
REPORT ON THE

Evaluations of the 40th General Election

of October 14, 2008

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Foreword

Before the call of the 40th general election, Elections Canada designed a formal process for assessing its performance in conducting that election, measuring the impacts of the most recent changes made to the electoral framework and identifying areas for improvement. This report, a first for Elections Canada, discusses the results of our evaluations. It serves as a bridge between the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 40th General Election of October 14, 2008*, and the report on recommended amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* that I aim to submit before the end of this year.

I am pleased to share this report with the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. It is based on data gathered before, during and after the election. Pre-election activities included a series of focus groups with official agents and consultations with election stakeholders and various groups of electors that might experience difficulty with the new voter identification requirements. Post-election evaluation activities included surveys,¹ as well as internal evaluations, such as debriefings with returning officers and field liaison officers. The report also benefits from the informal feedback we received from the Advisory Committee of Political Parties and individual members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

One challenge all evaluations based on complementary methodologies face is in distilling the feedback received through various surveys, focus groups and individual consultations into a succinct report. It is simply not possible to ensure that every perspective is included. We have, nevertheless, striven to ensure that the main messages from the input we received have been incorporated into this report.

As noted in my earlier report on the election, there were three areas of the electoral framework that merited additional attention: the new voter identification requirements, the current political financing rules, and constraints on our ability to administer the electoral process. This report elaborates on each of these areas by reviewing the election from the perspectives of voters, political entities and Elections Canada itself.

For the vast majority of electors, voting went very smoothly, even though this election was the first where they had to prove their identity and address before voting. Communications, outreach and the training of poll workers formed the backbone of our approach to ensuring that these requirements were well understood and applied. It appeared to work successfully. Most voters were aware of the new requirements, accepted them and were prepared to satisfy them. Nevertheless, some groups of voters found voting more difficult than the general population did,

¹ A list of the evaluations considered in preparing this report appears in Appendix 1. More information about the timing and methodology used for these surveys appears in Appendix 2; the survey reports may be found on the Elections Canada Web site at www.elections.ca.

particularly because of the proof-of-address requirement. To mitigate this challenge, Elections Canada will explore the possibility of adding its voter information card to the list of authorized documents that can be used to establish address. We also believe there is an opportunity to look at the current vouching provisions of the Act. The concern is that these may be overly restrictive, for example, in the case of family members.

The main concern expressed by candidates was the difficulties they faced in finding someone willing, available or qualified to be their official agent. A prime challenge stems from the complexity of the current political financing rules, which impose an enormous burden on official agents in terms of the legislative requirements, the level of responsibility and effort required to do the job. Easing this regulatory burden requires action on two fronts. Elections Canada can implement some administrative improvements, but it is the legislation itself that drives most of the complexity and makes the job daunting. I therefore plan to return to Parliament with recommendations concerning this issue as part of my next report.

To administer each election, Elections Canada must recruit, train and monitor a small army of workers. The bulk of this responsibility falls to our returning officers, who face significant obstacles and challenges in this area, some of which stem from restrictions imposed by the Act. Post-mortem sessions conducted with returning officers have made it clear that, while administrative improvements can contribute to minimizing the difficulties they face, there is a real concern that the Act itself may be imposing an unsustainable approach to managing polls. This area merits the attention of Parliament and I intend, in my recommendations report, to bring forward proposals aimed at reducing some of these constraints.

Turnout in the 40th general election was the lowest recorded in any Canadian federal election. Such low turnout is worrisome, and speaks to societal issues that are larger than Elections Canada's administration of electoral events. Our evaluations make clear that voter participation is a complex phenomenon that results from a variety of factors, which we need to better understand. Elections Canada plans to continue its research into these factors, to support future improvements to the electoral process that may help in mitigating this trend; however, it is clear that this issue requires the broad engagement and collaboration of civil society.

Finally, I wish to thank all those who took the time to meet with us, complete our surveys and provide forthright feedback on the conduct of the 40th general election. The depth and diversity of this feedback bespeaks a high level of engagement in working with Elections Canada to provide Canadians with an accessible electoral framework that they trust and use.



Marc Mayrand
Chief Electoral Officer of Canada

June 2009

I. Voters' Experience of the Election

I.1 Communications and Outreach

The 40th general election was the first in which voters were required to prove their identity and address when voting. Consequently, informing electors of this new requirement was the key focus of our communications activities and the predominant message in our advertising campaign throughout the election.

In addition to our standard television, radio and print campaigns, we distributed a pamphlet to all Canadian households reminding them of the new rules, informing them of their options for proving their identity and address and giving the list of identification documents authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer. Furthermore, we adapted the voter information card to inform electors about the new voter identification requirements, and made special efforts to reach elector communities that might face greater difficulties meeting the requirements or might not be reached by our general campaign. These efforts are detailed in the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 40th General Election of October 14, 2008*, which is available on our Web site at www.elections.ca.

Communicating with Canadians

Elections Canada used a variety of media products to communicate about the election and its requirements:

- voter information card
- householder (direct mail flyer)
- television ads
- newspaper ads
- radio ads
- cinema ads
- Internet/banner ads
- e-bulletins
- news releases

About 9 in 10 (89 percent) Canadians recalled receiving a voter information card addressed to them personally, and nearly 8 in 10 (79 percent) recalled at least one of the Elections Canada advertisements.

Respondents reported a very high recall rate (nearly 80 percent) of at least one of the media products Elections Canada used to communicate with citizens through the overall campaign. Nearly 90 percent of electors recalled the voter information card, although youth and Aboriginal Canadians were less likely (69 and 75 percent respectively) to say that they received a card. Television and radio advertising was also readily recalled (by about 50 percent of the population), while newspaper advertising was somewhat less so (by one-third). Finally, about half of electors remembered receiving the householder from Elections Canada.

There was a high level of awareness (over 90 percent) of the voter identification requirements among voters and non-voters alike, with exceptions among some groups of electors (Section 1.2 provides more details). In general, most respondents cited traditional media, such as television (32 percent), radio (22 percent) and newspapers (22 percent) for informing them of the requirements. They also cited the voter information card (27 percent) as one of the key sources of this information. Among those who remembered receiving the householder, almost 40 percent recalled that it provided specific information on the new identification requirements.

One of the key outreach initiatives was the Community Relations Officer Program². These officers, who worked specifically with youth, Aboriginal and ethnocultural communities, and with homeless electors, were asked to comment on their experience in reaching out to various groups. Among the community relations officers who answered our survey, 83 percent deemed the program they participated in helpful for raising awareness about the electoral process in their target group. They also offered suggestions for improvements to outreach activities, such as conducting more activities on-site and better adapting material to target groups.

Overall, almost all Canadians were aware of the election, understood the voter identification requirements, were aware that they were registered (if they were) and were aware of how to vote. While opportunities remain for Elections Canada to refine its communications and outreach programs further, the multimedia approach used in the 40th general election was clearly successful at informing Canadian electors of both the new voter identification requirements and the election itself.

1.2 Voter Identification Requirements

In the 40th general election, electors could choose from three ways to prove their identity and address in order to vote. As set out in the *Canada Elections Act*, they could:

- provide one original piece of identification, issued by any level of government in Canada or any governmental agency; this had to show the elector's photo, name and address;

² Where it was warranted, returning officers hired community relations officers to conduct local outreach activities such as setting up information kiosks and distributing communications material to specific groups of electors during the election. The 554 community relations officers worked an average of 75 hours during the election period.

- provide two original pieces of identification from a list authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada; both had to show the name of the elector, and at least one had to also show the elector's address; or
- swear an oath and be vouched for by an elector whose name appeared on the list of electors in the same polling division and who had acceptable identification.³

These new requirements represented a significant change for Canadians. As noted earlier, Elections Canada prepared an extensive communications and outreach campaign to ensure that voters were aware of the new requirements and came to the polls prepared to satisfy them. Most did: the requirements did not pose a problem for the vast majority of electors.

Awareness of the proof-of-identity requirement was very high across all regional and demographic groups. Even among those members of the general population who did not vote, more than 9 in 10 reported being aware of this requirement. Awareness of the proof-of-address requirement was slightly lower than of the proof-of-identity requirement, but still very high. Awareness of the proof-of-address requirement did show some regional demographic variation. Regionally, residents of the Atlantic provinces and Manitoba and Saskatchewan, as well as those living in rural areas,⁴ were slightly below average in awareness. Demographically, those with annual household incomes of under \$20,000, those with high-school education only and non-voters were slightly below the average.

Key findings from the evaluations

94 percent of electors were aware of the proof-of-identity requirement, as were 92 percent of those who did not vote.

Awareness was lower among those with only high-school education (91 percent) or whose household incomes were \$20,000 or less (91 percent).

Awareness of the proof-of-address requirement was lower (85 percent) than of the proof-of-identity requirement.

Regionally, residents of the Atlantic provinces (78 percent) and Manitoba and Saskatchewan (79 percent), as well as those living in rural areas (80 percent), were below average in awareness.

Among Aboriginal electors, awareness of the proof-of-identity requirement was 84 percent overall, 82 percent among those living in rural areas, and 78 percent among non-voters.

³ Additional details, including the complete list for proving identity and address, are described on the Elections Canada Web site at www.elections.ca. Because some electors, especially those in rural and northern areas, do not have a complete civic address that would prove their residence within a polling division, the Act provides that an elector who shows a piece of identification on which the address is consistent with the information contained on the list of electors is deemed to have established his or her residence.

⁴ As determined by the postal code of survey respondents.

Aboriginal electors overall (71 percent), and especially those living in rural areas (68 percent), were also somewhat lower in awareness of the proof-of-address requirement. About two thirds (67 percent) of non-voting Aboriginal Canadians reported awareness of the proof-of-address requirement.

Of the general population, 94 percent said they had a positive attitude to the proof-of-identity requirement. Attitudes to the proof-of-address requirement were somewhat less positive, with 88 percent indicating a positive attitude. Of Aboriginal Canadians, 80 percent indicated a positive attitude to the proof-of-identity requirement, while 75 percent of them indicated a positive attitude toward the proof-of-address requirement.

Virtually all voters (98 percent) reported bringing the required identification with them. Fewer Aboriginal Canadians (89 percent) did so.

While a substantial majority of Aboriginal Canadians were aware of both the proof-of-identity and address requirement, they were less likely to be so than the general population. Indeed, they were the only group less likely than the general population to be aware of both requirements. Both youth and immigrant/visible-minority groups had uniformly high awareness of the proof-of-identity requirement, and were no different from the general population in their awareness of the proof-of-address requirement.

For the most part, voters endorsed the new requirements. A large majority of voters had a positive attitude toward them. The majority of Aboriginal electors also expressed a positive attitude, but they were not as positive as the general population. Youth and immigrant/visible-minority groups were, overall, as positive as the general population was to each requirement.

Before the call of the 40th general election, Elections Canada undertook a number of consultations with organizations representing communities of electors who may have greater difficulty in meeting the new voter identification requirements. These included northern Canadians, students, homeless persons and residents of long-term care facilities. The principal challenge identified in the consultations was the ability of these groups of electors to provide proof of address. A number of recommendations stemming from these consultations were received after the general election and are now being considered.

Virtually all voters who came to the polls were prepared to satisfy the identification requirements, and brought the required identification with them. Slightly fewer Aboriginal Canadians did so.

Elections Canada's poll workers observed that the voter identification process went well overall (95 percent) and that voters were prepared to comply with the new requirements when they arrived at the polls.

The majority of candidates (61 percent) observed no problems with the implementation of the identification requirements, but enough (37 percent or 328 survey respondents) witnessed problems that raise some concerns. These problems included voters not having proper identification, being unable to vote or having problems with proving their identity and address, and uneven interpretation of the rules by poll workers. We also received feedback indicating that some of our poll workers did not inform electors proactively of all the options available to them to meet the new requirements, such as vouching. As well, even though a vast majority of poll workers felt well trained and prepared to implement the new identification requirements, a minority (8 percent) indicated that they did not verify whether electors had the proper identification before allowing them to vote. This would appear to confirm a need to continue improving our training programs, but it also highlights the challenge we face in imparting, through a three-hour training session, increasingly complex rules to some 200,000 poll workers, most of whom we hire to work for a single day. This is an issue we discuss further in Section 3.2: Voting Operations.

While the majority of electors endorsed identification and brought the required identification document(s) with them, initial elector reactions at the polls appeared unfavourable to about one in five poll workers, with electors in Manitoba and Saskatchewan expressing the most objections. Electors' main objection to the requirement was that not everyone has an address.

Elections Canada receives complaints from electors in every election. For the 40th general election, about one in six (219 of 1,352)⁵ related to the voter identification requirements. This suggests that groups other than Aboriginal Canadians may also have been challenged by the requirements, particularly by proof of address. These groups include homeless electors, residents of long-term care facilities, students, individuals without a permanent civic address and individuals who do not have a driver's licence. These issues, which were also raised during the consultations before the election, were further confirmed by our experience in the field, particularly as it relates to students and seniors in long-term care facilities. During our post-event sessions, some of our returning officers and field liaison officers indicated that students living away from home often lack pieces of identification related to the location where they currently live. They also pointed out that seniors in long-term care facilities may not have access to pieces of identification, which may be held by the administration of the facility or by their families.

There also appears to have been some confusion about the use of the voter information card as a piece of identification. The vast majority of electors received a voter information card showing their correct name and address. Each card also stated explicitly that "This card CANNOT be used as proof of identity or residential address," as the voter information card is not on the list of authorized documents for establishing proof of identification and address. Nevertheless, about one in four poll workers (23 percent) reported that it was a common problem for electors to think they could use their voter information card as identification. Voters in Manitoba and Saskatchewan were most likely to mistake their voter information card as a proof of identification. This inconvenience does not appear to have compromised electors' perceptions of the voting process or of Elections Canada: 97 percent reported finding it easy to vote, with

⁵ Total complaints received as of December 31, 2008.

86 percent stating it was “very easy,” while 98 percent were satisfied with the instructions they received from Elections Canada about casting a ballot.

We also received some feedback through complaints and during the consultations we held before the election on the current vouching provisions of the Act. Among the issues raised, the one that is of most concern to Elections Canada is that the Act may be overly restrictive of electors’ ability to vouch for family members. Under the current legislation, an elector can vouch for only one other elector in a federal election. It is not possible, for instance, for a parent to vouch for more than one child at the polls. In the recent provincial election in British Columbia, a relative could vouch for any voters who are members of their family. This approach may be better adapted to the needs of electors.

In summary, the overall implementation of the new voter identification requirements went well. Except for certain segments of the population, most voters were aware of the requirements, accepted them, and arrived at the polls prepared to satisfy them. Yet there appear to be some groups of voters that found it more difficult than the general population to vote, particularly because of the proof-of-address requirement. Elections Canada will therefore explore the possibility of adding the voter information card to the list of authorized documents, and allowing it to be used in combination with another authorized piece of documentation. Elections BC already allows the use of its provincial “Where to Vote” card for these purposes and early indications are that it worked well.

One of Elections Canada’s strategic objectives is to ensure Canadians’ access to the electoral process, while protecting the integrity of that process. For the 40th general election, our approach to the voter identification requirements was through communications, outreach and training. While improvements are clearly possible, particularly as they relate to the proof-of-address requirement and the training of poll workers, the overall approach appears to be working well.

1.3 Voting Process

Including advance polls and ordinary polling day, almost 14 million Canadians voted in the 40th general election. Voting went very smoothly for the vast majority of them:

- 97 percent found it easy to vote.
- 97 percent found the location of the polling station they used a convenient distance for them.
- 99 percent were satisfied with the language they were served in at the polling station.
- 96 percent were satisfied with the amount of time spent waiting to cast a ballot.
- 98 percent were satisfied with the instructions they received on casting a ballot.

Before the election, it was difficult to determine just what impact the new identification requirements would have on voters’ experience at the polls. There was a concern that it would slow down the voting process.

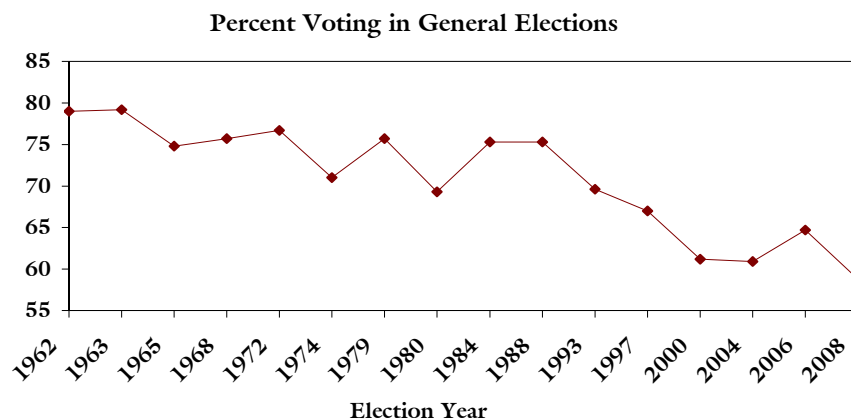
Drawing on our experience in recent by-elections, Elections Canada took steps to minimize the impact of the new requirements on the workflow at polling stations. The Chief Electoral Officer adapted the Act to allow for information and registration officers to facilitate the registration and voting process at advance polls. On election day, returning officers were required to have a supervisor and/or an information officer at practically all polling locations, as opposed to just locations containing more than three polling stations, which was the practice in previous general elections.

From the electors' perspective, these changes appear to have been successful and seamless. However, Elections Canada could realize greater efficiency if we had more flexibility to organize work inside our polling stations. At present, this is limited by the provisions of the Act, which explicitly defines the voting process, and the roles and responsibilities of returning officers and each type of election worker. This matter is further addressed in Section 3.2: Voting Operations.

As in past elections, about one in nine electors (11 percent) voted at an advance poll. This is virtually unchanged since 2006. Even though most voters still cast their ballot at a polling station on election day, advances in electoral technology, experienced in other democracies and by many Canadians during municipal elections, offer new avenues for alternative voting methods that cannot be ignored. As noted in Section 3.3: Future Services, a large number of Canadians are interested in accessing electoral services on-line. Elections Canada therefore remains committed, with the prior approval of Parliament, to conduct a secure electronic voting pilot in a by-election by 2013.

1.4 Voter Turnout

Including advance polls, special ballots and ordinary polling day, the total number of voters in the 40th general election was 13,929,093, or 58.8 percent of registered electors. This represented a 5.9 percent decrease from the turnout in the 39th general election and, as shown in the chart below, is consistent with a long-term trend for turnout to decline in successive elections. This is a trend observed in most provincial jurisdictions and other established democracies around the world.



The low turnout in the 2008 election is worrisome. It speaks to societal issues that are larger than the administration of electoral events. Addressing this trend requires the broad leadership of civil society. Elections Canada can assist by reducing administrative barriers to participation, thereby improving accessibility, and by conducting research to better understand the dynamics of voter turnout. With this in mind, we included questions related to voting behaviour, and factors that may impede participation, in our post-election survey of electors.

In interpreting the survey results, it is important to remember that self-reported turnout was higher than actual turnout (73 versus about 59 percent). This was also the case for the 39th general election (87 versus about 65 percent). This is a phenomenon observed in all such surveys.⁶ Despite these limitations, surveys remain the best method for understanding the factors that may contribute to electors' decision to vote – or not.

Consistent with past research, self-reported turnout tends to be lower among specific groups of electors. In particular, Aboriginal electors are the least likely to report that they have voted (54 percent in the 2008 election survey), followed by youth (63 percent).

During the 40th general election, Canadians had a range of opportunities to vote in various ways, in accessible venues and in more locations than ever before. As noted elsewhere in this report, both electors and candidates expressed high levels of satisfaction with the administration of the election. As such, administrative barriers do not appear to be a prominent factor in dissuading voting behaviour, although we note that more Aboriginal and young electors indicated these as factors than the general population did.

Self-reported reasons for not voting in the 40th general election – Using an open-ended question approach	
All electors	
Everyday situations, for example:	57%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holidays or being out of town (16%) • Being too busy or unexpected things coming up (15%) • Work or school schedules (11%) • Family obligations (3%) 	
Negative attitude toward politics or political parties, for example:	36%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apathy (14%) • Cynicism (8%) • Not knowing who to vote for or dislike of all candidates (9%) • Negative attitude toward political parties or their platform (3%) 	

⁶ It is well known that surveys over-report voting, "... in part because those who are less interested in politics and less inclined to vote are less prone to answer surveys... and in part because of mis-reporting due to social desirability." See André Blais, Elisabeth Gidengil, Richard Nadeau and Neil Nevitte, *Anatomy of a Liberal Victory: Making Sense of the 2000 Canadian Election* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 61. However, evidence shows that surveys can reliably be used to identify factors of voting and non-voting.

Self-reported reasons for not voting in the 40th general election – Using an open-ended question approach

Administration of the electoral process. For example:	8%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having received a voter information card (1%) • Not being sure if they were registered (1%) • Lack of proper identification (1%) • A transportation issue in getting to a poll (1%) • Not knowing where the polling station was or that it was too far (1%) 	
Aboriginal electors	
Everyday life situations	47%
Negative attitude toward politics or political parties	35%
Administration of the electoral process	18%
Young electors	
Everyday life situations	57%
Negative attitude toward politics or political parties	25%
Administration of the electoral process	16%

Everyday life situations dominate, at over 20 percent ahead of the second-most cited reasons for all electors, and significantly ahead of other reasons for both Aboriginal electors and youth.

Bearing in mind that self-reported reasons may be masking other factors, such as personal interest levels or other attitudes, it would appear that voting competes with other daily priorities for a substantial number of electors. In that sense, Elections Canada’s efforts to make registration and voting more accessible and convenient for electors (e.g. through initiatives such as e-registration and an eventual e-voting pilot) appear to be well positioned. By working at “bringing the ballot to the elector,” we may contribute to mitigating some of the reasons for lower turnout.

That being said, voting is a complex phenomenon that seems to result from a variety of factors that we need to understand better. Elections Canada will therefore continue to pursue research into these factors, to support future improvements to the electoral process. As examples, the agency is in the process of reconducting its study of turnout by age groups based on a sample of voters and data in the National Register of Electors, and its analysis of turnout on reserves.

We also renewed our partnership with the Canadian Election Study⁷; the study will be completed later this year.

Elections Canada also remains concerned by the low level of engagement of young Canadians in the electoral process. As indicated in our *Strategic Plan 2008–2013*, a key factor explaining youth disengagement is their lack of understanding of the importance of voting and becoming a candidate. Elections Canada remains committed to working collaboratively with a range of political and civil society partners to conduct targeted civic education for Canadians under 18 years of age.

More specifically, we are concerned about students, who often become eligible to vote for the first time while they are away from their families. Their first voting experience is made more complex by the residency rules of the Act as they apply to students. The onus is on students to determine whether they consider their place of residence to be with their family or where they study. Students who are away from their family home and have determined it to be their residence must vote by mail unless they happen to be at home during one of the voting days. Students who have determined that they reside where they study may intuitively think they can vote on campus – though this option is available only to students who live in residence on campus. Others must cast their ballot off campus, in the neighbourhood where they actually reside.

Representation from post-secondary student associations also indicates that local Elections Canada office staff have not consistently adhered to Elections Canada's procedures for students on campus. This is therefore an area that merits our attention, and where we look forward to engaging both returning officers and student groups. The aim is to improve service, and to simplify and improve communications and products.

⁷ Since 1997, Elections Canada has partnered with the Canadian Election Study (CES), a unique academic survey that has collected longitudinal data on Canadian federal elections since 1965. The replication of questions across studies, and the continual incorporation of new questions, makes the CES the most comprehensive account of the circumstances and the outcomes of national elections in Canada. The CES is based on a very large sample of Canadian electors (approximately 4,000 respondents) and traditionally consists of three consecutive panels (the same respondents are interviewed at three different moments), which provides for the collection of public opinion data both during the campaign period and after the election.

2. Political Entities' Experience of the Election and Political Financing Regime

2.1 Candidates

Just over 1,600 candidates participated in the 40th general election. Candidates generally felt quite positive about the agency's service during the election and with the performance of their returning officer. Most candidates also reported positive experiences with the various administrative processes and activities associated with the election. Despite the widespread positive experiences, about one in five candidates encountered difficulties with the nomination requirements set by the *Canada Elections Act*. Most of those who had difficulties with the nomination requirements said they found it difficult to collect enough signatures in their ridings (54 percent).⁸

Key findings – Candidates' perceptions

- 79 percent found that the overall quality of service received from Elections Canada was satisfactory.
- 79 percent were satisfied with the way the returning officer ran the election in their electoral district.
- The timeliness of processing nominations, the all-candidate briefings and Elections Canada's information services also received high marks (96, 83 and 79 percent respectively).
- Elections Canada's candidate-oriented tools were generally well received.

When it came to the use of tools provided by Elections Canada, 85 percent of candidates availed themselves of polling division maps, and approximately two-thirds made use of the voter lists (68 percent) and the "bingo card" (67 percent).⁹ Perceptions of the bingo card were mixed – only a minority of those who used the card found it useful. Tools less widely used included the letter from the Chief Electoral Officer to facilitate access to public places (40 percent) and the

⁸ In most electoral districts, candidates are required by the Act to collect the names, addresses and signatures of 100 electors from the electoral district in support of their nomination.

⁹ A statement of the electors who have voted on polling day.

GeoExplore Web mapping tool¹⁰ (19 percent). Even though a minority of candidates used the letter, feedback we received from political parties indicates that they felt it was extremely useful. Furthermore, the vast majority (84 percent) of candidates who did not use or were not aware of GeoExplore expressed interest in using it in the future.

Candidates provided assessments of other aspects of the electoral process (e.g. the voter identification requirements); these are discussed in the relevant sections of this report. They also offered numerous suggestions to improve the conduct of federal elections, although no single suggestion was mentioned by more than 8 percent of them. The table below groups these suggestions into three categories.

Candidates' suggestions for improvement¹¹	
Category	
Voting or registration changes, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing on-line voting (8%) • Adopting proportional representation (7%) • Reducing voter eligibility requirements (5%) • Using electronic voter registration (3%) • A return to door-to-door enumeration (3%) 	48%
Administrative suggestions, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better training of Elections Canada staff (8%) • Reducing paperwork or bureaucracy (5%) • Adding polling locations (3%) • Increasing the timeframe for voting and elections (3%) 	23%
Communications issues, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More election advertising (3%) • More accessible information for candidates and voters (3%) • Better organized information on the Elections Canada Web site (2%) 	8%

As part of the agency's ongoing commitment to administering the Act in a fair, consistent, effective and transparent manner, Elections Canada will be reviewing these suggestions and pursuing appropriate improvements to the electoral process for matters that fall within its mandate.

This was the first election in which Elections Canada was responsible for the appointment of returning officers. In the 40th general election, 85 percent of candidates were satisfied with their interactions with their returning officer; 60 percent expressed being very satisfied. This level of satisfaction establishes a benchmark for future electoral events.

¹⁰ This tool allows the user to locate civic addresses, streets, municipalities, electoral districts and other similar information.

¹¹ Up to three suggestions per candidate were accepted.

2.2 Advisory Committee of Political Parties

In addition to surveying candidates, the Chief Electoral Officer held bilateral teleconferences after the election with members of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties. The results of these discussions generally mirrored the findings of the candidate survey: committee members were generally satisfied with Elections Canada's services and the overall administration of the election.

One of the main complaints that several committee members expressed relates to the holding of "candidate debates" in which not all candidates in a particular electoral district were given an opportunity to participate. This is a complex matter. The Act is ambiguous on this issue, which we intend to bring to the attention of Parliament in our recommendations report.

Committee members also made a variety of suggestions for improving various aspects of the electoral framework, such as voter identification, the political financing regime, the training of electoral workers, revision and the candidate nomination process.

Some suggestions require administrative changes, and the responsibility rests with Elections Canada to assess and implement them in preparation for future electoral events. Others require changes to the Act and will be considered as we prepare the recommendations report.

2.3 Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

The Chief Electoral Officer appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on February 24, 2009. This appearance was preceded by bilateral meetings with individual committee members.

During the appearance, members of Parliament raised several topics, including the recruitment, training and compensation of electoral workers; the quality and accuracy of the list of electors; turnout; barriers faced by students in proving their address; filming in polling stations; delays at some polling stations; and the security of ballot boxes. Elections Canada is considering these topics as it moves forward with electoral process improvements that fall within its mandate.

2.4 Regulatory Burden

The *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada on the 40th General Election of October 14, 2008*, mentions that political financing rules have been amended repeatedly and significantly in the past few years. The provisions have become more complex and place greater burdens on political entities. As an illustration of this, the survey of candidates reveals that more than one in five (22 percent) had difficulty in finding someone willing, available and qualified to become their official agent. Candidates also believe that it is a difficult function with too much responsibility. Their perspective is borne out by focus groups that Elections Canada conducted with official agents and financial agents in the summer of 2008.

Agents' roles and responsibilities

Official agents are responsible for administering the financial transactions of a candidate's campaign, and reporting on those transactions in accordance with the Act. They are volunteers who might not possess detailed knowledge of the Act, or have bookkeeping or accounting experience. Many who accept the responsibility remain in the position reluctantly. One thing we heard in the focus groups was how hard it was to find someone to take over the role once the incumbent explained the rules to the new person. Most did not want to take over upon hearing of the rules and responsibilities.

Many agents agreed to take on the role before having fully appreciated the complexity of the rules stemming from the legislation. A common comment heard in the focus groups was, "If I had known what I was getting myself into, I would never have accepted."

Agents often experienced difficulty with the pace of the election, and with key steps, such as the timing of opening the campaign bank account and making deposits to or withdrawals from it, and what should happen at the very end of the process when, for example, surplus disposition has been resolved. They suggested that a one-page calendar showing key dates and responsibilities would be useful. Agents also stated they would like to get increased support from their partisan structures with regard to their role and responsibilities.

Elections Canada's support for agents

Once the election is underway and agents are identified to Elections Canada, we accompany them through the full cycle of their duties by providing training, various tools and a toll-free support desk.

During late October and November of 2008, we held 25 training sessions for agents in major centres across Canada. Attendance at these sessions totalled 272 individuals out of approximately 1,600. The sessions provided an overview of campaign financing and obligations of agents and candidates, outlined important dates, and demonstrated how to complete a candidate's return using Electronic Financial Return, an Elections Canada software application. Training facilitators answered as many questions from the audience as time permitted. Recent feedback strongly supports this training, with 96 percent of participants rating its quality as very good or excellent. However, while most said they were satisfied with their initial training, they also felt it could be improved, or that other, related tools would give that training more value.

Electronic Financial Return

Elections Canada encourages agents, as well as all other political entities, to use Electronic Financial Return in preparing and filing their return. There are several advantages to using it, for both the agents and Elections Canada. It increases the accuracy of returns, thereby reducing the number of corrections to be made, and it speeds up file processing and reimbursements. The need for fewer corrections and faster payments also reduces the administrative burden on political entities.

Issues of scheduling made access to training difficult for some agents, a fact reinforced by the survey of candidates: 28 percent indicated that no one from their campaign attended the information sessions on the financial requirements for candidates and their agents. Elections Canada is therefore exploring on-line training and tutorials, which agents could access at their convenience and at their own pace. We will, however, maintain in-person training sessions, as these provide an invaluable forum for exchange and dialogue between candidates' representatives and Elections Canada.

The tools Elections Canada provides to agents include multimedia kits containing videos, documentation such as manuals and sample forms, the Electronic Financial Return software and other reference materials. These materials are also available on the Elections Canada Web site. Participants in the focus-group sessions raised some issues about these tools; for example, some were seen as daunting, in terms of both the language used and the sheer length of the documentation. We have therefore launched an initiative to review and streamline the current tools.

We also correspond regularly with agents to remind them of their obligations, election expenses limits and filing deadlines. During the focus groups, most agents stated that Elections Canada's written communications were too frequent, formal and legalistic. Individuals struggled to understand the language of the formal correspondence and how it applied to their individual cases. Elections Canada is therefore reviewing its written communications with a view to addressing these elements, where possible.

The focus groups we conducted with agents showed that they generally viewed their interactions with the toll-free support desk¹² as constructive, and described our representatives as courteous, genuinely helpful, resourceful and available.

Complexity of the rules

During the focus-group sessions, participants – who represented various registered parties, including the five eligible to receive a quarterly allowance – revealed that becoming familiar with the Act and the requirements of their position is a major challenge. Agents struggle with the complex rules and requirements set out in the Act. Most stated that agents almost need to be financial experts to fulfill their role, while more than one professional accountant found the role of agent difficult.

Elections Canada can implement some limited administrative initiatives to ease the regulatory burden on political entities. However, the legislation itself drives most of the complexity that makes the current regime daunting. We will therefore examine whether aspects of the legislation can be improved with a view to reducing the regulatory burden, and will include possible improvements in our next report to Parliament on recommended changes to the Act.

¹² Elections Canada has a 1-800 number available to candidates, official agents and external auditors to help them understand their responsibilities. This service is available year-round, with extended hours during election periods and during the weeks leading up to a financial return filing deadline.

3. Administration of the Election

3.1 Voter Registration

As in past elections, Elections Canada produced preliminary lists of electors at the start of the election period, drawing on information in the National Register of Electors (“the Register”). Elections Canada estimates that 93 percent of eligible electors were on the preliminary lists and that 84 percent of eligible electors were registered at their current address. These estimates exceed our targets of 92 and 80 percent respectively, and are consistent with estimates produced for the 39th general election.

According to our survey data, almost 9 in 10 electors received a voter information card that confirmed that they were registered for the election. Even among young and Aboriginal Canadians, a majority received the card (69 and 75 percent respectively). Virtually all those who reported receiving a voter information card said that the name and address information was accurate (97 percent for name, 98 percent for address). There were no significant variations in the degree of accuracy of voter information cards by region, gender, age, education or household income.

Notwithstanding the accuracy of the preliminary lists of electors, and the corresponding accuracy of information on the voter information card, about one in nine (11 percent) candidates expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the voter lists provided to them by their returning officer, and a further 10 percent of surveyed candidates were unsure or provided no response. Elections Canada therefore looks forward to engaging these stakeholders in a dialogue to better understand their concerns about the quality of voter lists.

As far as the role of the voter information card in triggering electors to initiate a revision activity, results are modest. Survey data indicate that just under one third (30 percent) of those who received a card and found errors in it did something to correct the inaccuracies.

Among those who did *not* receive a voter information card, about half reported taking a variety of actions to find out if they were registered to vote. These included seeking clarification at the polling station or the local Elections Canada office (15 percent) and calling the 1-800 number provided by Elections Canada (8 percent). Still fewer consulted the Elections Canada Web site (4 percent) or informed a revising agent (4 percent). Results are similar among youth and immigrant/visible minorities, for whom 46 and 56 percent respectively did nothing to follow up. As compared to the general population and other subgroups, a slightly higher proportion of Aboriginal Canadians indicate that they did nothing to follow up (61 percent).

Taking action when an elector did not receive a voter information card is also strongly linked to self-reported voting behaviour. Among those voting in 2008, only 17 percent reported that they did nothing, compared with 74 percent among those who reported not voting.

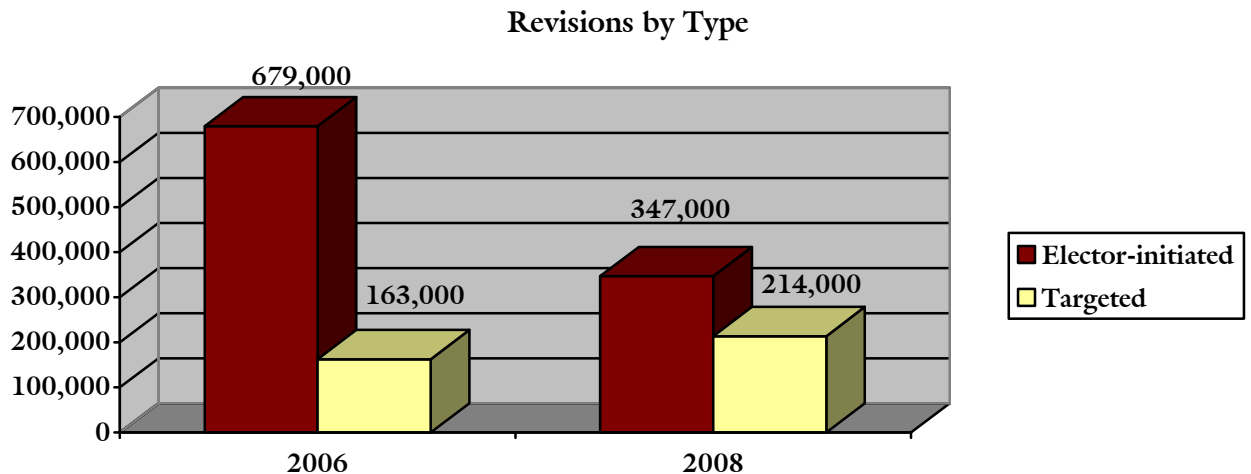
The relationship of confirmation of registration, as evidenced by receipt of a voter information card, and subsequent elector behaviour is complex and will require further research into the factors, such as registration, that may influence electors' voting behaviour.

During the election and as part of the revision process, Elections Canada offices conduct targeted revision initiatives, especially in new residential developments, areas known for high population mobility, student neighbourhoods, nursing homes and long-term care facilities. Starting in the second week of the election period, pairs of revising agents visited some 1.2 million targeted addresses (10 percent of residential addresses in the country).

Voter registration statistics show that there is a decreasing trend in the number of electors not on the list at their current address who get registered during the revision period in advance of polling day. In the 37th general election, for example, about 1.8 million registrations were captured during the revision period. The table below shows that, by the 40th general election, this number had fallen considerably.

Registrations during revision – Recent elections	
Election	Registrations
November 2000	1,792,151
June 2004	934,827
January 2006	841,764
October 2008	561,515

In contrast, the following figure shows that our targeted revision efforts were more successful in the 40th general election.



This has prompted Elections Canada to study its revision program more closely. It is also in keeping with the 2005 Report of the Auditor General, which recommended that we assess the cost-effectiveness of our revision activities.

The decline in registrations during revision reflects improvement in the overall quality of the data in the Register. It is possible, however, that recent changes to the *Canada Elections Act* may be contributing to both this trend and the increased success of targeted revision.

Revisal desks

During the general election, returning officers from five Vancouver electoral districts set up revisal desks in large downtown shopping malls as an alternative to door-to-door targeted revision. This was the first time that registration desks could serve electors from multiple electoral districts. The data gathered during this initiative show that these desks proved at least as productive, in terms of registration take-up rate, as door-to-door targeted revision usually is in British Columbia. However, because of the statutory requirement that there be a pair of revising agents on-site for each electoral district represented, this method proved less cost efficient than traditional door-to-door canvassing. While we do not plan to expand the use of revisal desks, we believe they remain a worthwhile alternative in areas where door-to-door targeted revision is ineffective.

As intended, the Act now makes it easier for voters to register at their door during targeted revision. When visited at home, a single respondent can register other electors by swearing an oath of eligibility without showing those electors' identification documents. This practice has enabled more electors to get on the voter lists through targeted revision.

However, the new voter identification requirements may contribute to reducing the importance of being on the voter list in advance of election day, because voters have to show identification and proof of address regardless of whether they are registered to vote. This may be prompting electors who would have otherwise initiated a registration transaction themselves to “save” it until voting day. Similarly, electors would also have less incentive to correct a mistake on a voter information card, or to ask the returning officer for a registration form if a card is not received. On this point, however, we lack sufficient data to reach definite conclusions, and will study this phenomenon further in future electoral events.

We also note that of the almost 14 million Canadians who voted in the 40th general election, the vast majority had their name on the voters’ list produced from the Register when they cast their ballots on polling day. Despite sustained improvements in the accuracy of Register data, a small percentage of voters (6.1 percent) casting ballots registered on polling day. This percentage has remained just above 6 percent for the past three general elections, and contrasts with the 2000 election, when almost 9 percent registered on polling day. This trend suggests that the current voter registration regime, in place since 1997, has reached maturity as far as polling day registration is concerned.

These findings invite reflection about our revision program, as might the e-registration process that we are developing to facilitate elector-initiated activities. Similarly, we will be assessing whether the voter information card could be used as proof of address, when accompanied by another document to prove identity. If this becomes the case, it may increase the motivation for electors to register in advance of election day.

3.2 Voting Operations

Elections Canada must recruit, train and monitor the work of a small army of poll workers (almost 200,000 in the 40th general election), to ensure that electors across the country enjoy a high standard of service when they go to the polls and vote. As noted earlier in this report, the great majority of electors were satisfied with their voting experience at the 40th general election. However, there were instances of inconsistent application of the voter identification rules by poll workers. That these occurred despite our best efforts points to a growing concern we have about our ability to ensure uniform service across the country while working within the constraints, set by the Act, on operating poll sites.

The Act not only specifies in detail the voting process and the roles and responsibilities of each type of poll worker, it stipulates that, before hiring their workers, returning officers must first contact the candidates representing political parties that placed first or second in the previous election and obtain from them lists of suitable persons for the positions of deputy returning officer (section 34 of the Act), poll clerk (section 35) and registration officer (section 39). Section 36 of the Act prohibits returning officers from filling the positions with individuals not named on these lists until 17 days before election day. As indicated in our first report on the 40th general election, these provisions limit Elections Canada’s ability to recruit and train workers.

Few candidates provide enough names of potential workers to returning officers: the proportion of poll workers identified by candidates fell from 42 percent in the 39th general election to 33 percent in the 40th. The figure was only 3 percent in British Columbia and only 2 percent in Alberta. This shortfall is turning recruitment into a major business function within returning offices, one that has to be executed within a very tight time frame.

Concurrently, Elections Canada must recruit more workers at each election as the number of polling stations increases to accommodate the growth of the electorate and as the voting process becomes more complex.

Service to electors

Elections Canada has implemented administrative changes in successive elections to ensure that electors receive a uniformly high level of service when they vote. These include:

- adding a recruitment officer to each local office to assist in recruiting enough workers;
- adding a dedicated training officer in each local office, and continuously upgrading training materials to incorporate modern experiential learning principles;
- adding positions in polls to assist with the implementation of the voter identification regime; and
- using the best and most experienced workers as central poll supervisors, so that there is an added layer of quality assurance on call during polling day to compensate for the inexperience of newly appointed workers, and to address exceptional matters.

Despite these initiatives, it is clear that we are reaching the limits of the voting operations model defined by the current legislation.

Post-mortems we conducted with field management (returning officers and field liaison officers) confirmed that they face enormous challenges:

- Recruiting enough workers to staff all their polling stations: In each election, returning officers request a greater number of derogations (authority to hire workers from outside the electoral district or who are less than 18 years old).
- Training all their workers in the limited time available after they are allowed to start recruiting: The tasks associated with poll work have become increasingly demanding. In the voting operations model currently defined in the Act, poll workers are generalists, and they must master numerous complex tasks. Not only is the time currently allocated for training too short (according to four out of five returning officers), the training itself has become sufficiently detailed to dissuade individuals from working for us. We hear increasing reports of workers quitting after the training.

The complexity of the job is only one disincentive that returning officers must overcome. To match the job requirements, returning officers believe that a comprehensive review of the *Tariff of Fees* is required. The wages paid to election workers are often not competitive or comparable to salaries paid to workers in the private sector. This is especially true in areas where labour markets are tight. Further, the rates of pay offered by some provincial electoral agencies are higher than federal rates, adding to the difficulties in recruitment. Returning officers are dissatisfied with the pay scales currently established under the Tariff and strongly recommend a review of all positions required for an election, their relevance and an adjustment of pay rates. Returning officers feel the rates must be competitive to attract qualified individuals.

However, as a result of the recent enactment of the *Expenditure Restraint Act*, we may be unable to pursue these changes until fiscal year 2011–12. Moreover, the 1.5 percent increase authorized under the Act for 2009–10 is below the increase in the Consumer Price Index that had been built into the tariff for this year, but that has been superseded by the Act. These constraints on the remuneration of election workers will limit our ability to resolve recruitment challenges for election workers.

At the start of the 40th general election, Elections Canada identified field staffing as a critical risk. As election day approached, we reviewed the progress returning officers were making in recruiting, training and assigning workers to polling stations daily. Just days before polling day, we drew up a watch-list of some 12 electoral districts, located mostly in the downtown areas of Montréal, Vancouver and Toronto, that faced severe understaffing issues. We implemented various initiatives to assist these returning officers, such as issuing public service announcements, running ads, allowing for the recruitment of 16- and 17-year-old workers, and looking at regional swapping of resources. These sustained, last-minute efforts ensured that services to electors were not compromised.

However, situations like these are an increasing concern and signal that it is time to explore alternative models for voting operations, some of which are currently in use in provincial jurisdictions, to make more optimal use of available resources and ensure a consistently high-quality voting experience for electors. New Brunswick's 2008 municipal election provides an instructive example. There, teams of election officers at a given polling site could provide services to any voter, regardless of the polling station to which the voter was assigned within the site. Dedicated officers struck electors' names from the voter lists and gave each elector a ticket for a ballot. Voters could then vote at any polling station within the site. This provided better service to electors and addressed some of the challenges involved in training workers for increasingly complex tasks.

We see many benefits in exploring a similar approach at the federal level. It would make the process less labour intensive; it would also simplify tasks (and consequently the training) of poll workers, and provide flexibility to rotate or replace poll workers during breaks and meals. It would also allow us to improve services to electors and may reduce wait times. Such flexibility is simply not available to us under the current legislation.

As noted in the report on the 40th general election, we are exploring several options to increase flexibility:

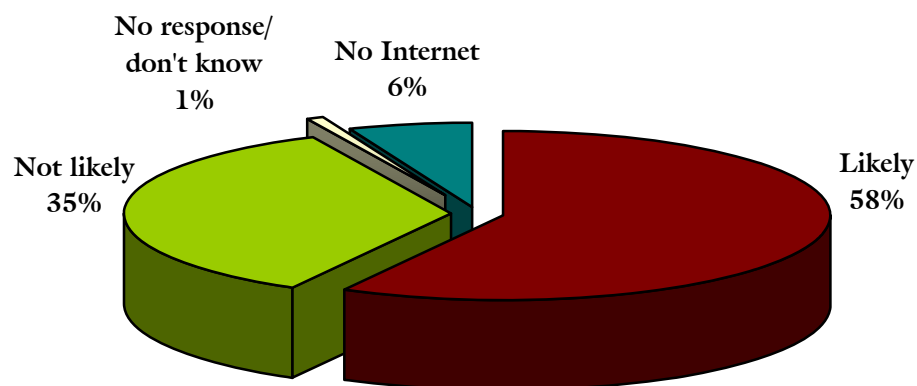
- providing more freedom to allocate work at polling stations and in the tasks that can be assigned to various workers;
- allowing returning officers to begin the recruitment and training of election workers earlier in the election period; and
- further encouraging the hiring of 16- and 17-year-olds for specific positions, such as information officers – recruitment of young Canadians might also further encourage them to participate in future elections.

We plan to address this matter further in our recommendations report.

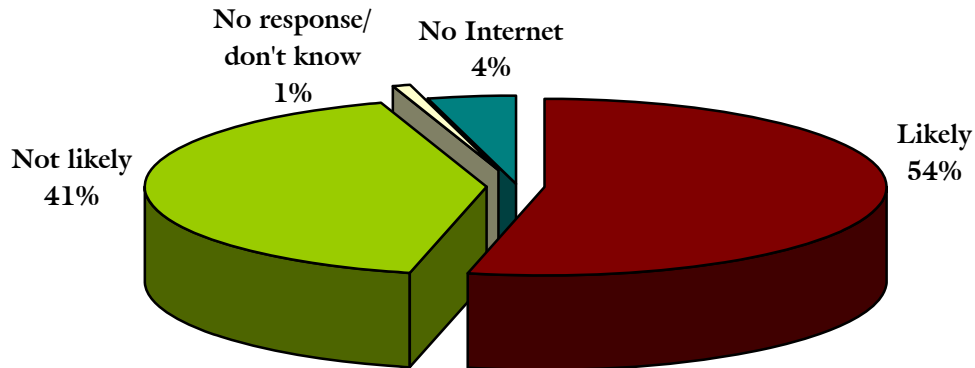
3.3 Future Services: E-registration and E-voting

In the fall of 2007, after a comprehensive review of our internal and external environment, Elections Canada completed its *Strategic Plan 2008–2013*. A key aspect of the plan is a commitment to increasing the accessibility of the electoral process by testing innovative ways to vote and offering electors additional ways to register. Our survey of electors therefore included a number of questions related to Internet registration and voting. Candidates were also canvassed on their views about using the Internet to access an Elections Canada Web site to register, make corrections to their voter information, and to vote.

Elector Interest in Using the Internet for Registration



Elector Interest in Using the Internet to Vote



A majority of elector respondents said that they would be likely to access an Elections Canada Web site to register or make corrections to their voter information if they could. Similarly, most would be likely to vote on-line. Interest levels in on-line registration and voting are stable compared to 2006 (61 and 55 percent respectively).

Almost 70 percent of youth indicated a likelihood to use the Internet to register or make corrections, and were among the most interested in voting on-line (69 percent). For all groups of electors, interest in using an on-line tool increases with the level of education and generally with household income.

Non-voters among the public, youth and Aboriginal Canadians (55, 64 and 41 percent respectively) report that they would be likely to use the Internet to register to vote if this service were available. Similarly, half of those who did not cast a ballot reported that they would be “very” likely to vote on-line, including 55 and 39 percent among youth and Aboriginal non-voters, respectively.

Special Voting Rules

Under the Special Voting Rules (Part 11 of the Act), any elector who cannot or does not wish to vote at a polling station during an election may vote using a special ballot. With a special ballot, an elector can vote by mail or in person at any local Elections Canada office. If an elector residing in Canada is away from his or her electoral district, either inside or outside Canada, he or she can also register to vote with Elections Canada in Ottawa. Special Voting Rules also apply to other categories of electors, such as those temporarily residing outside Canada and Canadian Forces electors. For many electors, voting by special ballot is the only practical way to exercise their franchise.

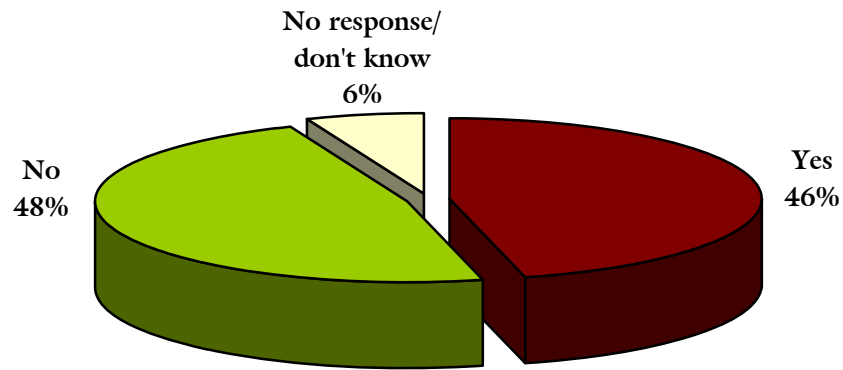
Voting by mail entails paper-based transactions between the elector and Elections Canada for the purpose of registering, issuing a ballot and returning it in time to be counted. This three-step process is conducted within tight legislative deadlines (usually, a 36-day calendar).

The short election calendar and the limitations of postal service can hinder the ability of many electors to meet these deadlines, most particularly when voting from outside Canada. During the last general election, of the 50,205 voting kits sent to electors voting outside their electoral district in Canada and abroad, Elections Canada received 3,675 within the two weeks after election day, too late to be counted.

This an area where we believe electors would benefit from on-line services.

A large majority of candidates (75 percent) stated that electors should be able to register on-line; 20 percent did not agree. Candidates were split on on-line voting, as illustrated in the following chart.

**Candidates' Perspective:
Should Electors Be Able to Vote Online?**



The survey indicates that most Canadians are interested in on-line registration and voting. The prospect of using an Elections Canada Web site to register or make corrections to their voter information, or to vote, is especially appealing to youth. Though candidates share Canadians' interest in on-line registration, many expressed doubts about on-line voting.

In view of the number of Canadians who are interested in accessing electoral services on-line, our efforts to put e-registration in place and to test e-voting are well aligned to their needs. At the same time, we are aware that many Canadians, and candidates in particular, are still uncertain about electoral services over the Internet, especially when it comes to on-line voting. We will continue our consultations as we move forward with these services, and will ensure that future voter services meet the high standards of integrity and security that Canadians have come to expect from their electoral processes. We will also return to Parliament with recommendations for legislative change that would allow us to fully implement on-line registration.

Conclusion

Elections Canada's efforts to administer the provisions of the *Canada Elections Act* in a manner that ensured the accessibility and integrity of the electoral process during the 40th general election were successful on most fronts. The new voter identification requirements were effectively communicated to the vast majority of electors, and almost all electors came to the polls prepared to satisfy those requirements. Candidates expressed high levels of satisfaction in our services and in their interactions with their returning officer.

The general success of the 40th general election tends to overshadow some trends that merit attention. The complexity of the political financing rules set out in the Act affects candidates and political parties, and it is our view that these rules have become sufficiently burdensome to warrant a review aimed at simplifying them and making compliance with them easier for political entities and their representatives. Furthermore, the Act imposes restrictions on Elections Canada's ability to organize and administer the election in a businesslike manner that maintains the high standards of integrity, security and service that Canadians have come to expect in their electoral processes. It is our view that this aspect of the Act also warrants review and simplification.

To address these issues, Elections Canada will bring forward recommendations for legislative amendments in its next report to Parliament. In preparing that report, we will be seeking the input and advice of registered political parties in these areas and others that may require legislative change through the Advisory Committee of Political Parties.

Delivering a general election is a massive undertaking taking place under very prescriptive rules. It calls on Elections Canada to reach out to over 23 million electors and provide them with an opportunity to cast their ballot to elect their members of Parliament. This is a process that is accomplished mostly through direct interaction with all electors. Overall, while this report suggests that these interactions were for the most part professional and effective, it also points to areas for future improvement. Elections Canada is committed to work collaboratively with parliamentarians, political parties, candidates, electors and their representatives to improve the electoral process and continue ensuring that elections are administered in a fair, efficient, transparent and trustworthy fashion.

Appendix I: Evaluation Activities

The following were considered in preparing this report:

- Qualitative Research Report on Needs and Expectations of Official Agents and Financial Agents – Focus Group Report
- Consultations on the voter identification requirements
 - Implementation of the Identification Requirements in the Canadian North
 - Stakeholder Engagement on New Voter Identification Requirements
- Survey of Electors
- Survey of Candidates
- Survey of Election Officers (Poll Staff)
- Survey of Returning Officers (Returning Officer Report of Proceedings)
- Survey of Community Relations Officers
- Aboriginal Elders and Youth Program Survey
- Field Liaison Officers Regional Evaluation Questionnaire
- Field Liaison Officer Post-mortem
- Returning Officer Post-mortem

Appendix 2: Methodologies of Selected Surveys

Survey of Electors

Elections Canada commissioned The Strategic Counsel, a survey firm, to conduct the Survey of Electors. The firm completed the telephone interviews between October 22 and November 17, 2008. In total, 3,348 electors participated in the interviews.

The base sample is composed of 2,500 Canadian electors from the general population. Sub-samples of specific elector groups were also constituted as follows:

- young electors aged 18–24 (over-sample): 500
- Aboriginal electors (over-sample): 500
 - on-reserve: 250
 - off-reserve: 250
- immigrants/visible minority (over-sample): 500

The response rate for each sub-sample is as follows:

- general population: 15 percent
- Aboriginal: 18 percent
- youth: 26 percent
- immigrants/visible minority: 13 percent

The national representative sample can be expected to provide results that are accurate within plus or minus 1.96 percentage points, 95 times out of 100.

The over-sample of Aboriginal electors is subdivided equally among those who live on-reserve (250) and off-reserve (250). When calling households, interviewers asked to speak with the Aboriginal person of at least 18 years of age who had the most recent birthday (to ensure randomness). Aboriginal identity and voter eligibility were also confirmed with each individual respondent. To ensure that 250 Aboriginal people living on-reserve were selected, The Strategic Counsel used a sampling frame based on information from Statistics Canada, which has a record of every reserve in the country, and known postal codes associated with Aboriginal reserves. To ensure that 250 Aboriginal people living off-reserve were selected, The Strategic Counsel used a five-step process that involved canvassing selected dissemination areas with higher concentrations of Aboriginal people.

The over-sample of immigrants/visible minority was based on questions asked about ethnic and cultural background as well as country of birth. The random digit dialing and the “most recent birthday” methods were used.

Survey of Electoral Officers

Elections Canada commissioned Leger Marketing to conduct the Survey of Electoral Officers. The survey firm completed the phone interviews with 3,115 out of 96,754 officers between January 15 and February 2, 2009. The margin of error for a sample this size is ± 1.8 percent, 19 times out of 20, and the overall response rate is 30 percent. Survey results were weighted to be representative of the audience by province, staffing position and type of poll.

Interviews were conducted with representative samples from each of the following target populations.

Particular Region	Unweighted	Weighted
North of the 50th Parallel	250	8
Type of Polling Station		
Advance poll only	638	274
Ordinary poll on election day	2,277	2,793
Mobile poll	200	48
Officer Group		
CPS (central poll supervisor)	600	400
DRO (deputy returning officer)	1,889	2,211
IO (information officer)	626	504

Survey of Candidates

Elections Canada commissioned Phoenix Strategic Perspective to conduct the Survey of Candidates. This survey population consisted of 1,601 candidates (147 of them had not provided a telephone number). In total, 877 candidates out of 1,601 completed the survey between January 25 and February 18, 2009.¹³ The month-long field period was intended to maximize the response rate. Candidates completed the survey primarily by phone, but were also given several options to self-administer the survey (on-line, or by fax, mail or e-mail), to encourage participation.

¹³ The on-line survey was available from February 5 to 23, to allow for last-minute completions and requests to do the survey.

This survey had a response rate of 59 percent, an exceptionally strong response rate for this type of research. Because this was a census survey, not a random sample of candidates, the results can be generalized only to the population surveyed. If this were a random-sample survey, the overall results would be considered accurate within ± 2.2 percent, 19 times out of 20.

Appendix 3: Limitations of Surveys in General

This report draws on data from several surveys. While surveys are highly valuable research tools that enable Elections Canada to evaluate its performance and services, they are also subject to several limitations. Some of the principal limitations associated with survey research are¹⁴:

- *Low response rates* – It is increasingly difficult to get people to respond to telephone surveys, while those who take the time to respond to surveys are in many ways different from people who do not. This “self-selection bias” makes generalizing the results of the survey risky.
- *Cell-phone-only households* – It is very difficult or impossible to contact respondents who do not have a landline telephone. This problem is becoming more prevalent with the increase of cell-phone-only households (6 percent in 2007). These respondents tend to be younger, more politically informed and more likely to use the Internet, social networking and blogs.
- *Small-cases exceptions* – Surveys are very useful for identifying large trends. For example, 2,500 respondents for a particular question yields a 1.96 percent margin of error but cannot be used to understand exceptional cases (25 respondents for a particular question yields a 19.6 percent margin of error).
- *Small populations* – For purposes of generalization, surveys must be adequately representative. This makes it difficult and more expensive to obtain accurate information on small populations or groups.
- *Self-reporting nature* – Surveys rely on the self-reported evaluation of respondents. What they remember and report cannot be controlled for.
- *Social-desirability bias* – Respondents can consciously or unconsciously give the answer that they think the surveyor wants to hear, or that they think will put them in the best light.
- *Oversimplified interpretation* – As a result of using pre-constructed categories of responses (which speeds up the surveys), there is a natural tendency to oversimplify what respondents **really** think. This can be a particular problem when trying to explain complex issues.

¹⁴ For example, see W. Lawrence Neuman, *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997).