

Spring 5-3-2022

Canadians' Views About the 2021 Federal Election Process

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Citation of this paper:

Democracy, Consortium on Electoral, "Canadians' Views About the 2021 Federal Election Process" (2022).
Working Papers. 1.
https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/c-dem_workingpapers/1

Canadians' Views About the 2021 Federal Election Process

Report prepared by Fernando Feitosa for the Consortium on Electoral Democracy

May 3, 2022

Summary Report

The 2021 Canadian Election Study (CES) included several questions in its post-election wave (fielded between September 23rd and October 4th, 2021) that are likely to be of direct interest, as they relate to Canadians' experience with and attitudes toward the electoral process. These questions covered the five following topics: 1) electoral administration, 2) electoral registration, 3) electoral information, 4) electoral experience, and 5) general opinion about elections. The survey instrument was presented on the Qualtrics online platform to a sample of 15,972 individuals, which represents 71% of the original sample of respondents in the 2021 CES.

Respondents in the 2021 CES were recruited from Leger Opinion Panel. They needed to be aged 18 or over, and Canadian citizens or permanent residents to be eligible. To ensure the representativeness of the sample, targets stratified by region and balanced on gender and age within the five regions (Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, West, and Territories) were applied.¹ More precisely, 50% of respondents should be men and 50% should be women. Likewise, 28% of respondents should be aged 18-34, 33% should be aged 35-54, and 39% should be aged 55 or higher. Finally, the study also established language quotas. These were 80% French and 20% English within Quebec, 10% French within the Atlantic region, and 10% French nationally.

The results reported here are based on a "cleaned" dataset, which excludes respondents who 1) took the survey more than once, 2) failed the attention check, 3) took more than 60 minutes to complete the survey, and/or 4) provided a different year of birth at the beginning of the survey compared with the end of the survey. Given the overrepresentation of some social groups in the dataset, the results are weighted by province, as well as gender, age, and education level.² As in the report prepared for EMB's with the 2019 CES, the results include breakdowns by gender (male or female), age groups (18-34, 35-54, 55-75, or 75-99), province (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, or Saskatchewan), and electoral participation (abstained or voted). The Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon are excluded from these breakdowns given that few respondents come from these places in the dataset.

Below we outline some of the highlights that emerged from the data, noting that the results are rounded to their nearest integers; for this reason, some percentages do not add up to 100%.

¹ The Atlantic includes Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island. The West includes Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. And the Territories include Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon.

² All population data were taken from the 2016 Canadian census.

1. Electoral administration

The first topic covered by the 2021 CES concerned electoral administration. The 2021 CES asked citizens 1) their satisfaction with the way Elections Canada (henceforth, EC) runs federal elections, 2) how fair was EC in conducting the 2021 election, and 3) their (dis)trust of EC.

We observe that **most Canadians (74%) were satisfied with the way EC runs federal elections** (22% very/52% fairly; see Figure 1 in the Supporting Information). These numbers resemble the ones obtained in 2019, when 77% of Canadians reported feeling satisfied with the way elections are run (19% very/58% fairly). As expected, dissatisfaction was highest among the Canadian youth, and those who abstained in the 2021 election (25% of those aged 18-34, and 28% of abstainers are not at all or not very satisfied). Provincially, the percentage of the dissatisfied was highest in Saskatchewan (19% not very/6% not at all). Interestingly, in 2019 Albertans were the most dissatisfied with the way elections are run (15% not very/10% not at all).

In a similar vein, **76% of Canadians believed that Elections Canada ran the 2021 election fairly** (36% very/40% somewhat; see Figure 2). Comparatively, in 2019 82% believed that Elections Canada ran the 2019 election fairly (36% very/46% somewhat). As with satisfaction, the 18-34 years old (14% not very/5% not at all) and Saskatchewanians (15% not very/8% not at all) were the ones who mostly think that the 2021 elections were run unfairly.

In contrast to the general positive evaluation of EC's electoral administration, **only 62% of Canadians trusted Elections Canada** (see Figure 3). The most distrustful were those aged 18-34 (40%), residents of New Brunswick (46%), and women (37%).

2. Electoral registration

The second topic covered by the 2021 CES concerned electoral registration. Indeed, the 2021 CES asked Canadians 1) whether they received their registration card in the mail, 2) whether the information in that card was correct, 3) whether they registered during the election, 4) how they registered during the election, and 5) whether registration during the election was easy.

With respect to whether Canadians received their registration card in the mail, we observe that **a substantial number of them received their registration card in the mail** (86%; see Figure 4). Those aged 18-34 (19%), and who abstained in the 2021 election (24%) were, however, more likely not to have received their registration card in the mail.

Of those who received the registration card in the mail, **97% reported that the information in the card was correct** (see Figure 5). While this value was somewhat lower among abstainers in the 2021 election (91%), it is still relatively high.

Of those who did not receive the registration card in the mail (14% of the original sample), **45% registered to vote during the 2021 election** (see Figure 6). Registration during the 2021 election was especially high among Canadians living in New Brunswick (67%).

The most common form of registration among those who registered to vote during the election was at the polls (38%), followed by online (30%), at the EC office (17%), and by mail (12%) (see Figure 7). In 2019 more Canadians registered in-person (6 percentage points more at the polls, and 9 percentage points more at the EC office), but less so online/by mail (10 percentage points less online, and 8 percentage points less by mail). Interestingly, online registration was lowest among those aged 35-54 (20%), and those living in British Columbia or Manitoba (21%).

Finally, of those who registered to vote during the election, **84% believed that registration was easy** (53% very/31% somewhat; see Figure 8). In 2019 79% found the registration process easy (52% very easy/27% somewhat easy). In line with research on gender gaps in self-confidence, men were more likely than women to report that registration was very easy (59% vs. 47%).

3. Electoral information

The third topic covered by the 2021 CES dealt with electoral information. That is, the 2021 CES asked Canadians how easy it was to find the information they needed to 1) complete a mail-in ballot, and, more generally, 2) vote, how informed they felt about 3) the documents needed to vote, 4) where to vote, and 5) how to vote at an advance polling station, and 6) what sources they used to get their electoral information.

Regarding the perceived difficulty of finding the information needed to complete a mail-in ballot, **95% reported that it was easy** (69% very /26% somewhat; see Figure 9).

Most Canadians (87%) also thought that it was easy to find the information they needed to vote (62% extremely/25% somewhat; see Figure 10). While this is less than in 2019, when 92% of Canadians had the same opinion (68% extremely /24% somewhat), it is still relatively high.

Reflecting the high percentage of citizens who found it easy to find the information to complete a mail-in ballot and, more generally, to vote, **most Canadians felt very informed about what documentation was required to vote** (46%; see Figure 11). Similarly, **a high number of Canadians felt very informed about where to vote** (49%; see Figure 12), and **about how to vote at an advance pooling station** (42%; see Figure 13).

Importantly, **the most common source of information were EC's flyers** (59%), followed by radio/TV (37%), and voter information cards (23%) (see Figures 14-26). Importantly, in 2019 EC's ads represented the third most common source, with 24% choosing this option. Other sources of information mentioned by Canadians were:

- EC's ads (18%)
- Newspapers (16%)
- EC's website (15%)
- Word of mouth (14%)
- Facebook (11%)
- Candidates/parties (10%)
- Website other than EC's (6%)
- Twitter (3%)

- Youtube (3%)
- Other social media (1%)

4. Electoral experience

The fourth topic covered by the 2021 CES pertained to electoral experience, with the 2021 CES asking Canadians 1) how satisfied they were with their 2021 electoral participation/abstention, 2) how they voted, 3) how secure they felt voting in person, 4) how easy it was to request a mail-in ballot and vote by mail, and 5) the main reasons why some Canadians abstained in 2021.

When it comes to satisfaction with the electoral experience, we observe that **most Canadians (83%) were satisfied with their participation/abstention in the 2021 election** (56% very/27% somewhat; see Figure 27). Importantly, those who abstained in 2021 tended to be less satisfied with their electoral experience than individuals who voted (24% vs. 95%).

Of those who voted in 2021, **the most preferred voting option was at the polling station** (44%), followed by an advance polling station (43%), by mail (10%), and at an EC office (3%) (see Figure 28). In contrast, in 2019 more Canadians (14 percentage points more) voted at a polling station on Election Day, while less Canadians (6 percentage points less) voted at an Advanced Polling location. Unsurprisingly, Polling Station on Election Day was more popular among younger than older voters, while the reverse is observed for advance polling station.

Of the 90% of Canadians who voted in person, **97% felt secure** (77% very/20% somewhat; see Figure 29). Importantly, a high rate of security is observed across all age groups and provinces.

Of the 10% of Canadians who voted by mail, **94% thought that the process of requesting a mail-in ballot and voting by mail was easy** (70% very/24% somewhat; see Figure 30). Of those who **thought** that it was difficult, **37% said that the ballot did not list the names of candidates or parties**, 29% that they were unsure if the package would arrive in time for their vote to be counted, and 24% that it took a long time to receive the vote-by-mail package, or that the process to request a vote-by-mail package on the EC's website was confusing. Other reasons were:

- Did not know where or how to request a vote-by-mail package (18%)
- The instructions in the vote-by-mail package were confusing (18%)
- Did not know one had to request a vote-by-mail package (16%)
- The process to request a vote-by-mail package by telephone was confusing (15%)
- Was unsure if return postage was paid or not (3%)
- The vote-by-mail package never arrived (1%)

Finally, of those who abstained in 2021 (14% of the original sample), **26% thought that their voting would not make a difference, 21% had no interest or did not care, and 18% did not have time to vote** (see Figure 31). In 2019, these percentages were 29%, 22%, and 21%, respectively. While the no-difference reason was highest among men (32% vs. 23%), the no-time reason was highest among women (19% vs. 15%). Other reasons for not voting were:

- Physical limitations, mobility issues, etc. (8%)

- The line was too long (7%)
- Not able to prove ID or address (3%)
- The mail ballot did not arrive in time (3%)
- Did not know when/where to vote (2%)
- Was isolating or quarantining due to COVID-19 (2%)

5. General opinion about elections

The fifth and final topic covered by the 2021 CES related to general opinion about elections. In fact, the 2021 CES asked Canadians in this last battery of questions 1) their support for a ‘none of the above’ vote option, 2) whether they think that low turnout weakens democracy, 3) their support for internet voting, 4) their willingness to vote online, 5) whether online registration is safe, 6) whether online voting is safe, 7) how comfortable they are about sharing information with EC online, and 8) whether Canadian elections are safe from foreign interference.

Most Canadians (50%) thought that ballots should have a ‘none of the above’ vote option (26% strongly/ 24% somewhat; see Figure 32). As expected, the support for this option was higher among abstainers (36% strongly/ 28% somewhat) than voters (24% strongly/ 24% somewhat).

Most Canadians (77%) also believed that low turnout weakens democracy (41% strongly/36% somewhat; see Figure 33). In contrast with respondents’ view on the ‘none of the above’ vote option, the perception that low turnout weakens democracy was higher among voters (45% strongly/36% somewhat) than abstainers (15% strongly/36% somewhat).

When it comes to online voting, **Canadians generally agreed that it should be allowed in the country** (26% strongly/24% somewhat; see Figure 34). Abstainers (38% strongly/23% somewhat) and those aged 18-34 (28% strongly/24% somewhat) were more in favor of online voting than voters (25% strongly/24% somewhat) and those aged 75-99 (16% strongly/17% somewhat).

In addition, **63% of Canadians reported that they would vote online if they were given the option** (41% very/22% somewhat; see Figure 35). This was especially high among abstainers (47% very/23% somewhat), and those aged 35-54 (46% very/21% somewhat).

Most Canadians thought, however, that online voting is risky (48%; see Figure 36). Those aged 75-99 were particularly concerned about the safety of online voting (51%).

Canadians were, however, somewhat more optimistic when it comes to online registration, as 52% believed that registering online is safe (see Figure 37). Such optimism is consistent with **72% of Canadians being comfortable with providing their date of birth, home address, and driver’s license number on EC’s website** (41% very/ 31% somewhat; see Figure 38).

Finally, despite no evidence of foreign interference in Canadian elections, **only 57% of Canadians believed that elections are safe from it** (14% very/43% somewhat; see Figure 39).

Source: The 2021 Canadian Election Study (CES) was conducted by Laura Stephenson, Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson, and Peter Loewen. The 2021 CES was administered online.

Supporting Information

1. Electoral administration

Figure 1. Distribution of satisfaction with the way EC runs federal elections.

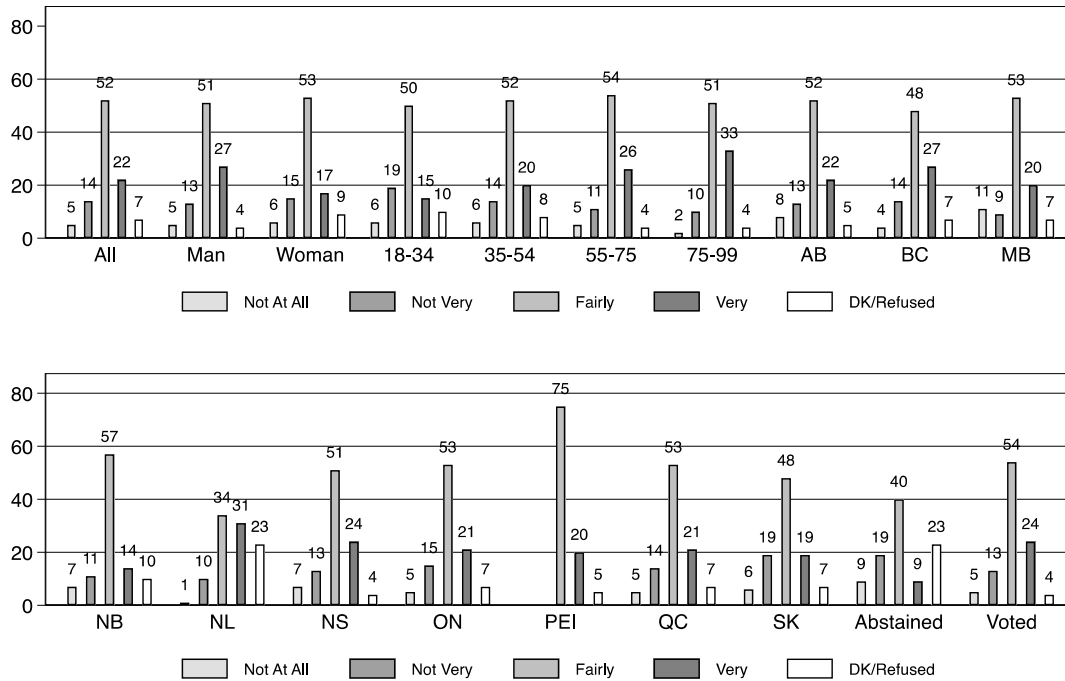


Figure 2. Distribution of how fairly EC ran the 2021 election.

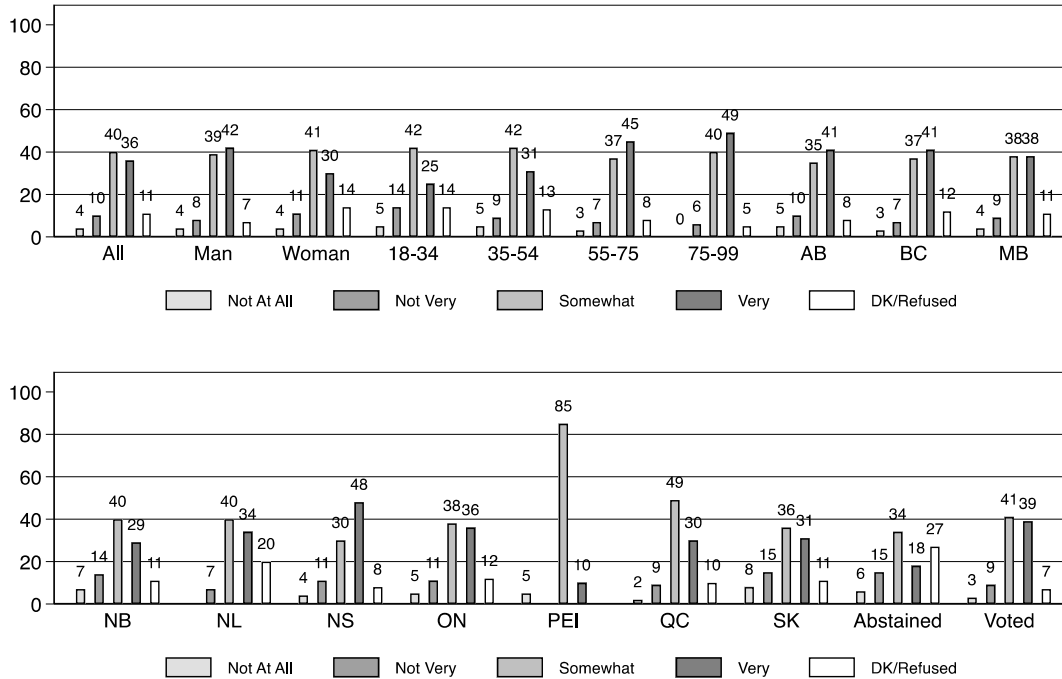
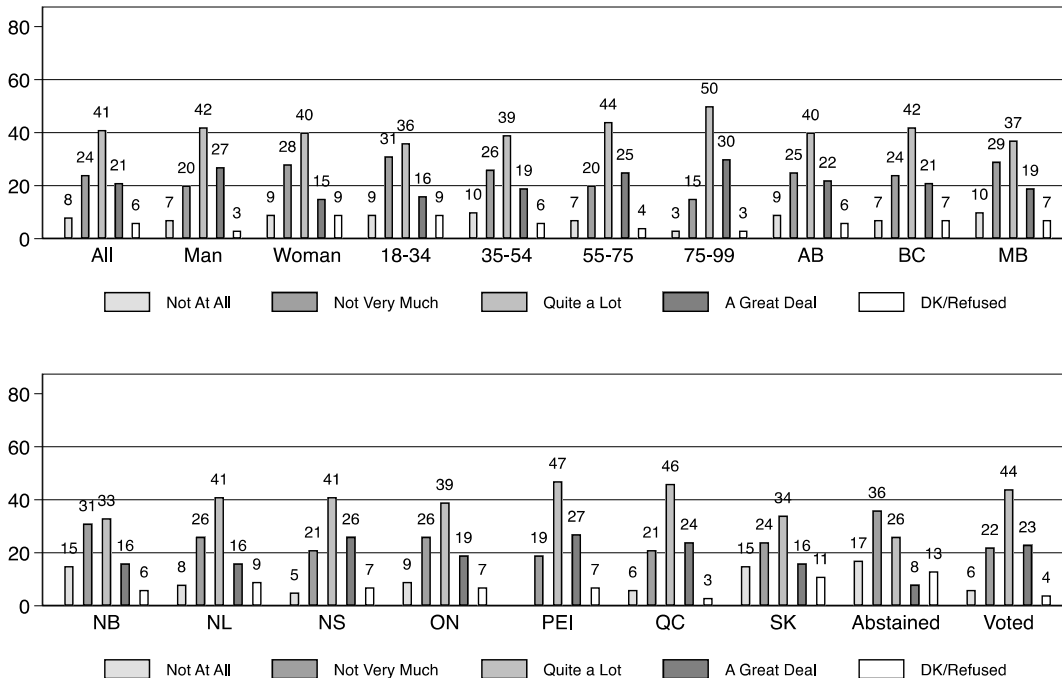


Figure 3. Distribution of trust in EC.



2. Electoral registration

Figure 4. Distribution of whether one received registration card in the mail.

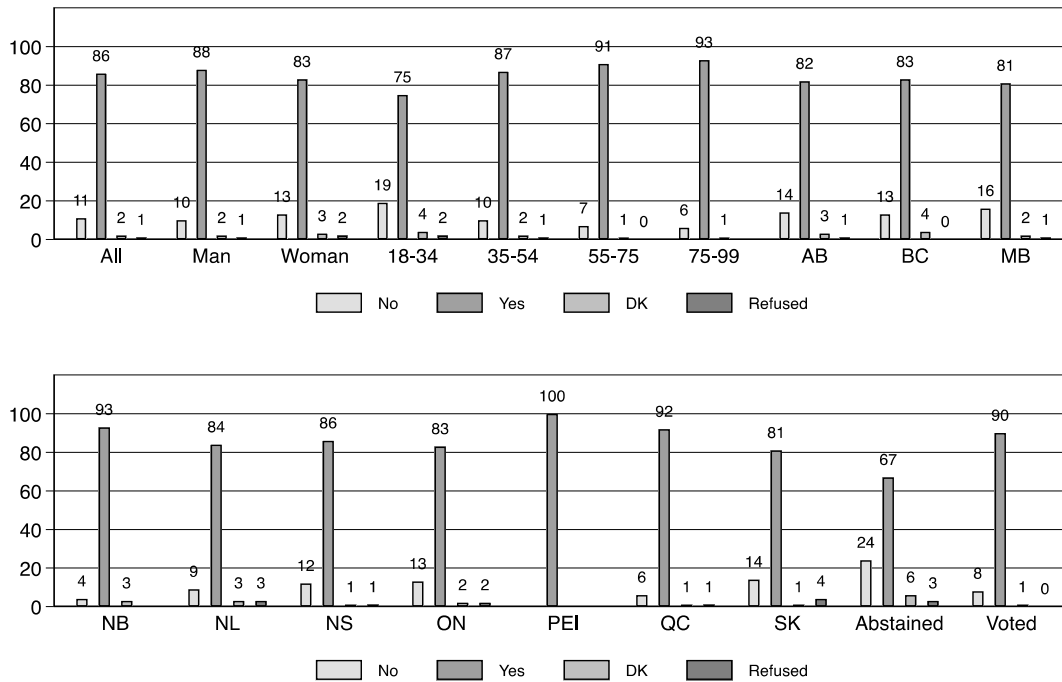


Figure 5. Distribution of whether registration card was correct.

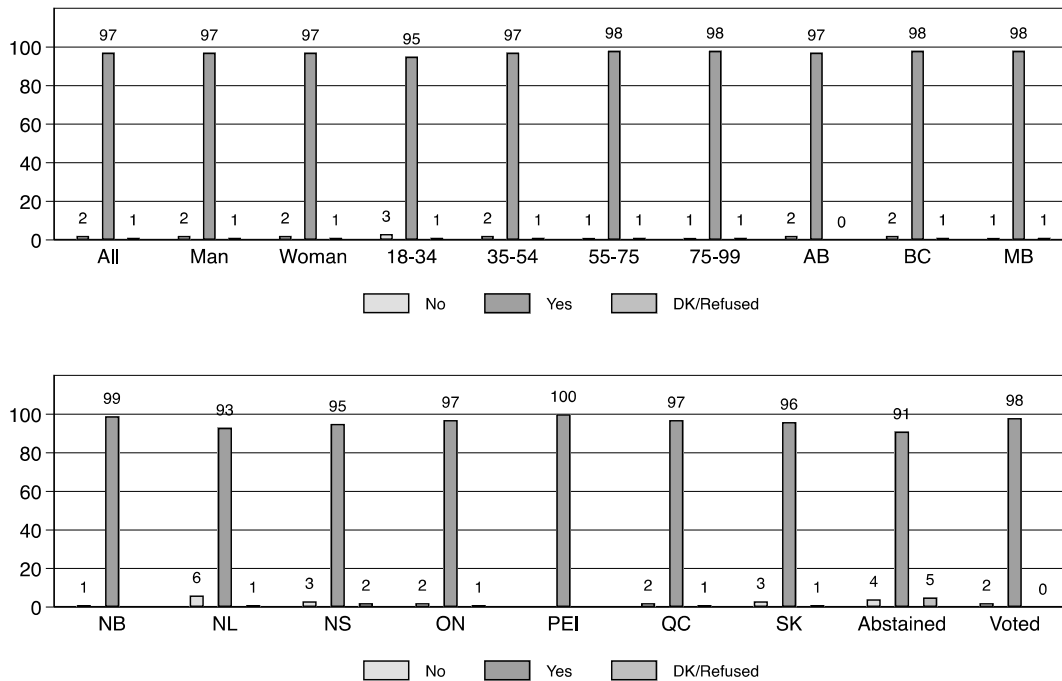


Figure 6. Distribution of whether one registered to vote during the election.

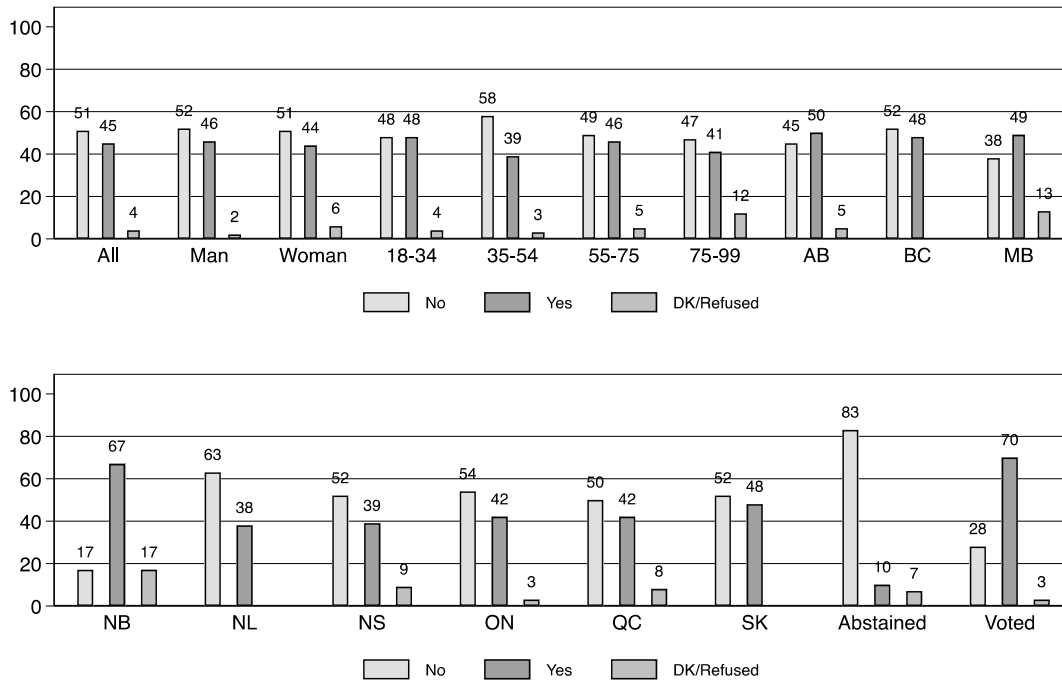


Figure 7. Distribution of how one registered to vote during the election.

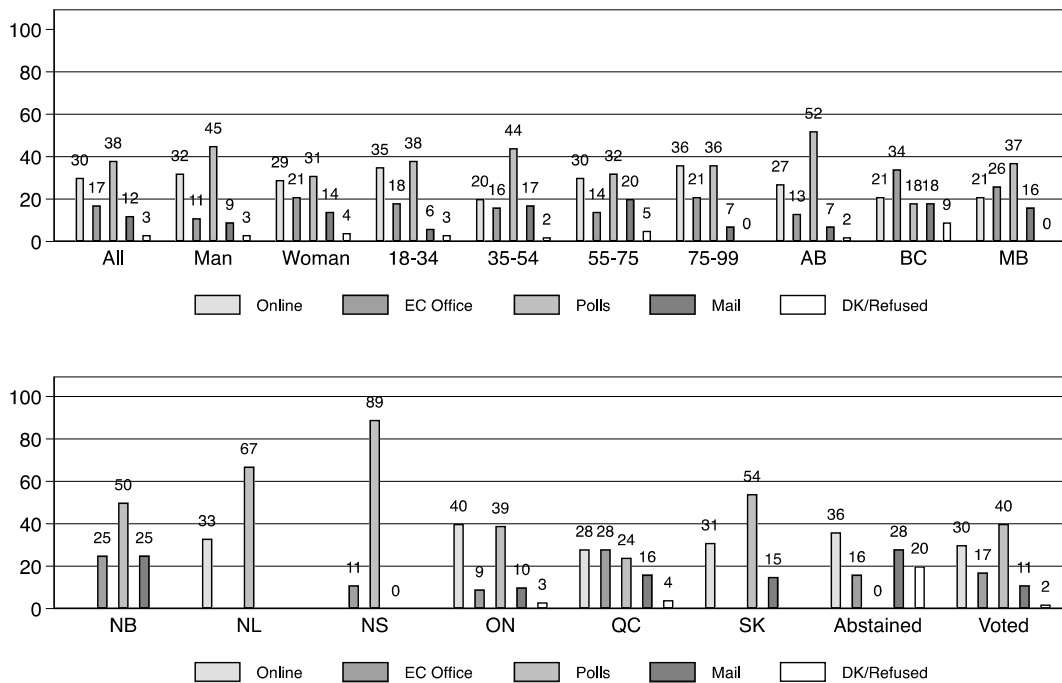
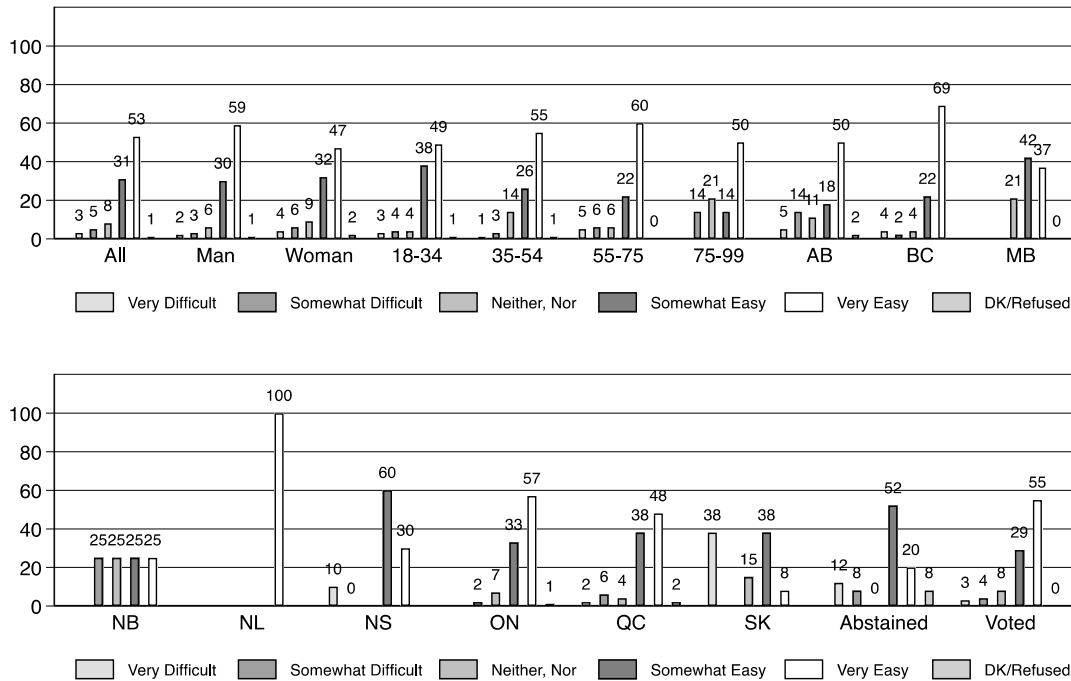


Figure 8. Distribution of how easy it was to register to vote during the election.



3. Electoral information

Figure 9. Distribution of how easy it was to find the information needed to complete a mail-in ballot.

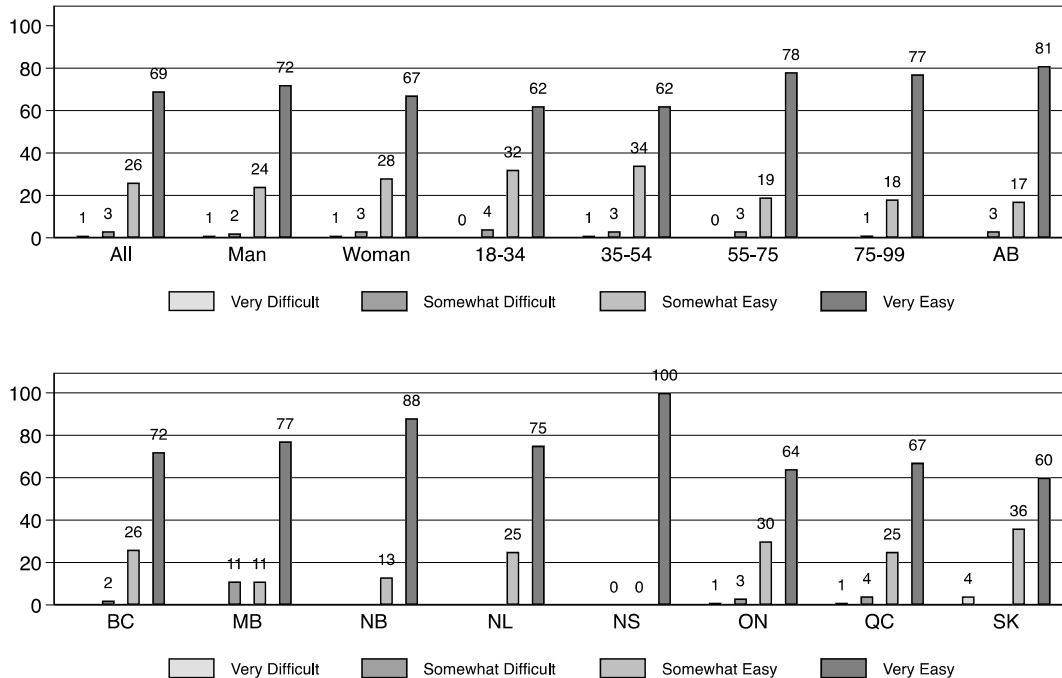


Figure 10. Distribution of how easy it was to find the information needed to vote.

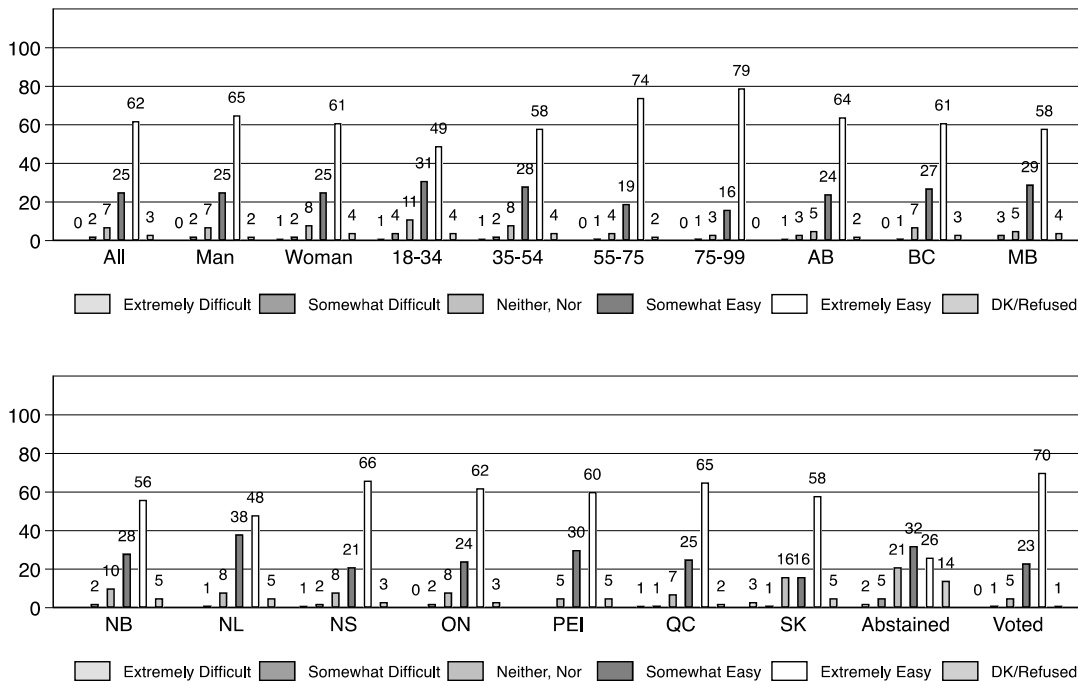


Figure 11. Distribution of how informed one was about the documents needed to vote.

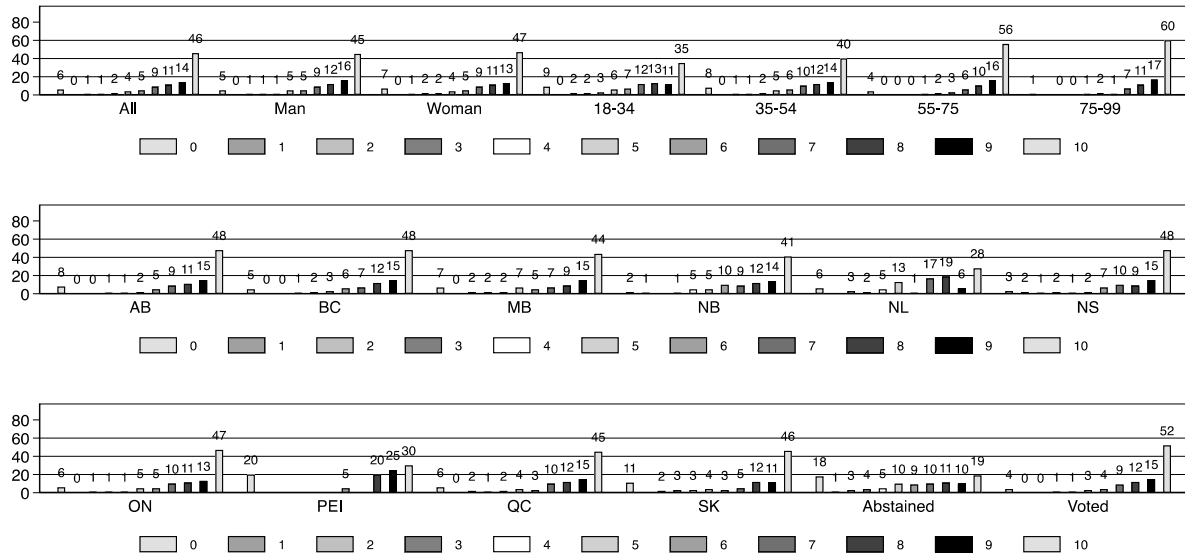


Figure 12. Distribution of how informed one was about where to vote.

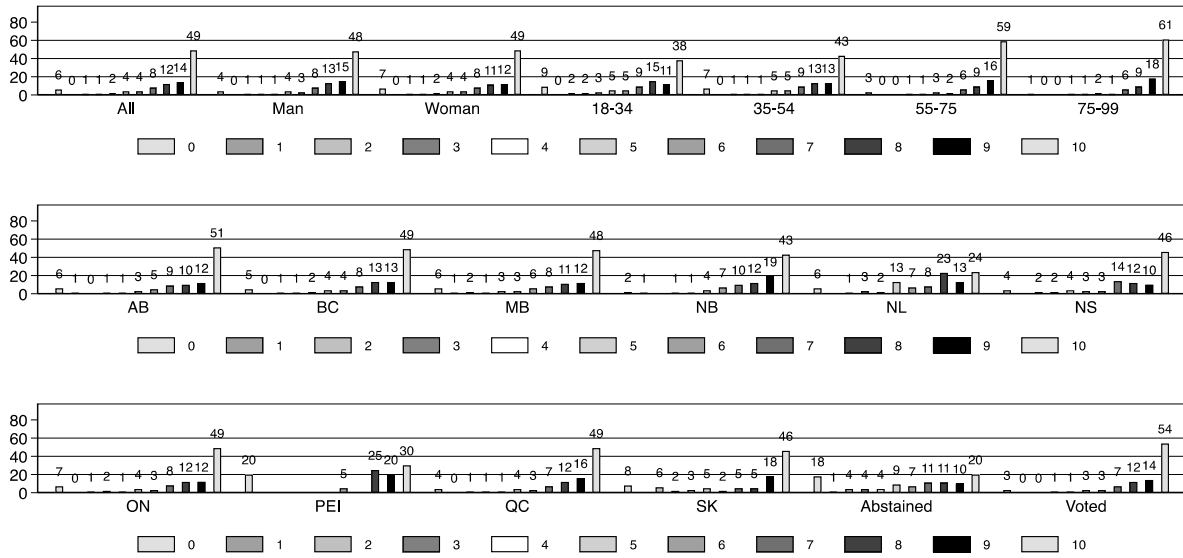


Figure 13. Distribution of how informed one was about how to vote at an advance polling station.

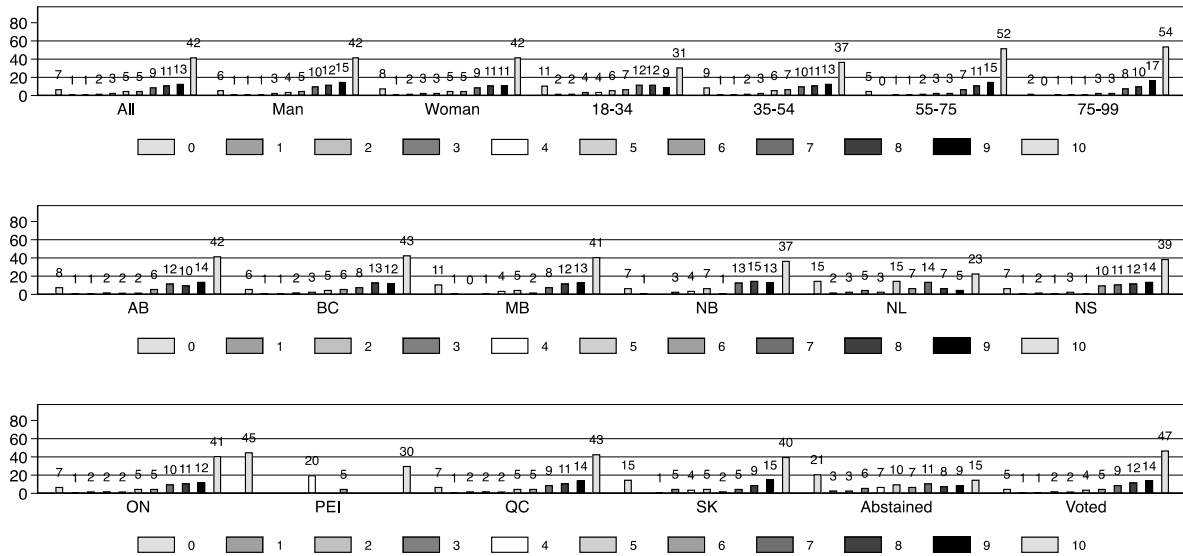


Figure 14. Distribution of information acquisition by EC's flyer.

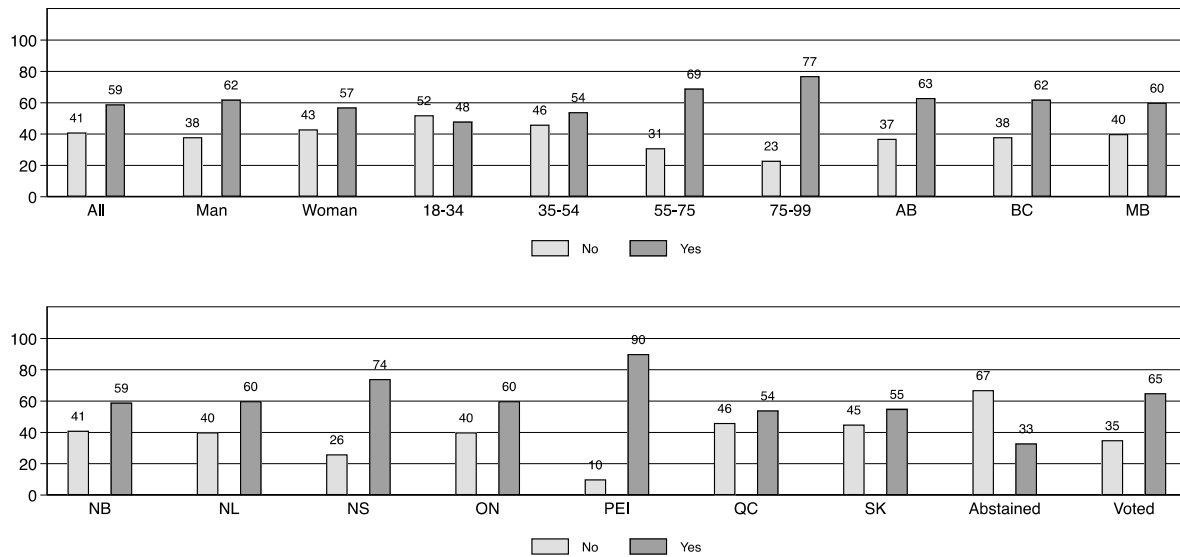


Figure 15. Distribution of information acquisition by voter information card.

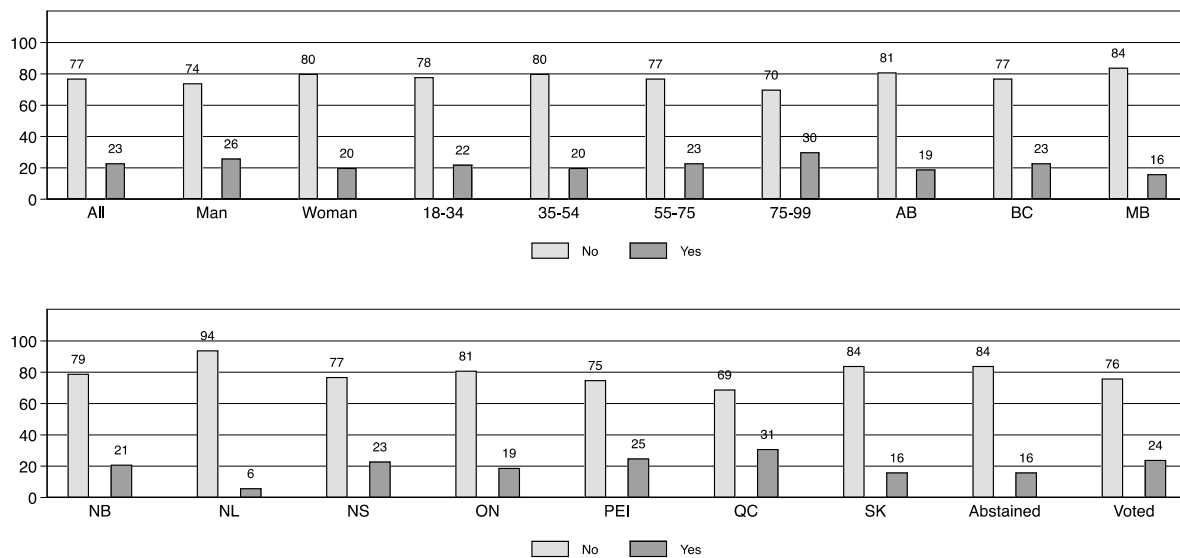


Figure 16. Distribution of information acquisition by EC's ads.

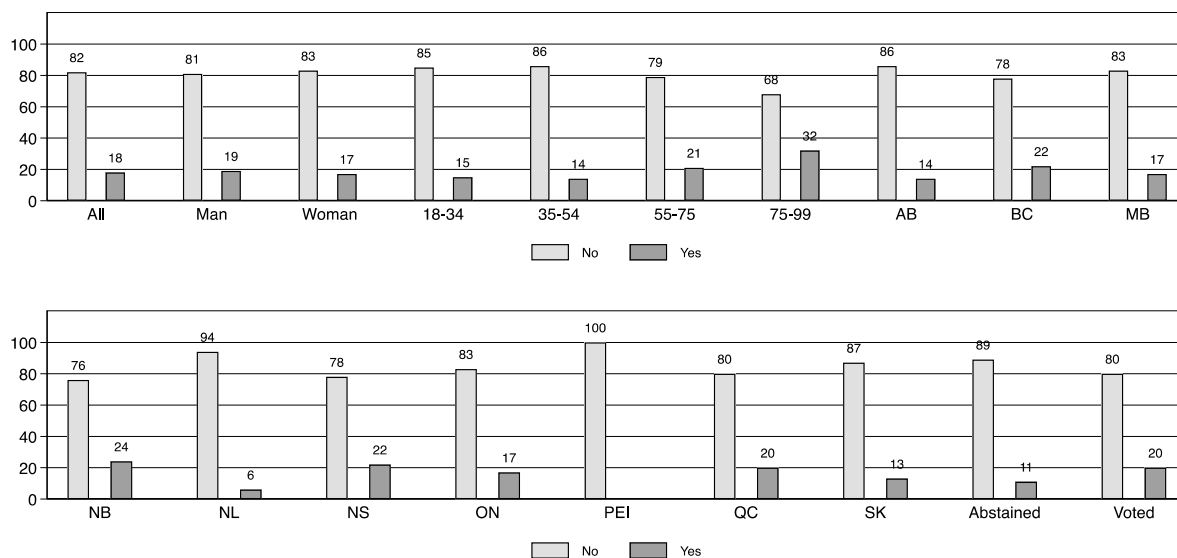


Figure 17. Distribution of information acquisition by radio or television.

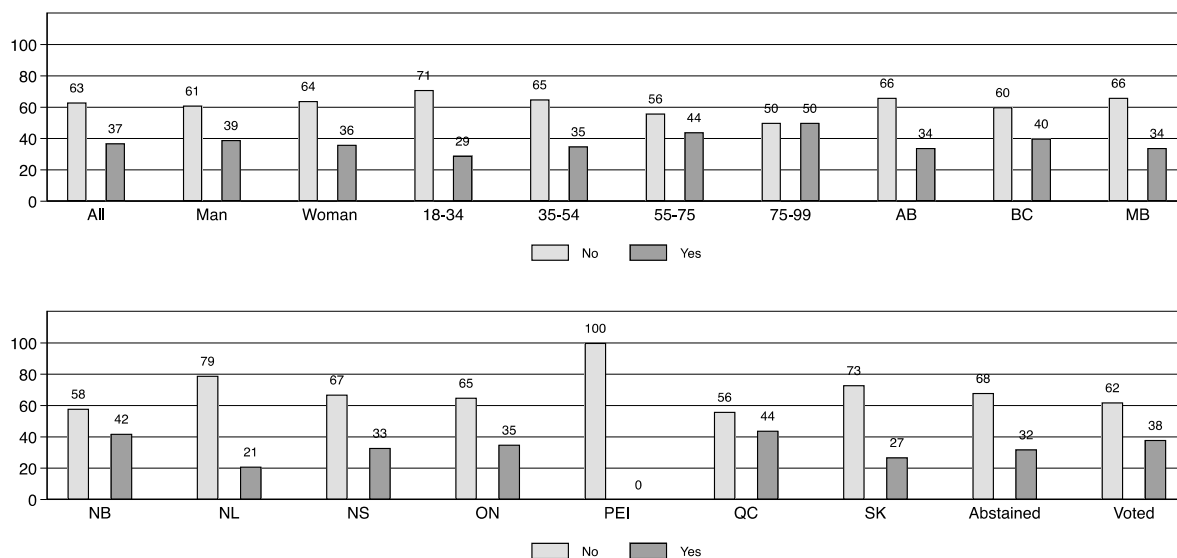


Figure 18. Distribution of information acquisition by newspapers.

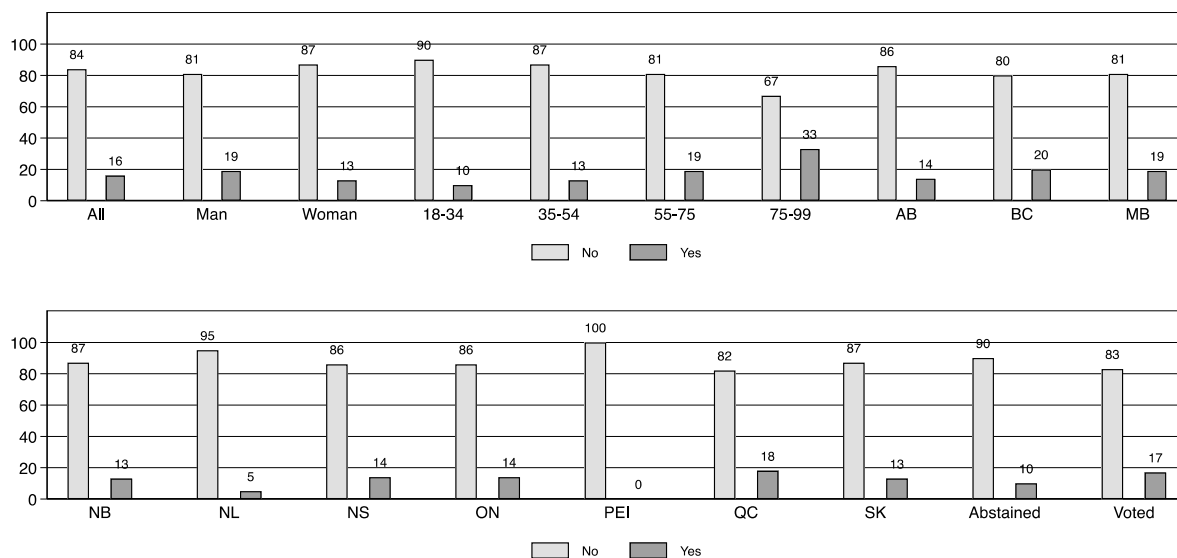


Figure 19. Distribution of information acquisition by EC's website.

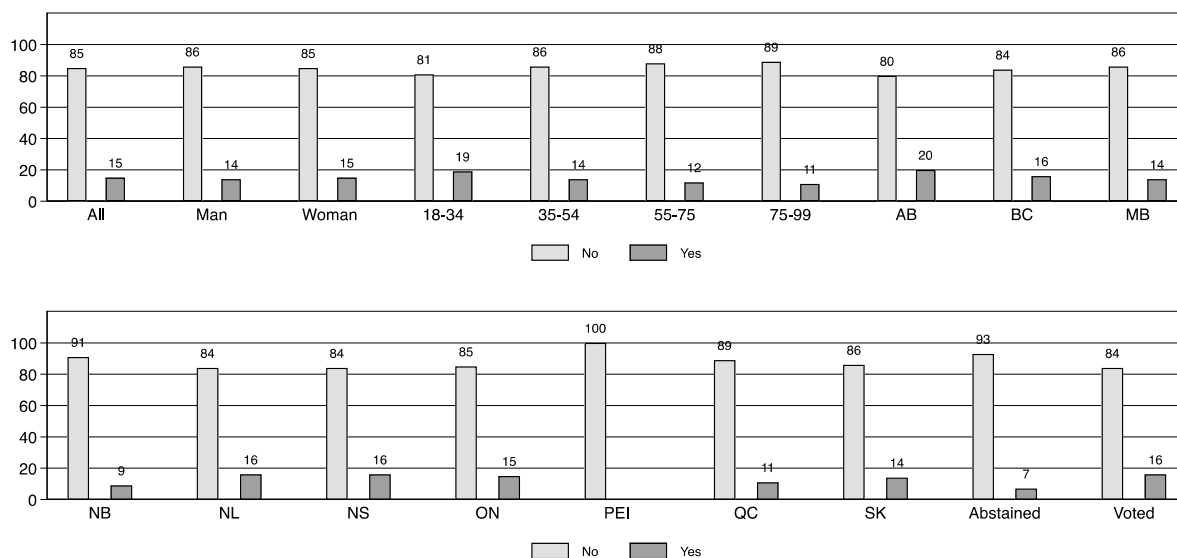


Figure 20. Distribution of information acquisition by word of mouth.

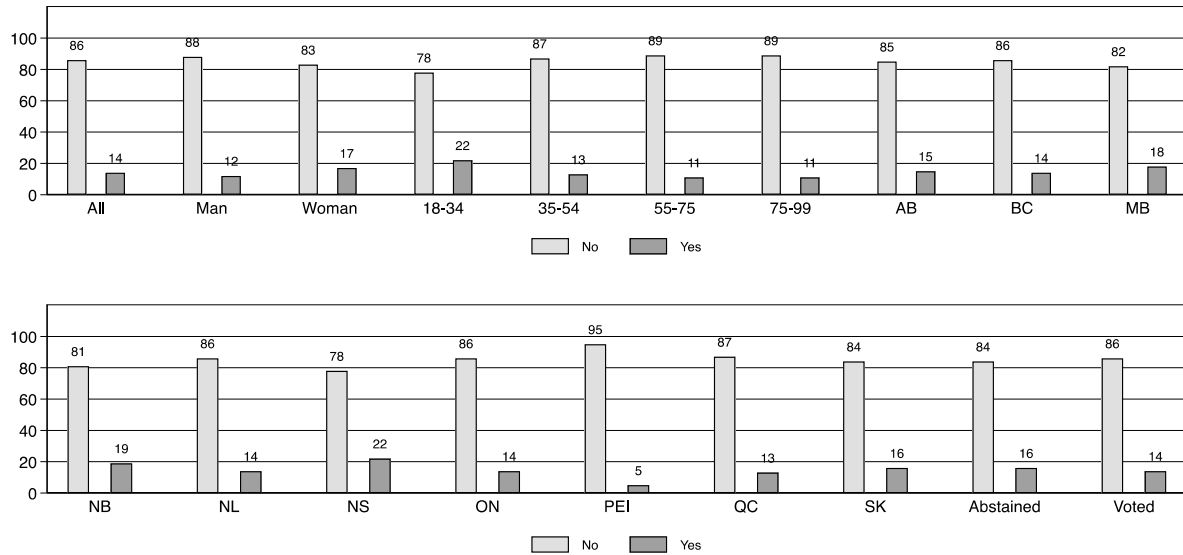


Figure 21. Distribution of information acquisition by Facebook.

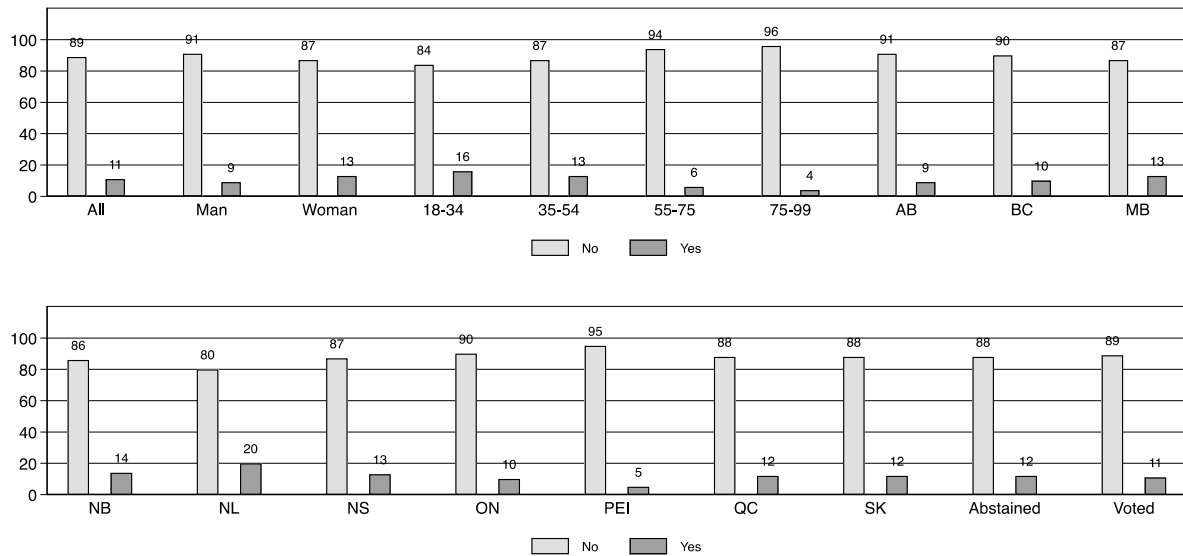


Figure 22. Distribution of information acquisition by Twitter.

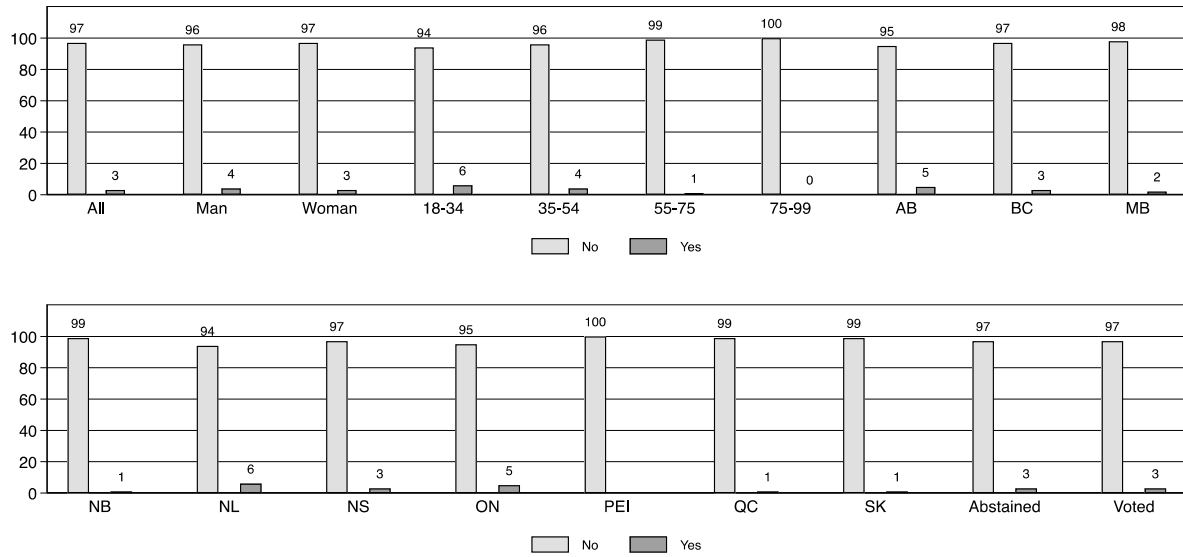


Figure 23. Distribution of information acquisition by YouTube.

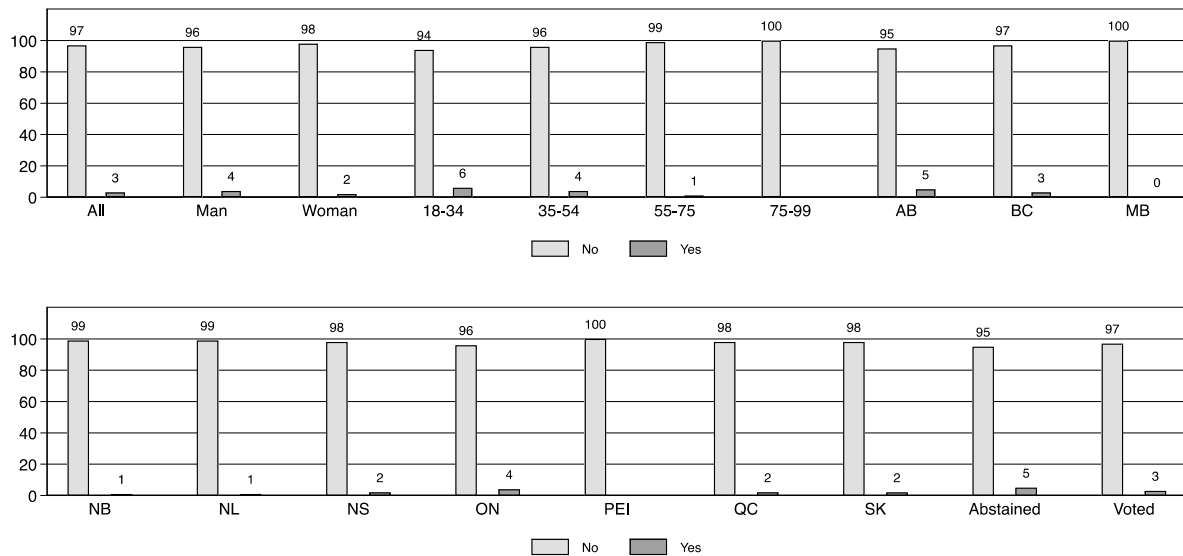


Figure 24. Distribution of information acquisition by other social media.

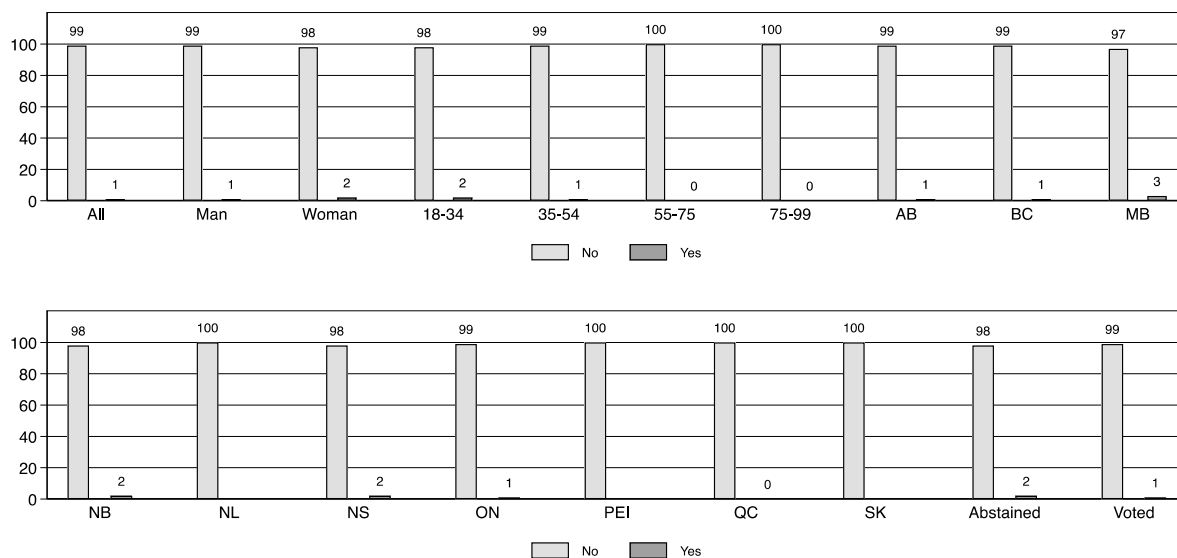


Figure 25. Distribution of information acquisition by website other than EC's.

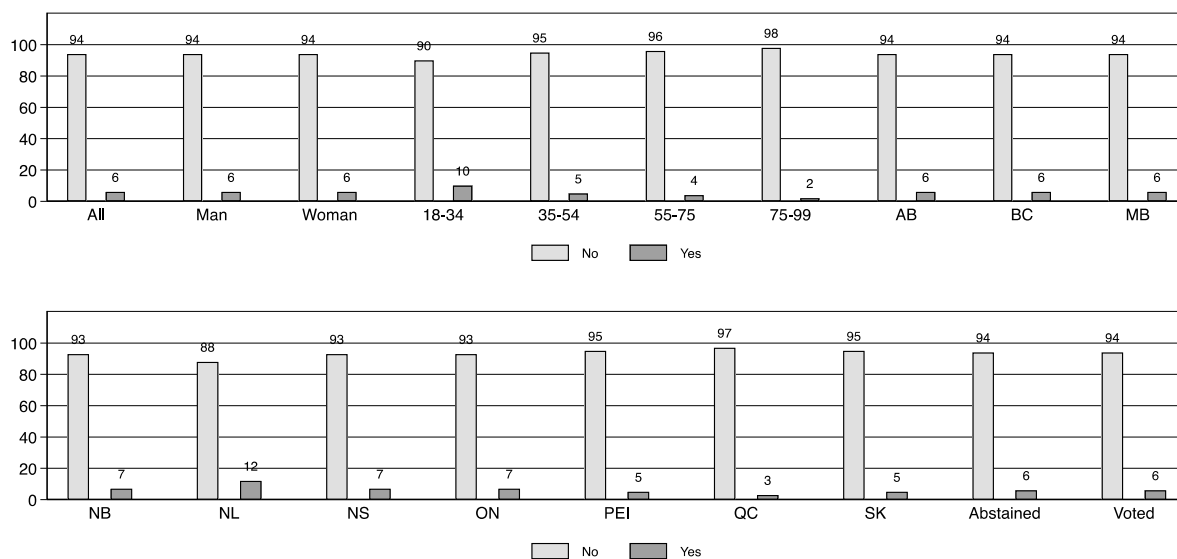


Figure 26. Distribution of information acquisition by candidates or parties.

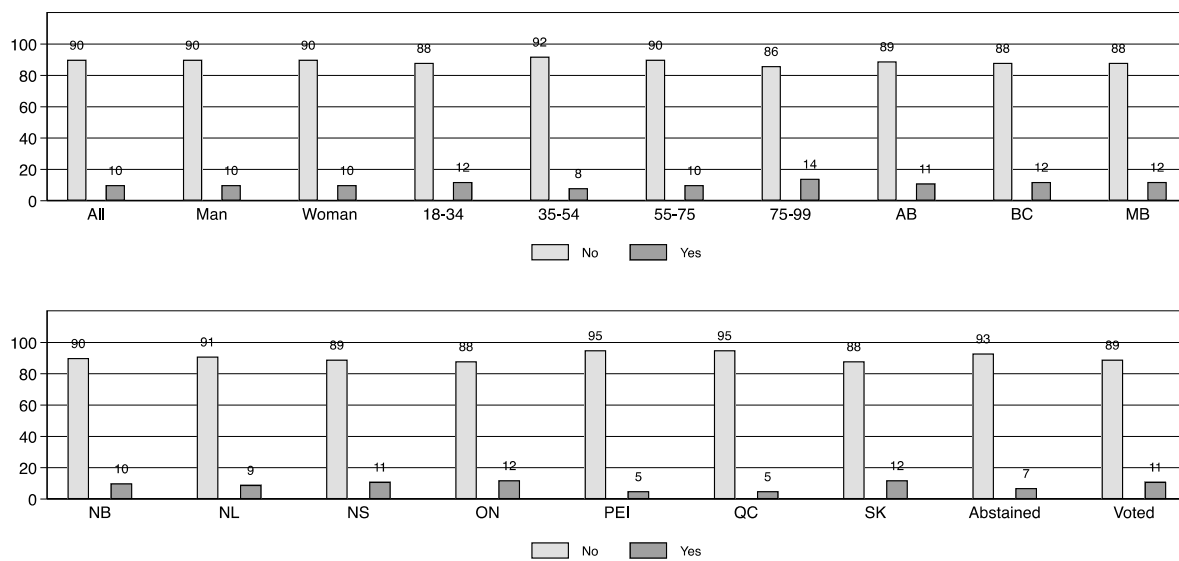


Figure 27. Distribution of satisfaction with electoral experience.

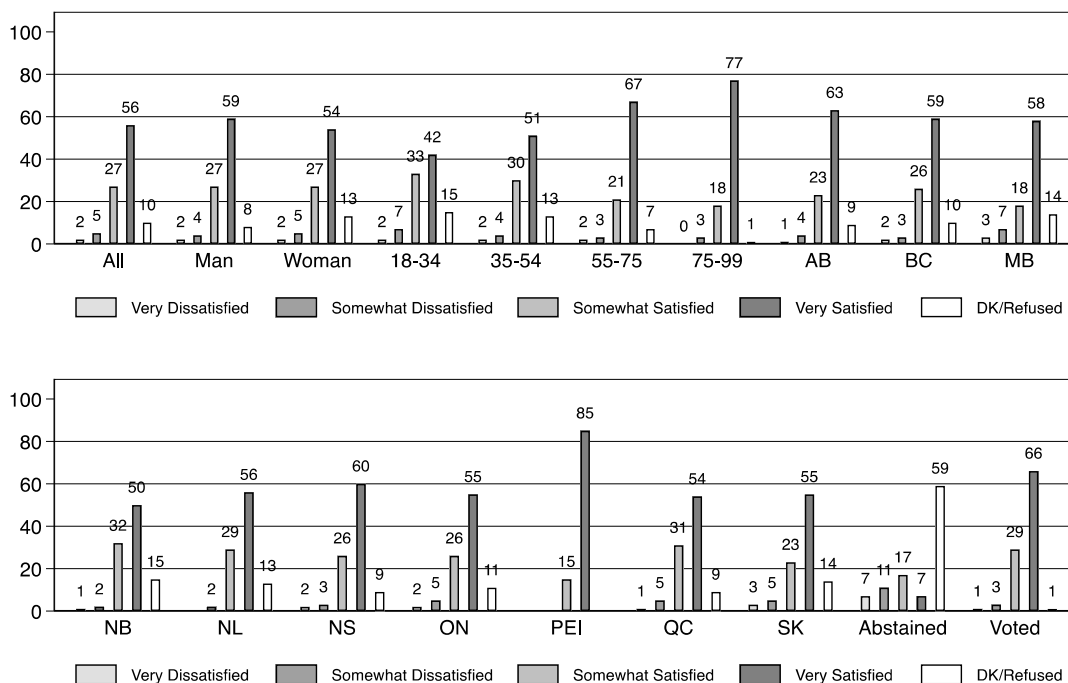


Figure 28. Distribution of voting in the 2021 election.

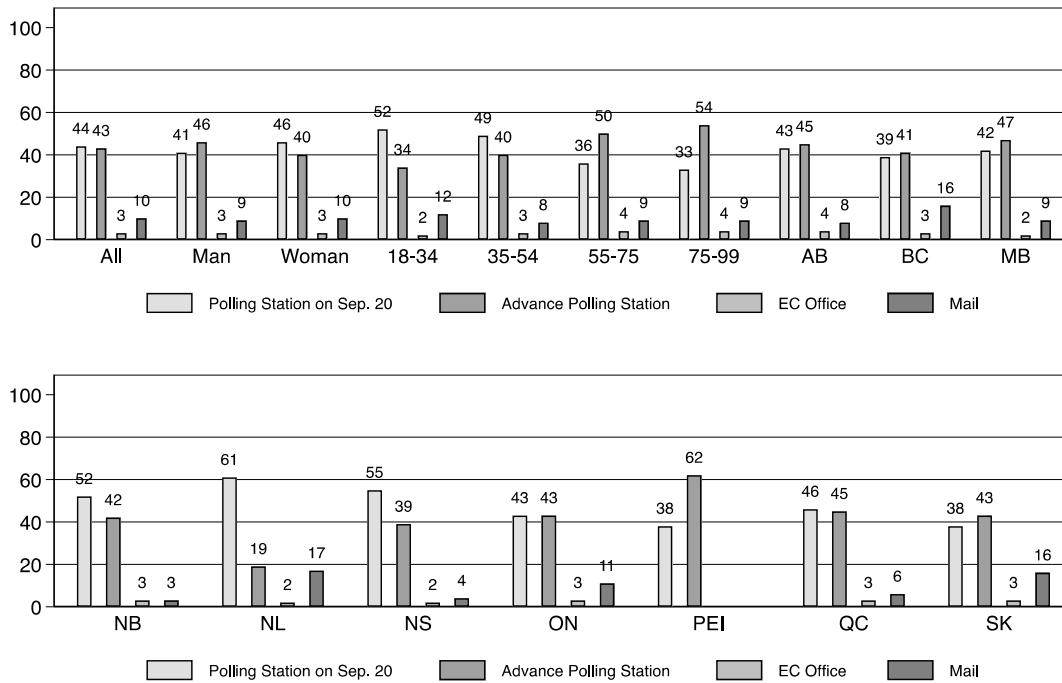


Figure 29. Distribution of how secure it was to vote in person.

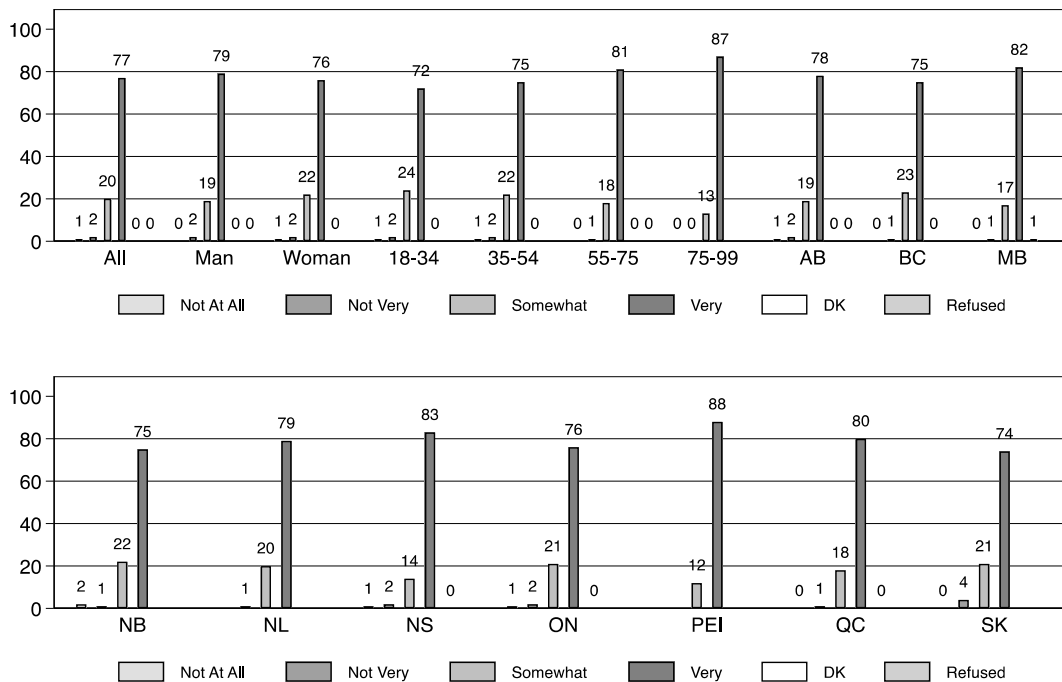


Figure 30. Distribution of how easy it was to request a mail-in ballot and vote by mail.

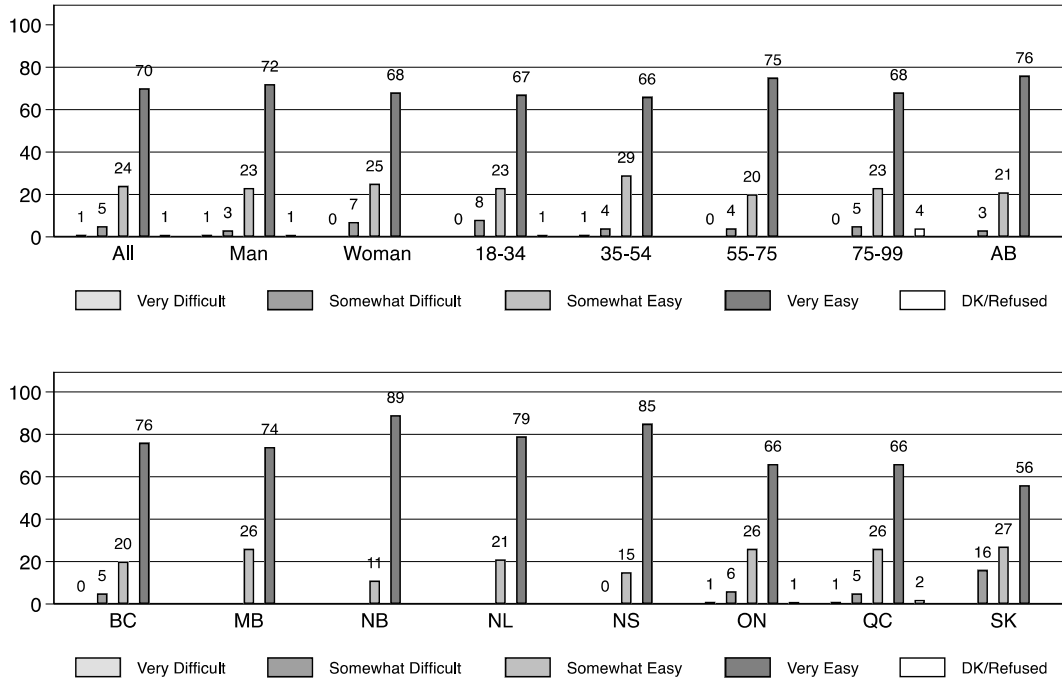
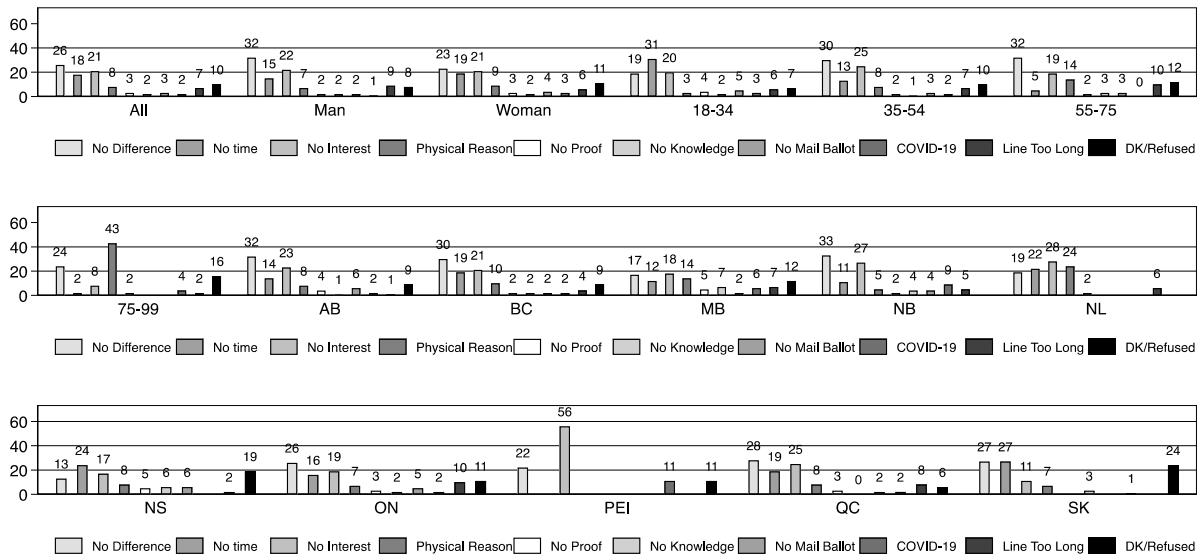


Figure 31. Distribution of reasons for abstaining in 2021.



5. General opinion about elections

Figure 32. Distribution of support for ‘none of the above’ vote option.

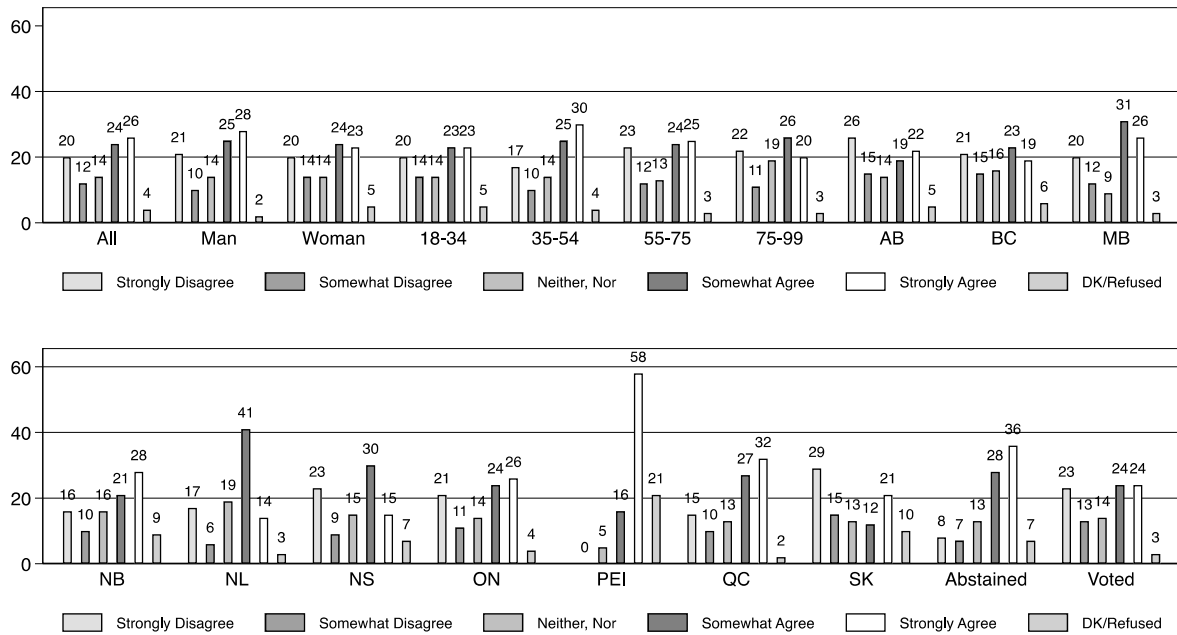


Figure 33. Distribution of view that low turnout weakens democracy.

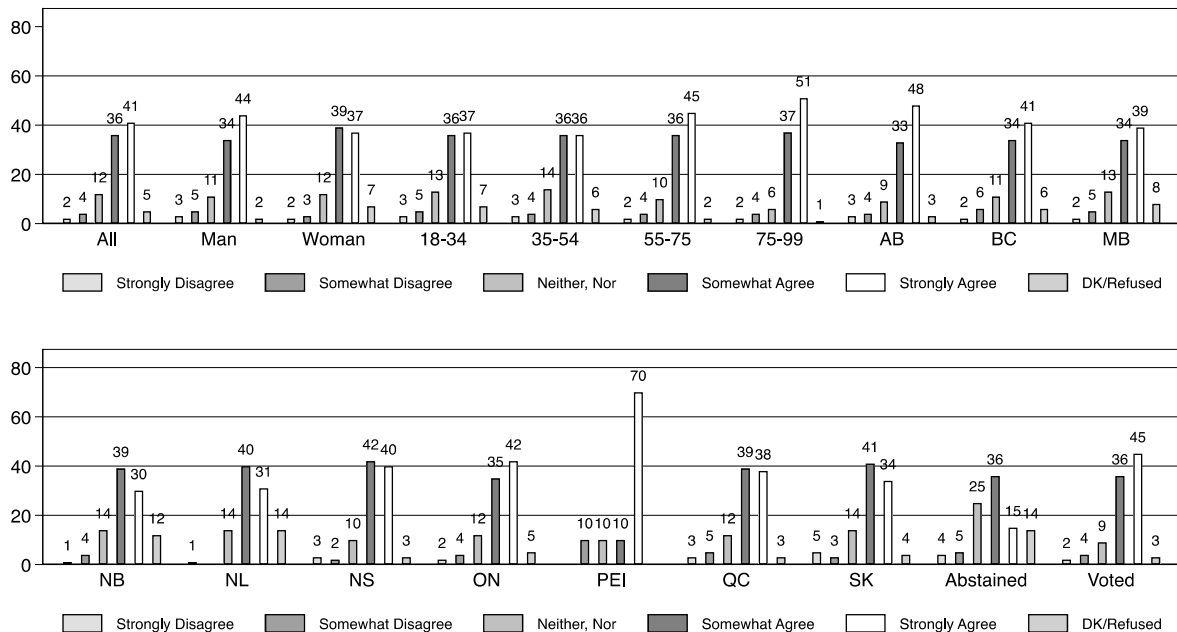


Figure 34. Distribution of support for online voting.

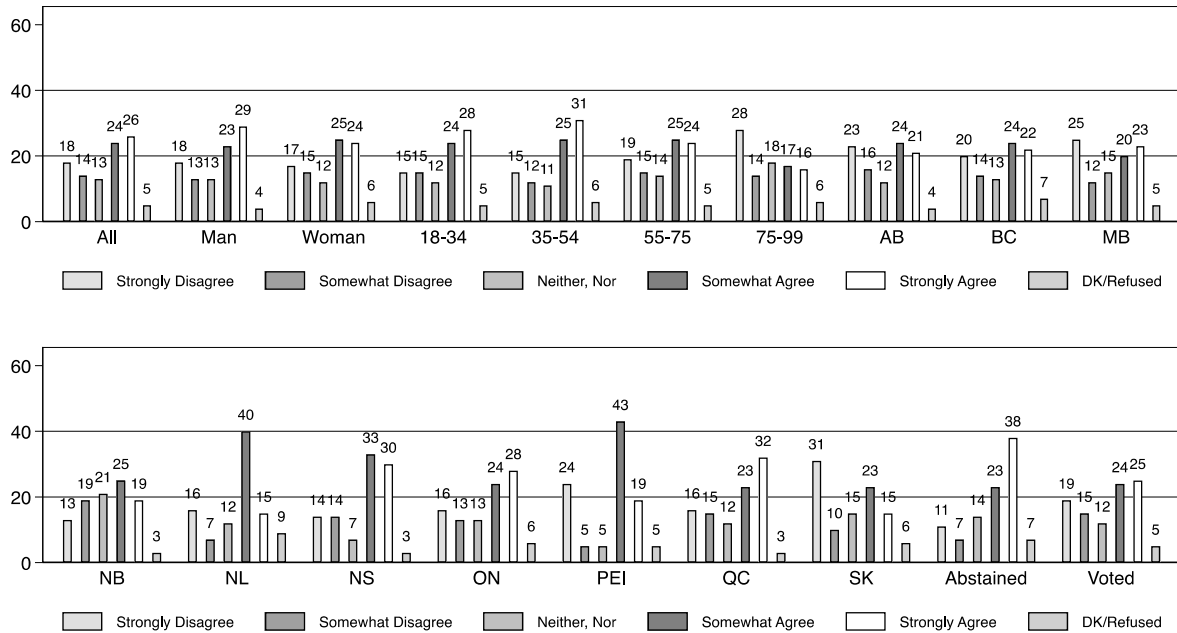


Figure 35. Distribution of willingness to vote online.

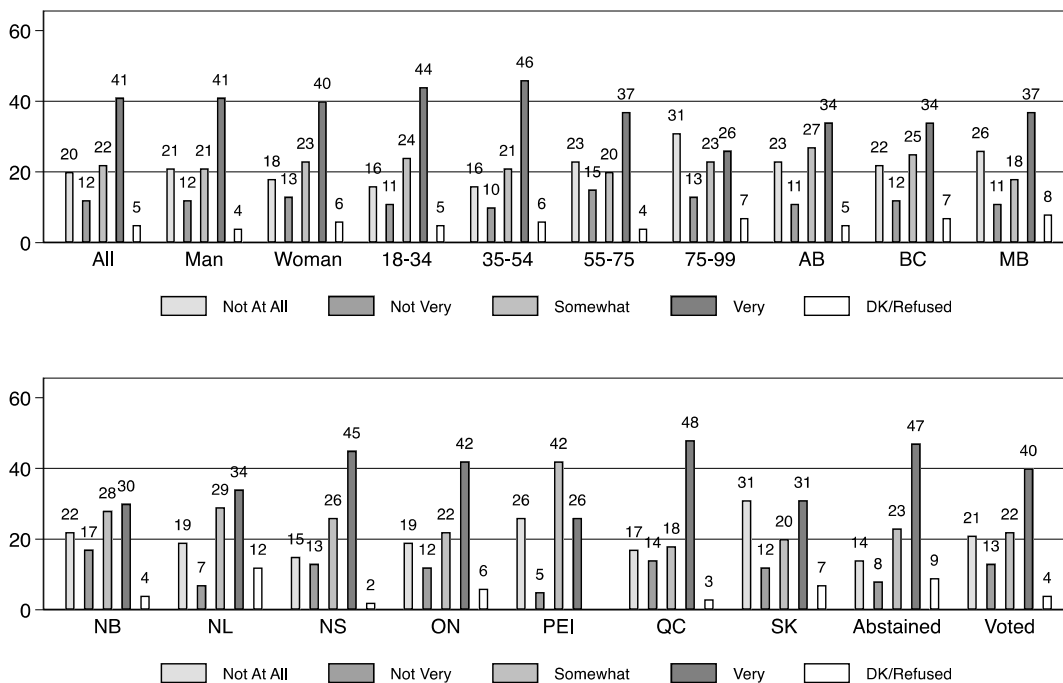


Figure 36. Distribution of view that online voting is safe/risky.

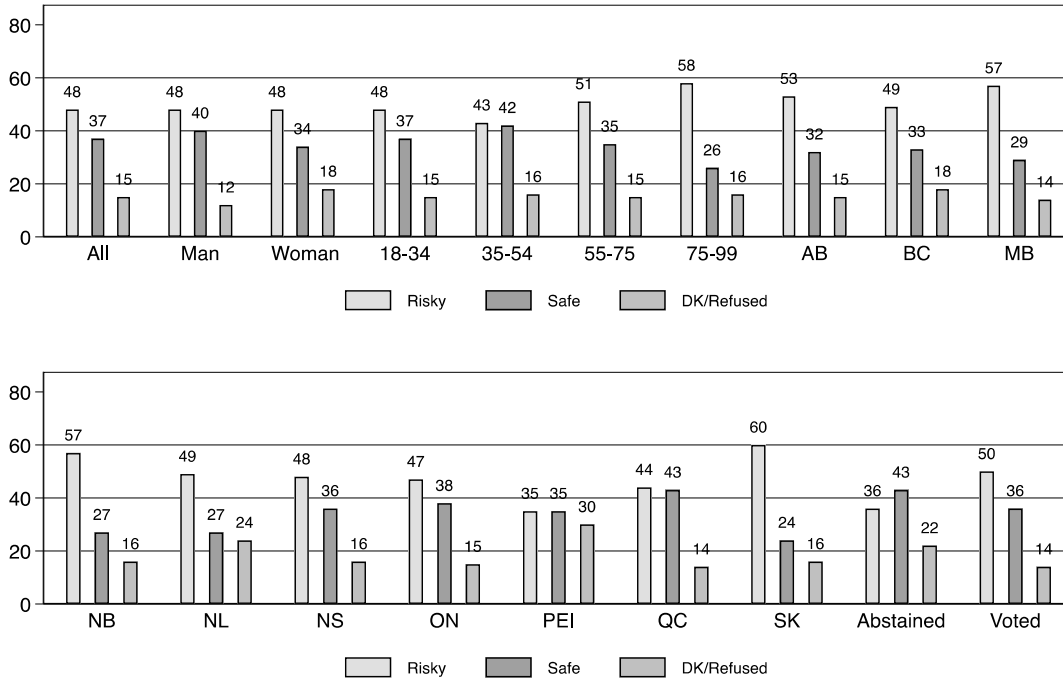


Figure 37. Distribution of view that online registration is safe/risky.

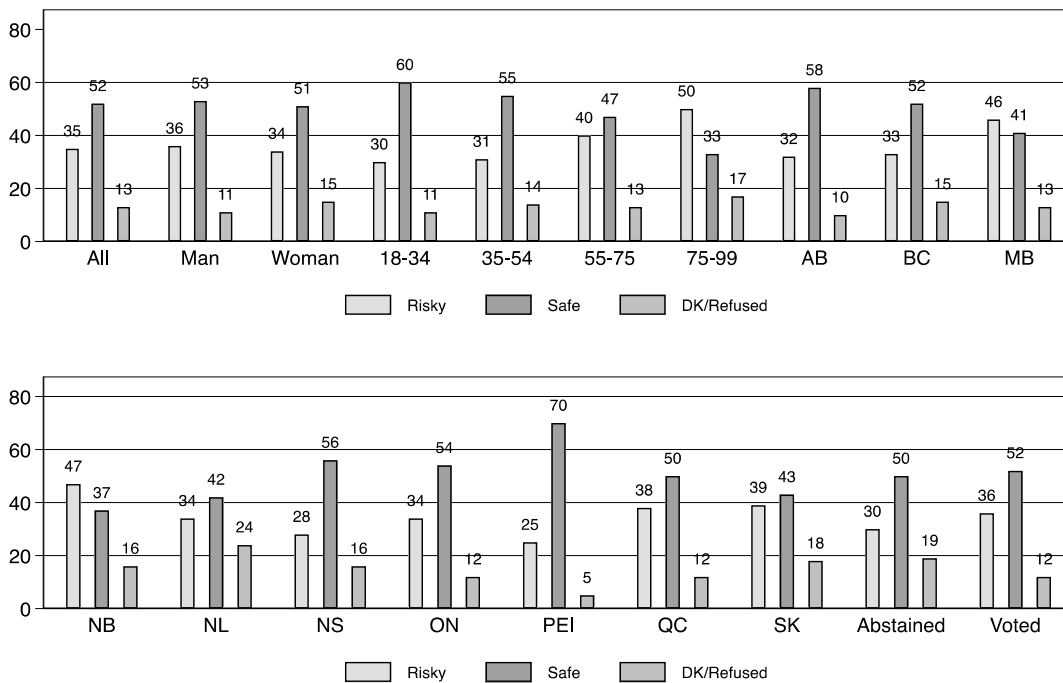


Figure 38. Distribution of comfort in sharing information online with EC.

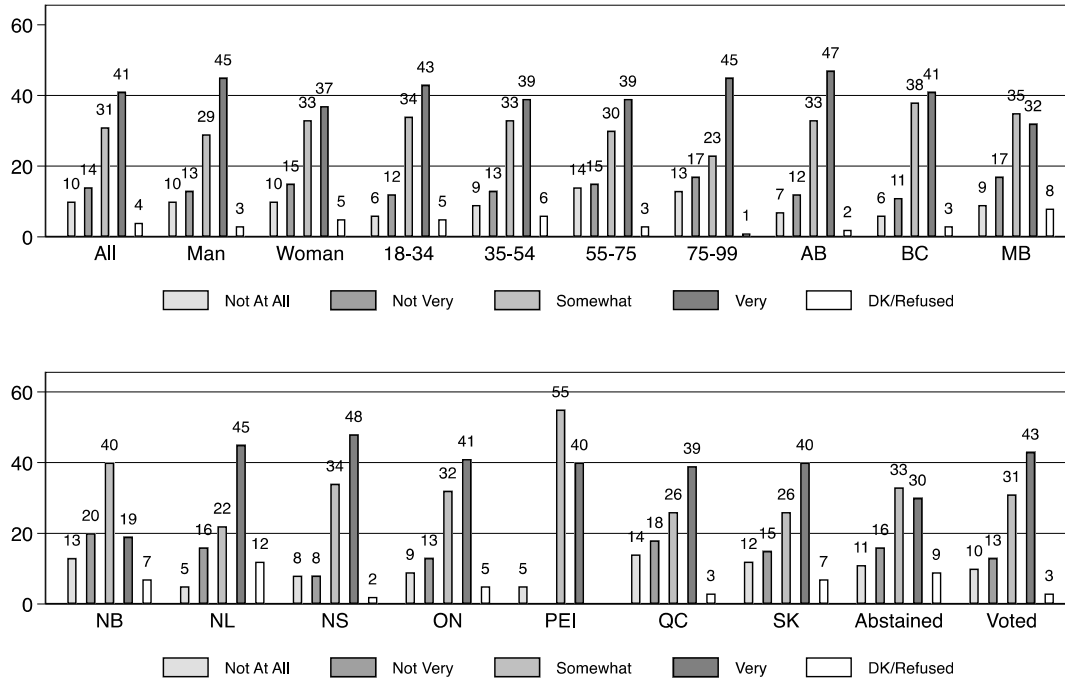


Figure 39. Distribution of how safe Canadian elections are with respect to foreign interference.

