

The Best Laid Plans: Exploring the Effect of Decreased Access to Polling Places on Confidence in Elections Canada in the 2021 Federal Election

Katharine McCoy

Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario

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Executive Summary

- There were 1,072 fewer polling places in the 2021 Canadian federal election compared to the 2019 one. To examine the potential impact of this discrepancy, this report assesses the role of polling places and voter experience in electors' confidence in Elections Canada in 2021.
- Satisfaction with the voting experience decreased slightly from 2019 (mean satisfaction = 2.77) to 2021 (mean satisfaction = 2.74), on a scale of 0–3.
- Confidence in Elections Canada remained consistently high in both years and increased slightly, from an average of 2.52 in 2019 to 2.57 in 2021, on a scale of 0–3.
- There is a positive relationship between satisfaction in the voting experience and confidence in Elections Canada. Higher levels of satisfaction explain the most variation in the level of confidence when compared to any other factor.
- There is mixed evidence of a relationship between the difference in the number of polling places and the level of confidence in Elections Canada.
- There is also a relationship between using a method of convenience voting (such as using an advanced poll) and having a higher level of confidence in Elections Canada.
- Overall, this report suggests that voter experience is important for maintaining a high level of confidence, but that convenience voting methods may also play a substantial role.

Introduction

“Election-day polling stations cut by more than half in 11 Greater Toronto Area ridings” declared the CBC on September 9, 2021. Due to the nature of the snap general election (announced August 15 and held on September 20, 2021) —with a campaign period only one day longer than the legal minimum and held in a pandemic—Elections Canada had to maneuver a myriad of challenges while facilitating the election. Given a lack of clarity surrounding pandemic measures and an unclear election date, property owners and managers were reluctant to provide spaces to Elections Canada, and many traditional spaces were not available (Elections Canada, Report on the 44th General Election). The CBC reported some of the differences between the 2021 federal election and the 2019 federal election, such as in the riding of Toronto Centre, which had 91 polling sites in 2019 and just 15 in 2021. These reductions had community leaders concerned about equitable access to the polls (CBC, 2021), particularly as the distance to polling places increased for some voters. They also expressed disappointment with these limitations (ibid.). Overall, despite the creativity of returning officers in finding alternative locations, there were 1,072 fewer polling places in 2021 than in 2019 (*Elections Canada Report on the 44th General Election*).

Given the smaller number of polling places, this report explores whether there is any relation between experiences at the polls and the confidence of Canadians in Elections Canada, and whether there is any association between reduced access to polls and Canadians’ confidence in Elections Canada. This is done in two parts using survey data from the 2019 and 2021 National Electors Study (NES) (Elections Canada, 2019, and Elections Canada 2021) and the 2019 and 2021 Canadian Election Study (CES) (Stephenson et al. 2019, and Stephenson et al. 2021). The first part of this study asks how an elector’s experience while voting relates to the confidence they may have in Elections Canada. It explores respondents’ satisfaction with their experience at the polls and confidence in Elections Canada, both in and across each election, and then looks for a relation between satisfaction and experience. It finds that voting satisfaction is positively associated with confidence in Elections Canada. The data indicate that overall confidence in Elections Canada increased between 2019 and 2021, while satisfaction went down, indicating this association may not be causal. The second part of this report asks if there is a relation between the difference in the number of polling locations and confidence in Elections Canada. It finds mixed support for such an association. Additionally, these data find no

statistically significant difference in confidence between the 2019 and 2021 federal elections but also that some individual-level demographic factors, like education and ethnicity, are associated with higher or lower confidence in Elections Canada.

Voting Costs and Trust in Electoral Management Boards

The literature on electoral integrity, voting experience, and electoral administration provides not only a framework within which to situate this report but also a vocabulary to examine practical phenomena, such as voting costs, convenience voting, travel costs, contingent valuation, and voter experience. Here, I define these terms and determine how they relate to the case of the 2021 federal election.

The literature on voting costs starts with Downs (1957), who argued that voters are more likely to turnout when the benefit of their desired electoral outcome outweighs the “cost” of voting. As early as the 1980s, this initial idea of a voting cost was extended. It was theorized that turnout would be lower where there were more obstacles to voting (Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980, p. 62). The cost of voting can be influenced by many things: increased distance to the poll (Dyck and Gimpel, 2005) and, by extension, the time spent getting there and voting may be considered obstacles and, therefore, make the cost of voting higher. In other words, “choices to vote or abstain, and especially of which method of voting to use, may be sensitive to the effort required to go to the polling place” (Dyck and Gimpel, 2005, p. 534). This is not a stagnant evaluation, as Dyck and Gimpel (2005) note, but rather an evaluation that is based on several factors. These are, therefore, *contingent valuations* where the cost of an unpriced good (i.e., the vote) is based on how “expensive” it is to reach. For example, Blais and Daoust (2020) note that something as simple as having a new polling location for voters to try and navigate to will increase the cost of voting (p. 65). I extend this framework to argue that increased costs can come from time spent *on getting* to a polling place but also *at* the polling place.

From the voting cost literature, we can expect that taking more time to get to a polling station or having fewer polling stations in a riding could influence the level of satisfaction with voting and, in turn, the level of confidence in Elections Canada. This report refers to these contingent parts of voting as the *voter experience*, or simply the experience that an elector has during the act of voting (see Appendix A for the model of this relation). It is important to note that a variety of things can influence an individual’s satisfaction with the voter experience, not

only time. Some of these things are the result of policy, such as access to mail-in ballots, but others are the result of chance, such as bad weather (Gomez et al., 2007).

In focusing on what policies can address, research on the role of election facilitation has usually focused on how different election policies may influence both voter turnout and trust.¹ For example, electoral management boards may turn to *convenience voting* methods and provide options for voters, such as advance polls and mail-in voting. These are traditionally seen as ways to lower the cost of voting, but research has found that they can depress overall voter turnout (Burden et al., 2014). Burden et al. frame this finding by arguing that voting is a social act (ibid.). For voters, then, it is not just the democratic act of casting a ballot, but the experience of voting and *being seen* to vote are also important. This means that voter turnout might be conditional on the visible turnout of others (ibid.). Offering convenience methods, such as mail-in voting or advance voting, would decrease the social aspects of voting, even while decreasing the cost of voting for the individual. This is compared to standard in-person, election day voting, which research has found creates social capital (Arceneaux, Kousser, and Mullin 2012).

Relatedly, Dyck and Gimpel (2005) found that distance has a non-linear impact on voter turnout. Constituents that are farther away from their polling place (more than 10 miles) more often use convenience voting methods; and so the distance from a polling station has less impact for those who live farther away from it when compared to those who live within 10 miles. Put simply, voters who live far away are less likely to vote in person, so distance from the polls does not have the same effect as for those who live close to their polling station. Overall, policies that make polling places harder to get to will lower overall voter turnout but only to a point. The social nature of voting means that convenience voting policies may increase turnout for individuals who require them but can *decrease* overall turnout in some contexts (Burden et al., 2014). These results about turnout are consistent for people who are regular and frequent voters, while data for those who vote less regularly are unclear (ibid.).

Thus, if the cost of voting is high, then voters are more likely to stay home. Having fewer polling places might increase the cost of voting, as they can result in barriers, such as increased wait times. However, even if there is a decrease in polling locations, an increased use of convenience voting methods might mitigate the expected increase in cost. This is because not all voters will go to the polls on election day and instead will use other methods to cast their ballot.

¹ Surveys can use “trust” and “confidence” interchangeably, and the same is done in this report.

However, as the effects of convenience voting methods are unclear, it is also unclear how to best lower the cost of voting. The impact of solutions like convenience voting on turnout appears to be mixed and context-dependent, but how they apply to institutional trust is even less clear. Following this, I consider the role of convenience voting methods in my analysis to see whether there is a relation between the use of convenience voting methods and a respondent's level of confidence in Elections Canada.

Similarly, the literature on trust indicates that there are many things that impact an individual's trust in both the election outcomes and in any electoral management board (EMB). Even if respondents have relatively low levels of confidence in the election itself, Bowler et al. (2015) found that turnout has a strong positive correlation with perceived higher administrative abilities of an EMB and the confidence that respondents have in it.² Simply put, if an EMB is perceived to be capable, it is more likely that individuals will trust it. Additionally, work shows that individuals with direct experiences with an EMB have a higher level of trust in it (Mochtak, Lesscheve and Glaurdić, 2021). All of this means that trust and confidence in an EMB may come from the perceived capability of the board but will also be higher for those who vote—and, therefore, interact with the EMB—regularly. While confidence in an EMB is influenced by many factors, trust is an essential piece in the success of an election and, by extension, the stability of the democratic process.

In applying all this information on voting cost, convenience voting, and trust in EMBs to the Canadian case, Blais (2000) found that the cost of voting was considered “practically nil” by most voters (p. 87). However, he found that survey respondents were less willing to vote if the time needed to vote increased to two hours (ibid.). This indicates that, while the cost of voting is considered low in Canada, it is still possible that voters will be turned off from voting if the cost is perceived as too high. Elections Canada is a highly centralized, independent, and well-established EMB (Ace Project, 2012). Garnett and Leibel (2022) have found that Canadians had a consistently high level of trust in Elections Canada from 2008 to 2021. Taken together, these two pieces of research indicate that, overall, in years outside the pandemic, the EMB in Canada has been well-regarded, and the perceived cost of voting is low. It is from this overall context

² Bowler et al. (2015) used the Pew Center [Election Performance Indicators](#) to determine an EMB's administrative ability. This is comprised of combined scores on 17 different indicators, such as “Voting Wait Time,” “Registration/Absentee Ballot Problems” and “Disability Access.”

that this report considers how pandemic-related constraints (fewer polling places, longer lines, and a higher rate of convenience voting) would have impacted this usually optimistic perception of Elections Canada.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study has two central questions. The first asks if there is any relation between voter experience and trust in Elections Canada. I explore this through survey data collected from Elections Canada's NES in both 2019 and 2021. The literature indicates that voter costs may affect turnout, but it says little about any impact on confidence in the EMB.

This report also asks if there is a relation between the difference in the number of polling places at a riding level and individual confidence in Elections Canada. This is done using survey data from the CES in both 2019 and 2021. Previous literature indicates that increased administrative capabilities are associated with increased confidence in an EMB (James et al. 2019), and media coverage at the time described the decrease in polling places as an administrative failure.

Considering all this, the rest of the report will test these two hypotheses. First, I hypothesize that there is a positive relation between voter experience and confidence in Elections Canada. I also hypothesize that individuals from ridings with a greater reduction in the number of polling stations will have a lower level of confidence in Elections Canada compared to those with fewer or no reductions.

Data, Methods, and Limitations

To answer these questions, I use Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression models with survey data from the NES and CES. OLS regression is commonly used for hypothesis testing, as it presents not only the estimated size and direction of any association between the dependent and independent variables, but also whether the relation is considered statistically significant. The data used come from surveys that contain relevant but different information and cover both the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

Table 1. Survey Data used in the report.

Study	Wave	Method	Date	N
2019 NES	1	Online and telephone	June 12–July 14, 2019	49,993
	2	Online	September 3–October 20, 2019	23,880*
	3a	Online and telephone	October 23–November 12, 2019	19,435*
	3b	Telephone	October 22–November 12, 2019	2,000
2021 NES	1	Online	August 16–September 19, 2021	53,731
	2a	Online	September 21–October 17, 2021	31,621*
	2b	Online and telephone	September 21–October 14 (telephone) or October 17 (online) 2021	7,967
2019 CES	1	Online	September 13–October 21, 2019	37,822
	2	Online	October 24–November 11, 2019	10,337*
2021 CES	1	Online	August 17–September 19, 2021	20,968
	2	Online	September 21–October 4, 2021	15,069*

Asterisks denote that the sample was a subsample of previous waves. Bolded waves are those that are used in the analysis here. Information on the 2019 NES comes from Elections Canada, National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election – Methodological Report. Information on the 2021 NES comes from Elections Canada, National Electors Study on the 44th Canadian Federal General Election – Methodology Report. Information on the 2019 CES come from Stephenson et al., 2019, and information on the 2021 CES comes from Stephenson et al., 2021.

All the surveys were conducted around the 2021 and 2019 federal elections. They were conducted either online, over the phone or a combination of the two. The details on the survey

data can be found in Table 1. Of note is that the 2019 NES was a phone and online survey that consisted of three waves. Wave 3b was a telephone-only survey and had 2,000 respondents that were not from the first wave but rather randomly dialed (Elections Canada, *National Electors Study on the 43rd Canadian Federal General Election – Methodological Report*). The 2021 NES Wave 2b's sample was partially a discrete probability sample, but with a non-probability top-up sample to increase the number of Indigenous electors who live on reserve (Elections Canada, *National Electors Study on the 44th Canadian Federal General Election – Methodology Report*).

The main dependent variable of interest is the level of confidence in Elections Canada. Respondents were asked to rank their level of confidence in Elections Canada on a four-point scale from “no confidence” to “a great deal of confidence.” The results were coded from 0–3, with higher numbers indicating a higher level of confidence. Similarly, respondents were asked for their satisfaction with voting on a four-point scale from “very dissatisfied” to “very satisfied.” Again, results were coded from 0–3, with higher numbers indicating a higher level of satisfaction. The time measurement from the NES was recoded into an ordinal categorical variable, where each increase in the number represents an additional 5- or 10-minute increase in the time a voter spent. Full question wording and variable coding can be found in Appendix B. This variable constitutes the independent variable of interest in Results: Part 1.

In the second set of models, I am interested in the impact of a decrease in polling places. To get that information, I draw on opensource data from Elections Canada to determine the difference in the number of polling places in each riding between 2019 and 2021 (Elections Canada, 43rd General Election: Official Voting Results (raw data), Table 11: Voting results by electoral district; and Elections Canada, 44th General Election: Official Voting Results (raw data) Table 11: Voting results by electoral district). The difference was calculated by subtracting the number of polls in 2019 from the number of polls in 2021 in each riding. As reported by Elections Canada, there was a decrease from 15,477 polling places in 2019 to 14,405 in 2021. That is, there were 1,072 fewer election day polling places in 2021 (*Report on the 44th General Election*). This decrease was especially notable in urban centres, where returning officers struggled to find non-traditional locations. Toronto alone had 448 fewer polling places (ibid.). As the CES includes a publicly available variable that indicates the respondents' riding, the calculated riding-level differences in the number of polling places between 2019 and 2021 were

matched to survey respondents based on their riding identification.³ I then coded the information on the differences in the number of polling places into a categorical variable that sorts riding into “decreased number of polling places,” “number of polling places stayed the same” and “increased number of polls” to include in the model. This means there is a modelling assumption that the decrease in polling places has a similar impact regardless of the number by which the polls decreased. A model without the recoding that considers the difference in the number of polls (rather than if there was a decrease or increase in polling places) is in Appendix D.

The survey data are weighted, meaning that each response is scored within the data and some responses “count more” than others. Weights are used to make survey data more representative of the general population of interest. The CES is weighted to be representative of the adult population in Canada, while the NES is weighted to be representative of electors, or those who are eligible to vote. All weights were provided in the dataset and not changed for this report. All models and statistics consider these weights to allow for more robust inference.

There are several limitations to the findings because of the nature of these data. First, the weights in the CES are limited to the provinces because there are so few respondents from the territories. The results, therefore, cannot be generalized to the territories. The samples also have a higher rate of turnout compared to the elections themselves. This means that, like other elections research that uses survey data, the results are more reflective of regular voters than all eligible electors or even Canadians as a whole. Additionally, for some of the variables in the models, there is missing data; in such cases, respondents were removed from that specific model. This is because survey questions around sensitive topics, such as income, will often lead respondents to decline to answer. Finally, the methods used here to explore the associations do not make any causal claims. This report is not saying that better or worse experiences at the polls do or do not cause a change in confidence in Elections Canada. Nor does it claim that a reduction in polls causes a change in the amount of confidence an individual will have for Elections Canada. Rather, it simply explores whether there is a relation between these things and how strong it may be for the sake of creating policies that might address that change.

³ This means that models in Results: Part 2 are multi-level models, where the effects of each individual riding are controlled for at that level. For ease of interpretation, the tables are presented without those coefficients (as the effects are substantively nothing), but a full model can be found in Appendix D.

Results

Part 1: Voting Experience and Confidence in Elections Canada

This section examines any potential relation between voter experience and satisfaction with Elections Canada, using data from the NES in 2019 and 2021. First, it presents descriptive statistics (Table 2). It then uses OLS to establish an estimate of the relation between these two variables and then explores some of the details of the voter experience and demographic factors that may also have a relation with confidence in Elections Canada. Finally, I interpret some of these results in plain language and explore some of the implications of these findings.

Table 2. The Weighted Means of Confidence in Elections Canada and Satisfaction in Voting Experience and their respective standard errors

Year	Weighted Mean Confidence in Elections Canada	Weighted Mean Satisfaction in Voting Experience	Number of Observations
2019	2.517 ± .0048	2.7649 ± .0041	21435
2021	2.568 ± .0038	2.7394 ± .0032	39568

Note that the mean confidence and mean satisfaction were created from measures that range from 0–3. For full details on the scoring and survey questions, see Appendix A. Data are from Elections Canada’s 2019 and 2021 National Electors Surveys.

Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics for the data. I find that mean satisfaction with voter experience was significantly lower in 2021 compared to 2019, $t(55699) = -4.94, p < .001$. Whereas overall confidence in Elections Canada was significantly higher in 2021 when compared to 2019, $t(59816) = 8.30, p < .001$.

I hypothesized that there would be a positive association between voter experience and confidence in Elections Canada. I present the results from the regressions in Figure 1 and Table 3 (see Table 3), which indicate support for this hypothesis. The first model examines the relation while controlling for sociodemographic variables of interest. This illuminates the relation between confidence in Elections Canada and satisfaction with the voting experience. The second model looks specifically at how the relation might change when the time spent voting is controlled for. The third model examines how different methods of convenience voting changes the relation between voter satisfaction and the confidence in Elections Canada. This allows us to

explore not only how the relation may change across different types of individuals but also in different methods of voting.

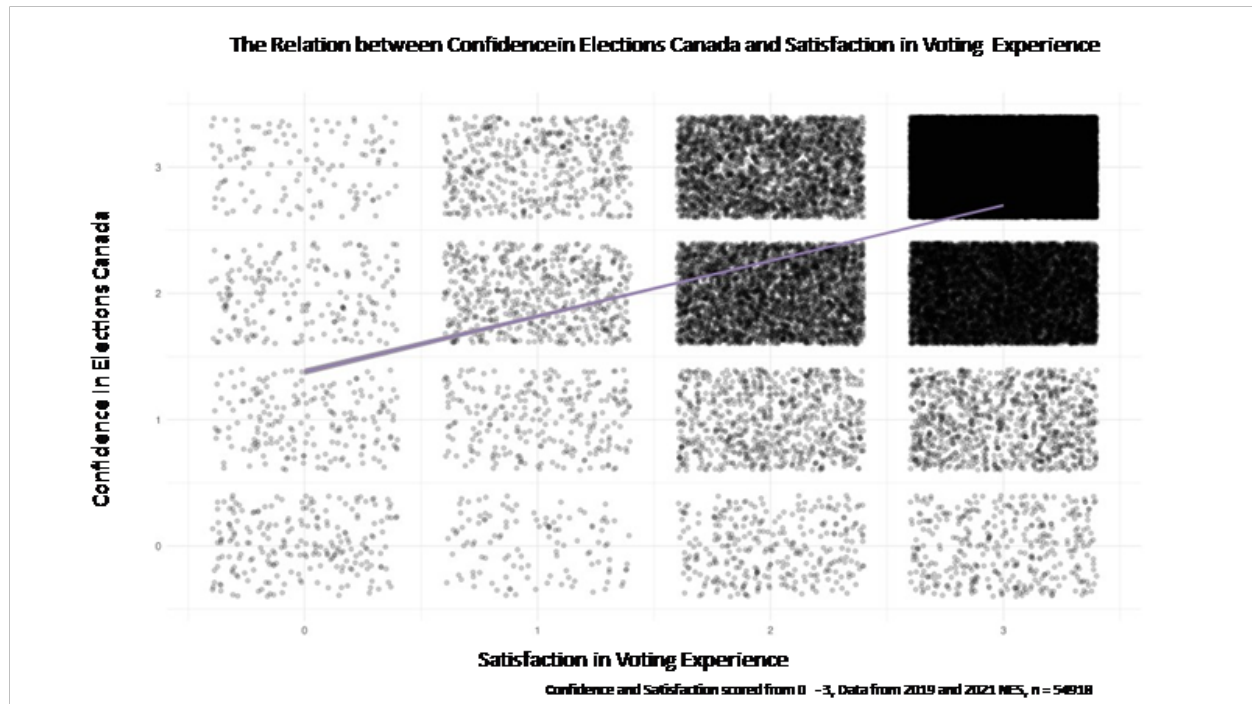


Figure 2. The relation between satisfaction with the voting experience and confidence in Elections Canada. Each point is an individual respondent. The purple regression line indicates a positive relation.

Table 3. The coefficients for weighted OLS regressions are presented in models 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3.

	Model 1.1	Model 1.2	Model 1.3
Constant	1.234 *** (0.146)	1.434 ** (0.022)	1.232 *** (0.149)
Satisfaction with Voting	0.332 *** (0.047)	0.416 *** (0.008)	0.333 *** (0.047)
Experience			
Visible Minority	0.022 (0.038)		0.024 (0.038)
Education	0.071 *** (0.009)		0.071 *** (0.009)
Income	-0.001 (0.001)		-0.001 (0.001)
Women	-0.078 *** (0.029)		-0.081 ** (0.029)
Travel Time		-0.002 *** (0.0004)	
Vote Time		0.0004 (0.0005)	
Convenience Vote		0.033 *** (0.006)	
Vote by Mail			-0.427 ** (0.258)
In-Person Voting			-0.003 (0.032)
Other Voting			0.088 (0.132)
R-Squared	0.12	0.13	0.12
N. Observations	1473	48586	1473

Signif. codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*'

Standard errors reported in parentheses

The reference category for the voting methods is the use of an advanced poll. The constants have the same number of observations as their respective model. As expected, models that include questions that ask for the respondent's income have a smaller N, as respondents do not tend to give sensitive information.

Model 1.1 regresses Confidence in Elections Canada on satisfaction with the voting experience, while controlling for demographics that may also impact the confidence a respondent has in Elections Canada (more detailed models of demographics can be found in Appendix C). It shows a positive relation between satisfaction with the voting experience and confidence, even when controlling for the effects of gender, education, income, and visible minority status. To put into perspective how much of a role satisfaction plays in explaining respondent confidence, the

role that a factor like education plays in explaining the relation (0.071) is just under a fifth of what is explained by the satisfaction in voting (0.332). Thus, model 1.1 provides support for the first hypothesis, i.e. there is a positive relation between voter experience and confidence in Elections Canada.

Model 1.2 explores how confidence in Elections Canada relates to satisfaction with the voting experience but controls for the impact of time and the use of convenience voting rather than demographic factors. This model also finds a positive association between satisfaction with the voting experience and confidence in Elections Canada. Additionally, the results indicate that taking more time once an individual was at a polling place (for example, in longer lines) does not appear to impact confidence; but longer travel time to the polling place did have a small negative relation with confidence. However, the level of satisfaction plays a much larger role in explaining the level of confidence (0.416) when compared with the amount of time spent.

Model 1.2 also shows that convenience voting methods have a positive relation with confidence in Elections Canada. This means that, if an individual used a method of convenience voting, it is associated with a higher level of confidence in Elections Canada. So, not only is there an association between satisfaction with the voting experience and confidence, but respondents who use convenience voting methods are generally more confident in Elections Canada.

Finally, Model 1.3 adds another nuance to the question, examining whether the relation between vote satisfaction and confidence in Elections Canada changes when accounting for the voting method. The findings are very similar to model 1.1. More specifically, while using advanced voting as a reference category, it finds that respondents who voted by mail are on average less confident in Elections Canada when compared to voters who cast their ballot in advanced polls. This coefficient is larger than the respondents who voted in person or used other voting methods (such as mobile polls). However, there was no discernible difference in the levels of confidence of those who vote in person or by other means compared to those who voted at advanced polls. This means practically that the relation between voter satisfaction and confidence is impacted by some methods of convenience voting, but this impact is not identical across voting methods.

Overall, consistent with the first hypothesis, I find that there is a relation between satisfaction with the voting experience and confidence in Elections Canada. In addition to

satisfaction with the voting experience, I find that education, travel time, using a convenience voting method, and, specifically, voting by mail may also have an impact on confidence in Elections Canada.

Interpretations and Implications

Overall, the results indicate that satisfaction with one's voting experience has a relation with a respondent's confidence in Elections Canada. It is important to note that this is not causal, as it is not possible to discern from this data if the positive voting experience causes higher levels of confidence in Elections Canada. However, the strength of the relation indicates that further research into the satisfaction that voters have with their experience at the polls would be useful. Policies that make the voting experience better (such as those that can decrease travel time) are recommended as an avenue of future research.

Although voting experience is significantly associated with confidence in Elections Canada, the nature of this association remains unclear. Model 1.2 indicates that aspects of voting experience, such as the time it takes voters to get to a polling place, and the time spent voting, have little or no impact on the level of confidence in Elections Canada. These findings counter assumptions arising from the literature, which indicate that increased time would be associated with a higher voting cost and that having a higher cost could result in less trust for an EMB. This does not appear to be the case in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections.

Additionally, convenience methods of voting are important in explaining the level of confidence that a respondent may have. However, it is less clear who uses convenience voting methods. If it is respondents who already have a high level of confidence in Elections Canada switching from in-person election day voting to convenience voting methods, policies that promote convenience voting may not affect the overall confidence levels. Thus, further research into exactly who uses convenience voting methods and to what effect would be useful before making further policy recommendations.

Part 2: Polling Places and Confidence in Elections Canada

This section examines the relation between a change in the number of polling places and satisfaction with Elections Canada, using data from the 2019 and 2021 CES, and publicly available Elections Canada data on the number of polling places in each riding. I hypothesized that individuals from ridings with a reduction in the number of polling stations will have a lower level of confidence in Elections Canada compared to those with no reductions or an increase in polling places. Overall, I find mixed support for a relation between these two variables and, therefore, no support for the hypothesis. I also explore some of the demographic factors that may also have a relation with confidence in Elections Canada from this different sample. Finally, I interpret some of these results in plain language and explore some of the implications of these findings.

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics from the CES data. Using weighted means, I find that confidence in Elections Canada increased slightly between 2019 and 2021. However, a weighted t-test does not find this difference to be significant. Therefore, we can conclude that overall, respondents did not have different levels of confidence in Elections Canada between 2019 and 2021.

Table 4. The Weighted Means of Confidence in Elections Canada, its standard errors, and Number of Polling Places.

Year	Weighted Mean Confidence in Elections Canada	Number of Polling Places	Number of Observations
2019	1.8122 ± .0253	15,477	10,325
2021	1.922 ± .0097	14,405	15,026

Note that the mean confidence is created from measures that range from 0 to 3. For full details on the scoring and survey questions, see Appendix B.

I hypothesized that there would be a positive relation between the difference in the number of polling places and the level of confidence in Elections Canada. I present the results in Figure 2 and models 2.1–2.3 (see Table 5), which indicate mixed support for the hypothesis.

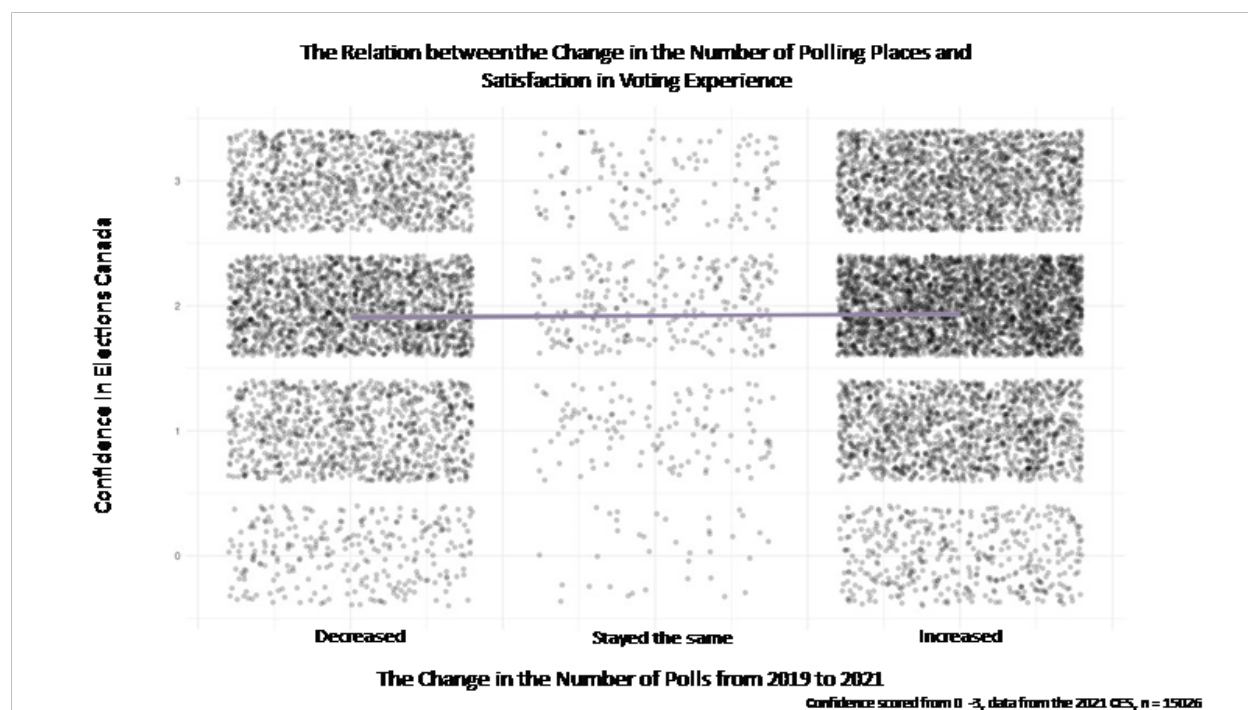


Figure 2. The relation between the differences in the number of polling places and confidence in Elections Canada. Each point is an individual respondent. The purple regression line does not indicate a directional relation.

Table 5. The coefficients for weighted OLS regressions are presented in models 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3.

	Model 2.1	Model 2.2	Model 2.3
Constant	1.400 *** (0.043)	2.137 *** (0.025)	1.538 *** (0.045)
Difference in No. Polling Places	0.018 ** (0.008)	0.012 (0.008)	0.016 ** (0.009)
Visible Minority	-0.151 *** (0.021)		-0.128 *** (0.022)
Indigeneity	-0.137 *** (0.052)		-0.161 *** (0.055)
Education	0.080 *** (0.005)		0.071 *** (0.005)
Income	0.038 *** (0.005)		0.036 *** (0.005)
Gender (Women)	-0.210 *** (0.016)		-0.192 (0.016)
Vote by Mail		0.111 *** (0.028)	0.100 *** (0.028)
In-Person Voting		-0.099 *** (0.018)	-0.082 *** (0.018)
Other Voting		0.167 *** (0.040)	0.60 *** (0.040)
R-Squared	0.066	0.011	0.052
N. Observations	11087	10206	9935
Signif. codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*'			
Standard errors reported in parentheses			

The reference category for voting methods is the use of an advanced poll. The constants have the same number of observations as their respective model.

Model 2.1 regresses confidence in Elections Canada on the difference in the number of polling stations at a riding level, while controlling for demographics that may also impact the confidence a respondent has in Elections Canada. It finds a small positive association. This indicates that an increase in the number of polling places is associated with a higher level of

confidence in Elections Canada, though it is important to note that it has a lower level of statistical significance compared to the other coefficients. Thus, model 2.1 provides some support for the second hypothesis. It is also interesting that the sociodemographic indicators, such as education and indigeneity, have a larger coefficient when compared to the differences in polling places.

Model 2.2 once again considers the difference in the number of polling places but does so in a way that controls for the impact of the way that people voted. The results indicate that the difference in the number of polling places does not have a statistically significant impact on the level of confidence that a respondent held in Elections Canada once the type of voting method is controlled. Overall, the findings indicate the method of voting explains more variance in the level of confidence that a respondent has in Elections Canada compared to the difference in the number of polling places.

Model 2.3 functionally combines the two previous models in that it controls for sociodemographic indicators *and* the method of voting. These results also indicate a small positive relation between confidence in Elections Canada and the difference in polling stations. Like model 2.1, the coefficients of other variables in the model are greater than that of the differences in the number of polling places.

Overall, I find mixed evidence of a relation between the difference in the number of polling places and confidence in Elections Canada. There is some support for the second hypothesis, but methods of voting and sociodemographic variables tend to have a larger impact on the level of confidence compared to the impact of the difference in the number of polling places.

Interpretations and Implications

The central finding is that there is mixed evidence as to whether the decrease in the number of polling places had an impact in the level of confidence an individual has in Elections Canada. There may be a small positive relation between the differences in the number of polling places and a respondent's level of confidence. This means that when there are fewer polling places in a riding compared to those in previous elections, a respondent's level of confidence is more likely to be lower. It also means that when there are more polling places in a riding when compared to the previous election, a respondent's level of confidence is likely to be higher. However, the statistical and substantive significance of this is lesser than that of other variables

like sociodemographic indicators, such as income or levels of education, and the method of voting.

These findings suggest that, while there were issues in securing polling locations in the 2021 federal election, it seems to have not had much of an impact on how voters viewed Elections Canada. The exact reason for this is not discernable from this data. It could be that the decrease in polling places was not well known, and voters viewed their new polling location simply as a change in location, rather than a decrease in service. It also may have been that voters were aware of the challenges of the pandemic, and a rally-around-the-flag effect stopped any negative impact. A rally-around-the-flag effect is simply when, in the face of an emergency, individuals tend to strengthen their support for political and public institutions (Mueller, 1970). This may have been what stopped voters from viewing the decrease in polling places as a negative change in voting service provision. Further research into this would be needed to clarify this association.

Another possibility is that the changes in the proportion of voters who used convenience methods, such as mail-in ballots, meant that any impact of the decrease in polling places was not felt. In other words, the voting method might mitigate the overall impact that the decrease in polling places had. However, this is also something that would require further research. It does imply that convenience voting is useful in mitigating a reduction in polling locations, especially if these methods are going to be encouraged outside of the pandemic context.

Finally, it seems that sociodemographic indicators have a strong relation with the level of confidence a respondent has in Elections Canada. The results indicate that respondents who are visible minorities, Indigenous, lower in income, or lower rates of education have less confidence in Elections Canada. This indicates that community-specific programs that target these groups for purposes of education and making voting more accessible to them would be a good avenue to pursue.

Discussion and Conclusion

This report uses two sets of data to explore the relation between confidence in Canada's EMB, Elections Canada and satisfaction in the voting experience and with the difference in the number of polling places between the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. This work extends previous research to looking at confidence in an EMB instead of voter turnout. It also considers

some specific policy areas and demographics that appear to have an association with a respondent's confidence in Elections Canada.

While there are some differences between the results given by the two different datasets, there are general trends. To briefly summarize the findings: there appears to be a positive relation between satisfaction in the voter experience and confidence in Elections Canada. While both were rated highly, the relation was strong when neutralizing the effect of other sociodemographic variables, such as income and education. Against some of the assumptions of the literature, the results indicate that the amount of time it took a respondent to vote did not have an impact on the level of confidence they have in Elections Canada.

There is mixed support for a positive relation between the difference in the number of polling places and confidence in Elections Canada. This means that a decrease in the number of polling places is associated with slightly lower confidence among respondents. However, when the method of voting is considered, this effect disappears. Additionally, several methods of convenience voting are associated with higher levels of trust. These findings set a different tone for the impact of convenience voting compared to the existing literature, which is unclear about whether the effects of convenience voting are positive. While this report does not address turnout, it finds that convenience voting is associated with higher levels of confidence in the EMB, something that is important for the electoral process. As such, these voting methods seem to be a good topic for further research to explore how they relate to the level of confidence.

In the context of increasing democratic backsliding around the globe, and the difficulties of facilitating elections in extenuating circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important that Canadians maintain their trust in institutions. This trust is integral if EMBs are to continue to run elections. In this context, the goal of this report was to see how electors responded to the facilitation of the 2021 federal election. The findings suggest that confidence remained high. This is the case even with the limitations and challenges associated with running an election during a pandemic.

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Appendix A: The Relation between Satisfaction and Time

The dependent variable of interest is satisfaction in the voting experience, and the reference category for the voting methods is the use of an advanced poll. Overall, while most of the variables of interest are statistically significant, the coefficients are substantively small, and the overall explanatory power of the models is very small. This indicates that the strength of the relation between these variables is small.

Table A1. The impact of travel time and voting method on the level of satisfaction with the voting experience.

	Model A1	Model A2
Constant	2.773 *** (0.003)	2.76 *** (0.004)
Travel Time	0.0004 (0.00004)	
Vote Time	-0.007 *** (0.001)	
Vote by Mail		-0.073 *** (0.011)
In-Person Voting		-0.016 *** (0.005)
Other Voting		-0.063 ** (0.027)
R-Squared	0.01	0.00
N. Observations	49279	55084
Signif. codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*'		
Standard errors reported in parentheses		

Note: the reference category is advance voting. The constants have the same number of observations as their respective model.

Appendix B: Question Wordings and Descriptive Statistics

The models in this report use data from the Elections Canada National Electors Survey from 2019 and 2021, as well as data from the CES of 2019 and 2021. This appendix expands on some of the wordings of the questions used and the distribution of response to those questions. If it is not mentioned as distinct from each other, readers can assume the question wording and responses are consistent across years.

National Electors Survey:

The question on satisfaction in voter experience was worded as follows: “Overall, how satisfied were you with your voting experience?” Respondents answered using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied.” These were recoded into scores ranging from 0 to 3. In total, 5,302 responses were removed (those who answered “don’t know,” who did not answer the question, or who rejected the question).

Table B1. Summary of responses to questionnaire item: satisfaction with voting experience, National Electors Survey

Overall, how satisfied were you with your voting experience?				
Response	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Value	3	2	1	0
Number of Respondents	44,846	8,702	1,429	724

The question on confidence in Elections Canada was worded as follows: “Overall, how much confidence do you have in Elections Canada?” Respondents answered using a four-point Likert scale, ranging from “a great deal of confidence” to “no confidence.” These were recoded into scores ranging from 0–3. Altogether, 1,185 responses were removed (those who answered “don’t know,” who did not answer the question, or who refused the question).

Table B2. Summary of responses to questionnaire item: confidence in Elections Canada, National Electors Survey

Overall, how much confidence do you have in Elections Canada?				
Response	A great deal of confidence	A fair amount of confidence	Not much confidence	No confidence
Value	3	2	1	0
Number of Respondents	38,707	16,927	2,803	1,381

Time spent traveling or voting was recoded into categories (0–5 minutes, 6–10 minutes, 11–15 minutes, 16–20 minutes, 21–30 minutes, and 30+ minutes). Therefore, when considering the time variable in the models, it should be interpreted as each increase in ~5 minutes, rather than each value representing an additional minute.

Gender was coded as respondents who identified as women against those who did not (men and non-binary respondents). Education and income were coded as ordinal categorical variables.

A respondent was considered a “visible minority,” if they responded that they were South Asian, Chinese, Black, Filipino, Arab, Latin American, Southeast Asian, East Asian, or Mixed/Other.

Canadian Election Studies

The question on confidence in Elections Canada was asked in a battery of confidence questions. It was phrased as, “Please indicate how much confidence you have in the following,” followed by a list of institutions, including Elections Canada. The courts, organized religion, the armed forces, public schools, big business, labour unions, the public service, and the police were also asked about. Respondents answered on a four-point Likert scale, ranging from “a great deal” to “none at all.” These were recoded into scores ranging from 0–3 and 1,185 responses were removed (those who answered “don’t know,” or who did not answer the question).

Table B3. Summary of responses to questionnaire item: confidence in Elections Canada, Canadian Election Study

Overall, how much confidence do you have in Elections Canada?				
Response	A great deal of confidence	A fair amount of confidence	Not much confidence	No confidence
Value	3	2	1	0
Number of Respondents	4,185	7,378	3,511	990

The differences in the number of ridings were calculated as the difference between 2019 and 2021 per riding, then recoded into a categorical variable, where a decrease in the number of polling places was coded as -1. If a riding had the same number of polling places across both elections, it was coded as a 0. If the riding had an increase in the number of polling places, it was coded as a 1. Models without this recoding, which treat the differences in polling places as a functionally continuous variable, are in Appendix D.

In models of Part 2, I controlled for ethnicity. However, in the 2019 CES, respondents answered for self-reported ancestry rather than ethnicity. These data have been cleaned to represent those who would be considered a visible minority. For the full coding, please see the replication files.

Education and income were again coded into ordinal variables, and gender was coded as respondents who identified as women against those who did not (men and non-binary respondents).

Appendix C: Model Descriptions and Additional Models for Part 1

Model descriptions and variables of interest:

- Model 1.1: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + demographics
- Model 1.2: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + vote time
- Model 1.3: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + vote method + demographics
- Model A1: Vote time on satisfaction with the voting experience
- Model A2: Vote method on satisfaction with the voting experience
- Model C1: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + education
- Model C2: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + disability
- Model C3: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + ethnicity
- Model C4: Satisfaction with the voting experience on confidence + residence

This appendix contains additional models for Part 1. The dependent variable is the level of confidence in Elections Canada, and the variable of interest is satisfaction with the voting experience.

These models examine more demographic variables. The reference category for education is someone who has completed high school. Disability is coded as a 1 if someone described themselves as disabled and a 0 if they did not. The reference category for ethnicity is white. The reference category for residence is the province of Ontario.

Table C2. The coefficients for weighted OLS regressions are presented in models C1 and C2.

	Model C1		Model C2
Constant	1.194 *** (0.022)	Constant	1.390 *** (0.023)
Vote	0.432 ***	Vote	0.0437 ***
Satisfaction	(0.007)	Satisfaction	(0.008)
Some	-0.088	Disabled	-0.003 ***
Elementary	(0.140)		(0.001)
All Elementary	-0.056 (0.080)		
Some High	-0.033 (0.024)		
School			
Some Trade	0.085 ***		
School	(0.015)		
All Trade	0.115 ***		
School	(0.012)		
Some	0.214 ***		
University	(0.011)		
Undergraduate	0.277 ***		
Degree	(0.011)		
Post-graduate	0.352 ***		
Degree	(0.012)		
Other	0.207 *** (0.071)		
R-Squared	0.17		0.14
Observations	54918		41537
Signif. codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*'			
Standard errors reported in parentheses			

The reference category for education is a completed high school diploma. The constants have the same number of observations as their respective model.

Table C3. The coefficients for weighted OLS regressions are presented in models C3 and C4.

	Model C3		Model C4
Constant	1.482 *** (0.025)	Constant	1.046 *** (0.169)
Vote	0.411 *** (0.009)	Vote	0.536 *** (0.055)
Satisfaction		Satisfaction	
Chinese	0.005 (0.025)	British	-0.045 (0.069)
East Asian	0.026 (0.075)	Columbia	
South Asian	0.073 *** (0.021)	Alberta	-0.185 ** (0.079)
Southeast Asian	0.105 (0.064)	Saskatchewan	-0.236 ** (0.108)
Filipino	0.065 ** (0.030)	Manitoba	-0.096 (0.116)
Black	0.007 (0.024)	Quebec	0.132 * (0.075)
Latin American	-0.023 (0.033)	New Brunswick	-0.170 (0.283)
Middle East/North Africa	0.051 * (0.031)	Nova Scotia	-0.117 (0.129)
Mixed	-0.066 *** (0.021)	Prince Edward Island	-0.654 *** (0.046)
Indigenous	-0.742 (0.513)	Newfoundland	0.006 (0.135)
		Reserve	-0.009 (0.075)
R-Squared	0.13		0.17
Observations	36610		1028
Signif. codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*'			
Standard errors reported in parentheses			

The reference category for ethnic background is white. The reference category for province is Ontario. The constants have the same number of observations as their respective model.

Appendix D: Model Descriptions and Additional Models in Part 2

Model description and variables of interest:

- Model 2.1: Difference in the number of polling places on confidence in Elections Canada + demographics
- Model 2.2: Difference in the number of polling places on confidence in Elections Canada + vote method
- Model 2.3: Difference in the number of polling places on confidence in Elections Canada + vote method + demographics
- Model D1: Difference in the number of polling places (as a continuous variable) on confidence in Elections Canada + vote method + demographics
- Model D2: Difference in the number of polling places on confidence in Elections Canada + vote method + demographics + riding-level coefficient
- Model D3: Difference in the number of polling places on confidence in Elections Canada + ideological self-placement

Ideology is coded as self-placement on an 11-point left-right scale, where 0 is extreme left and 10 is extreme right.

Table D2. The coefficients for weighted OLS regressions are presented in models D1, D2 and D3.

	Model D1	Model D2	Model D3
Constant	1.539 *** (0.045)	1.538 *** (0.045)	2.009 *** (0.052)
Difference in No. Polling Places	0.001 *** (0.0009)	0.016 ** (0.009)	0.022 ** (0.009)
Visible Minority	-0.124 *** (0.022)	-0.128 *** (0.022)	-0.098 *** (0.023)
Indigeneity	-0.173 *** (0.055)	-0.161 *** (0.055)	0.164 *** (0.059)
Education	0.072 *** (0.005)	0.071 *** (0.005)	0.054 *** (0.005)
Income	0.036 *** (0.005)	0.036 *** (0.005)	0.040 *** (0.005)
Gender (Women)	-0.192 *** (0.016)	-0.192 *** (0.016)	-0.195 *** (0.017)
Ideology			-0.069 *** (0.004)
Riding		-6.867e-07 (5.476e-06)	
Vote by Mail	0.102 *** (0.028)	0.100 *** (0.028)	0.088 *** (0.029)
In-Person Voting	-0.082 *** (0.018)	-0.082 *** (0.018)	-0.073 *** (0.018)
Other Voting	0.160 *** (0.040)	0.160 *** (0.040)	0.161 *** (0.040)
R-Squared	0.066	0.07	0.095
N. Observations	9935	9935	8818
Signif. codes: 0.001 '***' 0.01 '**' 0.05 '*'			
Standard errors reported in parentheses			

The reference category for voting methods is the use of an advance poll. The constants have the same number of observations as their respective model.