



Office of the
Chief Electoral Officer
of Canada

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



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Le directeur général des élections • The Chief Electoral Officer



January 27, 2022

The Honourable Anthony Rota, M.P.
Speaker of the House of Commons
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
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Dear Mr. Speaker:

I am pleased to provide the *Report on the 44th General Election of September 20, 2021*. I have prepared the report in accordance with subsection 534(1) of the *Canada Elections Act*, S.C. 2000, c. 9. Under section 536 of the Act, the Speaker shall submit this report to the House of Commons without delay. The report is referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

I request that you table this document on January 31, 2022.

The official voting results will be published in the coming months, in accordance with section 533 of the Act.

Yours sincerely,

Stéphane Perrault
Chief Electoral Officer



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Foreword

I am pleased to present Elections Canada's report on the 44th general election. This report describes the agency's activities to prepare for, deliver and close the event.

Over the coming months, I also plan on submitting to Parliament a recommendations report that will set out any amendments that, in my opinion, are desirable to better administer the *Canada Elections Act*. In addition, Elections Canada is evaluating its performance in conducting the general election and will identify other areas for improvement that do not require legislative action. We will publish the findings on our website later this year.

The 44th general election took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. To ensure that Canadians were safely able to exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate, we made many changes to our operations. These changes included, notably:

- new health and safety measures—such as personal protective equipment for election workers, hand sanitizer stations, plexiglass barriers, distancing signage and single-use pencils—at polling places and local Elections Canada offices
- expanded mail-in special ballot services, including a new online application portal and boxes designated to receive special ballots at polling places on election day
- updated training for election workers
- a single poll worker model, with one poll worker at each polling station instead of two
- a new health and safety component of the Voter Information Campaign, which included complementary campaigns targeting students and seniors and an enhanced recruitment campaign

Elections Canada also worked to be ready in case more Canadians chose to vote by mail using a special ballot than in previous elections because of pandemic-related health concerns. Ultimately, the agency received more than 700,000 special ballots by mail, a sharp increase from the roughly 55,000 received in the 43rd general election in October 2019. Canadians also increasingly took advantage of early voting services. More than 5.8 million electors voted over the four days of advance polls, an increase of approximately 21 percent from the nearly 4.9 million Canadians who voted in advance polls during the previous election.

Elections Canada also implemented a security strategy to protect the integrity of the general election. This strategy was designed to address potential attempts at electoral interference, whether through cyberattacks or the spread of inaccurate information about the electoral process. I am pleased to say that during the election there were no serious cybersecurity threats to Elections Canada's infrastructure beyond those faced daily by any federal government organization.

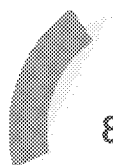
In the lead-up to the election, Elections Canada enhanced its voter registration services and the quality of the data in the National Register of Electors. Our outreach and promotional efforts in these areas focused primarily on increasing registration rates.

While early indications are that Canadians were generally satisfied with voting services offered by Elections Canada, the agency did experience a number of challenges in administering the 44th general election. We are carefully analyzing those issues and working on solutions for the future.

As with every general election, there is still much work to do to close the event, including auditing the campaign returns of political entities and publishing the official voting results. The agency will also conduct surveys of electors, political entities and election workers in order to complete comprehensive evaluations and assessments of key aspects of election delivery. In the context of a minority government, Elections Canada will do this work while maintaining its readiness to deliver the next general election, which could happen at any time.

In closing, I would like to recognize and thank the more than 195,000 election workers, returning officers, field liaison officers and other stakeholders who worked in particularly difficult circumstances to ensure that their fellow Canadians could safely exercise their democratic rights to vote and run for office in the 44th general election.

Stéphane Perrault
Chief Electoral Officer of Canada





1. Preparing for the General Election

A combination of circumstances related to the minority government context, the COVID-19 pandemic and new remote work arrangements made preparing for the 44th general election a unique challenge in the agency's 100-year history.

Elections Canada started to prepare for the possibility of delivering a pandemic election in spring 2020. As it continued its activities to close the 43rd general election and adjust, like so many other organizations, to the reality of most of its employees working remotely, the agency set up a task force to urgently develop the comprehensive plans and adaptive measures that would be needed if it had to deliver the 44th general election while the pandemic was still ongoing. Decisions and purchases had to be made early in the pandemic and on an ongoing basis as the agency's plans evolved.

During this preparatory period, Elections Canada focused on ensuring that its policies, procedures and protocols addressed pandemic circumstances and that returning officers¹ understood, and were ready to manage, how the pandemic might impact operations in their offices and at the polls.

A Safe Election

The agency's overarching priority was to ensure that Canadians would feel safe participating in the election, whatever their role.

Elections Canada developed safety measures in consultation with federal, provincial and territorial public health authorities, as well as with provincial and international electoral management bodies that were themselves preparing for pandemic elections.

The agency also updated or created new reference materials to guide election workers on how to implement changes to operations in the field. Examples include:

- *COVID-19 Guide for Election Administrators – Polling Places*ⁱ
- *COVID-19 Guide for the Service Centre*
- *COVID-19 Guide for Election Officers at the Polls*ⁱⁱ
- *COVID-19 Guide for Election Officers at the Polls – Supplement: Health and Safety Update*

To comply with physical distancing measures, Elections Canada developed a model for providing in-person voting services using a single poll worker, replacing the two-person model traditionally used in elections. Training guides and staffing instructions were revised accordingly.

¹ Returning officers are election officers appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer who are responsible for delivering and managing federal electoral events within the electoral district to which they are appointed.

Unlike provincial and territorial election agencies, Elections Canada could not take a uniform approach to addressing safety at the polls. Public health measures varied widely across provinces and territories, as well as at the local level. This lack of uniformity and the evolving situation risked creating confusion among electors, candidates and election workers about which rules applied to them.

The agency created the General Election Pandemic Intelligence (GEPI) Task Force to develop a coordinated approach to implementing the various response measures across the country. Its mandate was to ensure that Canadians nationwide could exercise their democratic rights to vote and be a candidate in a consistent, safe and secure manner. To achieve this and to maximize the impact of its efforts, the task force:

- established working relationships with public health authorities and security organizations across the country to get advice and guidance on how to adapt electoral procedures and tools in a pandemic
- received information regularly from health partners to monitor the pandemic environment
- proactively identified areas likely to need more attention based on information received from partners
- developed health and safety protocols, instructions and training packages
- facilitated the distribution of information within Elections Canada

Elections Canada also created a Pandemic Election Toolkit for returning officers. This resource, which was regularly updated with information specific to the returning officer's electoral district, served as a central point of reference for information related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The toolkit included:

- official letters from provincial and territorial chief medical officers providing more clarity about the conduct of general elections (i.e. public service versus public gathering)
- additional documents addressed to landlords, to support the selection of offices and polling places
- maps of electoral districts, with overlays of local public health areas to indicate which health authorities were responsible for which area
- other pandemic-related information, including contact information for local public health authorities

Working with Parliament

To help address the challenges related to the pandemic, Elections Canada submitted the *Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Administering an Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic*ⁱⁱⁱ to the Speaker of the House of Commons on October 5, 2020.



It recommended a temporary legislative response that would allow for desirable adjustments but leave the *Canada Elections Act* and the electoral system unchanged once the pandemic ends.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC) also carried out a study on delivering a potential election during the pandemic, hearing witness testimony from representatives of Elections Canada and other electoral management bodies, as well as from representatives of public health authorities and various stakeholder communities. Its report, *Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election*,^{iv} was issued in February 2021 and was closely aligned with Elections Canada's plans.

In December 2020, the government introduced *Bill C-19: An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response)*,^v which proposed a number of measures to adjust the *Canada Elections Act*^{vi} to the circumstances of the pandemic and included elements not found in Elections Canada's recommendations. One example of these new elements was the placement of boxes designated to receive special ballots at polling places, which Elections Canada added to its plans. Although Bill C-19 was not enacted, parliamentary debates, including those conducted at PROC, were useful in that they confirmed the agency's approach and inspired the addition of new measures.

Anticipated Challenges

Special ballots

Elections Canada prepared to receive as many as 5 million requests for special ballot voting kits from electors wishing to vote by mail—a scale 100 times greater than in the previous general election.²

While voting by mail has been an option available to all electors since 1993, it had never been widely used, especially by local electors (i.e. those who vote from inside their electoral district) who can get out to vote at their polling places. Expanding the capacity to receive and process applications for special ballots in a timely manner was a critical component of Elections Canada's planning. Voting by mail would be a safe alternative for electors who could not, or did not feel comfortable with, casting their ballot at a local office or polling station.

To protect the integrity of the electoral process, the *Canada Elections Act* provides for the issuing of special ballots on request, and only during the election period.³ Knowing that the uptake of—and curiosity about—the special ballot process was likely to be much greater for the 44th general election, Elections Canada communicated extensively with Canadians about this alternative voting method. To ensure that electors felt confident using this option, and trusted in the results of the election, the Chief Electoral Officer used every opportunity to explain the extra verification steps taken to ensure the integrity of voting by mail using a

² In the 43rd general election approximately 55,000 electors voted by submitting a special ballot by mail.

³ By contrast, in jurisdictions where they are the main method of voting—as is the case in some American states—mail-in ballots are typically issued automatically to all registered electors. In other jurisdictions, applications for mail-in ballots can be made ahead of the election period. At the federal level in Canada, such a system exists only for Canadian citizens living abroad.

special ballot. The agency developed infographics and videos, held technical briefings with political parties and the media, and invited observers to watch the count of special ballots at the agency's processing centre in Ottawa. Elections Canada also consistently communicated that—owing to the projected increase in the volume of special ballots cast and the enhanced integrity measures—results for some electoral districts might not be known on election night.

To simplify the special ballot application process for the 44th general election and be able to issue special ballot kits in a timely way, Elections Canada developed a system that allowed electors to request their kit online and upload the required proof of identity.⁴ A point-on-map feature was included to allow electors living at a non-standard address to identify their physical address by selecting a specific location on a virtual map. Elections Canada also added a feature that enabled electors to check the status of their special ballot request, and if an elector provided an email address when they applied, they automatically received confirmation when their special ballot application was received by the local office.

Elections Canada also provided, for the first time, pre-paid return envelopes. Apart from procuring the necessary supplies, the agency also had to purchase new machinery to process the increased volume of mail-in special ballots. Critical to the success of the operations was the fact that special ballots from electors voting by mail from within their electoral district were managed at local offices, in terms of both issuing and receiving the ballots. This minimized the time it took for these ballots to be sent to and returned by electors and divided the overall national volume into manageable amounts at the local level. Workflow simulations were conducted to assess the capacity of local offices to manage special ballot requests in a timely manner and to determine the workforce and space required. As a result, approximately 1,500 additional computers were purchased and set up in local offices to support the processing of applications.

Given the level of national interest in how many Canadians would opt to vote by special ballot, the agency published data on special ballot voting kits^{vii} showing the number of kits issued to electors, both in Canada and abroad, during the election.

Recruitment

As reported by the Public Health Agency of Canada,^{viii} the pandemic has disproportionately impacted Canada's seniors, with the majority of COVID-19 deaths⁵ occurring among adults aged 65 years and older. Elections Canada expected that these vulnerable Canadians, who made up a significant portion of the workforce for previous electoral events, would be reluctant to put themselves in a situation that would expose them to additional risk.

At the previous general election in 2019, Elections Canada struggled to recruit the large number of poll workers required to efficiently serve electors, falling about 16,000 workers short of its target of 248,000. For the 44th general election, the single poll worker model would reduce the number of workers required to deliver in-person voting services; however, additional workers would be needed to enforce physical distancing, clean surfaces, maintain

⁴ In past elections, local electors who applied to vote by mail had to send photocopies of their required documentation to an Elections Canada office.

⁵ Approximately 80 percent in 2020.

entry registers and ensure compliance with other health and safety measures. Consequently, the required workforce would again be over 200,000.

The agency increased the budget for its recruitment campaign and deployed regional recruitment strategies and resources. The pay rates of poll workers and election administrators and their staff, as set out in the *Federal Elections Fees Tariff*,^{ix} were also increased.⁶

Polling places

In preparing for the general election, it was expected that finding locations for polling places would present major challenges. Many traditional polling places, such as community centres, churches and schools, would likely be unavailable owing to concerns about the potential spread of COVID-19 or because these locations were being used as vaccination or testing centres. Other locations, although available, would not have the space or infrastructure needed to meet physical distancing or other public health requirements.

In 2019, 15,447 polling places were leased to house 64,671 election day polling stations. Of these, 46 percent were in schools and other conveniently located places that are generally familiar and accessible to electors in a community. It was expected that in 2021 few, if any, schools would be available, especially on a Monday, and that other community buildings would also be unavailable or would be unsuitable in light of distancing and public health requirements.

As polling places would likely be fewer and farther apart, electors could face increased travel distances, accessibility issues and longer lineups. To mitigate these risks, returning officers considered all possible alternatives, including places not usually used for voting, and communicated with property owners and managers at regular intervals throughout 2020 and 2021 to confirm availability.

Vulnerable electors

A key priority for Elections Canada was ensuring that vulnerable electors, including those residing in long-term care facilities and those in Indigenous communities, had the opportunity to vote safely. This was complicated by the fact that a large number of such facilities and communities were in lockdown and that voting by special ballot could present challenges for their residents.⁷

Under the *Canada Elections Act*,^x electors in long-term care facilities are generally served through mobile polls. In previous events, the same election workers would visit multiple facilities in a short time frame to deliver voting services to residents. This approach would not be appropriate in a pandemic.

⁶ Fees paid to field personnel at the 43rd general election were \$165 million. The current estimate for fees paid to field personnel at the 44th general election is \$201 million, an increase of 22 percent.

⁷ In particular, when applying to vote by mail, electors must prove their identity by producing photocopies of their identification documents or uploading photos of the documents over the Internet, neither of which is possible for many residents of long-term care facilities.

Given the varying and evolving circumstances at each long-term care facility across the country, it was necessary to implement a range of alternatives to the traditional mobile poll. As part of their readiness activities, returning officers were instructed to consult the administrators of long-term care facilities in their electoral districts to determine which of the following four voting options could be offered to residents:

- an on-site polling station on election day, open for up to 12 hours
- an early on-site polling station, open for up to 12 hours on a date established in the weeks before election day
- a coordinated special ballot voting process: When circumstances would not allow for an on-site poll, Elections Canada would work with the facility to provide residents with a special ballot application and voting kit. Facility staff could help residents fill out their application. Once the residents voted, election workers would collect their completed ballot kits. The electors' identity and address would be confirmed by facility administrators.
- voting independently by special ballot returned by mail: If the options above were impossible to carry out, electors could still apply to vote by special ballot and return it by mail.





2. Delivering the General Election

Issue of the Writs

On August 15, 2021, the Governor General dissolved the 43rd Parliament at the request of the Prime Minister, and writs of election were issued for all 338 federal electoral districts. The date for the 44th general election was set by proclamation of the Governor General as September 20. Advance polls were to be held one week before election day, from September 10 to 13. The election period was 37 days.

The timing of the election had both positive and negative consequences for Elections Canada. Though these are explored in more detail in the sections that follow, the two overarching factors were the increase in vaccination rates, which facilitated recruitment among a traditionally older workforce, and the fourth wave of the pandemic, which led to a large number of landlords retracting their commitments to provide space for polling places.

Local Elections Canada Offices

Setting up 501 local offices⁸ in Canada's 338 electoral districts was the first link in a chain of operations that were critical to the success of the election. Physical distancing requirements and the extra storage space needed for personal protective equipment forced returning officers to find bigger facilities to house their operations. Despite this challenge, most returning officers had secured an office within two days of the writs being issued.

However, delivering information technology, telecommunication systems and election supplies took longer than planned in a number of electoral districts. Delays in making local offices fully operational made it difficult for returning officers to complete tasks they normally perform early in the election period, including issuing special ballots to electors who applied for them immediately after the election was called. Elections Canada is currently reviewing its office provisioning model to better support returning officers and their staff.

National Register of Electors

Elections Canada maintains the National Register of Electors, a database of Canadian citizens who are 18 years of age or older. The Register is updated both between and during elections using administrative data received either directly from electors or through agreements with some federal, provincial and territorial agencies. Elections Canada receives data from the Canada Revenue Agency; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada; the Canadian Armed Forces; most provincial and territorial agencies responsible for driver licensing and vital statistics; and provincial and territorial electoral management bodies.

When an election is called, the agency uses the data in the Register to produce the preliminary lists of electors, which are provided to registered and eligible political parties and to returning officers. Returning officers then provide the lists for their electoral district to the

⁸ 338 offices for returning officers and 163 offices for additional assistant returning officers.

local confirmed candidates, as required by the *Canada Elections Act*.^{xi} The preliminary lists are also used to produce voter information cards and as the basis for both the revised lists of electors⁹ and the official lists of electors.¹⁰

At the issue of the writs, 96 percent of electors were registered, 92.3 percent of them at their current address. Thus, 88.7 percent of all electors were registered at their current address and “ready to vote.” While these quality indicators were marginally lower than at the call of the 43rd general election in 2019, they aligned with the long-term trend of improvements in the quality of the elector data maintained by Elections Canada. Appendix A provides further details about the Register and the agency’s initiatives to improve its quality.

Communicating with Electors

Elections Canada’s Public Education and Information program is designed to establish the agency as the authoritative source for information about federal elections and build trust in Canada’s electoral process. Because of the pandemic, the agency expanded its Voter Information Campaign to address several key strategic objectives. The first was to make sure that electors who preferred to vote in person at their assigned polling station would be confident that they could do so safely. The second was to promote the option of voting by mail using a special ballot to electors who could not, or did not want to, vote at their assigned polling station. The third was to explain, well in advance of election day, why results in some electoral districts might not be known on election night.

The 37-day multimedia campaign was rolled out in four phases (registration, voter information card, early voting options and election day) and featured a prominent health and safety component to reassure electors and potential workers.

To complement the Voter Information Campaign, Elections Canada devised communications strategies to deal with issues such as a reduced number of voting locations in many parts of the country and the limitations of the special ballot option for some electors.

Increased monitoring of the digital information environment also enabled the agency to develop pre-emptive messaging and react to unfounded concerns about the voting process. This topic is explored further in the Electoral Security section of the report.

As in past elections, the voter information card (VIC) played a crucial role in informing electors about the electoral process. A personalized VIC was mailed to each registered elector telling them when and where to vote, the accessibility of their advance and election day polling places, and how to contact the nearest Elections Canada office. In total, Elections Canada mailed over 27 million VICs to individuals whose names appeared on the preliminary lists of electors.

However, the challenges in confirming polling places and finding alternative locations due to the pandemic, as described further below, resulted in delays in printing and issuing the VICs.

⁹ The revised lists of electors are used at advance polls and incorporate changes made to the lists from the start of the election period until just before advance polling days.

¹⁰ The official lists of electors are used at election day polls and incorporate changes made to the revised lists of electors until just before election day.

Whereas they would have normally been issued at the end of August, most VICs were mailed a week later. Some 26.4 million VIC cards were mailed by September 6, 2021, shortly before advance polls, and an additional 1 million were mailed by September 15, 2021. Delays in mailing resulted primarily from the short election period and difficulties in finding suitable polling places.

These delays affected certain electoral districts more than others. In Brampton East (Ontario), the VICs for approximately 70 percent (52,000) of registered electors were not mailed until after advance polling days due to an administrative error. To mitigate the impact, Elections Canada worked with regional media advisors¹¹ to inform electors that they did not need their VIC in order to vote at advance polls. While turnout was much lower in Brampton East on the first day of advance polls than in the surrounding electoral districts, participation gradually increased over the four days. By the last day of advance polls, turnout was higher in Brampton East than in the surrounding electoral districts.

There were also some instances of VICs being sent with incorrect information. An estimated 30,000 VICs for electors in Gatineau (Quebec) were mailed out showing “unconfirmed” instead of the location of their advance or election day polling station. This error occurred when a polling place was deleted in the system before the VIC files were sent for printing. On September 9, 2021, Elections Canada mailed approximately 27,000¹² revised VICs to provide electors in Gatineau with the missing information or to advise them that the location of their polling station had changed. The agency contacted local media to quickly disseminate the updated information and published a targeted social media message encouraging electors to check online for their assigned polling place using Elections Canada’s Voter Information Service.^{xii}

After sending the VICs, Elections Canada distributed the *Guide to the federal election*^{xiii} to every household in Canada. This brochure provided information about voter eligibility, registration, ways to vote, identification requirements, accessibility of polling places, and voting assistance tools and services available on election day. It also prompted electors to contact Elections Canada if they had not received a VIC. The agency distributed 15,806,012 bilingual brochures across Canada and an additional 10,159 trilingual brochures in Nunavut. Elections Canada also published a version of the guide in 49 different languages, including 16 Indigenous languages, on its website.

The agency delivered information about the voting process and health and safety measures throughout the election period via social media; television, radio, digital and print ads; and the Elections Canada website. The messaging targeted Canadians at large and specific groups who face higher-than-average barriers to electoral participation.¹³ To ensure these messages were widely distributed to diverse communities, Elections Canada made several of its election-related advertisements and publications available in heritage and Indigenous languages, in addition to English and French.

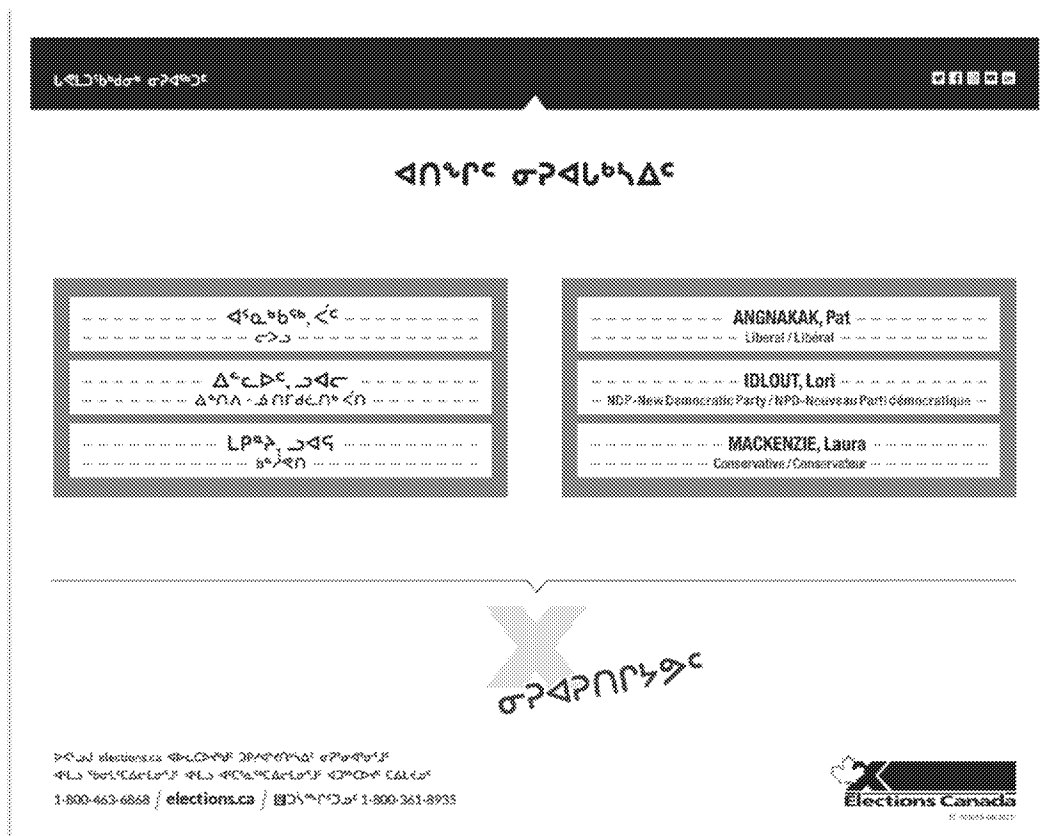
¹¹ Regional media advisors are election workers who support returning officers with media relations during an election. They are located across the country and provide coverage for their respective geographic regions.

¹² Replacement cards were not sent to the 3,000 electors whose VIC showed “unconfirmed” where the location of their advance polling station should have been; given that the revised VICs could only be mailed on September 9, they would not have arrived before the last day of advance polls on September 13.

¹³ New electors (youth and new Canadian citizens), Indigenous electors and electors with disabilities.



In Nunavut—where the territorial *Official Languages Act*^{xiv} recognizes the Inuit Language, English and French as official languages—Elections Canada took extra steps to ensure that voting was accessible to electors who do not speak English or French. In addition to providing information on the voting process in Inuktitut, as was done in the previous election, a poster replicating the ballot in Inuktitut was placed in polling places in order to assist electors in marking their ballot.



Elections Canada also translated several other materials into Inuktitut, including the list of candidates, recruitment messages and training materials for election workers. Every effort was made to hire poll workers who spoke at least one Inuit language.

The health and safety prong of the agency’s national advertising campaign detailed the measures in place for both electors and election workers, and encouraged electors to apply to vote by mail if they had tested positive for or had symptoms of COVID-19, or if they had been in contact with someone who had the virus. A dedicated section on the general election website included an educational video, infographics, a series of organic social media posts and several communication products for Election’s Canada’s community relations officers¹⁴ and stakeholders.

¹⁴ Community relations officers are Elections Canada employees who liaise with groups known to face barriers to registration and voting. They also facilitate communications between these target communities and local offices.



Though voting by mail using a special ballot has been an option for all electors for almost 30 years, Elections Canada used public opinion surveys to project that there would be increased interest in this alternative voting method as a result of the pandemic. In response, the agency created a new web page on voting by mail using a special ballot, complemented by a suite of FAQs on the topic. It also began running the paid advertising campaign on early voting options immediately after the close of nominations, which was sooner than in previous elections. Voting by mail using a special ballot was also promoted consistently as one of the four options available to electors, along with voting at an Elections Canada office, voting at advance polls and voting on election day. In the days before election day, Elections Canada reminded electors that if they had not yet had the chance to return their special ballot by mail, they could return it in person at any polling place in their electoral district by dropping it in a ballot box specifically set up for that purpose.

Complaints

Elections Canada always welcomes feedback from Canadians on all aspects of the electoral process. As in previous general elections, they could lodge complaints through an online form, by telephone, by email or by regular mail. During the election period, electors could also file a complaint at a local office or at a polling place. In addition to filing complaints directly with Elections Canada, electors can also submit complaints about the general election through other entities, such as the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

Complaints were given the highest priority when an individual's right to vote was at stake. Such complaints were often dealt with immediately by providing the affected elector with the address of the polling place or the telephone number for the returning officer.

Complaints related to a potential offence under the *Canada Elections Act* were referred to the Commissioner of Canada Elections for further investigation. Complaints related to potential offences involving robocalls or other voter contact services were referred to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

As of December 14, 2021, Elections Canada had received 9,410 complaints. The majority of them were related to accessibility; voter experience, long lines and interactions with poll workers; and voting by special ballot and other ways to vote.

To ensure that data on complaints about the electoral process is sound and presented in context, Elections Canada will publish further findings once the required analysis, review and categorization have been completed.

Recruitment and Training

Elections Canada's national recruitment campaign started on August 18, 2021, and lasted until September 18, 2021. Recruitment ads were placed in all electoral districts, with a particular focus on electoral districts that had previously faced recruitment challenges. The advertising budget for recruitment in 2021 was four times larger than that for the previous general election in 2019.



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

- promoting employment opportunities, particularly through the Inspire Democracy program,^{xv} 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, who are responsible for engaging with members of OLMCs and encouraging them to work at federal elections¹⁵

Recruitment efforts were also made in Indigenous communities before and during the election. Between August 5 and 19, 2021, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) made calls to 400 First Nations communities to promote employment with Elections Canada. Information about employment opportunities was also emailed to more than 702 band offices and First Nations communities and to 98 First Nations organizations. After the issue of the writs, the AFN assisted communities that had experienced difficulties recruiting workers for past elections, and the Iqaluit-based Ilinniapiak Skills Development Centre^{xvi} provided messaging to northern communities with historically low recruitment rates.

Elections Canada's recruitment campaign emphasized the measures in place to protect the health and safety of election workers, but it stopped short of mandating their vaccination, except if required by property owners or managers (e.g. administrators of a hospital, long-term care facility or First Nation). Given that a reported 72 percent of eligible Canadians were fully vaccinated as of August 14, 2021,^{xvii} right before the issue of the writs, Elections Canada expected that the majority of electors and election workers would be fully vaccinated by election day.¹⁶ In the end, the age profile of poll workers for the 44th general election was similar to that for the previous general election: 46 percent of poll workers were 60 years of age or older (47 percent in 2019), and 58 percent were 54 years of age or older (57 percent in 2019).

In addition to forcing Elections Canada to revise its recruitment strategies, the pandemic also compelled it to review its approach to training election workers. Because circumstances varied across the country, returning officers were presented with the following four options for delivering training, giving them the latitude to determine the best fit for their poll workers:

- Classroom training sessions: in-person and trainer-led; physical distancing, masks and sanitization measures required

¹⁵ These efforts resulted in 30 additional appointees (87 versus 57) when compared with the 43rd general election.

¹⁶ Vaccination rates varied considerably across Canada, with rates in some communities below 30 percent. This, combined with the fact that the health and safety protocols at the polls reflected the advice received by public health authorities, was an important factor in deciding not to require vaccination as a condition for working at the polls. The overall vaccination rate nevertheless gave Elections Canada confidence that it would be able to offer services by vaccinated poll workers in those locations, such as long-term care facilities, where it would be a requirement.

- Remote training sessions: virtual and trainer-led
- Training workbook: self-paced review of training materials
- Online training module: virtual and self-paced

As for the training of returning officers themselves, as well as their office staff, this was done either through the agency's Virtual Training Centre or through the self-paced review of manuals. Where normally some training sessions would be supplemented by in-person participation at regional meetings, participation in virtual meetings occurred instead.

In all cases, maintaining up-to-date manuals was a challenge owing to the agency's evolving pandemic response measures and varying restrictions across the country. Working groups within the agency managed this problem by developing complementary material that aimed to give workers the most current information about COVID-19 adaptive measures.

In total, returning officers were able to hire and train more than 195,000 workers, including 18,000 office staff and 177,000 poll workers.

Polling Places

While returning officers cannot lease polling places until the writs are issued and voting days are known, efforts to identify locations begin well in advance. Over the spring and early summer of 2021, returning officers began checking the availability of potential polling places¹⁷ with prospective landlords, city managers, school principals, school boards, First Nations band councils, and other property owners and managers. The results of these enquiries clearly indicated that many traditional polling places would not be available and that alternative locations would need to be considered. Moreover, with the onset of the fourth wave of the pandemic in August 2021, some property owners and managers who had previously told returning officers that they would lease space to them reversed their decisions. This forced returning officers to identify new places and secure the leases within a very short time. Returning officers demonstrated creativity in finding non-traditional locations such as commercial buildings and sports centres.¹⁸

Compared with the 43rd general election, there were 3 percent fewer advance polling places and 7 percent fewer election day polling places. Overall, this reduction proved to be manageable; however, in some instances, the large number of polling stations resulted in bottlenecks and lineups.

¹⁷ A polling place is a location where electors go to vote. One polling place may house several polling stations. Generally, one polling station (i.e. voting desk) is established for every polling division in an electoral district. Every polling station has one ballot box and a list of electors. Each elector is assigned to a specific polling station, based on their residential address.

¹⁸ Elections Canada leased approximately 105 percent more commercial buildings to use as polling places for the 44th general election when compared with the 43rd general election.



Table 1 – Number of polling places and stations

	Polling places			Polling stations		
	43rd general election	44th general election	Gap	43rd general election	44th general election	Gap
Advance polling days	3,802	3,688	-114	6,166	7,300	+1,134
Election day	15,477	14,405	-1,072	66,024	60,037	-5,987

Because the agency anticipated that the number of electors choosing to vote at advance polls rather than on election day would continue to grow and to offset recruitment challenges, returning officers were instructed to increase capacity at advance polling places by splitting the advance polls in order to have two polling stations, each with a portion of the list of electors. As a result, there was an 18 percent increase in the number of advance polling stations compared with the previous election. Conversely, owing to the expected lower turnout on election day, combined with the difficulty in securing space, the number of election day polling stations decreased by 9 percent, as many were merged together.

Though the adaptation of services to pandemic circumstances went relatively smoothly in the vast majority of electoral districts, returning officers struggled to find polling places in densely populated urban centres. In electoral districts where most polling stations were traditionally set up in schools or the lobbies of high-rise condo buildings, finding alternative locations spacious enough to safely welcome tens of thousands of electors proved challenging. In Toronto, 15 electoral districts had 448 fewer polling places than in the 43rd general election. In some of these electoral districts, the number of polling locations decreased by 75 percent, and the available polling places were not big enough to set up individual voting desks for all required polling stations. Consequently, the lists of electors for multiple polling divisions were combined so that all electors could be served using fewer voting desks. However, this also meant that electors in affected electoral districts were more likely to experience long lineups.

Voting Services

In view of the pandemic, Elections Canada had prepared for a major change in the patterns of elector behaviour during the 44th general election.

Electors not comfortable with voting in person at their polling place could instead vote by mail using a special ballot. While initial data collected in 2020 showed that as many as 5 million Canadians might do so,¹⁹ the agency revised its estimate for the uptake of this

¹⁹ In spring 2020, a survey of Canadians conducted on behalf of Elections Canada suggested that voting by mail using a special ballot would be the preferred method of casting a ballot for 20–25 percent of electors. Using this information, and data from previous elections, Elections Canada initially estimated that up to 5 million electors could choose to vote by mail in the 44th general election, depending on the public health situation at the time of the vote. Data from the British Columbia and Saskatchewan provincial elections, which both occurred in October 2020, was used to produce a revised estimate of 4 million.

voting method several times throughout the planning period as the pandemic situation changed.

While the actual number of electors who chose to vote by special ballot turned out to be much lower than initially planned for, more Canadians than ever before voted by special ballot from within their electoral district, either by mail or at a local office. In contrast, the number of electors who voted by special ballot from within Canada but outside their electoral district and the number of electors living outside Canada who voted by mail both decreased when compared with the 43rd general election.

In total, approximately 17.2 million Canadians, or 62.5 percent of registered electors, cast a ballot in the 44th general election. Of those, more than 16 million chose to vote in person—over 5.8 million at advance polls and 10.2 million on election day.

Voting by Special Ballot

Voting by special ballot is a voting method available to all electors. Two factors impact the options available to electors voting by special ballot:

- How they choose to cast their ballot: An elector can cast a special ballot by voting in person at a local office or by mail.
- Where they are when they cast their ballot: An elector can cast a special ballot from within their electoral district, from outside their electoral district but still within Canada, or from outside Canada.

The *Canada Elections Act*^{xviii} does not allow electors residing in Canada to apply for a special ballot before the writs of election are issued. As the election period for the 44th general election lasted the minimum of 37 days, this left only a few weeks for special ballots sent by mail to make the round trip from Elections Canada to the elector and back again.

For their ballot to be counted, electors who chose to vote from within their electoral district had to make sure that Elections Canada received their completed special ballot before the polls closed on election day. They could return it either by mail or in person at their local Elections Canada office. They could also go to an election day polling place in their electoral district and place their ballot in the boxes designated to receive special ballots. As well, electors who had applied to vote by special ballot but who were prevented from doing so at the election (e.g. their special ballot voting kit was never received or it was damaged or lost) could go to their polling place on election day, ask that their special ballot application be cancelled and vote in person instead. As shown in Table 3 below, more than 1 million special ballot kits were issued to electors voting from within their electoral district. Of these, just under 883,000 (87 percent) were returned on time and counted. Elections Canada is examining the distribution of late ballots across the 338 electoral districts to see whether measures can be taken to reduce those numbers in future.

On September 21, 2021, Elections Canada was advised of one electoral district, Mississauga–Streetsville (Ontario), where 1,589 special ballots from electors voting from within the electoral district had accumulated in a commercial mail room outside the control of the returning officer. Because these ballots were received after the September 20 deadline, they



were not counted. This had no impact on the results for that electoral district, as the leading candidate had a margin of victory of 6,567 votes. Elections Canada is continuing to examine what caused the incident and will implement appropriate measures to prevent a recurrence in future events.

Like electors voting from within their electoral district, electors voting from within Canada but outside their electoral district could vote in person at a local office or apply to vote by mail. Electors voting from outside their electoral district had to return their completed special ballot to the agency's central processing centre in Ottawa by 6:00 p.m. Eastern time on election day. As indicated in Table 3, more than 200,000 special ballot kits were issued to such electors, and almost 159,000 (78 percent) of them were returned on time and counted.

For Canadian electors living abroad, submitting a special ballot by mail is their only voting option. These electors can apply to be on Elections Canada's International Register of Electors at any time before an election or, once an election has been called, at any time before 6:00 p.m. on the 6th day prior to election day. Electors on this register are automatically mailed a special ballot at the beginning of every general election period. The unpredictability of international postal services, which always impacts the number of ballots returned on time, was exacerbated by the pandemic. As shown in Table 3, of the approximately 55,000 special ballots issued to electors living outside Canada, slightly more than 27,000 (48.5 percent) were returned on time and counted.

Table 2 – Preliminary statistics: Ballots cast by voting method

Voting method	43rd general election Ballots cast (with rate)	44th general election Ballots cast (with rate)
Electors voting by mail from inside their electoral district*	4,980 (0.03%)	507,722 (2.95%)
Electors voting at a local office from inside their electoral district*	392,141 (2.14%)	375,093 (2.18%)
Electors absent from their electoral district voting by mail, at a local office, Canadian Forces base, or correctional facility	228,755 (1.25%)	158,693 (0.92%)
Electors living outside of Canada voting by mail	34,144 (0.19%)	27,035 (0.16%)
Electors voting at their assigned advance polling station	4,879,312 (26.59%)	5,895,072 (34.25%)
Electors voting at their assigned election day polling station	12,811,027 (69.81%)	10,246,196 (59.54%)
Total	18,350,359 (100%)	17,209,811 (100%)

*The breakdown of special ballots cast by mail versus special ballots cast by voting in local offices is an estimate based on the total number of special ballots counted, the methods used to issue the ballots and their estimated return rates.

A comparison of return rates for special ballots between the 43rd and the 44th general elections in Tables 3 and 4 below shows a significant decline for all categories: local, national and electors abroad. In all likelihood, this reflects the fact that this election was one week shorter, which made it more challenging for voters to return their ballot in time.

Table 3 – Categories of special ballot voters for the 44th general election

	Ballots issued	Ballots returned on time and counted (with rate)	Ballots returned on time and not counted (spoiled) (with rate)	Ballots returned late and not counted (with rate)	Ballots not returned or cancelled* (with rate)
Electors voting by mail or at an Elections Canada office from inside their electoral district	1,015,305	882,815 (87.0%)	N/A	59,344** (5.8%)	73,146 (7.2%)
Electors absent from their electoral district voting by mail or at a local office, Canadian Forces base or correctional facility	203,446	158,693 (78.0%)	826 (0.4%)	19,231 (9.5%)	24,696 (12.1%)
Electors living outside Canada voting by mail	55,696	27,035 (48.5%)	221 (0.4%)	11,699 (21.0%)	16,741 (30.1%)
Total	1,274,447²⁰	1,068,543 (83.9%)	1,047 (0.1%)	90,274 (7.1%)	114,583 (9.0%)

*In situations where an elector requested a special ballot to vote by mail but did not return it, or returned it unused and subsequently voted at their election day polling station, the special ballot is considered cancelled.

**Includes all ballots set aside unopened under section 277(1) of the *Canada Elections Act*.

²⁰ In an early version of this report, Table 3 contained an error that has since been corrected. Copies of the report that were downloaded or printed before the correction was made will show an inaccurate total.

Table 4 – Categories of special ballot voters for the 43rd general election

	Ballots issued	Ballots returned on time and counted (with rate)	Ballots returned on time and not counted (spoiled) (with rate)	Ballots returned late and not counted (with rate)	Ballots not returned or cancelled* (with rate)
Electors voting by mail or at an Elections Canada office from inside their electoral district	401,092	397,121 (99.0%)	N/A	N/A	3,971 (1.0%)
Electors absent from their electoral district voting by mail or at a local office, Canadian Forces base or correctional facility	243,938	228,755 ²¹ (93.8%)	1,118 ²¹ (0.5%)	4,007 (1.6%)	10,058 (4.1%)
Electors living outside Canada voting by mail	55,512	34,144 (61.5%)	115 (0.2%)	6,537 (11.8%)	14,716 (26.5%)
Total	700,542	660,020²¹ (94.2%)	1,233²¹ (0.2%)	10,544 (1.5%)	28,745 (4.1%)

*In situations where an elector requested a special ballot to vote by mail but did not return it, or returned it unused and subsequently voted at their election day polling station, the special ballot is considered cancelled.

Voting at Advance Polls

A record number of Canadians—over 5.8 million—voted at advance polls between Friday, September 10, and Monday, September 13, 2021, continuing the trend of increased uptake of this voting method.²²

Planning for continued growth in the percentage of electors taking advantage of advance polls, returning officers recruited enough poll workers to staff 7,300 advance polling stations at 3,668 polling places. While the number of advance polling places was comparable to that for the 43rd general election,²³ the number of polling stations (i.e. voting desks) increased by 18 percent.²⁴ As a result, despite a 21 percent increase in the number of electors voting at

²¹ In an early version of this report, Table 4 contained errors that have since been corrected. Copies of the report that were downloaded or printed before these corrections were made will show inaccurate figures.

²² There were 4,840,300 valid votes cast at advance polls during the 43rd general election, 3,657,415 valid votes cast at advance polls during the 42nd general election, 2,100,855 valid votes cast at advance polls during the 41st general election and 1,520,838 valid votes cast at advance polls during the 40th general election.

²³ There were 3,802 advance polling places in the 43rd general election.

²⁴ There were 6,166 advance polling stations in the 43rd general election.

advance polls, the number of electors served per advance polling station rose by only 2 percent (from an average of 791 in 2019 to 807 in 2021), a marginal increase.

In two electoral districts, Vaughan–Woodbridge (Ontario) and Beauséjour (New Brunswick), it was discovered that a small number of ballots showed the incorrect list of candidates. These incorrect ballots were found in booklets that also included correct ballots. Elections Canada immediately contacted the printing company for each ballot booklet to determine, based on the printing method, how many ballots would have likely been affected. This assessment suggested that a very small number of ballots were improperly printed.

Returning officers across the country were simultaneously instructed to perform quality control activities and remove any other misprinted ballots from circulation. In total, two ballot booklets containing a single misprinted ballot and three ballot booklets containing a combined 33 misprinted ballots were removed from circulation. Returning officers in the two affected electoral districts were also instructed to inform candidates without delay so that they could alert the representatives who would be observing the count. In total, seven misprinted ballots were discovered and rejected during the count. No misprinted ballots were found in any other electoral district, and Elections Canada is reviewing its processes to improve its quality control mechanisms.

Voting on Election Day

As part of their recruitment activities, returning officers were directed to hire replacement workers²⁵ to fill in for staff who, owing to a variety of circumstances, were unable to work at their assigned polling place. Though hiring a roughly 10-percent surplus of poll workers is a standard practice for Elections Canada, the agency also put other contingency measures in place. These included procedures to promptly detect and adjust for worker absences, revisions to the *Federal Elections Fees Tariff*^{six} that improved worker remuneration, and the single poll worker model. This model, authorized for the first time during the 44th general election, not only enabled more physical distancing between election workers, it also gave returning officers more flexibility in assigning responsibilities. Despite an increase in the number of poll workers who failed to show up when compared with the 43rd general election,²⁶ the contingencies implemented by Elections Canada meant that less than 0.5 percent of advance and election day polls opened late.²⁷

The agency also developed an alternative voting model²⁸ to support returning officers who experienced challenges in either securing polling places or recruiting sufficient poll workers. This model was piloted in two electoral districts²⁹ where a large number of polling stations were assigned to a single polling place. Poll workers directed electors waiting in line to the first available voting desk rather than having each desk serve electors from one particular polling division. This model allowed electors to vote quickly, offered flexibility in the

²⁵ Also referred to as standby workers.

²⁶ During the 43rd general election, approximately 10,000 poll workers failed to show up for work, while during the 44th general election about 14,000 poll workers failed to show up.

²⁷ 31 polling places, out of approximately 7,300, opened late on advance polling days, and 258 polling places, out of about 61,400, opened late on election day.

²⁸ The “bank teller” model, also known as the “vote at any desk” model.

²⁹ University–Rosedale (Ontario) and Eglinton–Lawrence (Ontario).



number of voting desks required, and reduced the number of poll workers needed to manage lineups and support other polling place operations.

Because of worker shortages at some polling places and COVID-19 health and safety measures, such as frequent disinfecting of high-touch surfaces, physical distancing and one-way traffic through polling stations, many electors waited longer to vote in the 44th general election. Wait times were especially long in some electoral districts—including in Toronto, Ottawa and Montréal—that had significantly fewer polling places than in previous elections. Ultimately, however, with 10.2 million Canadians choosing to cast a ballot in person on election day, this voting method remained the most popular option.

Health and Safety at the Polls

Elections Canada had to work closely with several federal, provincial and local health partners to keep abreast of the various public health protective measures in place, such as mask mandates. The agency used tailored messaging to communicate the varying requirements at polling places in different areas of the country, which sometimes caused confusion among electors. In provinces with mandatory mask mandates for indoor venues, Elections Canada advised that electors who did not bring a mask with them, and refused to wear the mask offered to them, would be turned away from the polls unless they had a medical exemption. In provinces without mask mandates,³⁰ electors only had to wear a mask in their polling place if the landlord leasing the space to Elections Canada required that masks be worn inside the premises. Electors in these provinces who were unwilling to wear a mask were offered a transfer certificate³¹ if the landlord of their polling place required masks. In the instances where masks were not required by local public health measures, Elections Canada nonetheless encouraged electors to wear one.

Polling places underwent a health and safety analysis to ensure they met the federal guidelines on indoor ventilation^{xx} and had adequate air flow. The following materials were also made available:

- hand sanitizer stations at entrances and exits
- plexiglass barriers between voters and poll workers
- single-use pencils
- disinfectant cleaner to regularly clean high-touch surfaces, such as doorknobs, tables and handrails
- self-administered COVID-19 rapid tests for election workers

Additionally, fewer candidates' representatives were permitted at a polling station at any given time (to ensure occupancy limits and physical distancing protocols at polling places were respected).

³⁰ Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Yukon and Nunavut.

³¹ A transfer certificate allowed the elector to cast their vote at a polling place that did not have a masking requirement.

Election workers began their workday an hour earlier than in previous elections in order to implement the measures outlined above and set up polling places in a manner that respected physical distancing. Elections Canada also limited the number of people allowed inside each polling place at any time to ensure adequate physical distancing between electors.

In the days leading up to September 20, 2021, but after the deadline to apply for a special ballot to vote by mail, some electors were concerned that they would be unable to vote if they were diagnosed with COVID-19 or self-isolating. Due to the need to balance public health with the right to vote, Elections Canada asked that electors stay home and not go to an Elections Canada office or polling place if they had symptoms of or had tested positive for COVID-19.

While health and safety measures did result in some tension at polling places, a topic explored in the Electoral Security section below, they proved successful in that there were no COVID-19 outbreaks associated with the agency's election activities.

Accessibility at the Polls

The *Canada Elections Act*^{xxi} requires that local offices and polling places be accessible to all electors. To articulate that requirement on an operational level, the agency uses a Polling Place Suitability Checklist,^{xxii} which contains 37 accessibility criteria, 15 of which are mandatory.

In the 44th general election, 94.2 percent of polling locations met all 15 mandatory accessibility criteria. This is only a slight decrease from the 94.3 percent in the 43rd general election. Of the remaining 5.8 percent, 3.1 percent provided a level access entrance, while 2.7 percent lacked wheelchair access.

To mitigate the impact of having to use locations that did not meet all 15 mandatory criteria, Elections Canada provided returning officers with a list of recommended measures to proactively address accessibility shortfalls. These measures included but were not limited to:

- installing temporary ramps at sites that lacked level access
- hiring an additional worker to open heavy doors
- installing temporary outdoor lighting at locations that were poorly lit

The Chief Electoral Officer approved all requests for additional funds from returning officers to make temporary accessibility improvements.

The accessibility of polling places was published on voter information cards and Elections Canada's online Voter Information Service.^{xxiii} Electors who were concerned about the accessibility of their polling place were encouraged to contact their returning officer to get a transfer certificate allowing them to vote at another location. In addition, election workers received improved training on accessibility, and accessibility feedback mechanisms were made available to electors and workers alike.



Serving Indigenous Electors

The delivery of all registration and voting services to all Indigenous communities has historically presented challenges that are often unique to these groups of electors. Among others, these challenges are related to language barriers, remoteness and the low population density of some communities—which then translate into difficulties recruiting enough election workers or finding available polling places. As a result, Indigenous electors face barriers to participating in the electoral process that are unlike those faced by other Canadian electors.

In 2021, two other challenges led to more barriers for Indigenous electors: forest fires, which displaced or threatened to displace several First Nations communities for most of the summer, and COVID-19, which forced certain communities to restrict access to outsiders.

As part of preparations for the 44th general election, returning officers consulted with Indigenous leaders on how the pandemic was affecting their communities and what public health measures were in place locally. They also consulted about which electoral services would be best suited to the various communities, worked on securing polling places on reserves and started recruiting Indigenous election workers. Returning officers also made sure that appropriate health and safety and accessibility measures were applied, and that communities that restricted access to outsiders would still be able to exercise their right to vote by using special ballots.

Of the approximately 635 First Nations communities in Canada, 361 (57 percent) were assigned an election day polling station on their reserve. The remaining 274 First Nations communities were assigned an election day polling station off their reserve at varying distances. In one instance, a polling station that was initially planned to be on reserve had to be moved just outside the reserve as a result of protests from traditional leaders.

Table 5 – Polling Stations on First Nations Reserves

	42nd general election	43rd general election	44th general election
Number of polling stations	366	389	361

In the electoral district of Kenora in Northwestern Ontario—which encompasses 44 First Nations communities—3 communities, Cat Lake, Poplar Hill and Pikangikum, did not have polling stations on election day as initially planned and communicated. The leaders of these communities had been concerned that many of their residents would be away participating in traditional hunting and cultural activities on election day. The returning officer therefore moved in-person voting services from September 20 to September 13—that is, to one day during advance polls. Because the change came late in the election period, new voter information cards reflecting the change could not be issued to the electors in these communities. This resulted in some electors not finding out about the date change and being unable to vote. Elections Canada has issued an apology to electors in Kenora who were unable to vote. The agency has also reviewed with the community leaders the circumstances that led to the gap in communication and the service delivery decisions that were made.

Making polling stations available on election day is a minimum standard of service to be met, regardless of other voting service arrangements made locally. In the very rare cases where election day services must be cancelled, all avenues must be explored to offer alternative voting services and extensive communication efforts must be deployed. In this case, better communication with the communities early on could have prevented the lack of polling stations on election day. Services could have been maintained on election day, or electors could have been better informed of their voting options.

Moving forward, Elections Canada is reviewing the way in which it engages with and serves Indigenous electors in order to reduce barriers to participation.

Serving Electors in Long-Term Care Facilities and Seniors' Residences

Early in the election period, several administrators of long-term care facilities and seniors' residences informed Elections Canada that they would be opting for the unassisted vote-by-mail service offering for their residents. This approach, while mitigating the risk of exposure to COVID-19 associated with inviting non-residents into the facility, put the burden of applying to vote by special ballot and completing and returning the ballots on the residents.

Understanding that this could have a significant negative impact on participation among this group of electors, Elections Canada reached out to administrators to discuss other possible options and mitigation measures.

The agency worked closely with administrators to ensure that the COVID-19 protocols in place at each facility were well understood and could be respected by election workers, and returning officers were required to prioritize the assignment of vaccinated poll workers to these facilities and residences.

Elections Canada's direct outreach to administrators and flexibility in implementing the health and safety protocols specific to each facility had significant positive impacts. According to preliminary numbers, out of the 5,167 facilities and residences across Canada, 67.6 percent³² opted for an early on-site polling station, 19.2 percent³³ opted for a coordinated special ballot voting process, 9.6 percent³⁴ opted for an on-site polling station on election day, and only 3.5 percent³⁵ opted for residents voting independently by special ballot.

To assist election workers and the facility administrators and staff serving these vulnerable electors, Elections Canada developed the following documents:

- *COVID-19 Guide for the Service Centre*
- *Instructions for coordinated special ballot voting – Facility administrator*
- *Instructions for coordinated special ballot voting – RO office staff*

³² 3,494 facilities or residences with 215,556 electors.

³³ 994 facilities or residences with 407,579 electors.

³⁴ 496 facilities or residences with 40,582 electors.

³⁵ 183 facilities or residences with 75,325 electors.



Voting on Campus

The Vote on Campus initiative was introduced as a pilot project in the 2015 general election and was offered again, with a significant increase in scope, in the 43rd general election in 2019. Though the initiative was favourably received by electors during those two fixed-date elections, its implementation required considerable and sustained effort on the part of Elections Canada and campus administrators. In 2015 and 2019, parties from both groups worked for about six months ahead of the elections to, among other things, coordinate and secure the needed equipment, workers and spaces.

Because the pandemic created uncertainty about student presence on campuses and, in a minority government context, no fixed election date could be provided to campus administrators to help them plan, the agency reallocated the resources needed for the Vote on Campus initiative to other service offerings. The intent of this decision was to better enable Elections Canada to deliver an election to all electors—including students—in an unprecedented pandemic environment. Elections Canada communicated its decision to key partners from the 43rd general election,³⁶ published it on the agency's website in September 2020 and published it again in the *Retrospective Report on the 43rd General Election of October 21, 2019*,^{xxiv} on April 15, 2021.

In June 2021, in a context where more Canadians were vaccinated and the number of active COVID-19 cases was declining, the Chief Electoral Officer decided to revisit this decision. However, the election was called only two months later, long before the necessary conversations or preparations could be concluded with campus administrators.

Despite Elections Canada's not being in a position to offer Vote on Campus in 2021, students had several voting options available to them. Students could vote by mail or at any local office using the same special ballots they would have used under the Vote on Campus initiative. Special ballots preserve students' ability to vote using the address they consider home, whether that is where they live while at school or somewhere else.

Students who considered their residence on or near campus to be home also had the option of voting at their assigned advance or election day polling station, as long as they had accepted proof of identity and address. Those who considered themselves to be living away from home could return to their home electoral district to vote at their assigned advance or election day polling station there, if travel was a possibility for them.

Additionally, throughout the election period, the agency posted information on a dedicated section of its website to support students in voting, whether at a polling station or by special ballot.

Elections Canada appreciates that Vote on Campus was a welcome service offering for students attending post-secondary institutions in 2015 and 2019 and is committed to making it a part of its permanent service offering, even outside of fixed-date general elections.

³⁶ Polytechnics Canada, Universities Canada, Colleges and Institutes Canada, Canadian Federation of Students, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, Québec Student Union and Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec.

Electoral Security

Electoral Integrity

Along with ensuring the security of the election, Elections Canada worked to maintain Canadians' trust in the electoral process. This work included continued transparency about all aspects of the general election, but focused especially on processes that were new or had been adapted to pandemic circumstances. The messaging from Elections Canada was the same throughout the preparation and delivery periods: Canadians could trust the results of the election.

Because Elections Canada oversees the administration of the election in every electoral district, the agency was able to be consistent when communicating about the various integrity measures that govern casting a ballot, whether in person at a polling place using a regular ballot or by mail or at a local office using a special ballot. Understanding that there might be particular concerns about special ballots, Elections Canada, for the first time, invited observers to the agency's processing centre in Ottawa to witness the count of special ballots.

Environmental and Social Media Monitoring

Elections Canada's engagement with electors on social media platforms increased considerably during the 44th general election. This coincided with an improvement in the agency's ability to monitor certain election-related topics in the public environment and to address potential mis- or disinformation that could affect electors' ability to vote. The agency created its Environmental Monitoring Centre in 2020, enabling it to deepen its understanding of the information environment and observe inaccurate narratives as they developed, both before and during the general election. This in turn allowed Elections Canada to pre-emptively develop messaging for all its channels and share them with its followers, and to quickly craft reactive messages to respond to inaccurate information. These efforts, 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.

Physical Security

During the 44th general election, there were several reported incidents of violence, harassment and vandalism. Many of the underlying issues were not exclusive to this election; however, the COVID-19 pandemic and trends in the political environment, including growing polarization and extremism online, likely increased the frequency and escalation of incidents. Elections Canada actively worked to mitigate their impact by continuously monitoring the environment, communicating with security partners and supporting election workers with additional resources.

Returning officers in 111 of the 338 electoral districts requested, and received, increases to their budgets for security at polling places. Most incidents at the polls involved the refusal to wear a mask, while most protests were related to either mask mandates or vaccination policies.



On September 13, 2021, the agency told members of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties^{xxv} that, though advance voting went smoothly overall, there were some incidents of concern. These included reports of rude or harassing behaviour toward electors and election workers by individuals opposed to the wearing of masks, and disregard by some for the health and safety protocols at the polls.

While the impact of this behaviour on the overall security of the general election was low, any incident involving confrontational behaviour had the potential to harm the physical security of electors and workers alike. In response, Elections Canada reminded electors that inappropriate language or behaviour would not be accepted. Following feedback received after advance polls, the agency also developed a document entitled *Role of Police Service and Mitigation Strategies* to explain to election workers the role of police in relation to polling place activities and to provide tips on how to engage with disruptive individuals at polling places.

Although election workers were able to resolve most situations at polling places by respecting a medical exemption or explaining the local requirements, 78 incidents required police intervention.

Weather Events

Elections Canada actively monitored environmental events, prepared contingency plans and, in some cases, modified operations. As in previous elections, extreme weather events had the potential to impede electors' access to certain voting options. As a result of the agency's efforts to inform affected communities about alternative voting options, the impact of extreme weather events on electors' ability to vote was mitigated.

- **Wildfires (in Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia)**

The agency monitored wildfires throughout the election period, paying special attention to their possible impact on displaced electors (victims, first responders and relief workers). The Forest Fire Task Force was created and mandated to ensure that all electors affected by the wildfires were able to vote. The task force, which was made up of members from Elections Canada and Public Safety Canada, actively monitored the situation on the ground.

The task force also developed a targeted media approach to reach self-evacuated electors whose whereabouts were unknown. Using social media, radio, television and locally distributed print materials, Elections Canada informed displaced electors of their voting options, emphasizing special ballot options (i.e. voting by mail or at a local office). Electors who were evacuated from Lytton, British Columbia, could vote in person at polls in Spence's Ridge (the closest community) or by mail or at a local Elections Canada office if they had self-evacuated farther away.

The agency engaged the Government Operations Centre to distribute flyers on voting options to firefighters and aid agencies and at any known locations where evacuees were gathered or had a central point of contact—while reminding them that they could vote by mail or at any local Elections Canada office, regardless of where they resided in Canada.



Residents of the First Nations communities of Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids in Manitoba were evacuated to 13 hotels in Winnipeg. On election day, Elections Canada opened a poll for the communities in each of the two main hotels in Winnipeg. The Red Cross helped Elections Canada by informing electors from these communities about where and when to vote and provided shuttles to take evacuees staying in other hotels to their polling station.

Lastly, a special ballot coordinator was flown into a hydro work camp in Manitoba to enable the hydro workers to vote. These workers came from different regions and were working on restoring the hydro poles and lines at Pauingassi and Little Grand Rapids. They had been away from their homes for advance polls and would still be away on election day.

- **Hurricane Larry**

Hurricane Larry, classified as a Category 1³⁷ storm, brought intense winds and heavy rainfall to eastern Newfoundland beginning on the evening of September 10 and lasting until the morning of September 11, 2021. The hurricane damaged buildings and power lines in the electoral districts of Avalon, St. John's East, and St. John's South–Mount Pearl and left thousands without electricity.

Elections Canada continuously monitored Hurricane Larry and had contingency plans in place for the electoral districts most likely to be affected by the storm. The agency shipped extra computer equipment, to be used if any existing equipment was damaged, and worked with stakeholders to ensure that landline phones were installed in order to maintain lines of communication.

As the hurricane approached, many advance polls were forced to close early on September 10, 2021. Due to power outages, polling places in St. John's East and St. John's South–Mount Pearl remained closed on September 11, 2021, and reopened the following day when power was restored to the area.

Despite these closures, turnout at the advance polls in Avalon and St. John's South–Mount Pearl was higher than in the 43rd general election.

Candidates

For the 44th general election, Elections Canada, once again, offered prospective candidates the option of submitting their nomination papers via the agency's online Political Entities Service Centre.^{xxvi} Despite the pandemic, uptake of this option continued to be low: Elections Canada received only 12 percent of nomination papers electronically, while 88 percent were submitted to returning officers on paper.³⁸

During the October 2020 by-elections, the agency introduced a single elector signature form to facilitate the collection of elector signatures while minimizing risks associated with the

³⁷ Category 1 storms have sustained winds of 119–153 km/hr (64–82 knots/hr).

³⁸ 262 candidate nominations were submitted via the online portal; of these 253 were confirmed by returning officers. 1,858 candidate nominations were submitted in paper format; of these 1,757 were confirmed by returning officers.

COVID-19 pandemic. The form was revised and re-released with new accompanying guidelines in advance of the 44th general election.

These guidelines included instructions on how to distribute the form electronically. However, electors and witnesses were still required to provide “wet ink” signatures. The conventional form with space for 10 elector signatures remained a valid alternative. Candidates leveraged both the conventional form and the new single elector signature form to meet the nomination requirements.

Despite the challenges of a pandemic election, 2,010 candidates appeared on ballots in the 44th general election. Of the 338 who were elected to the House of Commons, 287 had been members of the 43rd Parliament.

Table 6 – Number of confirmed and elected candidates by gender						
	42nd general election		43rd general election		44th general election	
	Confirmed	Elected	Confirmed	Elected	Confirmed	Elected
Identified as male	1,253	250	1,384	240	1,222	235
Identified as female	535	88	744	98	734	101
Did not disclose their gender identity	0	0	13	0	45	2
Identified as another gender	0	0	4	0	9	0
Total	1,788	338	2,145	338	2,010	338

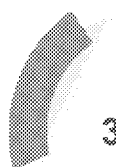


Table 7 – Number of seats in the House of Commons by political affiliation

Political affiliation	After the 43rd general election (October 21, 2019)	At the dissolution of Parliament (August 15, 2021)	After the 44th general election (September 20, 2021)	Change from dissolution of Parliament
Liberal Party of Canada	157	155	159	+4
Conservative Party of Canada	121	119	119	0
New Democratic Party	24	24	25	+1
Bloc Québécois	32	32	32	0
Green Party of Canada	3	2	2	0
Independent / No affiliation	1	5	1	-4
Vacant	0	1	0	-1

Third Party Participation

For the 44th general election, the agency received, processed and approved 105 applications for registration from third parties, a 31 percent reduction from the previous general election. This is a change in the trend over the last three general elections of increasing applications from third parties.³⁹ 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. In total, 88 percent of third parties received confirmation of registration within two business days. Financial returns from third parties can be viewed on the Third Party Financial Returns^{xxvii} section of Elections Canada's website. As in previous general elections, unions, medical groups, climate action groups, supply management groups and social advocacy groups made up the majority of registered third parties.

³⁹ There were 55 approved applications for registration from third parties in the 41st general election, 115 in the 42nd general election and 152 in the 43rd general election.





3. Closing the General Election

Counting and Validation of Election Results

On September 20, 2021, election day, preliminary voting results were incomplete at the close of polls because of the supplementary measures that were applied when counting special ballots from electors who voted by mail or at an Elections Canada office from within their electoral district. Notably, these integrity measures included verifying each special ballot and comparing it to information gathered at the polls in order to check that no elector had voted more than once. The ensuing delay of up to five days had been publicized well in advance of election day. Elections Canada had consistently communicated throughout the election period that the count of these ballots would not begin until September 21. By September 23, 291 electoral districts (86 percent) had completed their count of special ballots. By the deadline of September 25, 336 electoral districts (99 percent) had finalized their counts. The two remaining electoral districts finished their counts one day later, on September 26.

For the final validation of results, 332 electoral districts had finished by September 27 (within the seven-day time frame), while the validation dates in 6 electoral districts had to be postponed because of delays in the return of the ballot boxes to the offices of returning officers due to logistical and weather challenges during transportation. The last validation was completed in Nunavut on October 6, 2021.

Judicial Recounts

Judicial recounts took place in four electoral districts: Châteauguay–Lacolle (Quebec), Trois-Rivières (Quebec), Davenport (Ontario) and Brome–Missisquoi (Quebec). In all four cases, the second-place candidate had made an application for the recount, which was granted by a judge.

In each case, the manual counting of ballots under judicial supervision began as scheduled by the judge seized of the matter. The judicial recounts for Châteauguay–Lacolle (Quebec) and Trois-Rivières (Quebec) were completed. In the instance of Châteauguay–Lacolle (Quebec), the recount led to a reversal of the results and gave Liberal Brenda Shanahan, the incumbent member of Parliament, the win over Bloc Québécois challenger Patrick O’Hara by 12 votes. In Trois-Rivières (Quebec), the results remained unchanged and the Bloc Québécois candidate René Villemure was confirmed as the winner by 83 votes over the Conservative candidate Yves Lévesque. The judicial recounts for Davenport (Ontario) and Brome–Missisquoi (Quebec) were not completed; at the request of the candidates who had applied for each recount, the judge agreed to terminate the recount.

There were no automatic judicial recounts requested by returning officers, as the difference between the number of votes cast for the first- and second-place candidates was more than one one-thousandth of the total votes cast in each of the 338 electoral districts.

For more information on judicial recounts please consult the Judicial Recounts web page for the 44th general election.^{xxviii}

Contested Elections

As of this report, there were no contested elections.

Paying Election Workers

Elections Canada commits to paying election workers within six to eight weeks after election day. After four weeks, Elections Canada had paid more than 195,000 workers. As in any event of this magnitude, some workers' pay needed more attention as the files were incomplete at the time the returning officers were ready to close their offices. Returning officers have been working diligently to ensure that any missed timesheets or information is submitted promptly. Elections Canada continues to work on processing and resolving exceptional cases.

Estimated Cost of the Election

The cost of the 44th general election is estimated at \$630 million. Expenditures related to this general election are being incurred mainly over the course of four fiscal years (2020–21 to 2023–24), as they include the preparation, delivery and closing of the event, as well as evaluation activities and reimbursements to political entities.

As of this report, many disbursements were still being processed or had yet to be made; nevertheless, an estimate for these items is included in the total cost. Similarly, the costs related to the reimbursement of election expenses for political parties and candidates are based on an estimate.

Updates to the cost of the 44th general election as well as additional details and a cost comparison with the previous general election will be made available in the Official Reports section of the Elections Canada website.^{xxix}



Appendix A

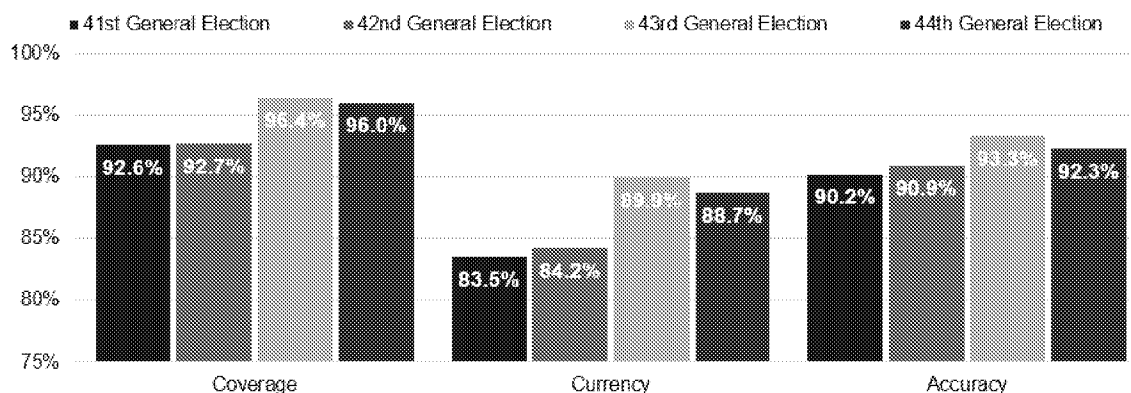
National Register of Electors

Coverage, Currency and Accuracy of the Register

Ensuring that the data contained in the National Register of Electors (the Register) reflects the most up-to-date information available contributes to reinforcing Canadians' confidence in the integrity of the electoral process. The quality of the information ensures that all electors in the Register will appear on the lists of electors and, if their information is current, receive a voter information card (VIC) at their present address. It is also important to political parties and candidates wanting to engage with electors. Quality is a function of three factors: coverage, currency and accuracy.

- **Coverage** is the proportion of all electors (i.e. Canadian citizens who are 18 or older) who are registered to vote. It has historically varied between 91 and 96 percent, and was at 96 percent at the start of the 2021 general election when the preliminary lists of electors were issued. The proportion of electors between 18 and 24 years old who were on the lists remained significantly lower, at 78.4 percent (78.9 percent in 2019).
- **Currency** is the proportion of all electors who are registered at their current address. It has historically varied between 82 and 90 percent, and was at 88.7 percent at the start of the 2021 general election when the preliminary lists of electors were issued.
- **Accuracy** is the proportion of registered electors whose address is current. These electors are correctly registered at their current address and would have received their VIC. Historically, accuracy has varied between 88 and 93 percent, and was at 92.3 percent at the start of the 2021 general election when the preliminary lists of electors were issued. This compares with 93 percent in 2019 and 91 percent in 2015.

Quality of the preliminary lists of electors (as measured at the beginning of the election period)



Initiatives to Improve the Register

Many factors affect the quality of the data in the Register, including demographic changes and the availability of data. To maximize its accuracy before the 44th general election, Elections Canada undertook the following special initiatives earlier in 2021, beyond processing its regular data sources:

- reviewed elector records containing the same last name, date of birth and address and removed any duplicates
- invited electors to update their voter registration or confirm that they were qualified to vote
- invited youth to register online when they reached the age of 18 and added pre-registered future electors as they turned 18

For instance, in November 2020, Elections Canada mailed verification notices to over 100,000 electors who were active in the Register but whose information the agency suspected was no longer accurate. In the notices, electors were asked to verify or correct their information using the agency's Online Voter Registration Service^{xxx} or to contact the agency's call centre if they were unable to use the online service. The mailing was part of Elections Canada's ongoing efforts to ensure that the Register is as accurate as possible. The *Canada Elections Act* authorizes the Chief Electoral Officer to remove from the Register the name of any person who fails to comply with the request within 60 days of receiving a verification notice. In February 2021, 98.3 percent of the electors who were sent verification notices were removed from the Register.

As well, Elections Canada received data about non-citizens (permanent residents and foreign nationals) from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). The agency sent qualification letters to individuals who were active in the Register but whose information matched the data provided by IRCC indicating that they were not Canadian citizens and therefore not qualified to vote. The letter informed them that they would be removed from the Register unless they confirmed that they were indeed qualified to vote.⁴⁰ Elections Canada sent qualification letters to more than 14,000 individuals in January 2021 and to over 700 individuals in August 2021. Of the individuals contacted, 96.6 percent were removed from the Register.

Finally, Elections Canada sent registration letters to individuals who were identified as potential new electors in select regions with lower youth coverage. The goal of these mailings was to encourage youth to register through the Online Voter Registration Service if they were qualified to vote. Between the close of the 43rd and the 44th general elections, Elections Canada mailed more than 270,000 letters to potential new electors aged 18 and 19 years old. As a result of these youth mailing initiatives, just over 39,000 new electors were added to the Register. These mailings promoted youth registration, which increased the Register's coverage and thereby improved the quality of the lists of electors.

One of the activities Elections Canada decided not to undertake in the lead up to the 44th general election was a targeted review, which typically involves setting up desks in

⁴⁰ To be qualified to vote, an individual must be 18 years old and have Canadian citizenship.

public locations where electors can register or update their information. This approach was not suited to pandemic circumstances. Adapting its tactics, Elections Canada added messaging to the Voter Information Campaign that encouraged electors to register or update their information using the agency's Online Voter Registration Service.^{xxxii} This allowed the agency to improve the quality of the Register without compromising the health and safety of vulnerable electors.

To further improve the quality of the Register before the next general election, Elections Canada plans to:

- improve data management tools and explore existing data sources further in order to enhance the quality of the addresses associated with elector records, including those of electors living on Indigenous reserves
- enhance the Online Voter Registration Service to allow new registrations or updates for certain segments of the population (e.g. those who are under 18, who have changed their name or who have a non-standard address)
- conduct various mailings (e.g. youth, verification, qualification)
- continue removing duplicate information by performing a manual review of elector records containing the same last name, date of birth and address (Corrections aim to update records for transgender individuals.)
- continue signing agreements with various partners and data suppliers to obtain data for Canadians who are under 18 years old so that they can be added to the Register when they turn 18

These projects and enhanced processes will ensure ongoing improvements in the coverage, currency and accuracy of the lists of electors, reducing the need for electors to register or update their information during an election and strengthening electoral integrity.

Online registration

Throughout the revision period, electors could use the Online Voter Registration Service to check if they were registered to vote, to register or to update their address information. In light of the pandemic context, the service was updated to allow local electors to apply online to vote by mail using a special ballot.

Throughout the election period, 2.3 million users accessed the Online Voter Registration Service to check if they were registered.⁴¹ Just under 70,000 individuals successfully added themselves to the lists of electors,⁴² and approximately 420,000 updated or corrected their information.⁴³ As in previous elections, uptake of this service was most prevalent among 18–24 year olds.

⁴¹ The Online Voter Registration Service was accessed by just over 2 million users during the 43rd general election and by approximately 1.7 million users during the 42nd general election.

⁴² Over 81,000 individuals successfully added themselves to the lists of electors during the 43rd general election, and approximately 107,000 added themselves during the 42nd general election.

⁴³ Approximately 200,000 electors updated or corrected their information during the 43rd general election and 208,000 did so during the 42nd general election.



Appendix B

Adaptations Made Pursuant to Subsection 17(1) of the *Canada Elections Act* During the 44th General Election

Subsection 17(1) of the *Canada Elections Act*^{xxxii} authorizes the Chief Electoral Officer to adapt any provision of the Act during an election period or within 30 days after the election. To exercise this authority, the Chief Electoral Officer must be satisfied that the adaptation is necessary because of an emergency, an unusual or unforeseen circumstance or an error. This power of adaptation may be used only for the purpose of enabling electors to exercise their right to vote or enabling the counting of votes.

Statutory provisions	Explanatory notes
Sections 30 and 60	<p>Purpose: To permit six returning officers to establish their office or the office of an additional assistant returning officer outside of their electoral district.</p> <p>Explanation: The Act requires each returning officer to open their office, in a convenient place in the electoral district, in premises that are accessible to electors with disabilities. When additional assistant returning officers are appointed in designated areas of an electoral district, the returning officer must also establish an accessible office in each of those areas. Electors are able to vote at the office of any returning officer or additional assistant returning officer during most of the election period. Six returning officers were unable, despite exhaustive searches, to secure suitable premises for these purposes within their electoral districts.</p> <p>The adaptation permitted these returning officers to open offices in accessible premises in an adjacent electoral district that were still located in a convenient place for electors of the electoral district in question.</p>

Purpose: To allow the offering of adapted voting services to electors who reside in a long-term care institution.

Sections 95, 125,
140 and 158,
paragraph 127(a),
and
subsection 538(5)

Explanation: Electors residing in long-term care institutions often face barriers when it comes to exercise their right to vote. To alleviate these barriers, the Act allows these electors to vote on polling day at a mobile polling station visiting their institution. However, the Act also requires that such mobile polling stations visit at least two long-term care institutions on polling day. Public health measures put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic made it impossible for Elections Canada to operate mobile polls in that way.

The adaptation allowed electors residing in long-term care institutions to be served by a polling station visiting a single institution or part of an institution. It also allowed flexibility in the scheduling of these polling stations, while safeguarding the right to vote of residents who were not able to vote at their institution.

Purpose: To preserve the right to vote of an elector who marked a ballot on the basis of erroneous information given to the elector by an election officer in the electoral district of Edmonton Manning.

Sections 140, 283
and 296

Explanation: The returning officer for the electoral district of Edmonton Manning offered adapted voting services to electors residing at the Edmonton Hospital by establishing a polling station in this institution on September 9, 2021. The election officers assigned to that polling station admitted 79 electors to vote using regular ballots; the ballots marked by these electors were deposited in a ballot box. On September 12, 2021, the returning officer discovered that electors having their place of ordinary residence outside of the electoral district of Edmonton Manning were mistakenly admitted to vote at the polling station established for the Edmonton Hospital. As the ballots had been deposited in a ballot box, it was impossible to differentiate the ballots deposited by electors entitled to vote in the electoral district from ballots deposited by electors who were not so entitled.

The adaptation nullified the votes cast by those 79 electors, allowing them to vote again in the proper electoral district.



Section 158

Purpose: To allow for transfer certificates to be issued in some circumstances on polling day.

Explanation: In a minority of provinces, public health authorities did not require masks or face coverings to be worn inside buildings or inside polling stations on polling day. The COVID-19 pandemic created a shortage of accessible premises that could be used by returning officers to establish polling stations, which forced returning officers to accept contractual conditions requiring any person accessing the leased premises to wear a mask or face covering, despite the position of the provincial public health authorities.

The adaptation allowed for the issuance of a transfer certificate, upon request, to electors who were reluctant to wear a mask or a face covering, allowing them to be served at other polling locations within their electoral district where masks or face coverings were not required by contractual conditions.

Section 171

Purpose: To permit the returning officer for the electoral district of Skeena–Bulkley Valley to establish an advance polling station for three days only—September 10, 11 and 12, 2021—in the communities of Atlin and Bella Coola.

Explanation: The Act requires that advance polling stations be open from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday, the 10th, 9th, 8th and 7th days, respectively, before polling day, and that they not be open at any other time. An advance polling station that cannot comply with the requirement to provide four days of service to electors must be cancelled in its entirety. In the two remote communities of Atlin and Bella Coola, the only possible locations for advance polling stations were available only on the first three days of advance polls because the sites were being used on the fourth day for a sitting of the British Columbia Provincial Court.

The adaptation allowed an advance poll to be established for three days in these remote communities.



Section 173

Purpose: To allow the production of ballots for advance polls in the electoral districts of Northwest Territories and Thunder Bay–Rainy River and in some remote communities in the electoral district of Nunavut.

Explanation: The Act prescribes specific rules for the production of ballots, including the type of paper to be used and the obligations of the printer retained to print ballots. Logistical issues prevented the delivery of ballots in time for the start of advance polling to the following communities in Nunavut: Arviat, Baker Lake, Cambridge Bay, Gjoa Haven, Kugluktuk and Sanikiluaq. In the electoral districts of Northwest Territories and Thunder Bay–Rainy River, the voter turnout at the first three days of advance polls was higher than expected, suggesting that one or more advance polling stations in these electoral districts would run out of ballots and be unable to replenish them before the close of advance polls.

The adaptation allowed election officers to produce ballots locally for their polling stations in sufficient quantities to enable electors to vote.

Section 289

Purpose: To permit the appointment of election officers who were not assigned to an advance polling station to count the votes cast at that advance polling station.

Explanation: The COVID-19 pandemic created challenges in recruiting election officers. As a consequence, the Chief Electoral Officer had authorized the recruitment of a single election worker, instead of two, for each table serving a polling division. This change, among others, required that experienced election officers—including election officers assigned to advance polling stations—be assigned to polling stations on polling day. This was problematic because the Act requires that an election officer assigned to an advance polling station be present during the count of the votes cast at that advance polling station. Such a count, with the Chief Electoral Officer's approval, can begin one hour before the close of polling stations on polling day.

The adaptation allowed the returning officer, with prior approval of the Chief Electoral Officer, to specify election officers who were not assigned to an advance polling station to count the votes cast at that advance polling station.



Appendix C

Instructions Issued Pursuant to Section 179 of the *Canada Elections Act*

The Chief Electoral Officer may, for the purpose of adapting any provision of the Special Voting Rules in Part 11—sections 177 to 280—of the *Canada Elections Act*^{xxxiii} (the Act), issue instructions to execute the intent of those sections in a particular circumstance. In general, instructions address issues with the Special Voting Rules process that are not contemplated by the Act, or they fill gaps in the Act that would prevent electors who are otherwise qualified to vote from casting their ballot. These instructions can be made applicable for the purposes of a particular election only, or they can be made to continue to apply for future elections until rescinded by the Chief Electoral Officer or superseded by new instructions made by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Statutory provisions	Explanatory notes
Sections 181 and 182, and subsections 267(3.2) and 269(3) (Applied during the 44th general election only)	<p>Purpose: To permit the appointment of a deputy special voting rules administrator and of two additional special voting rules administrators.</p> <p>Explanation: In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief Electoral Officer anticipated a significant increase of applications for registration and special ballot, which would make it impossible, in practice, for a single person to accomplish all of the duties of the special voting rules administrator attributed by Part 11 of the Act. Furthermore, the Act prevents the delegation of certain duties attributed to the special voting rules administrator.</p> <p>The instructions provided for the temporary appointment of a deputy special voting rules administrator and two additional special voting rules administrators, who were granted the authority to exercise the special voting rules administrator’s duties, including those duties whose delegation is currently prevented by the Act.</p>

<p>Subsection 205(3)</p> <p>(Applied during the 44th general election only)</p>	<p>Purpose: To allow three Canadian Forces units to administer different voting procedures under Division 2 of Part 11 of the Act.</p> <p>Explanation: Subsection 205(3) of the Act requires each commanding officer to fix voting times so that the polling stations in their unit are open for at least three hours a day on at least three days during the voting period provided at section 190 of the Act.</p> <p>In light of the nature of operations at sea, the instructions allowed the commanding officers for Her Majesty's Canadian Ships Harry DeWolf, Winnipeg and Fredericton to open a polling station in their unit, during the voting period, for the hours that the commanding officer considered necessary to give electors in their unit a reasonable opportunity to vote.</p>
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<p>Sections 235, subsection 239(2) and paragraph 277(1)(d)</p> <p>(Applied during the 44th general election only)</p>	<p>Purpose: To facilitate the vote by special ballot for local electors and, in certain circumstances, to permit a local elector whose application for registration and special ballot had been accepted to vote at a polling station on polling day.</p> <p>Explanation: The Act provides, with respect to electors residing in Canada, that an elector may vote only under the Special Voting Rules once their application for registration and special ballot has been accepted by the returning officer of their electoral district. In addition, for their vote to be counted, an elector must return their special ballot to the office of their returning officer before the close of polling stations on polling day. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chief Electoral Officer expected a significant increase of applications for registration and special ballot from local electors, which could cause delays in the receipt of special ballots at the returning officers' offices before the close of polling stations on polling day.</p>
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The instructions allowed electors to forward their special ballot to the returning officer's office by giving the special ballot to an election officer in a polling station of the electoral district, on polling day, before the close of the polling station. For polling stations where such a service could not be offered, electors were given the option to annul their application for registration and special ballot and to vote using a regular ballot at their polling station.



Section 235

(Applied during the 44th general election only)

Purpose: To permit an elector whose application for registration and special ballot had been accepted to vote at their polling station on polling day in specific circumstances.

Explanation: The Act provides that electors residing in Canada whose application for registration and special ballot has been accepted can only vote by returning their outer envelope to their returning officer's office before the close of polling stations on polling day. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, an increase in applications for registration and special ballot was observed by the Chief Electoral Officer. Delays were anticipated in the mailing of special ballot voting kits to electors and in the receipt of outer envelopes at the offices of the returning officers before the close of polling stations on polling day.

The instructions allowed for an eligible elector to request, at their assigned polling station, on the prescribed form, to have their application for registration and special ballot annulled and to vote by regular ballot at their polling station on polling day.

Subsections 245(1) and 250(2)

(Applied during the 44th general election only)

Purpose: To allow additional voting days to be held under Division 5 of Part 11 of the Act.

Explanation: The Act provides that every incarcerated elector is entitled to vote by special ballot on the 12th day before polling day at polling stations established in correctional institutions. On September 15, 2021, the Chief Electoral Officer was informed that two correctional institutions—the Edmonton Remand Centre in Alberta and the Établissement de détention de Sorel-Tracy in Quebec—had been unable, given the number of electors and the constraints associated with security and COVID-19 measures, to allow for all electors who wished to vote to do so in a single day.

The instructions allowed incarcerated electors at those two correctional institutions who had not voted on the 12th day before polling day and who wished to vote, to vote by special ballot on additional voting days held at these institutions.



Purpose: To authorize the procedure for the verification of electors' declarations to be conducted without opening the outer envelope in certain cases.

Sections 267 and 277

(Applied during the 44th general election and will apply to future general elections)

Explanation: The special ballot voting process could eventually be modified to allow some electors to vote using a special ballot voting kit provided to them electronically. As part of this process, those electors would be required to print and sign a declaration form and to provide their own inner and outer envelopes. In 2018, amendments were made to the Act to allow for this additional flexibility in the administration of the Special Voting Rules. As a consequence, where the Act used to speak of the setting aside of outer envelopes, it now speaks of the setting aside of inner envelopes. However, because of the short duration of the last Parliament and the COVID-19 pandemic, Elections Canada was unable to make progress on this project.

For the purposes of the 44th general election, the declaration that had to be signed by electors who voted under the Special Voting Rules was always printed on the outer envelope provided to the elector by the Chief Electoral Officer. Therefore, the election officers who proceeded to the verification of electors' declarations did not have to open outer envelopes to retrieve these declarations.

The instructions authorized the election officers who set aside an outer envelope to accomplish their duties by noting on the outer envelope, instead of the inner envelope, the reasons for setting it aside and by initialling the outer envelope. These instructions will also apply to future general elections.



Purpose: To permit the counting of certain ballots under Division 6 of Part 11 of the Act.

Explanation: The Act, which sets out the registration and voting procedures for incarcerated electors, requires that each application for registration and special ballot and each associated outer envelope be signed by both the elector and an election officer.

Paragraphs 267(1)(a) and 267(1)(b)

(Applied during the 44th general election only)

During the 44th general election, the Chief Electoral Officer was informed that all outer envelopes, for a total of 36 envelopes, received from the Établissement de détention de Rimouski in Quebec, were completed incorrectly owing to a miscomprehension of the relevant instructions. Both the signature of the elector and the signature of the election officer were missing. In accordance with the Act, such outer envelopes must be set aside and cannot be counted.

The instructions directed the election officers to not set aside the outer envelopes from the Établissement de détention de Rimouski solely on the grounds that the prescribed declaration was not signed by the elector and the outer envelope was not signed by an election officer.

Purpose: To permit the counting of certain ballots under Division 7 of Part 11 of the Act in the electoral districts of Burlington and Don Valley West.

Explanation: The Act provides that an elector residing in Canada whose application for registration and special ballot has been accepted shall vote by writing the name of the candidate of their choice on the special ballot, placing the ballot in the inner envelope and sealing it, signing the declaration prescribed by the Chief Electoral Officer, and placing the inner envelope and the declaration—if the declaration is not on the outer envelope—in the outer envelope and sealing it. During the 44th general election, the special ballots marked by 36 electors in the electoral district of Burlington and 45 electors in the electoral district of Don Valley West were not placed in an inner envelope nor in an outer envelope because of an instruction given in error by an election officer. Normally, in accordance with the Act, such ballots must be set aside by the election officer and cannot be counted.

Section 273 and paragraph 277(1)(a)

(Applied during the 44th general election only)

Considering that, in these specific situations, the integrity of the vote was not threatened, the instructions directed the election officers to not set aside the special ballots of the affected electors and allowed for the counting of their ballots.

Section 273 and
paragraph 277(1)(a)

(Applied during the
44th general election
only)

Purpose: To permit the counting of certain ballots under Division 7 of Part 11 of the Act for the electoral district of Gaspésie–Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Explanation: When an elector does not complete an application for registration and special ballot before a special ballot is issued to the elector, the elector's ballot cannot be counted pursuant to the process set out in the Act.

Election officers in the electoral district of Gaspésie–Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine offered, for polling divisions 500 and 501, adapted voting services to electors residing in a long-term care institution. In error, electors were provided with a special ballot, an inner envelope and an outer envelope, when they should have been provided with a regular ballot.

Considering that, in this specific situation, the integrity of the vote was not threatened, the instructions permitted the counting of those special ballots.





Endnotes

- i *COVID-19 Guide for Election Administrators – Polling Places*
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=emp&dir=trng/guide/covid19/manl&document=index&lang=e>
- ii *COVID-19 Guide for Election Officers at the Polls*
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=emp&dir=trng/guide/covid19/man&document=index&lang=e>
- iii *Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Administering an Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic*
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rep/oth/sprep&document=index&lang=e>
- iv *Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election*
<https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/PROC/report-12/>
- v *Bill C-19: An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (COVID-19 response)*
<https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/en/bill/43-2/C-19>
- vi *Canada Elections Act*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>
- vii *Data on special ballot voting kits*
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=ele&dir=pas/44gc/vbm&document=index&lang=e>
- viii *COVID-19 and deaths in older Canadians: Excess mortality and the impacts of age and comorbidity*
<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/coronavirus-disease-covid-19/epidemiological-economic-research-data/excess-mortality-impacts-age-comorbidity.html>
- ix *Federal Elections Fees Tariff*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2021-22/FullText.html>

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- x *Canada Elections Act*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>
- xi *Canada Elections Act*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>
- xii **Voter Information Service**
<https://www.elections.ca/scripts/vis/FindED?L=e&PAGEID=20>
- xiii *Guide to the federal election*
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=ele&dir=pas/44gc/spr/voting&document=guige&lang=e>
- xiv *Official Languages Act (Nunavut)*
<https://www.canlii.org/en/nu/laws/stat/snu-2008-c-10/latest/snu-2008-c-10.html>
- xv **Inspire Democracy**
<https://inspirelademocratique-inspiredemocracy.ca/index-eng.asp>
- xvi **Ilinniapaa Skills Development Centre**
<https://www.d2l.com/customers/ilinniapaa-skills-development-centre-isdc/>
- xvii **COVID-19 vaccination in Canada**
<https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccination-coverage/>
- xviii *Canada Elections Act*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>
- xix *Federal Elections Fees Tariff*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-2021-22/FullText.html>
- xx **Federal guidelines on indoor ventilation**
<https://www.ccohs.ca/covid19/indoor-ventilation/index.html>
- xxi *Canada Elections Act*
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>



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- xxii **Polling Place Suitability Checklist**
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=spe/checklist&document=index&lang=e>
- xxiii **Voter Information Service**
<https://www.elections.ca/scripts/vis/FindED?L=e&PAGEID=20>
- xxiv ***Retrospective Report on the 43rd General Election of October 21, 2019***
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rec/eval/pes2019/ege&document=index&lang=e>
- xxv **Advisory Committee of Political Parties: Terms of Reference**
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=abo&dir=adv/acpp/ter&document=index&lang=e>
- xxvi **Political Entities Service Centre**
<https://esep-pesc.elections.ca/en-CA/signin/>
- xxvii **Third Party Financial Returns**
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=fin&dir=oth/thi/advert&document=index&lang=e>
- xxviii **Judicial Recounts**
<https://enr.elections.ca/JudicialRecount.aspx?lang=e>
- xxix **Elections Canada’s Official Reports**
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=res&dir=rep/off&document=index&lang=e>
- xxx **Online Voter Registration Service**
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=reg&document=index&lang=e>
- xxxi **Online Voter Registration Service**
<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=reg&document=index&lang=e>
- xxxii ***Canada Elections Act***
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>
- xxxiii ***Canada Elections Act***
<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>

