for registering and voting in locations that might be more convenient to youth electors, and voting was carried out by special ballot. Electors who were outside their riding during the election period, such as students living on campus away from home, were among those who could benefit from this opportunity.

### *Elections Canada provided opportunities to enrich future voters' understanding of the electoral process*

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

The pandemic environment and an election early in the school year brought new challenges and required innovative approaches to deliver the Student Vote Canada program. These included holding the first-ever virtual capacity-building events, providing learning materials in multiple digital formats to support different teaching environments and adding adaptations and safety protocols to the student election manual. These changes enabled teachers to use the Student Vote Canada materials with the same learning outcomes, no matter their environment. Elections Canada engaged a contractor, [CIVIX](#), to run the Student Vote Canada program, which included the "Democracy Bootcamps." These professional learning events were highly successful, and they enabled a national audience of 569 educators to attend, with participating schools in each of the 338 electoral districts. A recent evaluation of the Student Vote Canada program found that the changes were largely successful in improving the program's design, implementation, impacts and relevance.

Elections Canada's civic education program continued to provide educators with free learning resources and information about elections and democracy. During the 44th general election, 2,791 teachers' guides were downloaded, and there were 115,000 unique visitors to the dedicated [Elections and Democracy](#) website. Overall, the program reached an estimated 870,000 future voters.

### **Finding: Target groups continue to face barriers**

The agency recognizes that providing services to voters in the official language of their choice at polling places across the country is important. For the 44th general election, Elections Canada continued to work to ensure that voting services and information were available in both official languages. According to the 2021 [National Electors Study](#), 94% of voters in official language minority communities (OLMCs) were satisfied with the official language in which they were served in 2021; this result was similar to the level obtained in 2019, when 93% of voters in OLMCs were satisfied.

#### **Official Language Minority Communities**

Official language minority communities are groups of people whose maternal or chosen official language is not the majority official language in their province or territory—in other words, Anglophones in Quebec and Francophones outside Quebec.

Elections Canada also worked with the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages to optimize the complaints process and minimize the time between incidents occurring and the filing of complaints. A full 92% of the complaints received during the election period dealing with incidents that had taken place at the polls were resolved within a few hours, giving returning officers time to address the issues and prevent problems from recurring.



The agency received significantly fewer official languages complaints in 2021 than in previous general elections: to date, 111 complaints have been received, whereas 238 complaints were recorded in 2019. While it is difficult to determine the exact cause of this decrease in complaints, it is likely that the measures put in place by Elections Canada, the timing of the complaints coming to the agency's attention and the improvements made to the complaints-management process contributed to improving the provision of service in both official languages at the polls.

In general, for the 44th general election, the hiring of poll workers who were capable of providing services in both official languages was successful, and the majority of returning officers mobilized bilingual workers in their electoral districts. Despite these gains, the recruitment of bilingual workers remains a significant challenge in ridings where the official language minority population is less than 5%. In the 44th general election, these challenges were exacerbated by the early election, the pandemic and the labour shortage that affected many sectors.

Returning officers reported that organizations representing OLMCs were also willing to collaborate on recruiting election workers, and this had a positive impact on the number of workers who could provide services in both official languages. As part of a pilot project to facilitate the recruitment of poll workers capable of providing services in both official languages, Elections Canada put in place new initiatives that helped returning officers target more bilingual candidates for poll worker positions; these initiatives included listing organizations in the Targeted Outreach Program Repository, strategies for communicating to OLMCs, consultation with OLMCs, and three partnerships as part of the Inspire Democracy program.

### **Finding: Voters were satisfied with services in their official language**

#### **Going forward**

Elections Canada will continue to work to refine and optimize voting services and increase the accessibility of the electoral process so that all electors have an equal opportunity to vote. Elections Canada recognizes the importance of ensuring that electors can exercise their right to vote in a federal election, and it is committed to delivering inclusive electoral services. Going forward, Elections Canada will do the following:

- Examine how the business process at the polls can be further streamlined on the basis of the “first come, first served” model, including introducing electronic voters lists at the polls.
- Propose piloting of new voting processes or technology to address the accessibility issues raised by electors with visual impairments.
- Review how the agency engages with Indigenous peoples to plan and deliver public education and election services for those wishing to participate in the electoral process.
- Establish a Vote on Campus working group to consult and share information with stakeholders, including student groups and post-secondary institutions.
- Develop a sustainable model for voting options for LTC facilities.



### **Objective 3: Political entities receive the support and information they need to meet their requirements under the *Canada Elections Act***

For the 44th general election, Elections Canada updated its information on candidates and parties to make it easier for Canadians to present themselves as candidates. The agency offered newly revised training, handbooks, guidance and communications materials. Virtual information sessions were held leading up to and during the election period, and targeted communications were sent to support candidates on a broad range of topics. The agency also developed two documents, *Canvassing and Campaigning in Residential Areas and Public Places* and *COVID-19 Guidance for Candidates Collecting Elector Signatures*, to support candidates. Statistics showed that these publications were accessed over 1,500 times during the election period. In all, 86% of candidates were satisfied with the overall quality of services received from Elections Canada in 2021; this percentage was slightly lower than the level obtained in 2019, when 89% of candidates were satisfied.

Subject matter experts from across the agency enhanced training for the Political Entities Support Network (PESN) call centre agents. Training sessions and updates to the PESN Support Guide allowed agents to better serve clients by making prompt and consistent responses across multiple communications channels at key points in the electoral calendar, especially during the busy nomination period. This ensured that candidates and parties received authoritative information from Elections Canada on how to become a candidate.

In order to reduce the number of in-person contacts with election officers during the pandemic, the agency allowed candidates to make their solemn declaration by videoconference with returning officers. No complaints and very few inquiries were received about the use of this process. According to the *Survey of Candidates*, 77% of candidates found it easy to comply with the nomination requirements in 2021, similar to the 78% for the 43rd general election. In addition, 94% of candidates were satisfied with the returning officers' timeliness in processing their nomination in 2021.

To further support candidates and parties, Elections Canada provides the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC); it is an online tool that allows candidates and political parties to access electoral products, submit e-nominations, obtain services and file financial returns. Although the portal facilitated a reduction of in-person interactions and a decrease in the demand for physical materials, the use of the online nomination form remained below expectations. As the pandemic pushed processes online, only 13% of nominations were submitted through PESC, although this percentage rose from 9% during the 43rd general election.

To facilitate electronic filing of financial returns in PESC, the agency successfully developed a new tool to provide parties with up-to-date information on the status of candidates' filings. This tool allowed parties to monitor the compliance of candidates with filing requirements. A user guide and training video were also created to facilitate the use of PESC, and an advanced level of support for candidates and official agents was provided. As a result, there was an increased uptake in the use of PESC for electronic filings of financial returns: 53% of candidates and 18% of parties used the online submission process in the portal to file at least one required document, up from 41% and 15%, respectively, from the 43rd general election.

Overall, according to the [Survey of Candidates](#), 65% of candidates reported that they, or members of their campaign, had used the PESC portal to submit e-nominations, download election materials, submit financial returns or access post-election results or resources. This is a higher level than the one obtained in 2019, when the portal was reportedly used by only 42% of candidates. Overall, 76% of candidates who had used the PESC portal were satisfied with their user experience. This percentage is higher than that obtained in 2019, when only 65% of candidates who had used it said they were satisfied.

### **Finding: Candidates and parties remained satisfied with the overall quality of service they received from Elections Canada**

After the 43rd general election, Elections Canada committed to improving the tools and resources for third parties and their financial agents to meet the obligations of the political financing regime. For the 44th general election, the agency enhanced the suite of products and services it offered, including:

- Improving its third party manual by adding new content and additional examples.
- Updating the questions and answers related to third party rules on its website.
- Making training for third parties available in the Virtual Training Centre and adding training videos on its website on the topics of registration, regulated activities, financial administration and reporting requirements.

The registration and confirmation processes for third parties were also improved. This resulted in the delivery of timely services that met the needs of third parties. The agency received, processed and approved 105 applications for registration from third parties, and 88% of third parties received confirmation of their registration within two business days. Additionally, the agency provided third parties with information on their political financing filing obligations when it confirmed their registration.

For the 44th general election, third parties were able to file their financial returns electronically through PESC: 27% used the online submission process in PESC to file at least one required document.

However, there was a 31% reduction in the number of registered third parties from the previous general election. This is a change in the trend over the previous three general elections, which saw an increasing number of applications from third parties. This decrease may be attributed to the fact that the 44th general election was not a fixed-date event; as a result, there was no pre-election period, and third parties had less time to plan their activities.

Financial returns from third parties, including interim returns, were published at [Third Party Financial Returns for the 44th General Election](#) on the Elections Canada website.

#### **Third Parties**

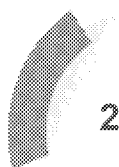
Third parties are organizations that want to participate in an election by promoting or opposing a party, candidate or nomination contestant. As in previous general elections, corporations, advocacy groups, professional and industry associations and labour organizations made up the majority of registered third parties.

## **Finding: Third parties received the information they needed to meet the political financing requirements**

### **Going forward**

Elections Canada will continue to engage political entities and candidates to ensure transparency and accountability. The agency's efforts to enhance services include the following commitments:

- Update political financing handbooks before the next general election.
- Update political financing training materials before the next general election.
- Provide video instruction and training materials for candidates and political parties on various aspects of PESC for the nomination process and other election administration–related topics.
- Promote the use of PESC among political entities to increase their use of it for political financing submissions.





## Electoral Integrity

A trusted election is one that is fair, secure, reliable and transparent. More than 100 years of expertise in electoral management has given Elections Canada a sound reputation in achieving the highest standards of accountability, integrity and security in the electoral process. Elections Canada has introduced the use of an electoral integrity framework to define the electoral integrity principles against which its programs and services can be measured and helps structure analysis and decision making to support consistent and rigorous application of the Canada Elections Act and achieve the agency's strategic vision.

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 respondents in the 2021 National Electors Study had a positive perception of the administration of the 44th general election; in other words, they thought that Elections Canada had run the election fairly, and they trusted the accuracy of the election results. This is similar to the level obtained in 2019, when 91% of electors had a positive perception of the administration of the general election.

The independent audit report on the performance of the duties and functions of election officers concluded that these officers had properly exercised the powers conferred on them on all days of advance polling and on election day and that they had properly performed the duties and functions required of them under the relevant sections of the Canada Elections Act. In addition, the audit concluded that the administrative controls established by Elections Canada, including manuals, training material and certificates and forms, were effective in supporting election officers in the exercise of their powers and the performance of their duties and functions in accordance with the Act.

As part of the preparations for the 44th general election, in addition to the expected outcomes from the Departmental Results Framework, Elections Canada identified a fourth outcome that it expected to achieve for Canadians:

4. Canadians have confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

### **Objective 4: Canadians have confidence in the integrity of the electoral process**

As in every election, many legal, procedural and technological safeguards were in place to protect the secrecy of the vote and the integrity of the voting process. As noted above, 90% of electors had a positive perception of the administration of the general election in 2021. More information on the various players and procedures involved in protecting Canada's federal electoral system is available in the Election Integrity and Security section of the Elections Canada website.

## **Risk assessments**

Elections Canada paid careful attention to threats and worked within the bounds of its legal mandate to protect election security. Integrity risk assessments were conducted in preparation for the 44th general election as part of Elections Canada's approach to safeguarding electoral integrity. A number of assessments focused on proposed changes to the electoral process related to the pandemic; for example, the single-poll-worker staffing model, polling place selection, recruitment and proposed health and safety measures. Other assessments supported the agency's overall environmental awareness and facilitated the identification of mitigation and response strategies. These strategies were documented in the form of integrity response playbooks and tested in cross-agency tabletop exercises.

## **Monitoring the information environment**

Ahead of the election, the agency developed a framework to counter inaccurate and misleading information. The framework defined processes and procedures to identify and address misinformation and disinformation on the voting process, whether the source of the information was domestic or foreign. By analyzing the information environment, Elections Canada was able to pre-emptively address inaccurate narratives related to the electoral process by implementing an integrity communications plan; this plan included adjusting all the agency's public communications, including its web content, to better address electors' potential integrity concerns and adding an integrity component to the Voter Information Campaign. For example, the agency created new web content that described its electoral safeguards and vote-counting procedures so that electors would understand all the measures that were in place to ensure the integrity of the process. The agency also created a suite of social media messages on various platforms, and these were shared widely at different times during the election period.

The agency, once again, developed an online repository of its official advertising and communications products; electors could verify the authenticity of information about the election by checking the repository. This effort, along with the agency's outreach and stakeholder-mobilization initiatives, served to reaffirm Elections Canada as the official source of information on the federal democratic process. According to the 2021 [National Electors Study](#), 93% of electors agreed that Elections Canada was the most trusted source of information about the electoral process in 2021; a similar proportion in 2019—92% of electors—agreed.

## **Adjustments to special ballot processes**

The agency implemented a range of measures to assist with the anticipated increase in demand for voting by special ballot, while maintaining the integrity of the electoral process. Some of the new measures included a new online application system, prepaid postage, a special information campaign and a ballot drop-off service at polling places. The procedures for validating and counting the special ballots were extended; as a result, the preliminary voting results took several days to complete to ensure that the necessary integrity protocols could be performed. To maintain confidence in the electoral process and results, Elections Canada was transparent and communicated early, and often, that the results would not be available on election night. For the first time, the agency invited observers to its processing centre in Ottawa to witness the count of special ballots to reinforce public confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

Elections Canada issued instructions under the *Canada Elections Act* and adjusted its own internal procedures to ensure that voting by special ballot remained accessible and secure. Some of these changes to the special ballot included:

Scope of Elector Group	Returns	Changes to Standard Operating Procedures
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Canadian Forces electors: members of the Canadian Armed Forces who voted at an established military poll.</li> <li>2. International electors: Canadian citizens who were residing outside Canada.</li> <li>3. Incarcerated electors: electors who were incarcerated in a provincial or federal correctional facility.</li> <li>4. National electors: electors residing in Canada who voted at a local Elections Canada office or by mail from outside their electoral district.</li> </ol>	<p>Special ballots from these groups were returned to, and counted by, ECHQ staff (i.e. at 440 Coventry Road).</p> <p>The deadline for ECHQ to receive these special ballots was 6:00 p.m. (Ottawa time) on election day (September 20, 2021).</p>	<p>Counting begins on a date set by the Chief Electoral Officer; if no earlier date is set, this is five days before election day. During the 44th general election, counting started on the 11th day before election day (Friday, September 10, 2021)—to handle the expected increase in the number of special ballots received and to respect the pandemic-related health and safety protocols—and finished on the day after election day.</p> <p>In this election, access to the 440 Coventry Road location was granted to representatives of political parties for the first time. They were thus able to observe the counting process for themselves.</p> <p>Instructions issued under the <i>Canada Elections Act</i> allowed for electors who did not receive or could not use their special ballot voting kit to cancel their request and vote at their polling place on election day by completing a Voting Status Certificate.</p>



Scope of Elector Group	Returns	Changes to Standard Operating Procedures
<p>5. Local electors: electors residing in Canada who voted at a local Elections Canada office or by mail and whose application for registration and special ballot had been approved by the office in the electoral district where they resided.</p>	<p>Special ballots from this group were returned to, and counted by, election officers at the local Elections Canada office in each electoral district.</p> <p>The deadline for election officers to receive these special ballots was the close of polls on election day.</p>	<p>Unlike the ballots received at ECHQ, those received at a local Elections Canada office cannot be counted until after the close of polls in that electoral district. During the 44th general election, the counting of local special ballots was deliberately delayed until at least the day after polling day to ensure that the necessary integrity checks could be performed.</p> <p>Instructions issued under the <i>Canada Elections Act</i> allowed for designated ballot boxes to be made available at most polling places on election day to accept special ballots from local electors who could not return their ballot by mail.</p> <p>Instructions issued under the Act allowed for electors who did not receive or could not use their special ballot voting kit to cancel their request and vote at their polling station on election day by completing a Voting Status Certificate.</p> <p>All special ballots collected in the specially designated ballot boxes, and any Voting Status Certificates completed, were returned to the local Elections Canada office after the close of polls on polling day and the end of the count of regular ballots. This enabled staff to carry out the necessary verification steps before the counting of local special ballots could begin.</p>

To maintain integrity, special ballots that did not meet the necessary criteria were set aside in accordance with the Act. A total of 1,068,543 special ballots were returned to Elections Canada. Of these, 99,988 were set aside, most of which arrived after the legal deadlines. An additional 106,695 special ballots were never returned to Elections Canada. More information on the counting of these votes can be found in the [Special Ballot Report: 44th General Election](#).



## Security

Elections Canada collaborated with key security partners and with other federal organizations, such as the Communications Security Establishment, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Public Safety Canada, Global Affairs Canada, the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency and the Public Health Agency of Canada, to modernize and secure its information technology infrastructure, protect electoral services and systems, and improve its overall security posture. Elections Canada met regularly with these agencies and departments to share information; discuss roles, responsibilities and protocols under potential scenarios; plan communications; and detect and respond to any threats to the integrity and security of the election.

In addition, as part of its efforts to integrate security safeguards into its day-to-day business, the agency provided employees and election administrators with training on how to safeguard information and perform proper cyber hygiene.<sup>6</sup>

### **Finding: Canadians had confidence in the integrity of the electoral process**

## Going forward

Elections Canada will continue to monitor the environment for threats and refine mitigation and response activities. Ongoing enhancements to practices, procedures and guidelines will further contribute to the integrity and security of the electoral process. The agency's continuous improvement efforts will also enhance the existing systems and tools available for political entities to support transparency. Elections Canada commits to:

- Develop tools to support engagement and communication with local law enforcement agencies to further develop relationships and ensure an effective response to security threats.

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<sup>6</sup> *Cyber hygiene* is defined in Ternium Plus as “a set of rules ... and recurrent practices that are related to information system security.”





## Support for Returning Officers

It is the returning officer who has the primary responsibility to deliver a federal election within their electoral district according to the Chief Electoral Officer's instructions. The support of ECHQ for the returning officer is key to enabling effective service to Canadians. For the 44th general election, returning officers had to adapt to a pandemic within a very short time; this response made the support they received from ECHQ all that more critical.

### Pre-event Assignments

The Chief Electoral Officer mandates returning officers to conduct pre-event assignments between electoral events. These include keeping files on prospective election officers and polling places up to date, maintaining contact with printing companies and party organizations, recruiting potential staff and identifying potential key staff to help meet obligations when the writ is issued.

A majority of returning officers indicated that, overall, the communications and support they received from ECHQ was effective and facilitated the delivery of the election.

According to the [Returning Officers' Report of Proceedings Summary](#) for this election, 63% of returning officers agreed that the overall support from Elections Canada was satisfactory.

Additionally, 79% of returning officers were satisfied that the training and information they had received prepared them for conducting the election. The report confirmed that the majority of returning officers agreed that the pre-event assignments and various training sessions in the pre-event period adequately prepared them, and their key staff, to deliver the 44th general election. Assignments were made available to returning officers in the summer leading up to the election. Of 338 electoral districts, 312 electoral districts (92%) participated in pre-event assignments.

As part of the preparations for the 44th general election, in addition to the expected outcomes from the Departmental Results Framework, Elections Canada identified a fifth outcome that it expected to achieve for Canadians:

5. Returning officers are supported in the administration and delivery of the election.

### Objective 5: Returning officers are supported in the administration and delivery of the election

The recruitment and retention of election workers remain the biggest logistical challenges that Elections Canada faces during each election. More than 200,000 election workers need to be hired and trained in a very short period of time 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 polling day procedures, meet accessibility and official language requirements and, for the 44th general election, adhere to evolving health

restrictions and mandates. For this election, returning officers were able to hire approximately 195,000 workers, including 18,000 office staff working in local Elections Canada offices and about 177,000 election workers assigned to polling places. This represents a decrease of approximately 37,000 compared with the 232,000 employees hired for the 43rd general election.

Elections Canada implemented several initiatives in an effort to mitigate the recruitment challenges of past elections. For example, the agency sought to gain efficiencies by adopting the single-poll-worker model. This enabled it to allocate resources optimally, thereby reducing the number of workers required to deliver in-person voting services. The agency also put in place contingency measures to support returning officers when recruited employees did not report for work; for example, returning officers and central poll supervisors were allowed to merge voting desks to enable voting to start immediately or enable the central poll supervisor or registration officers to open a poll while waiting for a standby deputy returning officer to arrive. During the 44th general election, about 14,000 poll workers failed to report for work, an increase from approximately 10,000 in the 43rd general election. Despite this increase, fewer than 0.6% of advance and election day polls opened late.

Elections Canada enhanced its recruitment campaign to address known recruitment issues and the anticipated recruitment challenges of conducting an election during a pandemic. The campaign ran from August 18 to September 18, 2021, with additional targeted campaigns in specific electoral districts that traditionally have difficulty recruiting workers. The agency also leveraged the use of social media on platforms like Snapchat, Spotify and YouTube to reach younger audiences and featured recruitment on the home page of its website for the entire election period. The recruitment campaign was aimed at raising awareness of paid working opportunities at the advance polls and on election day and encouraging potential workers to apply online. The campaign also outlined the health and safety measures that had been put in place for election workers. To ensure success, the agency tripled the campaign budget for the 44th general election so that it could target a larger audience.

To increase the agency's reach with audiences that face barriers to electoral participation, its [Inspire Democracy program](#) shared information about working in the election with community organizations and stakeholder groups. The program developed a webinar, "Working in a Federal Election," and sent information about job opportunities to a network of 619 stakeholder contacts. The youth community organizations contacted included the YMCA, the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, Apathy is Boring, Institut du Nouveau Monde, Citoyenneté jeunesse and Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française.

Elections Canada also implemented several measures targeting the recruitment of bilingual workers. These included:

- Promoting employment opportunities in official language minority communities (OLMCs).
- Creating a database, in collaboration with Canadian Heritage, of more than 400 local and regional organizations representing OLMCs, which all returning officers could access in order to recruit bilingual workers.
- Working with returning officers to increase the number of community relations officers for official language minorities; these officers are responsible for engaging with members of OLMCs and encouraging them to work at federal elections.

Recruitment efforts were also made in Indigenous communities before and during the election. Between August 5 and 19, 2021, the AFN made calls to 400 First Nations communities to promote employment opportunities with Elections Canada. Information about employment opportunities was also sent to more than 700 band offices and First Nations.

Finally, it is important to note that the new regional recruitment coordinator position gave returning officers access to additional recruitment support. According to the Returning Officers' Report of Proceedings Summary, the coordinator was an important player in the recruitment of bilingual poll workers in some electoral districts. However, some returning officers had difficulty understanding the scope of the position, and some struggled to effectively leverage and integrate it into poll operations.

### **Finding: Despite a range of measures in place to assist recruitment, it remains major challenge**

Following the 43rd general election, Elections Canada revised the training strategy for returning officers. In collaboration with subject matter experts across the agency, approximately 40 hours of training materials were prepared and deployed through six distinct virtual training courses. The agency also updated the election worker training program to reflect and support changes to the voting process as well as procedures related to the ongoing pandemic.

The agency deployed online training modules for recruitment, finance, voting operations and planning, technology and election worker training. The online courses supported the training of a record 4,583 staff in positions at local Elections Canada offices without any reported technical issues or outages. In previous elections, training accounts for key office staff had been granted centrally by ECHQ before personnel could access the training materials. The registration process often generated errors, and these caused delays for staff wishing to access the training materials under tight time constraints. For the 44th general election, the agency gave staff direct access to these courses. This change expedited registration for the online training and enabled quick access for field workers, which, in turn, reduced the demand for ECHQ support.

According to the Survey of Election Officers, 85% of election officers said that the training they received prepared them well to undertake their tasks during the 44th federal election; the percentage in 2019 was slightly higher (88%). Additionally, 97% of election officers reported that they felt informed about the COVID-19 safety measures in place when they first went in to work at the polls.

The independent audit of the performance of the duties and functions of election officers noted that the manuals, training materials, forms and certificates developed by Elections Canada effectively supported election officers. The auditors concluded that election officers properly exercised the powers conferred on them and appropriately performed the duties imposed on them under the Canada Elections Act.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that in-person learning and networking opportunities were significantly curtailed by the pandemic, and returning officers informally expressed regret at their inability to take advantage of them before the election.



## **Finding: Returning officers and election workers had the necessary training to perform their duties**

### **Going forward**

Elections Canada always strives to support election administrators and election workers to ensure that they are prepared to deliver services and information to Canadians in each electoral district. Elections Canada will continue to work with returning officers to ensure that the best supports are available. The agency will continue to develop and deploy training materials in support of all four training methods (classroom, videoconference, workbook and online). In response to the findings, Elections Canada specifically commits to:

- Leverage technology to reduce the number of election workers required to deliver an election.
- Promote the use of online training through various communication channels and explore options for increasing participation.
- Create more in-person, hands-on learning opportunities for election administrators, particularly in combination with regional and local meetings that are already being planned. While the agency plans to continue to expand the range of online, self-paced learning assets, election administrators may benefit from close discussion and collaboration with more experienced staff.
- Update returning officers' planning materials to ensure that returning officers are better informed about how to plan for splitting advance polls and adding extra deputy returning officers when they expect a high voter turnout.





## Summary of Findings and Action Items

### The health and safety of Canadians is protected when voting

#### Findings:

- The changes to Elections Canada’s procedures and communications products ensured that electors and election workers felt safe.
- Collaboration was key to planning a safe election.

#### Action items:

- Review and update health, safety and security procedures and tools—including protocols, instructions and comprehensive training packages—for both field and ECHQ staff.
- Communicate early on about the convenience of voting by special ballot and provide more information on how to submit these ballots.
- Leverage existing procurement vehicles through PHAC and PSPC to secure sufficient protective equipment and safety materials.

### Electors have access to a variety of inclusive voting options that meet their needs

#### Findings:

- Canadians had access to information on when, where and ways to vote during the pandemic.
- Despite delays in some locations, Canadians remained satisfied with their voter experience.
- Although Elections Canada was prepared to meet the increased demand for special ballot voting, electors who voted by mail had difficulties returning their ballot before the deadline.
- Target groups continue to face barriers.
- Voters were satisfied with services in their official language.

#### Action items:

- Examine how the business process at the polls can be further streamlined on the basis of the “first come, first served” model, including introducing electronic voters lists at the polls.
- Propose piloting of new voting processes or technology to address the accessibility issues raised by electors with visual impairments.
- Review how the agency engages with Indigenous peoples to plan and deliver public education and election services for those wishing to participate in the electoral process.
- Establish a Vote on Campus working group to consult and share information with stakeholders, including student groups and post-secondary institutions.

- Develop a sustainable model for voting options for LTC facilities.

## **Political entities receive the support and information they need to meet their requirements under the *Canada Elections Act***

### **Findings:**

- Candidates and parties remained satisfied with the overall quality of service they received from Elections Canada.
- Third parties received the information they needed to meet the political financing requirements.

### **Action items:**

- Update political financing handbooks before the next general election.
- Update political financing training materials and handbooks before the next general election.
- Provide video instruction and training materials for candidates and political parties on various aspects of PESC for the nomination process and other election administration–related topics.
- Promote the use of PESC among political entities to increase their use of it for political financing submissions.

## **Canadians have confidence in the integrity of the electoral process**

### **Finding:**

- Canadians had confidence in the integrity of the electoral process.

### **Action items:**

- Develop tools to support engagement and communication with local law enforcement agencies to further develop relationships and ensure an effective response to security threats.

## **Returning officers are supported in the administration and delivery of the election**

### **Findings:**

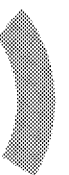
- Despite a range of measures in place to assist recruitment, it remains a major challenge.
- Returning officers and election workers had the necessary training to perform their duties.





**Action items:**

- Leverage technology to reduce the number of election workers required to deliver an election.
- Promote the use of online training through various communication channels and explore options for increasing participation.
- Create more in-person, hands-on learning opportunities for election administrators, particularly in combination with regional and local meetings that are already being planned. While the agency plans to continue to expand the range of online, self-paced learning assets, election administrators may benefit from close discussion and collaboration with more experienced staff.
- Update returning officers' planning materials to ensure that returning officers are better informed about how to plan for splitting advance polls and adding extra deputy returning officers when they expect a high voter turnout.





# Appendix A: Departmental Results Framework<sup>8</sup>



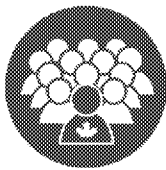
<sup>8</sup> This Departmental Result Framework was in place between 2018 and 2021. For the most current version of the current Departmental Result Framework, please consult the agency’s [Departmental Plan](#).



## Appendix B: Departmental Result Indicators

### Results Achieved for Electoral Administration and Oversight

#### Departmental Result



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

Departmental Result Indicator	Target	Actual Results
Percentage of electors included in the National Register of Electors	At least <b>94%</b>	<b>97%</b>
Percentage of polling stations that meet Elections Canada's key accessibility criteria	<b>100%</b>	<b>94%</b>
Percentage of electors' residences that are within 6 kilometres of their assigned polling place on polling day	At least <b>95%</b>	<b>92%</b>
Percentage of electors' residences that are within 12 kilometres of their assigned polling place on advance polling days	At least <b>95%</b>	<b>93%</b>
Number of electors who attended the Inspire Democracy workshop on becoming a candidate	At least <b>30</b>	<b>190</b>

#### Departmental Result



Canadians receive electoral information and services that meet their needs

Departmental Result Indicator	Target	Actual Results
Percentage of electors who are aware of the option to vote at a polling station on election day	At least <b>90%</b>	<b>88%</b>
Percentage of electors who are aware of the option to vote at an advance poll	At least <b>90%</b>	<b>61%</b>
Percentage of electors who are satisfied with the information provided by Elections Canada	At least <b>85%</b>	<b>94%</b>

## Departmental Result



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

Departmental Result Indicator	Target	Actual Results
Percentage of Canadians who have a positive perception of the administration of elections	At least <b>95%</b> of electors	<b>90%</b>
	At least <b>85%</b> of candidates	<b>78%</b>
Number of security incidents with a demonstrable effect on the electoral process	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Election officers' level of compliance with procedures at the polls	A deviation of less than <b>2%</b> for key controls	Within Tolerance <sup>1</sup>
	A deviation of less than <b>11%</b> for secondary controls	Outside Tolerance <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Controls are within tolerance if they do not lead to a major finding or pervasive observation.

<sup>2</sup> Controls are within tolerance if they do not lead to a major finding or pervasive observation. One pervasive observation was made relating to a single secondary control. More details are available in the report.