Advisory Committee of Political Parties

MEETING SUMMARY

Post 42nd General Election Special Meeting
November 19, 2015

Meeting Summary

The objective of the Post 42nd General Election Special Meeting of November 19, 2015, was to invite political parties to share comments and feedback on the conduct of the 42nd GE, particularly their on-the-ground experience of services provided to voters and political parties.

This summary follows the order of the Agenda included as Appendix A. A list of the participants is included in Appendix B.

Introductory Remarks and Debrief on the Conduct of the Election by the Deputy Chief Electoral Officers

Belaineh Deguefé, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Integrated Services, Policy and Public Affairs (DCEO ISPPA), welcomed members of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP) to the Post 42nd General Election Meeting. He recognized newly registered political parties and participants for whom this was their first ACPP meeting.

Debrief on the Conduct of the Election

Michel Roussel, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events (DCEO EE), gave ACPP members an overview of the conduct of the last general election.

The DCEO EE mentioned that although the official turnout (established at 68.5%) is not yet final, Canadians voted in greater numbers than they have for over 20 years. It seems that this increase strained the old business model of voting services, especially at advance polling stations. We need to assess the long-term sustainability of how we administer the voting process. In general, how we offer our services, especially voting services, does not always meet Canadians' expectations in terms of accessibility, speed and efficiency.

The governing party has identified an extensive electoral reform agenda. Elections Canada (EC) needs to be prepared to contribute its technical expertise to the discussions about this agenda. EC will also review the conduct of the election with a variety of stakeholders to recommend key elements to modernize the electoral process and improve the administration of future elections. As part of its normal practice, EC is currently fielding surveys seeking the feedback of electors and candidates.

EC must conclude its own analysis on the last election quickly, with input from key stakeholders, to be able to contribute changes to improve service to electors and candidates.

Observations from the 42nd general election – Voting operations

1. Voting Services

EC's first foray into introducing technology to support services to voters was a success: the agency set up 486 offices with improved connectivity and IT services, plus another 76 locations offering special ballot voting services on campuses. These advancements have provided EC with the IT basis to support further steps towards automating electoral services at places such as advance or ordinary polling stations. EC believes that voters are ready for such changes and expect greater modernization of services.

Voter registration

More than 1 million confirmations and 300,000 registrations or address changes were made online, compared with some 485,000 registrations at local offices. More importantly, e-registration was the channel of choice for voters 18 to 44 years old. This contributed to the quality of the list of electors.

Voting process/procedures at the polls

Polling place voting is increasingly complex and challenging to administer, especially at advance polling stations. It lacks efficiency and does not match Canadians' expectations of services or stakeholders' expectations of record quality.

EC raised the need for a different operational model in 2012, including the re-engineering of the functions/processes and the computerization of the voter's list, poll book and ballot-counting operations. The case for this transformation is strengthened by what we saw at the last election. For example, bringing technology to the polls could transform the voting experience by allowing electors to vote at any polling station in their riding.

Special ballot on campus

Some 72,000 young electors used this service. EC needs to assess the efficiency of the service provided before deciding whether this service can be expanded across the country.

2. Communications with electors

EC revamped its communications program from the bottom up through the Electoral Reminder Program, offering a redesigned suite of products in plain language and multiple formats and working with non-governmental organizations to share this information widely. Additionally, EC communicated extensively via social media and also developed products that other groups could distribute, which were in tremendous demand.

The impact of social media was striking: EC was able to push out communications (information) to electors and gather intelligence on the election and how it was going (e.g. when a server was malfunctioning). Teams were monitoring keywords in social media, which allowed EC to respond quickly. Limitations: there were no systems to track the length of lineups, which would be useful to know so the agency could anticipate a corresponding delay in the counting of results.

3. Voter identification policy

EC is awaiting the results of a survey of electors on the specific topic of voter's proof of identity and address at the polls. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the regime, especially the exceptions relating to the proof of address, is cumbersome to administer in a consistent manner and in some situations may create administrative barriers to voting.

4. Election workers' job performance and working conditions

An audit of election workers' performance is mandated by law and is being carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PWC). Results will be published in spring 2016.

Given the complexity of our voting process, and in light of the anecdotal evidence collected on election day, EC suspects that much will remain to be done. The staffing model was changed and the training was improved to better deal with procedures and compliance at the polls. Due to a prescriptive *Canada Elections Act* (CEA), many election workers must deal with difficult working conditions, which have a negative effect on recruitment.

Observations from the 42nd general election – Service to political parties/candidates

Provision of polling place data to candidates and parties

This was the first time that comprehensive and updated polling place address information was shared with political parties, with updates circulated via e-mail. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most political parties struggled with integrating the frequent updates to polling place addresses.

Provision of list of electors data to candidates and parties

We are aware that there were issues with some returning offices delivering the candidates' list in print file format instead of database format, which is regrettable and should be remedied in the next election.

Facilitating the work of the scrutineers

Scrutineers have a very important function in our democratic system; they bring a unique perspective to voting operations. EC wants to know what political parties heard and learned during the vote, and whether they feel that EC staff fully respected their scrutineers' rights under the law, particularly the right to:

- watch over special ballot voting at returning offices
- examine voter ID documents at a poll
- receive a copy of all the bingo cards completed at a poll on election day, or
- take a picture of the bingo card completed at an advance poll

The nomination process for candidates

The long writ period meant that parties' candidates had ample time to prepare their papers. This showed in the fact that returning officers had to deal with much fewer last-minute, frantic and incomplete applications. EC is commissioning a survey of the candidates on these and other questions.

Roundtable discussion

Following the DCEO EE's introduction and debrief, ACPP members expressed their appreciation of the overall conduct of the election and posed questions regarding the 2015 election feedback form.

Members also asked about complaints and the number of people who reported experiencing barriers to voting due to identification. Michel Roussel noted that EC proactively asked Canadians to provide their feedback on all aspects of their voting experience through a variety of new channels of communication. Engagement with EC across all channels was significantly higher, including complaints. No clear evidence is available yet about people who experienced barriers because of voter identification, but EC conducted post-election surveys and will report on this aspect in late spring 2016.

The DCEOs were also asked if EC would be in a position to administer the next election with a potentially different election system, to which they replied that it would be premature to speculate on the content of any reform at the moment, but obviously EC's duty is to administer the CEA as enacted by Parliament.

ACPP Members' Feedback on Services to the Public

ACPP members were invited to share their experience and comments on EC services to the public during the 2015 election.

Advance polls

ACPP members expressed their concerns about long line ups at advance polls. While it indicated interest in voting, some people left without casting their ballot. ACPP members were interested in knowing how that may be alleviated in the future. It was suggested that voters could start the process while waiting (e.g. by filling out a form), or that the size and number of advance polling stations could be increased, and that more voting stations could be added on site.

Special ballots on campus

Overall, ACPP members applauded this initiative and reported that students were enthusiastic to vote in their home riding. However, the long line ups meant that some students had to leave before they could cast their ballot. While this initiative was deemed innovative, the mechanics were an issue.

Changes to polling locations and on voter information cards

ACPP members noted that it seemed like there were a lot of polling location changes this year, which created confusion for voters. Some voter information cards (VICs) also had the wrong information, and while EC attempted to correct the issue by reprinting and resending, it left voters confused as to where to go.

Michel Roussel clarified the difference between a change of polling stations in between VICs and a change of location from a previous election. The former change did not increase from previous elections, while the latter did, in fact, increase. The number of changes in locations can be attributed largely to the redistribution of federal ridings. Some members nonetheless expressed dissatisfaction with the errors experienced.

Questions were also asked about EC's policy on how far a poll can be from electors' residence, which was an issue in some cases. Mr. Roussel shared an overview of the list of criteria that ROs use to select a polling location: accessibility, proximity, availability, etc.

Voter identification

ACPP members mentioned that they have seen a lot of reports in social media about people being turned away for lack of ID, when they had the right ID. For instance, some voters were asked for a photo ID or a driver's licence specifically.

On-site services to voters

There were concerns about polling stations not complying with their official hours of operation: in northern communities, some polling stations reportedly opened up to two hours late and also closed early.

ACPP members also mentioned reports of polling stations running out of ballots in some First Nations communities and were interested as to how that may be resolved in the future. It was explained that the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) allowed for ballots to be photocopied or transferred between polling stations, but some voters may have left because of the wait. The full extent of the impact of the shortages on the exercise of the vote remains unclear, but EC is committed to determining the extent and impact of the problem.

There were also reports of pre-marked ballots, and ACPP members were seeking an explanation. Michel Roussel informed members that EC is currently conducting official reviews on the lack of ballots on reserves, as well as pre-marked ballots, and asked parties to put all complaints in writing and formally send them to EC to help with investigation and so that appropriate action can be taken.

Questions were also asked about the pay and the training offered to staff and whether both factors could be improved to attract better applicants. Members' suggestions included more training sessions, the presence of trainers on site on election day, hiring more staff (especially to fill in during breaks), increasing pay and holding training sessions closer to election day.

It was noted that voting at a specific polling location seems like an unnecessary and obsolete restriction and that voters should be able to vote at any polling station within their riding. Mr. Roussel informed members that EC had proposed to test a system to vote anywhere in a riding in the past and that it plans to resubmit a proposal for Parliament to examine this.

There were also questions on the possibility of on-site online voting for the next election. Mr. Roussel assured members that EC has the infrastructure and the know-how to use more technology at polling places (e.g. computerized ballot counting). EC is open to studying the issue.

Returning officers

In most cases, returning officers' (ROs) expertise and services were acknowledged and appreciated, and there was a request to have an experienced RO present at a future ACPP meeting to answer members' questions.

ACPP Members' Feedback on Services to Political Parties

ACPP members were invited to share their experience with and comments on EC services to political parties during the 2015 election.

Returning officers

Some problems with ROs at specific locations were raised (i.e. Sudbury and Calgary), such as candidates' nominations being refused, misinformation on access rules for canvassers and scrutineers given to university campuses, bingo sheets not being provided, etc. It was suggested that these problems might stem from a combination of training issues and inadequate remuneration, which limits the pool of potential candidates. Michel Roussel asked parties to put all allegations in writing and formally send them to EC, which will allow the agency to take appropriate action where applicable.

Stéphane Perrault, DCEO, Regulatory Affairs (DCEO RA), informed members that campuses seemed to be unaware of the access rules for canvassers and scrutineers, and while this is an enforcement issue for the Commissioner of Canada Elections, it is also a matter of outreach. Parties should call the hotline before an issue escalates.

Candidates' debates

Some parties expressed their concerns that smaller and emerging parties are usually excluded from candidates' debates and asked if EC could provide directives on these meetings and find ways to ensure that they have more visibility. They reiterated their concerns and their need for more visibility and more access to the public sphere. Stéphane Perrault informed members that, as explained in a previous interpretation note (OGI), the CEA does not require that all candidates be invited to a debate.

EC's communication channels

Service provided to parties through EC's legal hotline and general hotline was deemed good and effective overall, but some members reported situations when EC agents lacked information and training, which caused long delays and processes to get an actual answer.

In some instances, reports indicated that the EC website gave inaccurate polling place information through postal code searches. The need for a more streamlined process to report inaccuracies on the EC website was raised. It was also asked if EC could consider integrating more information about candidates on their website, such as a picture and a link to their social media accounts, in addition to their name and party.

Campaign signs

Questions and comments were raised about damaged campaign signs, more specifically on how to prevent and deal with vandalism and stealing. Some parties reported that when they contacted EC, they were told it was police matter, which is inaccurate. There were also reports of candidates' signage not being compliant with by-laws and members asked how EC could address this issue adequately. Stéphane Perrault clarified that there are rules in the CEA protecting signs and that it was the role of the Commissioner of Canada Elections to enforce these rules. While municipalities are entitled to remove signs, they must, prior to taking action, notify the person who authorized the sign on behalf of the campaign (unless the sign is a hazard to public safety).

Rules and regulations

Canvassing and access to premises

Canvassers were usually successful in accessing apartment/condo buildings using the access letters on the EC website.

There seemed to be a general lack of knowledge as to what the canvassers do. For instance, post-secondary institutions seemed unaware of the rules of access and limited accessibility to SVRE sites, or even denied overall access to canvassers. It was suggested that EC could address this issue with some outreach and inform the community centres and campuses that host polling places about the rights and responsibilities of candidates and canvassers.

It was also noted that the general public needs to be informed about what a candidate's nomination paper is, and more specifically, that signing a nomination paper does not mean that you have to vote for that candidate.

Some candidates experienced issues while trying to collect their signatures and were denied access to public places. It was mentioned that while candidates have responsibilities towards EC, it appears they do not have any form of protection.

There were some concerns regarding the mandatory $1,000 deposit to become a candidate, which not every Canadian can afford, creating a barrier to participation for potential candidates. It was suggested that this barrier should be removed.

Tools

It was mentioned that the password for the electoral list was problematic, complicated and used unusual symbols. In some instances, the correct files were not delivered; ROs provided the preliminary list in PDF format, when it should have been provided on a USB key; and the database did not allow users to extract information correctly.

ACPP members also reported that the bingo sheets were not always properly filled out (missing information or containing mistakes, voters appearing twice), and that, in some instances, they were simply not available as required, or ROs would fail to provide them. Members requested to be provided with a proper list of voters and wanted to reinforce that they were entitled to bingo sheets on request.

ACPP Forward Agenda and Open Forum

Moving forward

Belaineh Deguefé, DCEO ISPPA, thanked members for their initial reflections and feedback and asked them to send their written comments on this last election and suggestions for areas of improvement using the feedback form by the close of this calendar year, December 31, 2015.

Mr. Deguefé mentioned that EC does not anticipate meeting with ACPP members before the next AGM in 2016, for which likely agenda items will include the Report on Accessibility at the Polls and the general election evaluations and recommendation reports. Mr. Deguefé noted that, in 2016, if circumstances permit, EC will organize a technical briefing on accessibility. The objective of the session would be to engage ACPP members and representatives of EC's Advisory Group on Disability Issues.

Stéphane Perrault, DCEO RA, let ACPP members know that political parties will be asked to update their registration and get the required 250 signatures by June 30, 2016.

Proposed forward agenda items and open forum

ACPP members were invited to propose agenda items for the next meeting.

It was suggested that the CEO should consult with all parties for the nomination of the Broadcasting Arbitrator (BA), who should fall under the responsibility of the CEO, as the CEA does not require that only parties represented in Parliament choose the BA. Mr. Perrault reaffirmed that the CEA provides for the nomination of the BA by the parties represented in Parliament, but assured members that EC will consider options to consult with parties that are not represented in the House of Commons.

Questions were asked about the RO selection process, compensation and training. It was suggested that some of these elements might be inadequate.

Concerns were raised about the complexity of the rules and the differences in rules governing third parties. Mr. Perrault agreed that the law is complex, and while EC is trying to simplify its procedures and

guidelines, it remains an ongoing challenge, which is reflected in the language used by the CEO in his reports to Parliament.

There was some interest in PWC's audit and its timeline. Mr. Perrault informed members that EC expects to be reporting on the audit around June 2016, which might be just in time for the next AGM. Mr. Roussel noted that there are existing links between the RO competency profile, their job performance and the audit, which will likely be topics covered at the next AGM.

A member suggested a pilot project to use students to staff polls, perhaps as part of a civics class. Mr. Roussel mentioned that the CEO has allowed ROs to hire election workers as young as 16. The 2015 election is not the first time this has been done. In the last election, EC brought the average age of election workers down. ROs across the country are making an effort to hire young Canadians. Mr. Roussel also noted that EC's special ballots offices on campuses were staffed by students and that they were well run.

There were questions about the effects of Bill C-23's impacts on EC's ability to reach out to Canadians. Mr. Roussel indicated that EC's outreach efforts were focused on providing electoral information to voters: when, where and ways to register and vote, and that this worked well for this election, if voter turnout is an indicator. He also pointed out that, in previous elections, EC never invested heavily in the motivational messaging related to voting. The legislation did not prevent EC from having a robust campaign to share key voting information with electors.

One member brought forward a suggestion that attendees be compensated for their time to participate in ACPP meetings. The question of compensation of official agents was also raised, as they are not currently receiving any indemnity for their considerable efforts. A comment was made about the possibility of setting a maximum campaign length, because campaigning is expensive for small parties. It was also noted that parties generally received more communications and information than needed, which tended to render them ineffective and pointless.

Other proposed forward agenda items included whether the mandatory $1,000 deposit to become a candidate could be removed; the possibility of adding voting stations at advance polls; the exclusion of smaller political parties; and recommendations to enforce the integrity of campaign signage.

Closing Remarks

Michel Roussel, DCEO EE, thanked ACPP members for their review of the election, their recommendations and their observations. He reminded members that EC is expecting their written feedback by December 31, 2015.

Mr. Roussel noted that when the ACPP meets in June, EC should be able to share the evaluation of the 2015 election. As for the forward agenda, he thanked members for their suggestions, which included a number of interesting possible items.

In closing, Mr. Roussel thanked ACPP members for participating in the meeting.

Appendix A: Agenda

Elections Canada
Meeting of the Advisory Committee of Political Parties
and OGI Steering Committee
November 19, 2015
Hilton Lac-Leamy (Chopin Ballroom)
3 boulevard du Casino, Gatineau, Quebec

AGENDA

Time	Agenda Item
8:00–9:00	Breakfast and Registration
8:30–9:00	Introduction Session for New Members
9:15–9:30	Welcome
9:30–10:00	DCEO's Introductory Remarks
10:00–10:15	Break
10:15–11:00	ACPP Members' Feedback on Services to the Public
11:00–12:00	ACPP Members' Feedback on Services to the Political Parties
12:00–13:00	Lunch (served on site)
13:00–13:45	ACPP Forward Agenda and Open Forum
13:45–14:00	DCEO's closing remarks
14:00–14:15	Break
14:15–16:00	OGI Steering Committee

Appendix B: Meeting Participants

Political Party	Representative(s)
Animal Alliance Environment Voters Party of Canada	Liz White Stephen Best
Canada Party	James Pankiw Austin Thomas
Canadian Action Party	Jeremy Arney Will Arlow
Christian Heritage Party of Canada	Martha Sjaarda Peter Vogel
Communist Party of Canada	Elizabeth Rowley Johan Boyden
Conservative Party of Canada	Dustin Van Vugt
Democratic Advancement Party of Canada	Stephen Garvey Syed Hasnain
Forces et Démocratie	Benoît Cyr
Green Party of Canada	Marlene Wells Nick Carter
Liberal Party of Canada	John Arnold Leslie Hardy
Libertarian Party of Canada	Nichole Adams Allen K. W. Paley
Marijuana Party of Canada	John Akpata Talis Brauns
Marxist-Leninist Party of Canada	Anna Di Carlo Louis Lang
New Democratic Party of Canada	Lucy Watson Dave Hare
Party for Accountability, Competency and Transparency	Joel Shuster
Pirate Party of Canada	Roderick Lim
Progressive Canadian Party	The Hon. Sinclair Stevens Al Gullon
Rhinoceros Party	Jean-Patrick Berthiaume Donovan Eckstrom
Seniors Party of Canada	James Fairbairn John Gingerich
The Bridge Party of Canada	David Berlin Charles Lior

Appendix C: Written Comments Received from ACPP Members

Four political parties submitted additional written comments following the November 19 meeting, which are summarized below.

1. **Registration, electronic registration and online services to voters**
- There needs to be proper photo identification; online registration could compromise voters' identity.
- While online services to voters were generally very good, these services are not available to those voters without easy access to computers, e.g. elderly; those living in certain First Nations' communities. One suggestion for the future is for more outreach activities to assist specific communities in registering voters.

2. **Voting operations (e.g. advance voting, voting by special ballot, polling places, ID policy)**
- Some polling stations didn't open quickly enough due to a shortage of volunteers. Lines were very long, particularly at the advance polls.
- The additional EC offices on campuses were very successful.
- While the changes in electoral boundaries were appreciated, polls were located at long distances from where voters were living, requiring them to have cars, if in remote areas or smaller communities, in order to get to the polls.
- There was the sentiment that some candidates who violated advance polling restricted areas were not punished, and that this might have an impact on voters at advance polling.
- The fact that some polling stations ran out of ballots is an issue of serious concern.
- While a number of polling stations opened one or two hours late, the CEO did not extend voting hours in those locations.

3. **Communication with electors**
- The increased communication was noticeable. There seemed to be clarity in the information.
- VICs sometimes had incorrect polling places/addresses, confusing voters.

4. **Other comments and observations**
- There was less exclusion reported by candidates from all-candidates' meetings, which was good, but some media sources still sometimes completely ignore the small parties. CBC's coverage, including election-night coverage, ignored all but the top four parties, denying all registered parties the right to public credibility.

Service to Parties

1. Services from election officers

- Some elections officers seemed unaware of changes to the CEA, e.g. DROs not knowing what voter ID was acceptable; poll clerks not appreciating requirement to provide bingo sheets every hour on ordinary polling day; ROs not being aware of the requirement to provide bingo sheets on request in the days after the election; some poll clerks not understanding their duties, slowing down the voting process.

- Generally, the service was good, though it is still sometimes hard to get good answers to tough technical questions.

- The online training materials for election officers could be improved to help address this situation.

- Sections 325 and 495 were not enforced in Alberta ridings in regard to vandalism and theft of candidates' signs, and to illegal signage via municipal local bylaws. This lack of enforcement impacted parties' ability to inform the electorate.

2. SITES data to candidates and parties

- SITES data frequently changed, creating additional workload for those inputting the data. EC's site has all the info but it is sometimes cumbersome and difficult to find what one is looking for.

3. List of electors data

- This was useful and available in convenient formats, though it probably would have been better to have produced one fewer preliminary list before the final one for the sake of clarity.

- There were issues with the way in which the EC system was applying the electoral status and sequence ID. Passwords for the electors' lists were often too complicated with various symbols, characters and spaces. The correct file was not always delivered and some ROs stated that they had no obligation to provide a text file but only one in PDF. The user guide provided with the file gave incorrect information in regard to the legend for electoral status and invalid field length. The old instructions were not updated to reflect the changes to the file. Some lists were not ready as required under the CEA.

- Sections 326 and 327 do not require all registered candidates to be included in local public opinion polls and surveys. This exclusion is undemocratic, and it was used to influence the local vote in this general election, especially those voters who voted strategically.

4. Nomination process for candidates

- EDAs should be reminded ahead of time of their responsibilities to report the nomination process, as it is easily forgotten.

5. Other comments and observations

- The BA should be allowed to require the stations that carry the free time ads for parties to carry them in greater frequency and shorter length. Having to produce several different lengths of ads was quite inconvenient. 30-second ads would be preferred.

- Some parties are finding it increasingly difficult to find people willing to take on the work and responsibility of official agent. Official agents should be given some financial compensation for completing their work in a timely manner just as auditors are.

- Good work by EC overall.