



FACILITATING FIRST NATION VOTER PARTICIPATION FOR THE 42nd FEDERAL GENERAL ELECTION

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

FINAL REPORT

April 29, 2016

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	2
Recommendations	2
1. AFN Mandate, Background and Objectives.....	3
1.1 AFN Mandate.....	3
1.2 Project Background	4
1.3 Project Objectives.....	4
2. Methodology	5
2.1 Identifying the Problem.....	5
2.2 Literature Review on Barriers to Voting.....	6
2.2.1 Six Barriers to Voting.....	6
2.2.2 First Nation Voter Participation Statistics.....	7
2.3 The Research Approach.....	7
2.3.1 Report on First Nation Population	8
2.3.2 Report on Priority Federal Electoral Districts	9
2.4 AFN Outreach Options and Messaging.....	9
2.4.1 Outreach Solutions	9
2.4.2 Key Messaging and Communication.....	10
2.5 Additional Messaging	11
2.6 AFN Outreach Plan	13
2.7 AFN Focus Group and Outreach Survey	14
2.7.1 AFN Focus Group	14
2.7.2 AFN Outreach Survey.....	16
2.8 AFN Call Centre.....	16
3. Findings and Results	18
3.1 Outreach.....	18
3.1.1 AFN Call Centre	18
3.1.2 Distribution of Elections Canada Products	23
3.1.3 Online Surveys	24
4. Analysis.....	33

Executive Summary

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) was contracted by Elections Canada (EC) to provide critical support during the 42nd Canadian federal general election (GE). This work included supporting EC information outreach efforts to First Nation electors about when, where, and how to register and vote as well as helping to fill research gaps related to First Nation electors.

The primary goal of this report is to provide a detailed overview of AFN activities delivered as an EC contractor during the 42nd GE. The report outlines each of the key steps included in the AFN-EC Statement of Work and details some of the key findings and results.

A second, yet equally important, goal of this report is to further the discussion around First Nation electoral participation by contributing recommendations based on the AFN's experience as a First Nation–representative organization. A key function of the AFN is to review public policy and to provide policy recommendations on behalf of its membership. This report identifies 10 recommendations that would have a positive impact on First Nation electors and therefore serve to strengthen the Canadian democratic process by making it more inclusive and accessible.

It is important to note that the AFN recommendations are not a deliverable of the AFN-EC contract or Statement of Work; as such, they are not EC recommendations. Rather, they are AFN recommendations and are meant to be viewed as such and read alongside the work outlined below.

This report begins by outlining the recommendations and will provide an analysis of each recommendation in Section 4.

Recommendations

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) was contracted by Elections Canada to provide critical outreach support during the 42nd general election and to fill research gaps related to First Nation electors. Based on the work and experience of the AFN over the past 14 months, we are pleased to advance the following recommendations:

1. Elections Canada should seek amendments to the *Canada Elections Act*.
 - a. Enable First Nation electors who live within a community/reserve encompassed by a single polling division to establish their place of residence without the need for identification that proves a home/civic address.
 - b. Enable First Nation electors to use the voter information card as a permanent form of identification proving their place of residence.
 - c. Mandate Elections Canada to support get-out-the-vote campaigns and other activities that encourage First Nation voter participation.
 - d. Enable any Canadian citizen aged 16 years or older to register with Elections Canada for the purpose of participating in an election when they reach the age of majority.

2. Elections Canada should ensure that all First Nation communities have the opportunity to have at least one on-reserve polling station.
3. Elections Canada should take steps to create an ongoing administrative relationship between returning officers and First Nation Band administrators.
4. Elections Canada should ensure that all First Nation communities have access to a community relations officer for Aboriginal electors in their community during the election period.
5. Elections Canada should hire local community members to carry out registration drives in their respective First Nation communities in advance of an election.
6. Elections Canada should partner with First Nation educational organizations to design culturally appropriate curricula outlining the federal electoral process.
7. Elections Canada should develop programs and services under the Electoral Reminder Program that are accessible and culturally relevant to First Nation electors.
8. Elections Canada should ensure that First Nation electors need prove only their identity and residence once in order to participate in a respective election.
9. Elections Canada should prioritize the gathering and processing of data relating to factors that could inform First Nation voter participation.
10. Notwithstanding the above, Elections Canada should continue to respect the perspectives of First Nation citizens who choose not to participate in a federal election.

1. AFN Mandate, Background and Objectives

1.1 AFN Mandate

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is the national, political representative organization for First Nation governments and their citizens, including those living on and off reserve. Every Chief in Canada is entitled to be a member of the AFN, and the National Chief is elected by the Chiefs in Canada, who in turn are elected by their citizens. The role and function of the AFN is to serve as a nationally delegated forum for determining and harmonizing effective collective and co-operative measures on any subject matter that First Nations delegate for review, study, response or action, and to advance the aspirations of First Nations.

The National Chief is the official spokesperson of the AFN – distinct from Regional Chiefs or other political representatives – and in this regard represents the views of the national organization. The AFN’s official position on a particular subject may or may not reflect the individual perspectives held by its membership. In addition to the National Chief, the AFN secretariat provides the research and technical expertise necessary to fulfill its function as a national First Nation political representative organization.

1.2 Project Background

For the past three federal general elections (GEs),¹ the AFN has worked with Elections Canada (EC) to help inform First Nation individuals and communities on various elements of the electoral process in Canada. The focus of the 39th GE was on getting out the First Nation vote, while the following two elections (the 40th and 41st) were largely focused on providing information to help overcome barriers to voting faced by First Nations.

Research shows that First Nations vote at a much lower rate in federal GEs than the overall Canadian population (61.4% compared to 44% between 2004 and 2011).² Qualitative data gathered by the AFN in 2006, 2008 and 2011 suggest that numerous barriers contribute to this outcome, including a lack of culturally relevant information (e.g., political and language barriers), the need to prove residency and identification, and a lack of information regarding EC programs and services.³

While the evidence points to the existence of barriers for First Nation electors,⁴ a lack of data and research makes understanding the specific nature of these barriers and their relationship to First Nation electoral outcomes challenging. First Nations are not a homogeneous group that can be understood as a single unit. Each region, nation and community has its own unique cultural, political, geographical and socio-economic concerns. These factors, as well as many others, can impact the barriers to voting experienced by First Nation electors.

In 2014, the Canadian federal government passed Bill C-23, the *Fair Elections Act*, legislation that amended the *Canada Elections Act* (CEA). These amendments included more difficult identification requirements, changes to vouching as well as a diminished mandate for EC. These changes were identified by the AFN and others as being catalysts for increased barriers to voting for First Nations.⁵

Following the changes to the CEA in 2014, EC reached out to the AFN to explore a partnership for the 42nd GE. The AFN, as the national representative for First Nations, was uniquely positioned to help provide information to First Nation electors and communities across Canada about the changes to the CEA as well as help EC fulfill its mandate to ensure that First Nation electors understood the ways in which they could register and vote. These discussions led to a contract between the AFN and EC for work that was carried out in the lead-up to, during and following the 42nd GE in 2015.

1.3 Project Objectives

The specific requirements of the contract were outlined in the Statement of Work (SOW) agreed to by both the AFN and EC. The objective, consistent with the official EC mandate, was to make sure that First

¹ Specifically, the 39th GE in 2006, the 40th GE in 2008 and the 41st GE in 2011.

² Jean-Sebastien Bargiel, "Federal Voter Turnout in First Nations Reserves (2004–2011)," Elections Canada, 2012.

³ Additional information can be found in "41st Federal General Election Assembly of First Nations Call Centre Final Report," May 26, 2011, and "Increasing Voter Turnout of First Nations Voters: Phase 2 Project Summary," March 9, 2009.

⁴ For the purposes of this report, an elector is someone who is eligible under the CEA to vote in Canadian federal elections. Conversely, a voter is someone who has cast a vote in a particular Canadian federal election.

⁵ See

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=e&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=2&DocId=6514414&File=0>.

Nation electors knew when, where and the ways to register and vote during the 42nd GE. This work had three components.

1. Research – The AFN would research existing barriers to voting faced by First Nation electors and calculate an index that would help prioritize the AFN’s outreach to First Nation communities based on a variety of factors.
2. Communication – The AFN would support EC communication efforts to ensure that First Nation electors knew “when, where and the ways” to register and vote.
3. Outreach – The AFN would reach out directly to First Nation electors, First Nation leadership and First Nation Band administrators.

This report will provide a comprehensive examination of the work completed by the AFN under the contract with EC. The report is divided into four sections: AFN Mandate, Background and Objectives; Methodology; Findings and Results; and Analysis.

2. Methodology

The AFN began its work by validating existing assumptions about First Nations’ participation in federal GEs. This analysis used available data on First Nation voter turnout in federal GEs as well as existing national and international literature on barriers to voting experienced by Indigenous peoples. This first step helped identify the challenge(s) that required a solution.

Once the challenge(s) were identified, the AFN engaged in both quantitative and qualitative research to identify and quantify barriers for First Nation electors in each federal electoral district (FED) across the country. This work resulted in the calculation of a First Nation Barriers to Voting Index (BVI)⁶, which supported AFN targeted outreach of First Nation communities.

The third step in this work included developing outreach options and key messaging. This formed the basis for the bulk of the work delivered by the AFN under the terms of its contract with EC. The AFN and EC engaged in an extensive dialogue to ensure the non-partisan nature of the work.

The final step included developing a way to help measure the impacts of AFN outreach activities. A First Nation Federal Election Focus Group, online surveys and the final report all form a part of this step.

The methodology used by the AFN during the project can be divided into several distinct areas: identifying the problem, creating a list of barriers to voting, developing the research approach, and creating outreach options and messaging.

2.1 Identifying the Problem

Research undertaken by EC following the 2011 GE showed that on-reserve First Nation electors participate in federal GEs at a much lower rate than the general Canadian population. The reasons for

⁶ In previous reports, the AFN refers to the First Nation Barriers to Voting Index as the FNBV. We have decided, for simplicity, to change the acronym to BVI.

the difference in voter turnout (as high as 17%⁷) are not easily quantified and addressed. Observation and experience suggests that significant barriers exist for First Nation electors who wish to participate in the federal voting process, but identifying and tracking these barriers remains a challenge.

The primary goal of this contract was to ensure that any First Nation person who wanted to participate in the federal GE would have the information they required to be ready to vote and that their communities could connect with EC to address any barriers to participation. As a result, the early identification of existing barriers and the development of potential solutions formed a critical part of this project.

2.2 Literature Review on Barriers to Voting

The AFN Literature Review on Barriers to Voting used available national and international sources to help create an initial list of barriers to voting faced by Aboriginal electors.

The initial list of barriers laid the groundwork for a report on priority FEDs and the AFN Report on Barriers to Prioritize Outreach, and it formed much of the basis for the AFN outreach plan.

The AFN literature review groups existing barriers to voting into broad thematic categories: language, age, identification, geography, political, socio-economic status and knowledge. Additional or different categories could be used, including culture/cultural and Internet connectivity.⁸

2.2.1 Six Barriers to Voting

Taking into account the available data sources, as well as the scope of the contract, the AFN literature review identified six barriers that could impact First Nation electoral participation in Canadian federal GEs:

1. Language – When the primary language spoken in a First Nation community is not one that is supported by the electoral process.
2. Socio-economic status – Lower education and income levels have an impact on voting.⁹
3. Geography – Many First Nation communities are isolated and may not have the same access to information, advance polls or polling sites in their communities as would other more urban populations.
4. Age – Youth (aged 18–24) are less likely to vote, based on survey and research findings.¹⁰
5. Information – There is a lack of culturally appropriate information available for many First Nation electors.¹¹

⁷ See

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=e&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=2&DocId=6514414&File=0>.

⁸ Assembly of First Nations, “AFN Literature Review on Barriers to Voting,” 2015, 9.

⁹ Harell, A., Panagos, D. and Matthews, J.S. (2013). “Explaining Aboriginal Turnout in Federal Elections: Evidence from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.” *Aboriginal Policy Research Studies*, 21. Retrieved from: http://apr.thompsonbooks.com/vols/APR_Vol_10Ch1.pdf.

¹⁰ Fournier, P. and Loewen, P. (2011). “Aboriginal Electoral Participation in Canada.” *Elections Canada*, 7. Retrieved from: http://www.elections.ca/res/rec/part/abel/AEP_en.pdf.

¹¹ Examples would include information not provided in a First Nation language, or the information does not reflect a First Nation world view, further alienating First Nation electors.

6. Identification – The voter identification requirements may be prohibitive for many First Nation electors.

2.2.2 First Nation Voter Participation Statistics

Research consistently shows that First Nation electors vote in federal GEs at lower rates than the national average.

In a 2012 report, EC examined voter participation rates on First Nation reserves, finding that on-reserve voter participation (44%) was 17 percentage points lower than the national average (61.4 %) between 2004 and 2011.¹² These numbers are generally reflective of historical trends. In addition, there is some evidence that First Nation voter participation has been declining since the franchise was extended to all First Nation citizens in 1960.¹³

EC does not require electors to disclose demographic information at the polls, so the accurate tracking of First Nation participation rates in federal GEs can be challenging.

To date, two approaches have typically been used to determine First Nation voter participation rates. The first approach is the survey method. The strength of the survey method is that it is better able to explore the reasons behind voting behaviour. It is also able to cross geographic boundaries in ways that other methods cannot. The weakness of this method is that it has difficulty accounting for the many differences among First Nations across Canada due to a lack of scale.

The second approach measures the number of votes cast at polling stations located on First Nation reserves and compares this number to the number of registered electors on the reserve. This approach has the benefit of a much larger sample size, but it is not able to account for First Nations who voted off reserve, nor is it able to differentiate between First Nation and non-First Nation electors who cast a ballot on reserve.

Perhaps the greatest challenge inherent in both of the methods described above relates to the determination of an appropriate baseline for comparison. EC uses registered electors rather than eligible electors as its baseline (to be an eligible voter in a GE, you must be a Canadian citizen and 18 years old on the day of the election). As of 2014, 92.4% of eligible Canadians were registered.¹⁴ Specifying the proportion of eligible First Nation electors on the voters list is difficult given the lack of data available. It is expected that this number is much lower among potential First Nation electors, and, as a result, it represents a misleading baseline when determining First Nation voter participation.

2.3 The Research Approach

The AFN's research approach to this project was outlined in an initial AFN Research Plan and the SOW. The primary goal of the research plan was to identify barriers to voting and key stakeholders for AFN outreach and then to provide some measurement for the impact of the project. There are 634 First Nations in Canada, with a population of approximately 650,000 citizens. To ensure effective use of resources, and to focus the AFN's outreach efforts, it was deemed necessary to develop a priority list of FEDs based on the BVI.

¹² Bargiel.

¹³ Fournier and Loewen, 15.

¹⁴ See <http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=reg/des&document=index&lang=e>.

The research approach had three primary component parts.

1. Report on First Nation Population by Federal Electoral District (FED)
2. Report on Priority Federal Electoral Districts (FEDs)
3. Final Project Report

2.3.1 Report on First Nation Population

The primary goal of the report on First Nation population by FED was to identify an initial list of priority FEDs for project outreach activities.

To accomplish this, the report used both spatial analysis (geographic information systems) and a variety of Canadian Aboriginal population data sets to create a comprehensive list of all the FEDs with associated population data.

The following data sets were transposed and used by the AFN throughout the analysis:

- Aboriginal and First Nation population data from the 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada
- Registered Indian Population from the 2013 Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada (INAC, now known as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada) Indian Registry
- List of First Nation communities from the 2014–15 INAC Community Database

Given the nature of the project, the AFN selected the Registered Indian Population, aged 18+, as the data set that best reflects the target audience for AFN outreach activities.

The AFN identified four main criteria to determine priority FEDs. The first two criteria looked at the on-reserve registered Indian population (RIP) that was 18+ in each FED and established two base thresholds.

1. 2013 RIP 18+ on-reserve population \geq 4% of the total population in a FED
2. 2013 RIP 18+ on-reserve population \geq 2,000 people in a FED

These two criteria established an initial list of 39 FEDs. The on-reserve RIP 18+ population was significant because the project was predominantly focused on First Nation citizens located on reserve.

The third and fourth criteria examined FEDs based on significant RIP 18+ population and First Nation communities across FEDs.

- 2013 RIP 18+ \geq 8,500 across an FED
- Number of First Nation communities \geq 10 across a FED

Using these four criteria for analysis, the AFN identified a preliminary list of 43 priority FEDs; this would incorporate 497 (or 78%) First Nation communities and an estimated 524,318 (or 81%) First Nation citizens living both on reserve and off reserve.

2.3.2 Report on Priority Federal Electoral Districts

The purpose of the report on priority FEDs was to identify a final prioritized list of FEDs and First Nations, which would be used to focus the AFN's outreach efforts. The priority list of FEDs built on the work completed in the report on First Nation population by FED and used the list of barriers impacting First Nation electors identified in the AFN literature review to create the First Nation BVI.

The first step was to quantify and standardize each barrier identified by the AFN literature review using available data sources. In many cases, such as with socio-economic barriers, identifying and quantifying multiple data sources was not possible, so a proxy was used. In the case of socio-economic status, educational attainment was the data source used to help measure that particular barrier as education has been shown to be a key indicator in socio-economic status.

Those barriers that the AFN were able to quantify are listed below; associated data sources are identified in parentheses.

- Language (First Nation languages spoken)
- Socio-economic status (educational attainment)
- Geography (access to polling stations)
- Age (2013 RIP aged 18 to 25)
- Information (access to a community relations officer for Aboriginal electors, or CRO-A)

The identified barriers, when standardized and calculated on an index ranging from 0 to 1, were applied to each FED, along with the AFN's population analysis, to produce a comprehensive BVI score for each FED.

The report on priority FEDs ranked the 43 FEDs identified through the AFN population analysis. Of these, 32 FEDs were considered a high priority for AFN outreach, while an additional 11 FEDs were identified for additional AFN outreach.

2.4 AFN Outreach Options and Messaging

Identifying barriers to voting and the priority FEDs represented the initial phase of the project, focusing the AFN's outreach. Working with EC to help identify solutions and key messaging for AFN outreach and communication was the next step.

2.4.1 Outreach Solutions

As noted in the Project Background section above, the contract was the result of a long-standing AFN-EC dialogue that focused on providing First Nation electors with information on voting as well as examining barriers to voting. AFN research highlighted several barriers to voting that are consistently identified in the literature. These barriers were one of the reasons that the AFN and EC contracted to work together during past elections. The changes under Bill C-23 – the *Fair Elections Act* – contributed to the increased need to focus on barriers to voting during the 42nd GE.

Many First Nation electors – particularly those living on reserve and in remote locations – lack the identification required to prove their home/civic address. Many First Nation communities do not use a traditional civic address designation for their domicile; instead, they rely on a Post Office (PO) Box, General Delivery or rural route designation for their incoming mail. This type of designation does not

meet the requirements for proving home/civic address under the CEA. The requirements under the CEA to prove home address creates a critical barrier for some First Nation electors.

Vouching, the process of having a registered elector with the proper identification vouch, or attest to, the home address of other electors who lack the proper identification, has been widely used in First Nation communities in past elections. Bill C-23 removed vouching from the CEA and replaced it with a more limited option called “swearing an oath.” Not only did it remove this critical tool used previously by some First Nation electors, but changing the name had the potential to create unnecessary confusion for First Nation electors.

In addition to the changes already described, Bill C-23 ended a pilot program, which was used in the 41st GE, that enabled First Nation registered electors to use their voter information card (VIC) as proof of residence. The VIC provided an added incentive and tool for First Nation electors. It provided an incentive to register in advance for voting day because only those electors who registered in advance received a VIC. It also enabled those First Nations who were on the National Register of Electors (the Register), but who lacked proof of residence, to more easily meet the identification requirements.

These changes to the CEA, combined with existing identification barriers, had the potential to make it far more challenging for First Nation citizens to prove their home address for the purposes of registration and voting.

Meeting the new, more stringent identification requirements was a critical problem, one that was defined by the AFN as the most significant barrier to First Nation participation in the 42nd GE. The challenge itself was two-pronged in that many First Nation electors living on reserve do not have the required identification documents, and/or the identification they do have usually does not include a home/civic address.

2.4.2 Key Messaging and Communication

The AFN and EC identified the Letter of Confirmation of Residence as the best vehicle to address these two challenges. The Letter of Confirmation of Residence is a form letter, signed by a designated Band authority, attesting to the named elector’s home address. EC considers First Nation Band administrators a designated authority and thus accepted a Letter of Confirmation of Residence signed by a First Nation Band administrator as proof of address. To ensure clarity, and to speak to the unique challenges facing First Nation electors, the AFN developed a First Nations–specific Letter of Confirmation of Residence.¹⁵ The AFN also developed supporting information, including a [YouTube](#) “how to” video for both First Nation electors and First Nation Band administrators.

Developing and delivering the Letter of Confirmation of Residence formed a central part of AFN messaging, but a series of other issues were also included.

First Nation electors, particularly those living on reserve or those with a high ranking on the BVI, were viewed as less likely to have access to all the available information about the changes brought about by Bill C-23. Ensuring that First Nation electors were aware of how to mitigate any barriers to voting formed a critical part of AFN messaging and communication efforts.

¹⁵ A copy of the First Nation–specific Letter of Confirmation of Residence can be found online at <http://www.afn.ca/en/news-media/current-issues/federal-election-and-voting-information>.

To help First Nation electors who could experience challenges during the 42nd GE, the AFN developed fact sheets highlighting critical information, including changes to the identification and vouching rules and the availability of the Letter of Confirmation of Residence as a potential solution to identification barriers. In addition to the fact sheets, the AFN provided technical oversight to EC in the development of a handbook for First Nation Band administrators and leadership. This handbook described the ways in which First Nation electors could register and vote, and it included specific references to the Letter of Confirmation of Residence as well as potential solutions relating to other potential barriers.

For those First Nation electors interested in a comprehensive review of potential challenges and solutions, the AFN developed a series of technical bulletins. All products were delivered through existing AFN networks and channels, including the AFN website, AFN social media (Facebook, Twitter) and broadcast faxes as well as through other general AFN outreach activities (in-person outreach and AFN call centre). A comprehensive review of AFN communication outputs appears in the Findings and Results section of this report.

While outlining the identification barriers and corresponding solutions was critical in the development of key messages, it was not the exclusive focus of AFN messaging.

Additional focus was placed on ensuring that First Nation communities were aware that they could request a polling station for their community and that EC programs were available, such as the CRO-A program and the Aboriginal Elder and Youth Program (AEYP).

2.5 Additional Messaging

While the AFN's research efforts and past experience contributed to the key messaging that was developed for the 42nd GE, data gathered through a pre-election First Nation focus group and survey also played a critical role and helped in the refinement of the messaging.

First Nation electors are often vulnerable to geographic barriers because of the remote location of many reserves. This can lead to situations where First Nation electors have to travel hours to access their designated polling location. Expecting First Nation citizens who already experience a high number of barriers to voting to then travel long distances to cast their ballot is unreasonable and has the potential to further alienate electors.

One concern that the AFN and EC identified during the course of the pre-GE consultations was that First Nation reserves either did not have a polling location or did not have an adequate number of polling locations to ensure that electors had easy access. There was an additional concern that First Nation Band administrators might not be aware that they could request a polling station from their respective returning officer (RO). Each FED has an RO who is responsible for the administrative operation of a GE, and this includes selecting and providing for polling locations throughout the FED. If a First Nation has not previously had a polling location because they do not have a substantial population base, or if they do not ask, it is reasonable to assume that an RO will not place a polling location in that community. It is worth noting that some FEDs encompass vast areas and that the potential for an RO to have contact with – or even know of – every First Nation community in their FED is unlikely. While EC has several initiatives in place to mitigate this reality, such as having assistant ROs to support the RO in a respective FED, more needs to be done to address the challenges faced by small First Nation communities that exist in geographically large FEDs.

A key element of the AFN messaging was to ensure that First Nation electors and First Nation Band administrators were aware that they could call their RO and request a polling location in their community. This did not guarantee that the RO would provide one, but it would create upward pressure on the RO and hopefully make him or her aware of the need. It would also create a point of contact for a First Nation community interested in accessing EC programs and services such as the CRO-A program, the AEYP and targeted revision (i.e., registration of electors by EC field staff).

In addition to its messaging about polling locations, the AFN provided messaging to First Nation communities and electors about the availability of the EC Electoral Reminder Program (ERP). The CRO-A was a position created by EC to assist ROs in reaching out directly to First Nation communities. A CRO-A could assess local First Nation concerns and provide direct access to EC information. The AEYP was designed to provide a culturally sensitive experience to First Nation electors by placing a First Nation elder and/or youth in a polling location on voting day so that they could explain the voting process to First Nation electors, often in a traditional language.

The AFN also supported EC by providing information on registration and the online services that were available. While these topics were available, they did not form the core of AFN messaging. The new online registration system offered by EC was not considered functional for many First Nation electors, and it represented another barrier to voting. The AFN identified three primary reasons for this. First, the online registration system requires a driver's licence to register online or to update information if someone is already registered.¹⁶ As outlined in the Literature Review on Barriers to Voting section of this report, First Nation electors often face challenges meeting identification requirements. Second, many First Nation electors face connectivity concerns. This can be related to geographical location and/or socio-economic status, two additional barriers noted previously. Third, the AFN found that, in many cases, focusing on registration as a critical step to voting, whether it is through the online system, at a local EC office, at the polls or through some other method, serves to create a barrier to voting by emphasising a process that can be perceived as both difficult to access and confusing.

According to EC, over 25.3 million electors were registered in advance of the 42nd GE. There are a number of ways that an elector can be registered, including if they voted in a previous GE and if they did so by mail, online or at a local EC office. While specific pre-registration numbers for First Nation electors are not available, we can assume, based on past voter turnout rates, that it is *significantly* lower than those for the general Canadian population.

Registration is a necessary part of the voting process, and asking electors who are not already registered to do so in advance of voting days was a core EC message during the 42nd GE. However, while advance registration can be beneficial, particularly for those who are able to meet the identification requirements easily, it also represents another step in the voting process.

The 41st GE had allowed First Nation electors to use the VIC as a form of identification proving residency. This created an incentive for pre-registration that Bill C-23 undermined. Without the incentive of using the VIC as a form of identification, it was believed that AFN messaging for First Nation electors should not focus on creating this additional step to voting by emphasizing advance registration. The AFN and EC agreed that the focus for First Nation electors should be on knowing the "bottom line"

¹⁶ It is important to note that the vast majority of Canadian electors are registered for federal elections through a process other than signing up online or at the polls. Electors can choose to be added to the Register when they file federal income tax or if they have voted in past federal elections.

of what was required to register and vote and that the focus should be on describing voting as a single process that takes place on voting day, rather than as two steps (registration and then voting).

Information on pre-registration was made available, however, for those First Nation electors or communities that expressed an interest in the topic during AFN outreach activities.

In the future, steps should be taken by EC and its partners to create an administrative and technical dialogue with First Nation communities well in advance of a federal GE. This would allow for more realistic timelines and hopefully lead to the efficient mobilization of the resources and capacity required if First Nation electors are to enjoy the benefits of pre-registration and other EC programs. Further, First Nation electors, particularly youth, indicated that EC should create messaging specifically tailored to First Nation electors that better reflects their cultural values and experiences as electors.

2.6 AFN Outreach Plan

The AFN outreach plan was developed in coordination with EC and outlined in a comprehensive proposal report before the 42nd GE. The outreach plan had four component parts, identifying:

1. Key stakeholders to be reached through outreach activities
2. A calendar identifying key dates and outreach opportunities
3. Specific outreach activities
4. Evaluative tools

The first step in developing the AFN outreach plan was to identify key stakeholder groups for targeted outreach using both the SOW and the results of AFN research.

The contract SOW identified First Nation electors and First Nation Band administrators as the priority stakeholders for the project. To assist in prioritizing these two broad categories, three key stakeholder groups were identified.

1. First Nation Band administrators
2. First Nation electors who request information on where, when and the ways to register and vote in the 42nd GE
3. First Nation electors in a FED who encounter one or more barriers to their ability to participate (vote) in the 42nd GE

Once key stakeholders were identified, the AFN developed a shared outreach calendar of First Nation events that could provide a venue for both AFN and EC outreach activities. The calendar included event title, date, location, type of event, anticipated participants, the most appropriate outreach activity and the materials required.

In addition, the AFN worked with EC to develop a list of activities to be delivered. AFN outreach activities included in-person attendance at events across Canada and an AFN call centre. The AFN call centre will be discussed in detail below.

The AFN outreach plan proposed that up to 10 regional First Nation events would be selected from the AFN outreach calendar for in-person outreach between May 2015 and August 2015. The primary goal of the AFN in-person outreach was to deliver key messaging to First Nation electors and to listen to

concerns and, where possible, identify solutions. Events were selected based on availability, AFN priority research (location of First Nation event) and the criteria used for identifying key stakeholders.

Two primary in-person outreach products were developed for delivery: an AFN information booth and an AFN presentation. The AFN information booth provided key messaging and selected EC products, and it gave AFN staff an opportunity to connect with First Nation electors. Likewise, an AFN presentation was developed to deliver key messaging to First Nation electors and was delivered on request.

In addition to the key messaging, AFN in-person outreach activities delivered information about EC's ERP materials and programs, including EC online services, EC language services, the AEYP, the CRO-A program and potential EC job opportunities.

Critical to AFN outreach was the development of tools to assist in measuring the impacts of the various activities. To this end, the AFN proposed to develop and implement an AFN focus group and a series of surveys that would contribute to the evaluation of AFN and EC outreach activities. The AFN focus group and outreach survey will be discussed in detail in the following section.

While AFN outreach was effective at ensuring that EC messaging was present at key regional First Nation events, future outreach work should focus on more effectively leveraging First Nation social media networks and local organizations in addition to maintaining some level of in-person outreach at large events.

2.7 AFN Focus Group and Outreach Survey

The goal of the AFN focus group, outlined in an AFN focus group plan, was to facilitate an enriched conversation with First Nation electors about Canadian GEs. In addition, the AFN focus group was developed with the intention of creating a control group that would be used to measure the impact of AFN and EC outreach activities during the 42nd GE. As a result, the focus group met both before and after the 42nd GE.

As a second initiative, the AFN developed an online outreach survey that was shared through AFN networks and social media channels both before and after the 42nd GE. The objective was to attempt to measure the impact of outreach activities, address identified gaps in data when it comes to First Nation participation in Canadian GEs and gain further insight into identified barriers to voting for First Nation electors.

2.7.1 AFN Focus Group

The AFN focus group met both before and after the 42nd GE. The initial focus group took place on July 6, 2015, in Montreal, QC, and consisted of a cross-section of 20 eligible First Nation electors. The number of participants selected was based on a number of factors, including interest in federal politics, availability, statistical relevance and budget limitations. The participants represented the diversity of First Nation peoples broadly, including by age (18–75), gender (male or female), region (eastern, western, central, northern regions of Canada) and residence (on or off reserve). In addition, specific requirements for selection included:

- Being a First Nation eligible elector
- Able to attend both focus group sessions

The second focus group took place on December 7, 2015, in Gatineau, QC. Given that one goal of the focus group was to measure change, the same 20 participants were required to attend both focus group sessions as part of the focus group participation contract.

Both focus group sessions used a similar approach to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Participants were required to fill out a detailed AFN focus group survey in advance of each session. The first survey was designed to both establish baseline information regarding the participants' awareness of the ways in which they could register and vote in the 42nd GE and to gather information about the participants' experiences during federal GEs generally. The second survey was filled out following the 42nd GE and was similar to the first survey to allow for comparative analysis.

In addition to having participants complete a survey, the focus group gave participants the opportunity to explore four questions using a group interview method. The questions were selected from the AFN focus group survey and adapted for the interview method.

Pre-election AFN Focus Group: July 6, 2015

Question 1: What is your history of voting in past federal elections, and do you intend to vote in the upcoming federal election?

Question 2: What types of ID have you used to vote in past federal elections?

Question 3: What kinds of experiences have you had when voting in a federal election?

Question 4: Have you faced any barriers when considering voting in a past federal election or during the election period?

Post-election AFN Focus Group: December 7, 2015

Question 1: Did you vote in the 2015 federal election? If you voted, how would you describe your experience during the voting process?

Question 2: If you voted in the last federal election, what ID did you use at the polling station? Did you have any problems using the ID that you had?

Question 3: How aware were you of the AFN or Elections Canada voter information campaigns during the last election? Did you and/or others find them useful?

Question 4: Do you have suggestions for the AFN on work they should be engaged in for the next federal election?

Both AFN focus group sessions gave participants the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns and share experiences. The second focus group session, in particular, provided the AFN with the opportunity to engage participants in a discussion about best practices and next steps.

Focus group feedback made it clear that participants appreciated and found value in this forum. Several participants pointed out that information provided in the focus group on the ways to register and vote proved critical to informing their own network of First Nation electors. In addition, the focus group provided AFN staff with an opportunity to both test key messaging and gather a broader understanding

of First Nation voter experiences. There is definite utility in continuing to actively engage First Nation electors and to seek their feedback on Canadian federal GEs.

2.7.2 AFN Outreach Survey

The AFN developed and delivered two online outreach surveys for the project. The surveys were conducted before and immediately following the 42nd GE. Both surveys were shared as broadly as possible using AFN networks and social media channels.

The first (pre-election) survey was conducted from August 1 to October 19, 2015. The second (post-election) survey was conducted from October 22 through to December 1, 2015.

The initial survey sought to measure the knowledge of each participant regarding a variety of electoral topics that included:

- Voting history
- Ways to register and vote
- Barriers to voting

The second online survey mirrored the first, while also focusing on each participant's experience during the 42nd GE. Taken together, the AFN focus group and the outreach surveys function as a tool for measuring the impacts of AFN and EC outreach efforts. In addition, both activities provided valuable data on First Nation experiences during Canadian federal elections.

The results of the AFN outreach surveys are detailed in Section 3.1.4.

2.8 AFN Call Centre

Central to AFN outreach efforts was the AFN call centre. The AFN had staffed and operated a call centre under previous EC contracts, and it has been considered by the AFN and EC as forming a critical part of past outreach efforts by helping establish a direct connection with First Nation communities.

The primary purpose of the AFN call centre was to directly connect with First Nation Band administrators. It was to ensure that they were aware of the identification requirements for their citizens who may want to vote and to provide them with access to the Letter of Confirmation of Residence and information on how to issue it to their citizens.

In past elections, the AFN call centre focused on providing information only. For the 42nd GE, the AFN and EC expanded the scope of the call centre in an attempt to create a dialogue with First Nation communities to improve the available data on the types of barriers First Nations face and the types of information about addressing these barriers to which they have easy access. To this end, call centre staff were expected to provide AFN key messaging (changes to voter identification, Letter of Confirmation of Residence) and then, depending on the level of interest expressed by the respondent, explore a series of additional topics, including:

- How to get in touch with their RO for services
- How to get a polling station in their community
- Employment opportunities with the AEYP
- Registering at the polling station, including details for off-reserve members

- How to swear an oath
- Voting at advance polls or by mail

AFN call centre staff were also able to follow up on the phone with information sent by e-mail, including:

- AFN Federal Election Frequently Asked Questions
- AFN Template Letter of Confirmation of Residence (for individuals and for Band administrators)
- AFN Communications Fact Sheet (two posters)
- AFN Bulletin on the AFN Open Forum
- EC Voter Identification Sheet

The call centre ran from mid-September to mid-October 2015. Eighteen AFN call centre staff were assigned various regions across Canada. Training was provided on how to use the scripts as talking points, enter data into Google Survey for weekly reporting to EC and updating Excel spreadsheets (call logs) to keep track of calls.

A broadcast fax was sent in mid-September to notify First Nations regarding outreach, and calls started coming in immediately after. There was a debriefing with AFN staff a few days later on first impressions and to address any challenges. Initially, AFN staff indicated that they were experiencing challenges connecting with Band administrators. Several attempts were often required to successfully reach the appropriate person. Once a connection was made, Band administrators often preferred to receive information by e-mail rather than by phone.

Priority calls to 497 First Nations were placed between mid-September and mid-October. The deadline for the first round of 497 priority calls was September 25 (which was subsequently extended to mid-October), with a one-week buffer before starting the second round of calls to the remaining 143 communities (to further First Nations not on the priority list).

The AFN call centre, as in past years, proved to be an important tool for connecting First Nation communities to core EC messaging and information about the ways to register and vote. In addition, the AFN call centre provided AFN with an opportunity to gather additional data on the experience of First Nation electors, including better data on the barriers they face.

Future iterations of the AFN call centre should make additional efforts to identify the correct point person in a First Nation community. This should be done well in advance of the federal GE so that First Nation communities can respond to the unique challenges they face and better ensure that their membership can fully participate in Canadian federal elections if they so choose.

3. Findings and Results

3.1 Outreach

3.1.1 AFN Call Centre

Number of First Nations Called

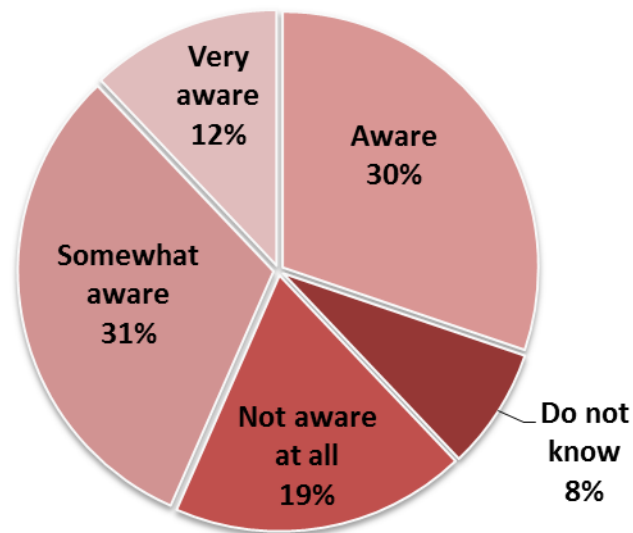
Of the 1,122 calls made by AFN staff through the call centre, 485 of the 497 First Nations prioritized for outreach were called (or 98%). This meant that 100% (or 43 out of 43) of the priority FEDs were called.

Of the 485 First Nations called, AFN staff made contact with 430 (or 87%) of the priority First Nation communities identified for outreach.

Results of Calls

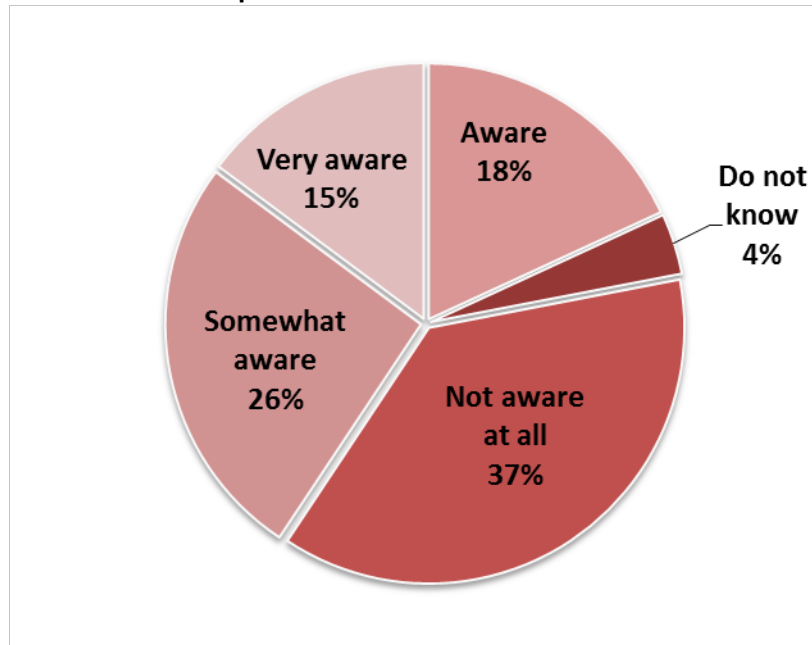
Of the 430 First Nations the AFN staff contacted, 42% were “very aware” or “aware” of the ID requirements to vote in the upcoming federal election. Approximately 31% were “somewhat aware,” while 19% of First Nations were “not aware at all.” Approximately 8% of First Nations called “did not know.” (See Figure 3.1.)

Figure 3.1: How aware were respondents of the ID requirements? (n = 430)



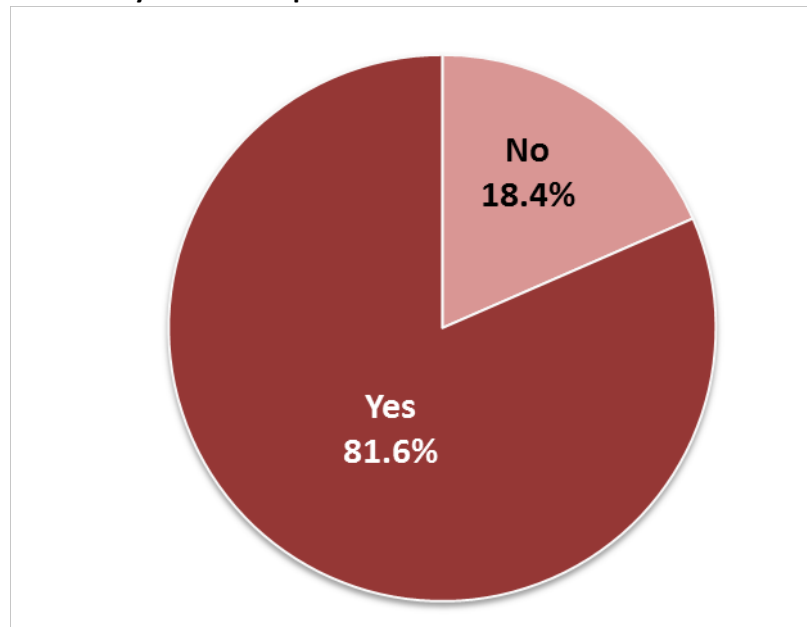
When asked about the Letter of Confirmation of Residence, 33% of First Nations were “very aware” or “aware” of the ID requirements to vote in the upcoming federal election. Approximately 26% were “somewhat aware,” while 37% of First Nations called were “not aware at all.” Approximately 4% “did not know.” (See Figure 3.2.)

Figure 3.2: How aware were respondents of the Letter of Confirmation of Residence? (n = 430)



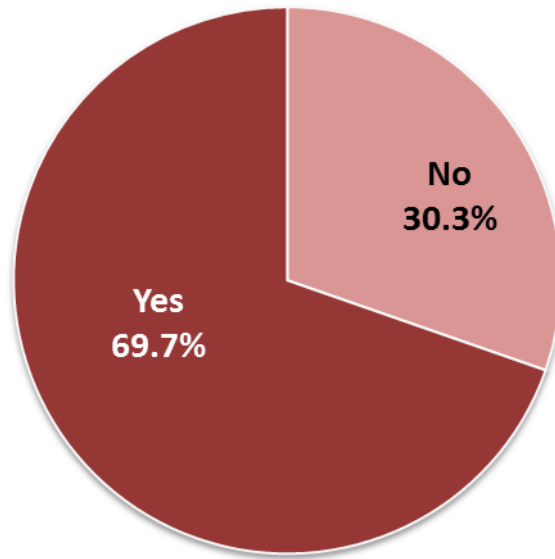
When asked whether the First Nation wanted a template Letter of Confirmation of Residence sent to them (usually by e-mail and sometimes by fax) in order to print individual letters, 82% responded “yes,” whereas 18% responded “no.” (See Figure 3.3.)

Figure 3.3: Did they want a template Letter of Confirmation of Residence? (n = 430)



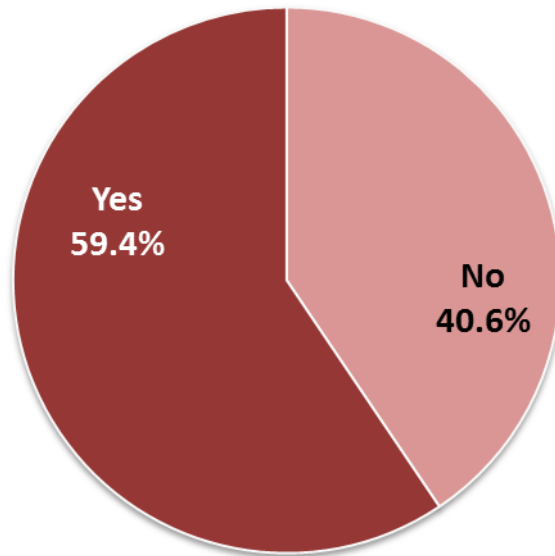
When asked whether the First Nation also wanted another version of the Letter of Confirmation of Residence so that they could use their Band membership list and merge it with the template letter to create a batch of letters, 70% responded “yes,” and 30% responded “no.” (See Figure 3.4.)

Figure 3.4: Did they want details on how to use mail merge? (n = 430)



When First Nations were offered additional information on topics related to the federal GE, 59% answered “yes,” and 41% answered “no.” (See Figure 3.5.)

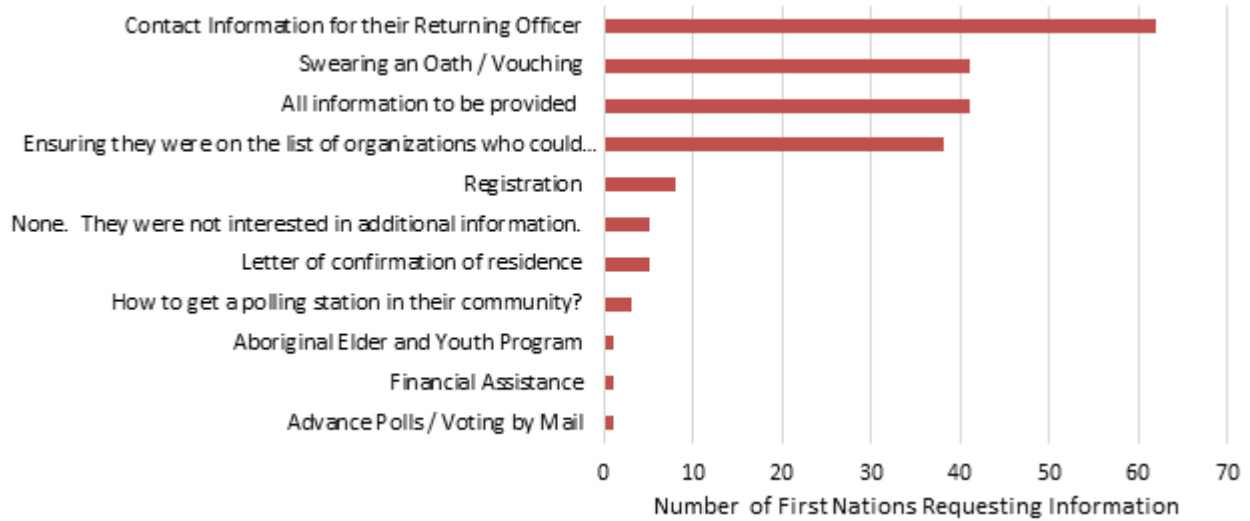
Figure 3.5: Were they interested in additional information? (n = 430)



When First Nations responded “yes” to receiving additional information, they were offered topics such as how to get in touch with an RO; details on swearing an oath; determining whether they were on a list of organizations that could provide the Letter of Confirmation of Residence, details on registration and how to ask for a polling station in the community; whether there were any job opportunities (AEYP); and details on advance polls. Over 40% responded that they wanted all the information available sent to

them, while approximately 5% were not interested in receiving any additional information. (See Figure 3.6.)

Figure 3.6: What kind of additional information were they interested in?



In every case where an e-mail was sent to a First Nation as part of call centre activities, it would include the name of the RO for their FED as well as a toll-free number and information on how to reach the RO.

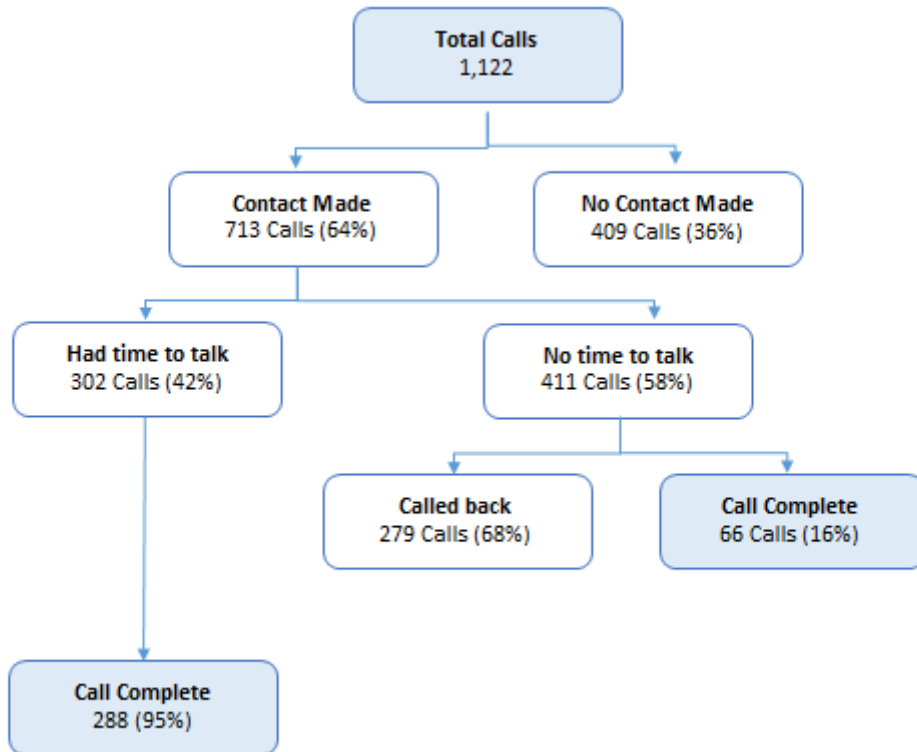
Flow of Calls

The following outlines the flow of calls made by AFN staff through the call centre. Note that often, multiple calls were required to reach the appropriate person at a respective Band office.

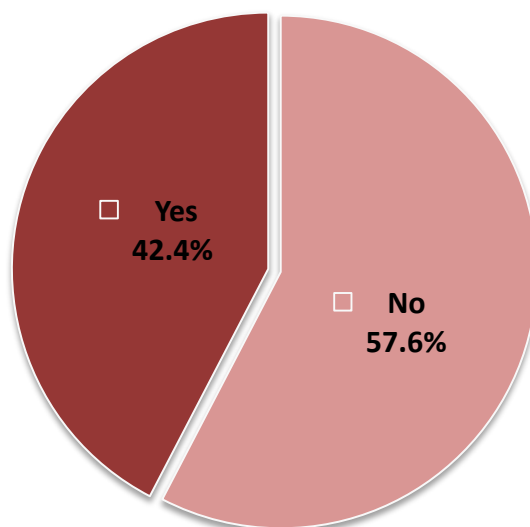
Overall, 18 AFN staff were involved in the call centre and made 1,122 calls to 485 First Nations.

Of the 1,122 calls made by AFN staff, contact was made with an individual by phone 713 times (or 64% of the time). Of approximately 36% of the calls (or 409), no contact was made with an individual (i.e., phone message, wrong number, no answer). (See Figure 3.7.)

Figure 3.7: Flow chart of call centre calls



For the 713 calls where contact was made over the phone, more than 42% (or 302) of First Nations called had time to talk to AFN staff. Nearly 58% (or 411) of First Nations called did not have time to talk. (See Figure 3.8.)

Figure 3.8: Did the person have time to talk?

For the 411 First Nations called that did not have time to talk, AFN staff were able to e-mail information to someone at the First Nation and “complete the call” for 66 (or 16%) of them. For 279 (or 68%) of the First Nations called, AFN staff talked to someone, but required a follow-up call to connect with the appropriate person at the First Nation in charge of election activities. (See Table 3.1.)

For the 302 First Nations called that had time to talk, AFN staff were able to convey all the information and “complete the call” for 288 (or 95%) of them. Approximately 9 (or 3%) of the remaining First Nations called required further follow-up.

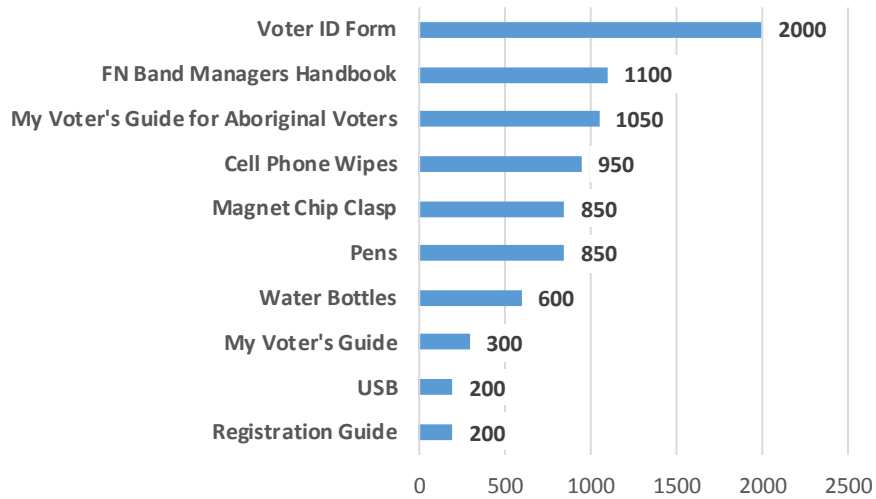
Table 3.1: Status of call centre calls

Call	Yes	No
Call complete	95%	16%
I got the right person, more conversation needed.	3%	8%
No one answered. I need to call back.	0%	7%
Someone answered, didn't talk to the right person. I need to call back.	1%	68%
Other	1%	1%

3.1.2 Distribution of Elections Canada Products

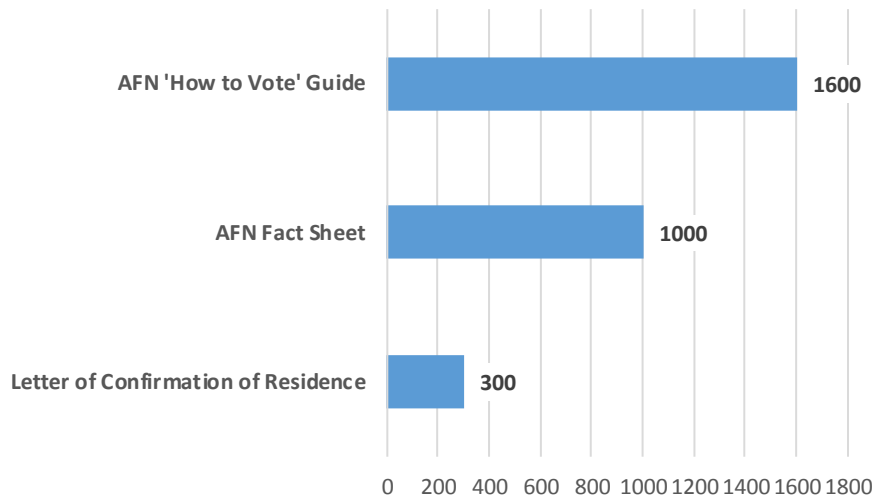
In addition to broad communication efforts, the AFN distributed EC products through AFN in-person outreach activities. Products were selected based on messaging priorities and feedback from First Nation electors. (See Figure 3.9.)

Figure 3.9: Elections Canada products distributed



In addition to EC materials, the AFN developed and distributed a number of products through outreach activities. (See Figure 3.10.)

Figure 3.10: Products distributed through outreach activities



3.1.3 Online Surveys

Before the election, the AFN sent an open online survey to its First Nation communities and partners to distribute. Overall, 78 participants answered this pre-election survey.

Following the election, the AFN sent out an online survey to First Nation communities and partners to distribute. Overall, 306 participants answered this post-election survey.¹⁷

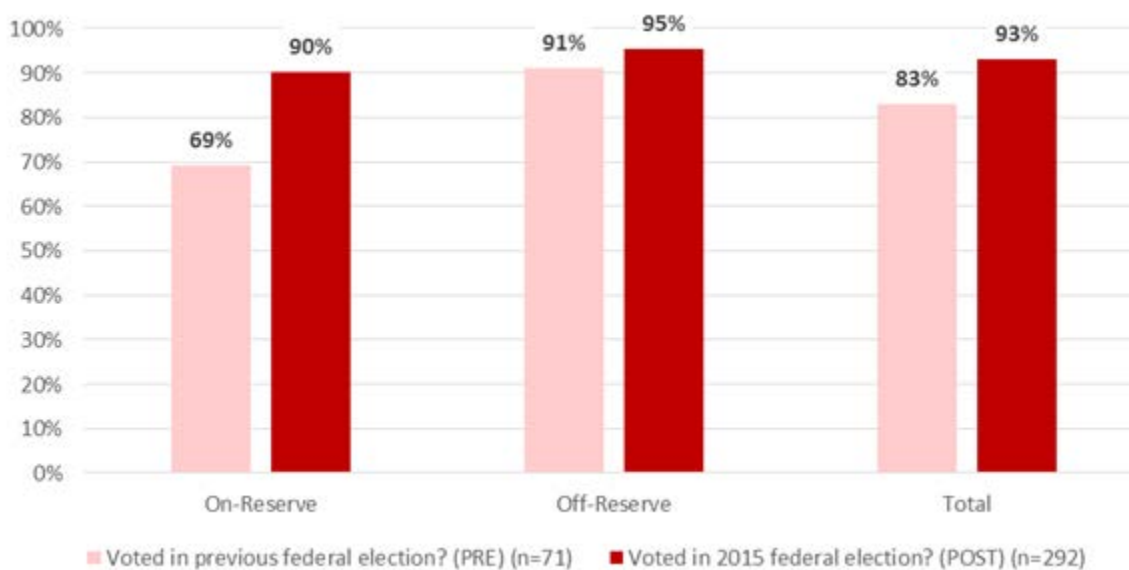
Questions around voting participation, voting experiences, challenges and barriers to voting – for the 2015 and previous federal elections – were included. The data are provided for information, and results should be interpreted with caution, recognizing that the survey sample was small, participants self-selected and the number of participants in the pre- and post-election surveys varied significantly. Additionally, participants’ ability to recall their experience in previous federal elections was likely limited by the amount of time that had elapsed.

Voting Participation

Figure 3.11 shows the comparison between voting participation before the 42nd GE and following the 42nd GE for First Nation electors living on and off reserve. Approximately 83% of First Nation electors indicated that they had voted in a previous GE, compared to 93% who identified that they voted in the 2015 42nd GE. This change in voter participation was especially realized for First Nation citizens living on reserve, increasing from 69% to 90%. Surveys are known to over-report voter turnout due to a combination of factors, including social desirability and selection bias.

Of those that voted in the 42nd GE, 65% of First Nation electors who live on reserve voted in their First Nation community, while 8% of First Nation electors who live off reserve voted in their First Nation community.

Figure 3.11: Voting participation by First Nation citizens (self-reported responses from online surveys)

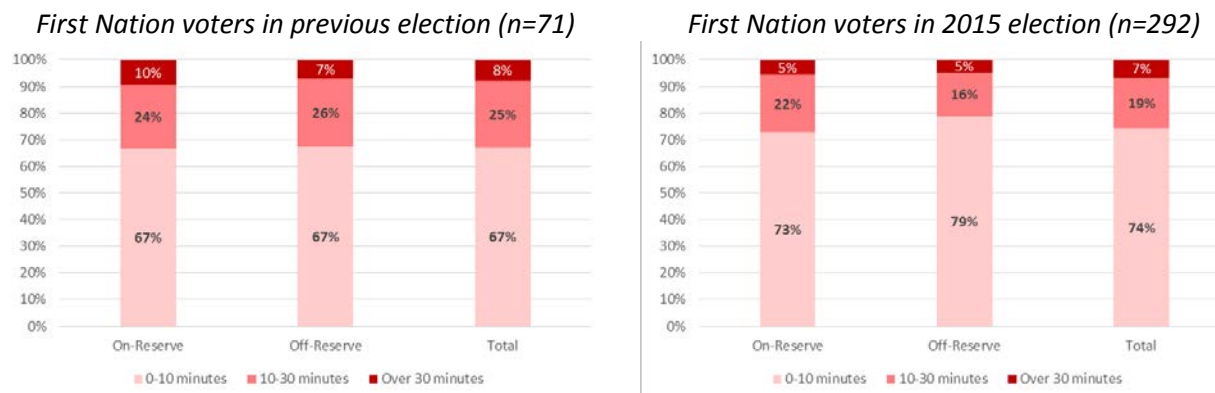


For First Nation survey participants who indicated that they had voted in the 42nd GE, 74% identified that they had travelled 10 minutes or less by car to vote, compared to 67% of survey participants who had voted in previous federal elections. Approximately 19% of 2015 voters had travelled 10 to 30

¹⁷ When accounting only for First Nation electors, $n = 71$ for the pre-election survey, and $n = 292$ for the post-election survey.

minutes to vote, compared to 25% of voters in previous elections, while 7% of 2015 voters had travelled longer than 30 minutes to vote, compared to 8% in previous elections. The decrease in distance travelled was most evident for First Nation voters living off reserve. (See Figure 3.12.)

Figure 3.12: Distance to voting



Identification

First Nation voters were asked what type of identification they had used when voting. Figures 3.13 and 3.14 show a comparison of the types of identification used by First Nation voters in previous elections and in the 42nd GE. Note that participants could select more than one piece of identification from the list.

The identification used in previous elections was similar to that used by First Nation voters in the 42nd GE. A driver’s licence was used by most individuals (43% in previous elections and 47% in 2015), followed by an Indian Status Card (24% and 19%), VIC (17% and 17%),¹⁸ utility bill (10% and 7%) and provincial or territorial ID card (3% and 4%).

During the 42nd GE, 2% of respondents indicated using a Letter of Confirmation of Residence, signed by their First Nation, as a form of identification. Approximately 1% had someone swear an oath for them, while 3% used “other” forms of identification, such as a bank statement, firearms licence, pay stub or social assessment stub.

¹⁸ In post-election surveys, electors sometimes report that they brought their VIC “as identification.” The VIC was not accepted as identification or proof of residence in the 2015 election, but electors were encouraged to bring it.

Figure 3.13: Type of identification used when voting

First Nation voters in previous elections (n = 72)

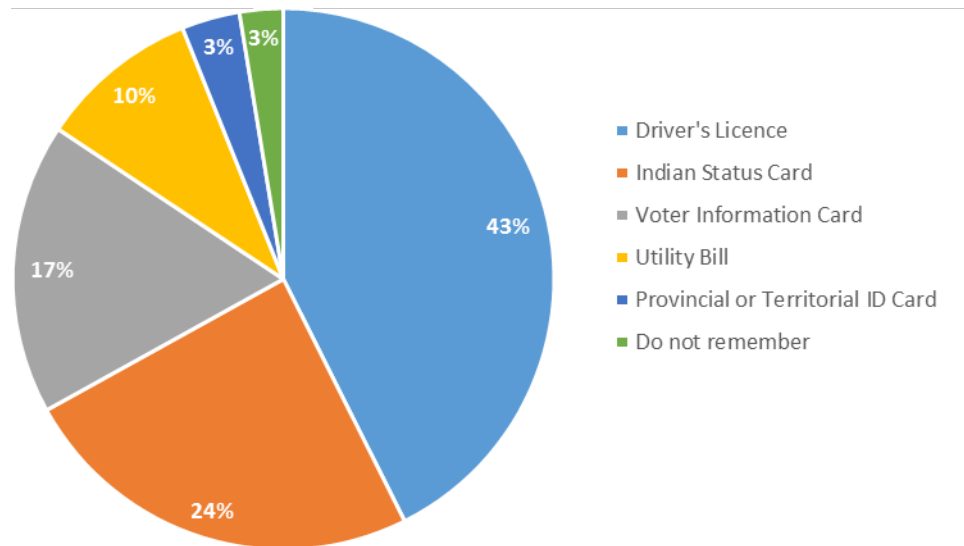
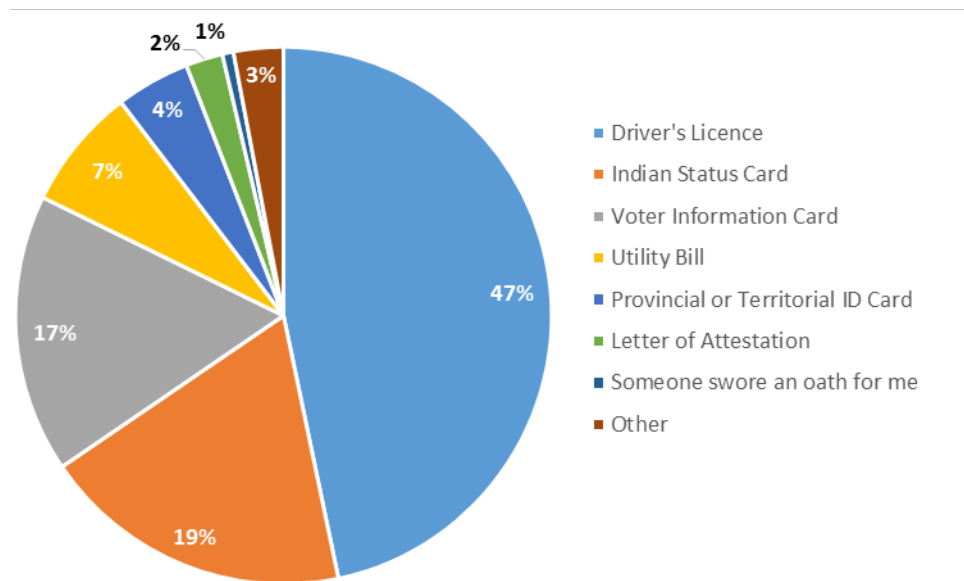


Figure 3.14: Type of identification used when voting

First Nation voters in 2015 election (n = 292)



Voting Experiences

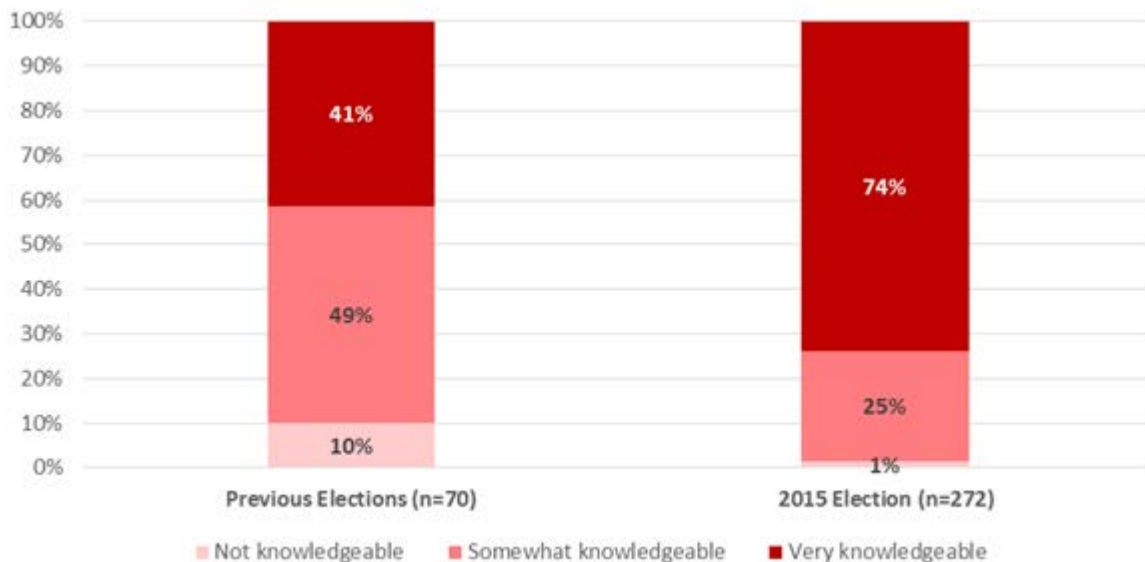
First Nation voters were asked to describe their experience while voting during federal elections. The AFN online survey looked at voter experiences in both the 42nd GE and in past federal elections as a basis for comparison.

Experience is subjective, and many factors can play a role in determining a positive, negative or neutral outcome. For the AFN online survey, knowledge of various aspects of the voting process was considered a useful indicator when determining voting experience for First Nation electors. As noted, there are many other factors that can impact experience, but given that the primary role of EC and the project was to provide electors with information, knowledge was the chosen indicator.

The AFN online survey asked First Nation voters to rate their knowledge of where and when to vote (Figure 3.15) on a scale ranging from not knowledgeable to somewhat knowledgeable to very knowledgeable.

The survey found that, in previous federal elections, 41% of respondents considered themselves very knowledgeable, while 10% rated themselves as not knowledgeable. For the 42nd GE, 74% of respondents viewed themselves as very knowledgeable, while only 1% considered themselves to be not knowledgeable.

Figure 3.15: Knowledge of where and when to vote



Respondents were asked to rate their knowledge of the different ways they could vote in past federal elections and the 42nd GE (Figure 3.16).

In previous federal elections, a total of 85% of respondents expressed that they had been at least somewhat knowledgeable, while 39% had been very knowledgeable. For the 42nd GE, 93% of respondents considered themselves to be at least somewhat knowledgeable, while nearly 60% considered themselves to be very knowledgeable.

When comparing previous election results to the 42nd GE, the gap in those respondents who considered themselves not at all knowledgeable about the different ways they could vote in federal elections drops 9 points, from 16% to 7%.

Figure 3.16: Knowledge of different ways you can vote

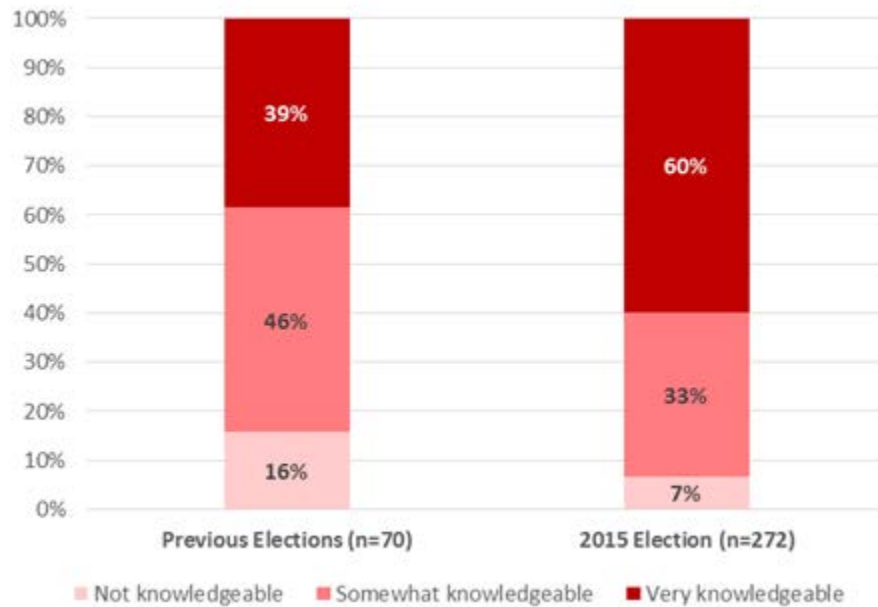
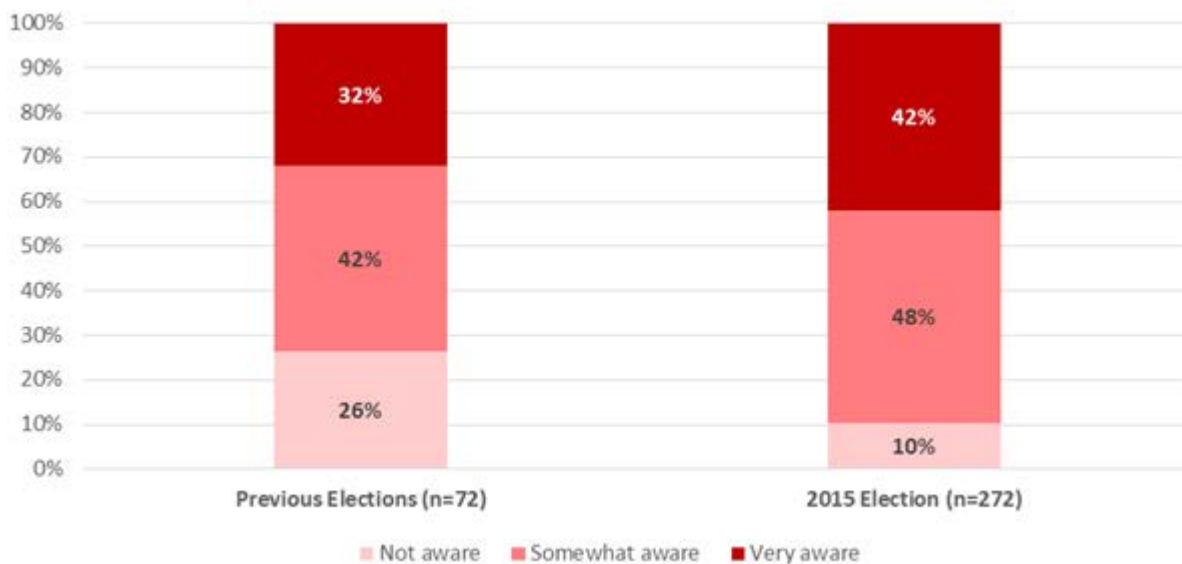


Figure 3.17 outlines respondents' knowledge of EC voter information campaigns during previous federal elections and compares this to the 42nd GE.

In previous elections, 74% of respondents stated that they had been either somewhat or very aware of EC voter information campaigns. During the 42nd GE, this number climbs to 90% of respondents, with a 10% increase in those who considered themselves very aware of EC information campaigns.

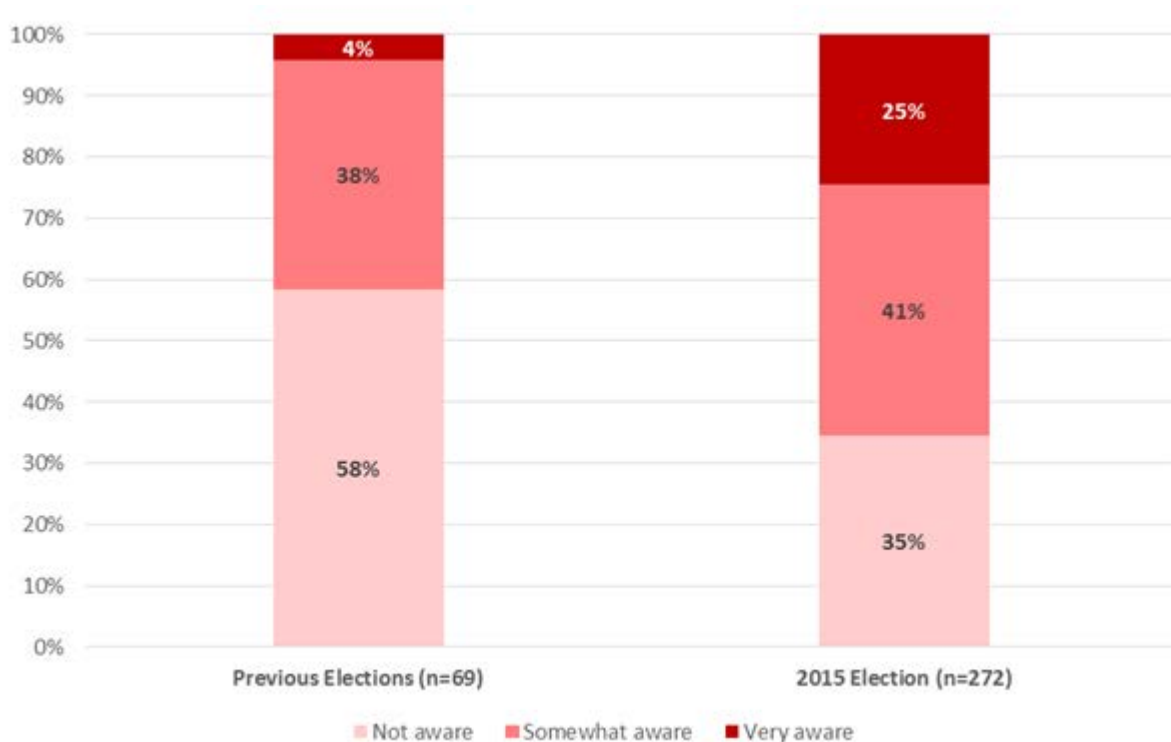
Figure 3.17: Knowledge of Elections Canada information campaigns



In addition to rating knowledge of EC voter information campaigns, the AFN survey asked respondents to rate their knowledge of AFN voter information campaigns in both previous federal elections and during the 42nd GE.

Figure 3.18 shows that 58% of respondents had been “not aware” of AFN voter information campaigns during previous federal elections. This number decreases 23 points to 35% for the 42nd GE. Conversely, only 4% of respondents had been “very aware” of AFN voter information campaigns in previous federal elections, while 25% were “very aware” during the 42nd GE.

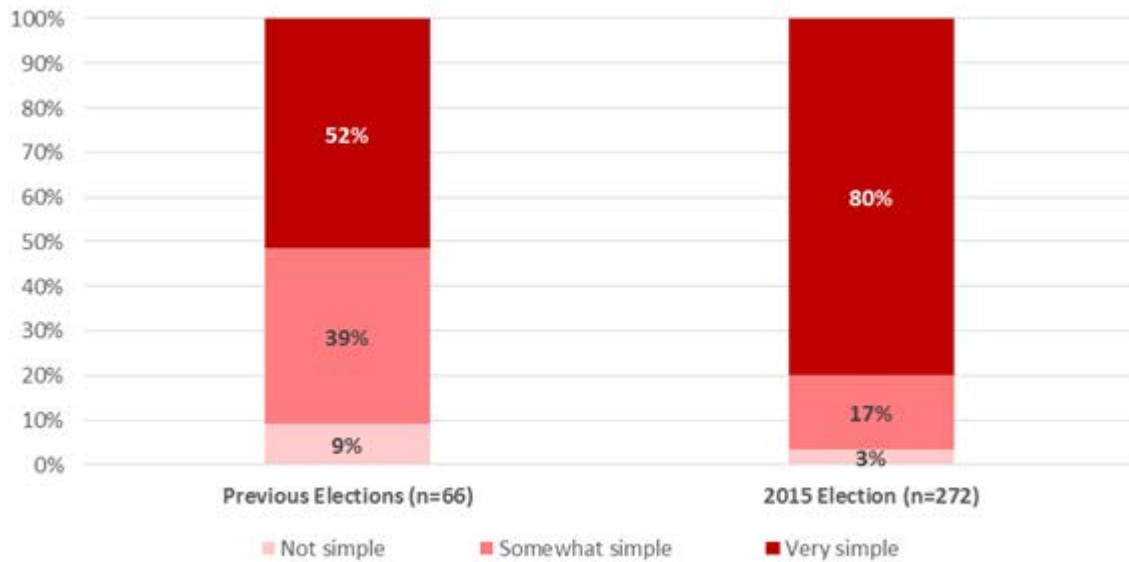
Figure 3.18: Knowledge of AFN voter information campaigns



The final determinant of voter experience used by the AFN online survey was simplicity of voting. Respondents were asked to rate how simple the voting process was during both previous federal elections and the 42nd GE.

In previous federal elections, 91% of respondents reported that they had found the process either “somewhat simple” or “very simple.” In the 42nd GE, this number increased to 97% of respondents (which may reflect changes in the process, more effective communication or both). The number of respondents who had found the process “somewhat simple” in previous elections decreased from 39% to 17% for the 42nd GE, while those who had found voting to be “very simple” increased from 52% to 80%. (See Figure 3.19.)

Figure 3.19: How simple was the voting process?



Barriers to Voting

The final area measured by the AFN online survey was barriers to voting for First Nation electors.

Respondents were asked to select from a list of barriers that had applied. This question was asked for both previous federal elections and the 42nd GE.

Figure 3.20 shows that, in previous federal elections, the most common barrier according to respondents was a lack of information (23%), followed by knowledge of federal politics (16%) and the timing of the election (13%). The relevancy and importance of federal elections for First Nation electors was selected as a barrier by 24% of respondents. A further 7% highlighted ID requirements as a barrier to voting.

Figure 3.21 looks at barriers to voting during the 42nd GE. Of these, 21% of respondents selected ID requirements as a barrier, a 14 percentage point increase from previous elections. Knowledge of federal politics was again selected by 16% of respondents as a barrier to voting, while a lack of information was chosen by 15%, which is down 8 percentage points when compared to previous elections.

Figure 3.20: Challenges experienced when voting in previous elections (*n* = 70)

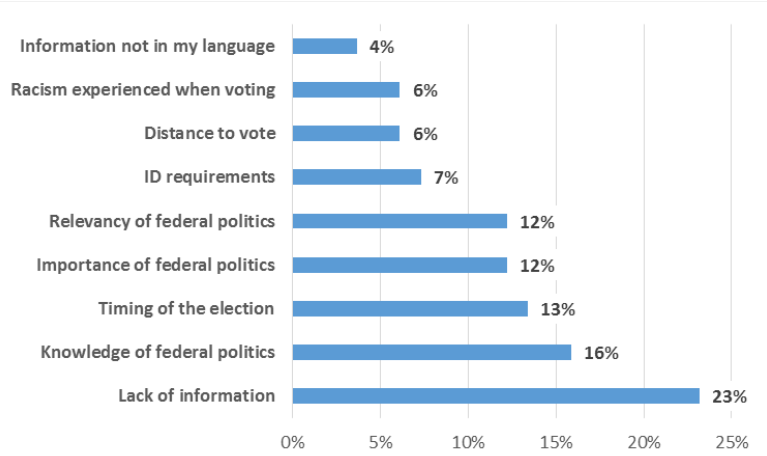
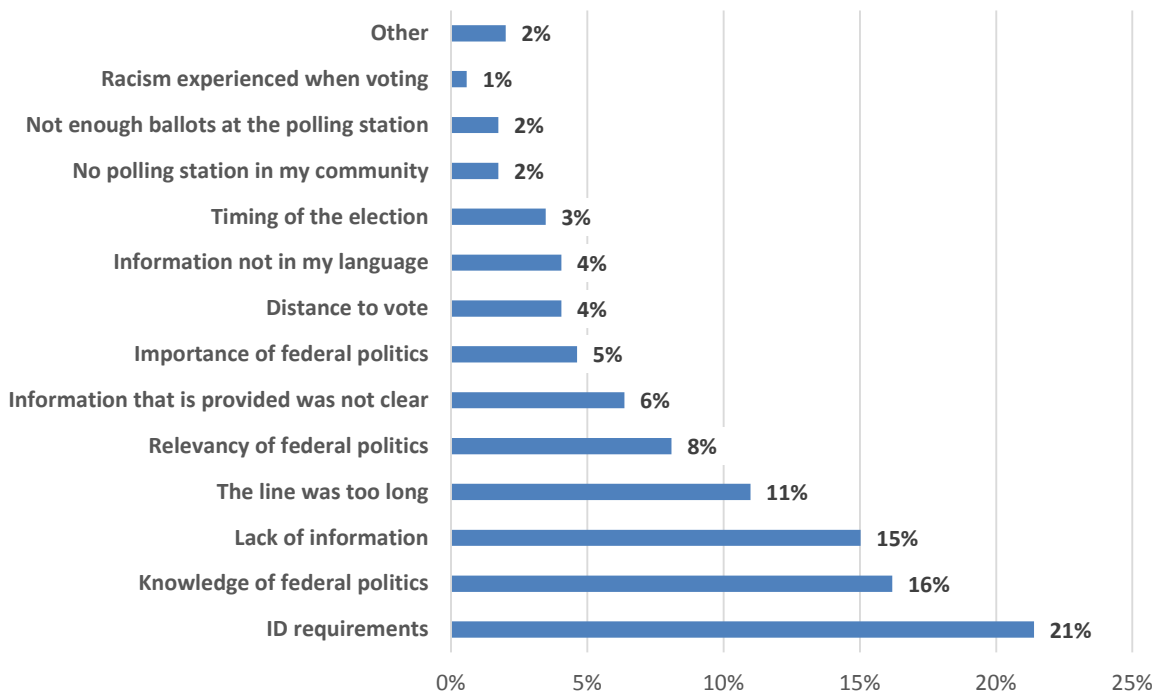


Figure 3.21: Challenges experienced when voting in the 2015 election (*n* = 272)



4. Analysis

EC partnered with the AFN to fulfill two primary outcomes in the lead-up to, during and immediately following the 42nd GE. First, changes to ID and vouching in the CEA made outreach to First Nation electors about the ways they could vote a critical issue. EC contracted the AFN to provide technical expertise and logistical support to help provide First Nation electors with information about the ways in which they could register and vote during the 42nd GE. Second, to assist in developing a plan for information outreach, the AFN agreed to research barriers to voting faced by First Nation electors.

The previous sections of this report outline the methodological approach taken by the AFN and the critical findings that resulted from this work. Generally, this report identifies barriers to voting for First Nation electors and outlines the steps taken to help mitigate these barriers as part of a broad AFN-EC information outreach strategy.

While identifying and mitigating barriers to voting during the 42nd GE was a primary outcome, developing long-term solutions was not identified as a focus in the official SOW. Despite positive outcomes that flowed from AFN and EC efforts, barriers to voting continued to exist for First Nation electors. It was therefore critical that some thought be given to long-term strategies and solutions.

This final section of this report takes the experience of the 42nd GE and provides EC with a set of recommendations meant to mitigate or eliminate barriers to voting for First Nation electors in the future. The following recommendations are based on the AFN's experiences, observations and analysis during the 42nd GE. While many recommendations are based on quantitative analysis, others are based on the various experiences and insight of staff who were engaged in this work.

1. EC should seek amendments to the CEA.

- a. **Enable First Nation electors who live within a community/reserve encompassed by a single polling division to establish their place of residence without the need for identification that proves a home/civic address.**
- b. **Enable First Nation electors to use the VIC as a permanent form of identification proving their place of residence.**

First Nation electors, particularly those living on reserve, have a difficult time meeting the home address requirements outlined in the CEA. Homes on First Nation reserves often do not have a traditional home address and instead rely on a PO Box or a rural route number.

Changes to the CEA in 2014 eliminated the VIC as a form of identification that could be used to prove place of residency, and this was a major contributing factor leading to the contract because it made meeting identification requirements even more difficult.¹⁹

The goal of the CEA identification requirements is to ensure that each elector is voting in the place he or she considers home. However, First Nation electors find it difficult to meet CEA

¹⁹ EC introduced a pilot project for the 41st GE that responded to concerns on First Nation reserves about identification; it allowed First Nation electors to use their VIC as proof of address. Many First Nation Band administrators contacted as part of the 2015 AFN call centre initiative expressed frustration over the changes to the CEA and the impacts they would have on identification requirements.

requirements because some Western concepts limiting “home” to a physical residential dwelling do not neatly overlay with some First Nation concepts relating to space and place, which can more centrally emphasize a community or territory as home. This contrasts with the definition found in Canadian society at large, which tends to view home through the lens of private ownership and the single-family home or domicile.

A simple solution, one that would be consistent with the spirit of CEA identification requirements, is for Canada to amend the CEA to allow First Nation electors who are members of a Band located in a single polling division, and who wish to vote on reserve, to meet the requirements by providing identification proving their Band membership. Proving Band membership on reserve is the same thing as proving home address for Canadian society more broadly because it directly connects the elector with the space he or she most strongly identifies as home. First Nation electors will more easily be able to meet identification requirements by proving Band membership than by meeting current home address requirements.

Canada should also amend the CEA to once again allow First Nation electors to use the VIC as a piece of ID that meets the residency requirements. The VIC provides electors and EC with proof of registration and also ties electors to their polling location based on the residency information provided during registration. As long as an elector can provide identification with a name that matches what is on the VIC, that should be sufficient.

c. Mandate EC to support get-out-the-vote campaigns and other activities that encourage First Nation voter participation.

Many First Nation electors view Canadian federal electoral politics as reflective of a foreign system that has been imposed on them. Research suggests that some First Nation electors choose not to vote because they believe that their participation undermines their inherent sovereignty, while others choose not to vote as a form of political protest toward a colonial structure that they identify as oppressive.²⁰ Others find federal electoral politics to be confusing or overwhelming, while others feel that it lacks relevancy in their lives.

First Nations were not given the right to vote in Canadian federal elections until 1960. In addition, First Nations have endured the theft of their lands and territories, genocidal policies and practices, a denial of their Indigenous rights and ongoing marginalization and poverty at the hands of the Canadian body politic; therefore, it may not be surprising that some First Nation electors are hesitant to participate in the Canadian political system.

If Canada is serious about reconciliation, one part of this must include taking meaningful steps to encourage First Nation electors to identify with and participate in federal elections. Providing information is important and necessary, but the 42nd GE showed us that First Nation electors want to know why they should participate²¹ as well as how to participate. EC should be mandated to play a role in encouraging First Nation electors to participate in Canadian federal elections.

²⁰ Harell, A., Panagos, D. and Matthews, J.S. (2013). “Explaining Aboriginal Turnout in Federal Elections: Evidence from Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.” *Aboriginal Policy Research Studies*. Retrieved from: http://apr.thompsonbooks.com/vols/APR_Vol_10Ch1.pdf.

²¹ AFN Focus Group (Summary of Group Work – AGA Response to Question 3). According to many commentators in First Nation communities, social media and the ability to access information about why an elector should participate was critical.

d. Enable any Canadian citizen aged 16 years or older to register with EC for the purpose of participating in an election when they reach the age of majority.

Providing Canadian citizens with the ability to register with EC before they are 18 years old creates additional opportunities for early EC engagement with marginalized populations.

It would empower EC to undertake outreach efforts in First Nation communities between election cycles and create additional opportunities for targeted revision (registration drives) and educational forums.

In addition, it would create early momentum among interested electors and, in combination with changes to identification requirements, could help increase registration and participation rates among First Nation electors.

2. EC should ensure that all First Nation communities have the opportunity to have at least one on-reserve polling station.

For marginalized electoral populations, accessibility is critically important. This report has shown that the distance to a polling location can act as a barrier to voting.²² Ensuring that First Nation electors have access to at least one polling location on their reserve will help reduce geographical barriers and increase access.

In addition, ensuring that each First Nation community that wants a polling location on reserve has one will increase the flow of information between EC and First Nation communities and further the work of reconciliation and nation building.

The responsibility for making sure that each First Nation community has access to a polling location should not rest with a First Nation's Band administration or leadership on reserve. They may choose not to accept a polling location on their reserve, but every First Nation should be given the opportunity to accept or reject a polling location on reserve well in advance of the federal election. Outreach should be conducted by EC through the appropriate RO, with support from within the community (e.g., the CRO-A).

3. EC should take steps to create an ongoing administrative relationship between ROs and First Nation Band administrators.

During the 42nd GE, some First Nation representatives expressed concerns about not being given adequate notice to properly participate in the election or potential pre-election activities (e.g., pre-registration). First Nation communities face complex social challenges, and providing First Nation Band administrators with support and information well in advance would contribute to mitigating existing barriers to voting. With increased notice and support, First Nation communities would be better able to ensure that their citizens are well informed, have the proper identification and are able to assist in the coordination and staffing of polling locations on reserve. It would also provide EC with more opportunities to provide targeted revision.

The AFN call centre initiative noted many instances of First Nation Band administrators lacking sufficient information about identification requirements, changes to the CEA, the Letter of Confirmation of Residence and the availability of EC programs and services (such as the AFN call centre). Contact information for a local RO was the piece of additional information most requested

²² Several First Nation Band administrators noted during the 2015 AFN call centre initiative that they either did not have a polling location on reserve or were not aware that they could have one (AFN call centre). In one case, the Band administrator noted that the local RO was unwilling to provide the community with a polling location.

by First Nation band administrators, suggesting a critical need for more information and support at the Band level.

During federal election cycles, the RO becomes the critical point person for EC in each FED. The RO is responsible for deciding where polling locations will be placed, staffing programs such as the CRO-A and the AEYP, providing targeted revision for populations who are under-registered, etc. EC should consider expanding the role of the ROs to ensure that they build an administrative relationship with First Nation communities. This role would remain active between election cycles and focus on electoral education, targeted revision and other yet to be developed programs designed to address barriers to voting for First Nation electors.

4. EC should ensure that that all First Nation communities have access to a CRO-A in their community during the election period.

The EC CRO-A program is designed to provide targeted outreach to First Nation communities during Canadian federal elections, with the stated goals to:

- Increase election awareness
- Provide information on how, when and the ways to register and vote
- Explain the importance of registering and voting
- Make voting as accessible as possible for the target group

The CRO-A, with the support of First Nation Band administrators and Band leadership, is well positioned to positively impact First Nation electors on reserve.

Past experience and AFN research into barriers to voting for First Nation electors suggest that an information deficit exists on reserve concerning Canadian federal electoral politics. The AFN was hired to help close this information gap, and it did so substantively through the call centre initiative.²³ However, the AFN call centre targeted Band administrators, seeking to provide them with information that they could distribute at the community level. Given the range of challenges that some First Nation communities face more generally, it is unrealistic to ask First Nation Bands to provide their community members with information about EC programs and services or other relevant information related to voting in Canadian federal elections.

EC can help address these capacity concerns by ensuring that each RO contacts each First Nation community in their FED and ensures that Band administrators are able to access a CRO-A if they require one.

5. EC should hire local community members to carry out registration drives in their respective First Nation communities in advance of an election.

First Nation electors are registered at much lower rates than the national average. Targeted revision should be a key EC strategy to help increase First Nation enumeration.

As outlined in previous recommendations, EC must take a proactive approach to contacting First Nation administrators and providing them with the capacity to ensure that their community members have access to key programs, such as targeted revision. This should be done well in advance of any federal election. It should not be incumbent on the First Nation community to seek

²³ AFN survey results show (Section 3.1.3 – Figure 3.15) an increase in post-election First Nation awareness of where and when to vote in the 42nd GE.

out these services because of the obvious capacity and information barriers at the Band level. Hiring local community members to support pre-registration (e.g., by going door to door) and sharing information is a necessary step in supporting First Nation engagement in federal elections.

6. EC should partner with First Nation educational organizations to design culturally appropriate curricula outlining the federal electoral process.

Canada's First Nation population is the fastest-growing population in the country, with a youth population that is disproportionately large (i.e., under 25). Reaching these youth in schools can be an important part of addressing the information gap relating to electoral participation. However, because most electoral information is generated for all Canadians, it does not necessarily resonate with First Nation youth – this was made abundantly clear in our focus groups.

A focus on culturally appropriate curricula not only has a higher likelihood of resonating with First Nation youth, but it also signals to them that their participation is being sought. By seeing themselves reflected in this kind of curricula, meanings attached to participation in a federal election have the potential to be enhanced.

7. EC should develop programs and services under the ERP that are accessible and culturally relevant to First Nation electors.

This report has identified the form of, and access to, information as a barrier in voting for First Nation electors.²⁴ Specifically, First Nation electors require access to information that is both readily available and meaningful to them.²⁵

First Nation electors have expressed concerns that the Canadian federal electoral process is a foreign system, one that does not reflect First Nation cultures or interests.²⁶ This is particularly understandable when it is recognized that First Nation citizens did not receive the right to vote in federal elections until 1960. Both a lack of culturally relevant information and the historical and political context contribute to feelings of alienation among First Nation electors and help explain persistent informational barriers to voting.

To help address concerns about access and cultural relevance, EC should work with First Nation organizations and electors to develop programs and services to be distributed under the ERP that reflect their cultures and beliefs and that are presented in a manner that is meaningful and accessible.

8. EC should ensure that First Nation electors need only prove their identity and residence once in order to participate in a respective election.

Decreasing barriers to voting for First Nation electors is, in part, about making the process of voting easier. In the 42nd GE, EC focused on encouraging electors to register in advance of voting day. In effect, potential electors were being invited to engage in a two-step process: register in advance and

²⁴ In addition to AFN research on barriers to voting and anecdotal evidence, the AFN call centre found that roughly 60% of Band administrators contacted were interested in having access to additional information (Section 3.1.1 – Figure 3.5) and that many were interested specifically in how to contact their local RO (Section 3.1.1 – Figure 3.6). This suggests a lack of information and furthers the idea that First Nation electors require additional information and support if this gap is to be closed.

²⁵ AFN survey results found that roughly 15% of respondents chose “knowledge of federal politics” as a barrier to voting (Section 3.1.3 – figures 3.20 and 3.21).

²⁶ Harell, Panagos and Matthews.

vote on election day. In both cases are electors required to establish their identity and address. For those populations that are less inclined to vote, or for those that are confused by or intimidated by voting, asking them to do this twice has the potential to turn them away altogether.

In an effort to decrease duplication, and to create an easier process, EC should ensure that First Nation electors are required to meet any identity and residency requirements only once. Where this is not possible, it will be imperative to ensure that any identity and residency requirements are easy to meet and that pre-registration is clearly defined as an option rather than a requirement. In any case, voting on election day should be described as a single action, whether or not an elector is pre-registered.

9. EC should prioritize the gathering and processing of data relating to factors that could inform First Nation voter participation.

As outlined at the outset of this report, the AFN is a national First Nation–representative organization. The AFN has provided technical support and expertise to support EC’s efforts during the last four federal elections. The AFN has a great deal of experience working with First Nation organizations, communities and citizens. Our analysis and recommendations are based on both our findings and our experiences as a First Nation–representative organization.

However, more data and further research is required to better understand the barriers that exist for First Nations in the context of federal electoral participation. For example, a comprehensive national survey of potential First Nation electors has never been attempted and would greatly contribute to our understanding of First Nation electoral participation. This is but one of many different examples of further work and research that could be explored. Additional efforts should be made to track voter turnout rates on reserve as well as the types of identification that are used to prove both name and home address.

While EC has some data, many gaps remain with respect to understanding and addressing First Nation electoral participation rates in Canada. A concerted investment to help reduce these gaps could help to significantly improve the situation in future elections.

10. Notwithstanding the above, EC should continue to respect the perspectives of First Nation citizens who choose not to participate in a federal election.

In advocating for the removal of barriers that may affect First Nation participation in federal elections, the AFN is not seeking to override the interests of any First Nations or their citizens who choose not to participate in a federal election – we all reserve this right. More appropriately, the AFN has worked with EC to ensure that any First Nation citizen who chooses to participate in a federal election has the ability to exercise this choice. EC must continue to recognize this right on the part of First Nations and their citizens.