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Measuring Preferences and Behaviours in the 2019 Canadian Election Study

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Abstract: The 2019 Canadian Election Study (CES) consists of two separate surveys with campaign-period rolling cross-sections and post-election follow-ups. The parallel studies were conducted online and through an RDD-telephone survey. Both continue the long tradition of gathering information about the attitudes, opinions, preferences, and behaviours of the Canadian public. The online survey especially introduces some important innovations that open up the potential for exciting new research on subgroups in the electorate.

Résumé: L'Étude électorale canadienne de 2019 est composée de deux sondages distincts comportant des échantillons quotidiens ("rolling cross-sections") tout au long de la campagne ainsi qu'un suivi postélectoral. Ces deux études ont été menées en ligne ainsi que par le biais d'un sondage téléphonique à composition aléatoire. Toutes deux poursuivent la longue tradition de collecte d'informations sur les attitudes, les opinions, les préférences, et les comportements du public canadien. L'enquête en ligne présente notamment quelques innovations importantes qui ouvrent la voie à de nouvelles recherches passionnantes sur des sous-groupes de l'électorat.

Keywords: Canadian Election Study, online survey, phone survey, subgroup analysis, rolling cross section

Elections are fundamentally important events in democracies. At the heart of electoral democracy is the role of citizens in deciding who governs them. In a representative democracy like Canada's, elections are a principal way that preferences are expressed.

Since 1965, teams of researchers have conducted Canadian Election Studies (CES). These data are a treasure trove of information about the attitudes and opinions of Canadian voters - from party and leader ratings to issue attitudes and electors' backgrounds - for over fifty years (see Kanji, Bilodeau and Scotto 2012). The 2019 CES is no different. Mindful of its history and important role in documenting the public's mood, the current team (Laura Stephenson, Allison Harell, Daniel Rubenson, and Peter John Loewen) sought to strike a balance between continuing questions that have been asked in the past and branching out into new areas that will facilitate cutting-edge research. To this end, we brought together some of the best aspects of studies that were conducted in the previous, 2015, federal election, including the CES (Fournier et al. 2015) and the Local Parliament Project (Loewen, Rubenson, and Koop, 2018). We sought to balance the value of having continuous measures of questions over several years with newer trends in the study of political behaviour, such as collecting measures of personality traits and fielding survey experiments on timely topics. The 2019 CES was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through Insight Grant #435-2018-1208 and Partnership Grant #895-2019-1022.

The Design of the Study: Mode, Sample and Size

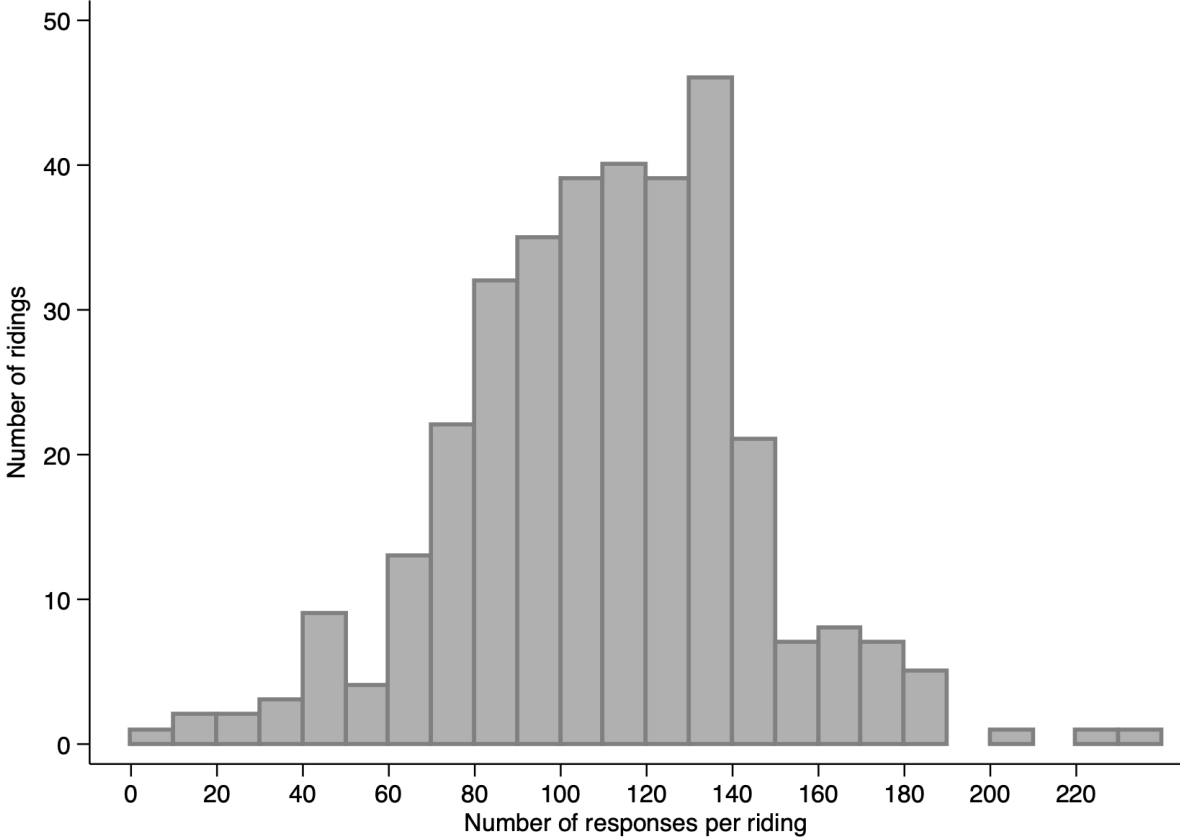
The most striking aspects of the 2019 Canadian Election Study are that it was conducted in two modes – an RDD telephone survey (n = 4021) and a large-scale, online collection (n = 37,822). Both datasets and relevant documentation are available at Project Dataverse (Stephenson et al., 2020a, Stephenson et al., 2020b) and through the Canadian Opinion Research Archive¹. This is not the first time the CES was conducted in different modes. Since 1988 the studies have involved multiple waves of questionnaires with the same respondents. Most commonly, this meant a campaign period phone survey, a post-election phone survey, and a follow-up mailback pen-and-paper questionnaire. In 2011 this model was expanded to include a fourth, web-based wave. In 2015, there was a parallel online survey conducted alongside a traditional three-wave study (phone and mailback). In 2019 each of the surveys had two waves, one during the campaign and one after the election.

The telephone survey was conducted by Advanis, Inc. and largely followed past CES studies in terms of content and order, though it was significantly shorter than previous studies (averaging approximately 20 minutes for each wave). For the campaign period survey (CPS), the sample quotas were similarly distributed across the country (5 regions: Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairies, British Columbia, 20 per cent sample each). Because of the rise of cell phone use, the study was intentionally dual-frame, utilizing both landline and wireless numbers. The CPS sample included 66 per cent wireless and 34 per cent landline numbers. Respondents were asked about the types of phone lines they have and that information is incorporated into the weights provided in the sample. The response rate for the campaign period survey was 5.6 per cent and the post-election survey (PES) re-interview rate was 72 per cent.

¹ <https://www.queensu.ca/cora/home>

The 2019 online data collection was designed to build upon the model used by the Local Parliament Project in 2015 (<https://www.localparliament.ca>) designed by Loewen and Rubenson, with Royce Koop. Online panel data has the advantage of being far less expensive than RDD telephone surveys, allowing a much larger scale than traditional telephone studies and increasing the likelihood of collecting significant numbers of respondents from all ridings across the country and from smaller demographic groups. This facilitates, for example, the analysis of local riding effects (Allen Stevens et al., 2019). In the 2019 Canadian Election Study – Online Survey we continued with this model. Of the 338 ridings in Canada, we have 50 or more responses in 95 percent of ridings (see Figure 1). The online data also used a cooperative model for data collection where other researchers were invited to contribute questions that were assigned to small subsamples of the study after they received the core instrument. This allowed us to further increase sample while promoting a range of separate studies outside the research team.

Figure 1: Number of responses per riding, CES Online 2019, Campaign Period Survey



Note: N= 37,262. The riding of 560 respondents could not be determined from the postal code they entered.

The online study survey was programmed by the CES team and associates and hosted by the University of Western Ontario through its licensed Qualtrics platform. Qualtrics also recruited respondents, aiming for three-day samples that were stratified by region (Ontario, Quebec, West, East, and North²) and balanced on gender and age within each region. Regions were sampled according to their approximate demographic weight. We also aimed for a language distribution of 80 per cent French and 20 per cent English within Quebec, 10 per cent French within the

² There were no quotas for the Northwest Territories, Yukon or Nunavut, but any respondents from those regions were accepted into the sample.

Atlantic region, and 10 per cent French nationally. Respondents needed to be aged 18 or over and Canadian citizens or permanent residents in order to participate. The weights provided in the dataset are based upon age, gender, education and province census distributions. Traditional response rates cannot be calculated for online samples, but the re-interview rate for the PES was 27.3 per cent. The datasets were pre-processed by cleaning out any respondents who provided incomplete responses to initial demographics or the core survey, took the survey twice, those who completed either wave of the survey in less than 8.5 minutes, those who “straight-lined” multiple grid questions (“straightliners”), and respondents who provided a postal code not matching their province.

The 2019 CES continued the tradition, begun in the 1988 survey, of rolling cross section samples (Johnston and Brady, 2002; Johnston et al., 1989). In both modes, responses were designed to be representative of the general population in three-day windows. This meant averaging about 100 surveys per day on the phone and 1000 per day online. Given the importance of the last few days of the campaign for affecting the outcome, we gathered on average about 1650 responses per day in the last five days of the campaign online.

The 2019 CES continued Canada’s involvement with the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems by administering Module 5 in both modes’ post-election waves (<https://cses.org/data-download/cses-module-5-2016-2021/>). Along with providing comparative items across a host of electoral democracies, this module includes interesting questions on nationalism and populism. Due to length restrictions (in terms of both time and not having a mailback component), the telephone surveys contain far fewer questions than the online surveys. Designing a shorter

survey made us pay close attention to privileging questions that would be important for understanding the dynamics of the campaign and election outcome, as well as those that were crucial for important time series about the Canadian population. The core online CES instrument included two types of questions: those fielded to the full sample and those fielded to a series of split samples in order to ask a broader range of questions in the core instrument. For example, questions about positions on issues like assisted dying were randomly asked of one third of the sample.³ This format allowed us to make sure that we struck a balance between innovative research questions and ones that help us to understand the evolution of Canadian public opinion. Finally, in collaboration with electoral management bodies across Canada, we included several questions in the online study about electoral administration, such as sources of information about voting. Because turnout is a perennially interesting and important research question for political scientists and policy makers, understanding more about the actual cost and process of voting is relevant.

Key Contribution: Facilitating Subgroup Analysis

Traditionally, studies of vote choice are limited in their ability to analyze within-group variation because of smaller sample sizes. Those interested in studying the political behaviour of immigrants, for example, often have to pool several CES surveys in order to get a large enough sample (for example, Bilodeau, White and Nevitte 2010; Harell 2012), complicating the analysis with election-specific dynamics. The size of the 2019 CES online sample alleviates this problem and opens up new and promising avenues of research, as well as the possibility of examining

³ Questions about government spending in the phone survey were also asked of a random subset of respondents.

important cleavages within groups. The 2019 online study includes a substantial number of foreign-born citizens (4925) and, for the first time, includes permanent residents in Canada (1342). There are also substantial samples of ethnic, linguistic and religious minority communities which allow for finer-grained analyses than catch-all "visible minority", allophone or non-Christian religion categories, as well as a large group of first-time eligible voters and LGBTQ respondents (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sample Size of Selected Subgroups in 2019 CES – Online Survey

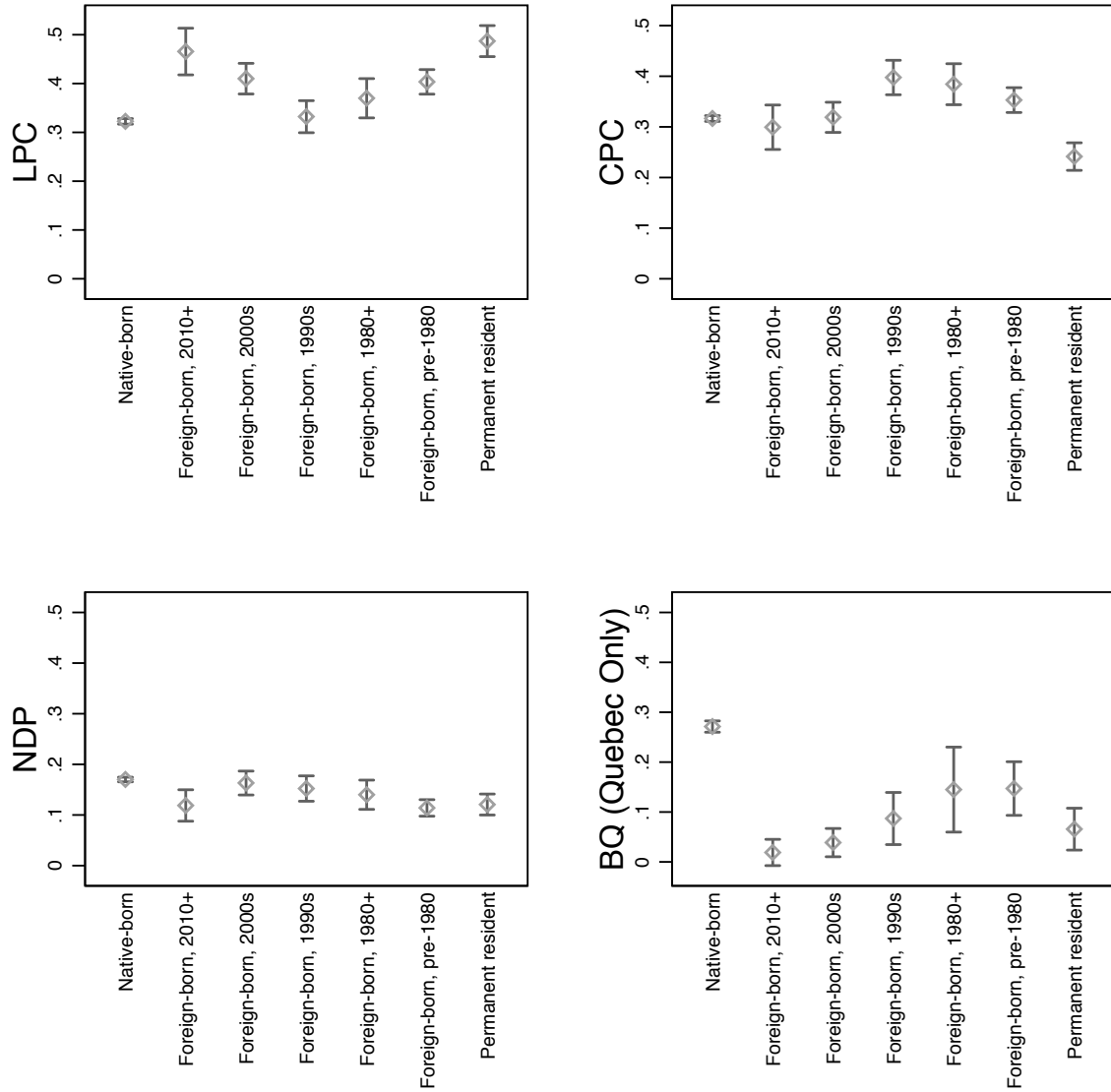
Immigration		Linguistic	
Foreign-born citizens	4925	Arabic	417
Permanent residents	1342	Chinese, Cantonese, Mandarin	1198
		French	12007
Ethnic Diversity		Filipino, Tagalog	549
Chinese	1493	Italian	611
Aboriginal, First Nation	1738	Indian, Hindi, Gujarati	763
Hispanic	480	German	833
Indian	882	Pakistani, Punjabi, Urdu	314
Metis	605	Russian	276
Filipino	222	Spanish	793
Religious Diversity		Gender and Sexual Diversity	
Buddhist	472	Non-Binary Gender	291
Hindu	433	Homosexual	1566
Jewish	531	Bisexual	1635
Muslim	739	Other Sexual Orientation	431
Sikh	204		
Greek/Ukrainian/Russian Orthodox	470	First Time Voters	
		18-20 year olds	1221

Note: Unweighted frequencies.

Subgroup analysis is particularly important because “common wisdom” often dictates that some groups of people lean one way or another politically – for example, immigrants supporting the Liberals (Blais 2005) – and this can have implications for party campaign activity and attention, not to mention for our understanding of electoral dynamics. Figure 2 provides examples of the power of our sample to detect subgroup variation. The Liberal advantage among immigrant-origin electors was reproduced in 2019 (see Figure 2), but there is substantial variation across immigration waves, with Conservatives doing particularly well among older cohorts of immigrant electors. Potential citizens (permanent residents) are also particularly favourable toward the Liberals, suggesting the Liberal advantage among immigrants may continue in future cohorts of citizens.

Figure 2: Vote Intention by Immigrant Status and Year of Entry into Canada

[figure 2 about here]



Note: CES 2019, Online Survey. Graphs show unweighted means for vote intention, with 95 per cent confidence intervals. Permanent residents were asked which party they would vote for if they were eligible.

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The Consortium on Electoral Democracy (c-dem.ca) has administered the Canadian Election Study since 2019 and will coordinate telephone and online surveys at the federal, provincial and local levels until 2026. The network of more than 50 researchers and partners across Canada addresses urgent questions relating to political commitment, under-representation, levels of government, the evolution of public opinion between and through elections, as well as data collection practices with a cooperative, evidence-based approach.

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