



# Select Committee on the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

## Corrected oral evidence: Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013

Tuesday 10 March 2020

3.30 pm

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Members present: Lord Shutt of Greetland (The Chair); Lord Campbell-Savours;  
Lord Dykes; Baroness Eaton; Lord Hayward; Lord Lexden; Baroness Mallalieu;  
Baroness Pidding; Baroness Suttie.

Evidence Session No. 14

Heard in Public

Questions 159 - 168

### Witnesses

I: Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer of Canada; Michel Roussel, Deputy  
Chief Electoral Officer. (Via videolink)

## Examination of witnesses

Stéphane Perrault and Michel Roussel.

Q159 **The Chair:** We are delighted to have you with us. I have a formal statement to make at the beginning. We welcome you to this evidence session, which is being broadcast live via the parliamentary website; a transcript of the meeting will be taken and published on the Committee website. You will have the opportunity to make corrections to the transcript where necessary. I am clear that you are Stéphane Perrault; would you give us the name of your colleague?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Yes, I am the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, and my colleague is Mr Michel Roussel, the Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation. He is in charge of operations for the election.

**The Chair:** He is your deputy.

**Stéphane Perrault:** Yes, he is my deputy.

**The Chair:** Fine. Can you give us an overview of how electoral registration works in Canada? What do you see as the key strengths and weaknesses of the Canadian system?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Absolutely. It is an honour to do that. In Canada, we have had a national register of electors since 1997; before that, we did enumerations during elections themselves. The national register is a permanent list of all the electors in Canada, and from the register we generate the lists that are used to conduct elections.

Registration in Canada is not automatic. The rules are that electors, of their own volition, have to accept being registered on the register of electors. There is one exception: electors who are registered at provincial level are automatically registered at federal level, through sharing data with provincial partners. Beyond that, electors have to take a step to be included in the national register of electors.

It is important to keep in mind that the national register of electors is largely fed through data partners. Canada is a federation, as you know, and most of the data for life events—births, deaths, drivers and moving—is collected at provincial level. To feed the national register of electors, we have some 45 agreements with data partners that share information with Elections Canada. Those chains of information allow us continuously to update the register on that basis. In some cases—for example, the driver's licence—we receive on a periodic basis information from drivers' bureaux. Through this, we either update existing electors who are registered on the national register of electors or we find new individuals we did not have, and then we write to those individuals and ask whether they wish to be included on the register. We do periodic mailouts to increase the content of the national register of electors.

Electors on their own can be included in a number of ways. We have an online registration system, so they can register online, and they can verify whether they are registered and, if they are registered, whether they are registered at the right address. They can go online and do that, and we encourage voters, in particular in the lead-up to an election and during an election period, to look up their information on the register and make sure that they are registered at the proper address and, if not, to register themselves. They can also mail their application, but, increasingly, it is done through the online registration system.

There are a number of other ways to get on to the register. Electors, when they file their taxes, can check a box attesting that they are Canadian citizens, are 18 years of age and wish to be included on the register of electors. Through tax filings, from our information-sharing agreements with the Canada Revenue Agency, we include new voters on the register and, of course, use that data to update information on the register.

Finally, there are a number of ways to register during the election. Electors can go to the returning offices, and they can go online, as I mentioned, and we do some targeted revision in high-mobility areas. We visit new residential developments and seniors' homes to make sure that we have everybody registered, and that feeds into the national register and helps to produce the list of electors.

In Canada, about 14% of elector information changes every year, and most of that is change of address, due to people moving around. About 3 million Canadians move every year, out of 27 million voters. Outside the election period, the vast majority of changes occur through our data-sharing agreements with partners. It is not the electors who provide us with that information; we learn of electors who have moved and then automatically make changes to their voter information through our partnerships—for example, through drivers' bureaux. Some electors go online and register or update their information, but they are in a minority, outside the election. Inside, during the election period, it is the reverse: the vast majority of changes to the register are made by electors themselves, either by going online or by attending a returning office.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for that start. You indicated that it is a national register, yet it is obviously geographically based. If you live in a polling district, in a riding, you can vote only in the specific polling district where you are registered, as I understand it. Am I right in that?

**Stéphane Perrault:** For the most part, yes. The register includes information about the voters, who can, of course, add geographic information. Voters are assigned to electoral districts and, within districts, a polling division, which has a list of some 400 electors in a particular area where electors go to vote on polling day, or at advance polls. We will probably come back to that later on. Electors in Canada must attend their polling division, the place where they are assigned to vote, with one

exception; if they vote through special ballot, either by mail or at any returning officer's office, they can vote anywhere in the country.

**Baroness Mallalieu:** How do you deal with the question of confidentiality? When people go on to your online system and make changes, how do you stop them accessing information that they should not receive, for example, about other people?

**Stéphane Perrault:** When they go online to verify whether they are registered, they have to provide their name, date of birth and address information. In some cases, if they have moved, they provide their former address information, which will give them confirmation that they are on the register at a particular address. Once they have that confirmation, they can change that address information. They cannot access other people's data to do that.

There are several ways for an elector to be added to the register, if they are not on the register. A person can enter their name and address, and then they will be required, if they have a driver's licence, to include the driver licence number, the file they have to motor legally. That creates a connection, because we have access to the motor vehicle data; we have a common identifier in the driver's information, and that confirms that we are satisfied that this person, with their name, date of birth and driver's number information, is the right information. If they have a driver's number, that's how they register and vote.

If they do not have a driver's licence, and a significant number of Canadians do not have a driver's licence, they can upload identification documents on to the register, and in that case there is a manual verification that we use to be satisfied as to the quality of the documents, and whether they are the types of documents that we accept. Based on that, we can confirm their registration address.

**The Chair:** Before the last federal election, Elections Canada secured a very high registration rate of 96.4% of eligible electors, which seems splendidly high. What are the main factors contributing to that?

**Stéphane Perrault:** I have to agree that I am quite happy about those numbers, which are the numbers as they were at the time of what we call cutting the preliminary list of electors. That is prior to targeted revision and prior to updates done during the writ period, so the actual numbers are materially higher even than at the time of voting on polling day. But 96.4% is high for the preliminary list of electors.

A number of factors contributed to that. Certainly, we did some mail outs to young Canadians in the lead-up to the election, we encourage Canadians to go online and verify their information. We also remove them from the record, so the increase in coverage of the national register is not made at the expense of accuracy. Our accuracy numbers have gone up; accuracy is at 93.3%. The reason for that, largely, is that we removed over 200,000 obsolete records from the register before the election. Those are records for which we had no active registration for a

period of time, so we wrote to those voters and, if they did not write back, we excluded them from the register.

One new thing we did at this election was that we used the Canada Revenue Agency data not only to update the records but to add new voters, and we did that for the first time for one reason. In the past, we did not have access to data on non-citizens residing in Canada, and our analysis showed that a fairly large number of people who checked on the tax form to be included on the register, and who also checked the box saying that they were Canadian citizens and signed to that effect, in fact were not all Canadian citizens. There was a certain amount of pollution in the data.

In the past, we did not use tax data to increase the number or add people to the register but merely to update their information. This time around, because of new legislation, we have access to information from the immigration department, which provided us with a list of people who are resident in Canada but are not Canadian citizens. We have used that to filter the tax filer data. Through that process, we were able to add 900,000 voters to the register in the spring leading up to the election, significantly improving the overall coverage of the register.

**The Chair:** I have one more question at this stage. Forgive me if I compare and contrast, but there is one concept that we do not really understand here, which is being able to get yourself on the register on polling day. That is something we do not have, and we cannot conceive of it. In the papers you sent us, it appears that 5% of people who vote register on polling day. How does that work? Indeed, it slightly worries me that people could say, "We can't be bothered with signing up early because we can do it on the day". How do they know which polling place to go to, to register? Some of them may not be used to voting. It seems somewhat messy, and it could be very time consuming on polling day if people turned up who were not expected.

**Stéphane Perrault:** We have polling day registration, which includes not only polling day but any of the four days of advance polling. An elector can show up who is not registered and provide documentary proof of their identity and address. If they do not have documented proof of address, they can have somebody attest to their address who has proper documentation and resides in the same polling district. Evidence has to be shown of identification and address. About 5% of voters register on polling day.

It is not entirely without challenge; it creates a small element of uncertainty in the number of people we can expect at a particular poll. We sometimes see a higher percentage of polling day registration, but for the most part it works quite well. Voters need to know where to go, so they need to call Elections Canada or their local returning office with their address information, and they get directed to the proper poll, or they can go online and enter their postal code and information online and we direct them where to attend, whether it is a local school or a local church. Then they go there and register on polling day.

It is a slower process. We encourage people to register in advance; we much prefer them to register in advance, so that we know exactly how many people we can expect and the process at the polls is not slowed down by registration, but it is not overly problematic.

**The Chair:** How many staff are there normally in a polling place?

**Stéphane Perrault:** A polling place will include a number of polls; we have to make that distinction. A poll is a list of voters that is typically between 400 and 600 voters. The reason why it varies in number is that, in rural areas, we do not want people to have to travel too much; if we have a larger list, they have a longer distance. Every polling division has a short list of the voters within the electoral district. In a polling place, say a school gymnasium, we may have up to eight, 10 or sometimes 12 different polling divisions. Voters arrive; they have a voter information card, because, when they register, they receive a voter information card that gives them the address of the polling division and, within that address, the particular poll they must attend. They go to a school and they have to attend, for example, poll number 103, so they need to go to that particular poll to vote.

**The Chair:** Thank you, that is helpful.

Q160 **Lord Hayward:** Can I follow up on the question the Chairman just asked? You have answered one part of my question, but from the way you are talking about registration on the day it seems to be open to potential fraud quite easily. I recognise that we have a slight sound problem at this end, but, as I understood it, you identified that you have to have a name, an address and a date of birth, and, from that, you can change the registration. I am not too adept at IT, but my lodger, who is in his 20s, would find it incredibly easy to find any person's name, address and date of birth. What protection do you have in relation to fraud in those circumstances? I could have great fun changing my neighbours' addresses.

**Stéphane Perrault:** There are two types of fraud you may be concerned with. The example you gave is a form of voter suppression fraud, whereby you go in with somebody else's name and address and remove that person, without any documents to prove that, because the person is already registered and you have basic information from the address, so you go online and remove their address from the poll. There are a couple of safeguards around that. The first is that the voter who has been removed can still come on polling day and register on polling day at that particular poll, so he or she will not be suppressed. The documents that they need to vote and the documents they need to register are identical. It is not more cumbersome through voter ID to come to the polls to register or to vote; the same documents are required. Going online and moving people out of their district to prevent them voting would not be very effective; voters could, as I said, enter a postal code, find the right poll, go there and register to vote.

The other type of fraud would be to move yourself to another polling location. For example, for strategic voting, you could move your vote to another electoral district where it is more competitive. If you do that, when you come to vote, for the same reason, you still need to provide documentary proof of your address, so you cannot move yourself to another location, unless at the polls you also have documentary proof of address in that polling division. To do that, you have to prove it, which is why in Canada we have proof of address not only when you register but when you vote, if you are already registered.

**Lord Hayward:** Can I clarify whether you have identified that the online tool is actually popular? Is it used by certain demographic groups more than others?

**Stéphane Perrault:** At the last election, 2 million voters went online to verify their address and, of the 2 million, 200,000 corrected their address information. Those were Canadians who had moved. Then we had 80,000 who added themselves to the register. Within the 80,000 who added themselves to the register, 60,000 were aged 18 to 24, so the vast majority of users who go online to register tend to be in the 18 to 24 age group.

Q161 **Baroness Eaton:** Are there any gaps in the register between different demographic, socioeconomic and other groups? How does Elections Canada monitor those and ensure that harder-to-reach groups are registered and represented?

**Stéphane Perrault:** That is an important question. The most important gap we have is for the 18 to 24 group. Coverage of the register for those over 24 or 25 is at almost 100%. Coverage for 18 to 24, in 2015, at the last election, was at 72%; in this election, it is at 78%, so that is a material improvement for that age group, but it remains the most significant gap for us. For the future, we have a future voters list. Canadians aged between 14 and 17 are able to pre-register and we can automatically put them into the register when they come of age. That is being set up as we speak, and we have yet to reap the benefits of it.

The age gap is the only gap you can see by looking at our register, because we do not have sociodemographic data other than age and geography. We have some geographic indications. We do surveys after an election, and through surveys we identify groups that face special barriers to voting. In preparing for the election, we use special outreach voters groups. We do targeted communications using social media, for example, and outreach activities to encourage those communities, which will include, for example, First Nations, youth and new Canadians; we encourage those people to go online to register ahead of the election. That is how we identify and close the gaps.

Q162 **Lord Dykes:** Can I come back to some of the key aspects and leading examples of different kinds of fraud that you have seen perpetrated in elections? Are there particular areas of fraud where the population perceives the system to be vulnerable?

**Stéphane Perrault:** There is no evidence base for systemic fraud in Canada. We spoke earlier, for example, of people moving addresses on the register, but that is something that we can verify. If we have seen somebody moving during the writ period, and then moving back, we put right that information and, under the data-sharing agreement, we identify those types of fraud. We have mechanisms in place.

Overall, Canadians are very trusting of our electoral process. Traditionally, at the last election, our survey showed that 92% were confident in the administration of the election and trusted the administration of the election. We do not have data for this election, but I expect it to go down, because we have seen trust in institutions generally go down, so this is not without concern. Overall, confidence in electoral administration in Canada is very high.

As I said, there is no evidence of organised fraud in Canada. We have a number of safeguards; one of them is through data-sharing agreements. Through other administrative partners, we have data on voters, so we can see whether they are moving around in ways that are suspicious, and we can identify that in the registration. As I said earlier, strict documentary evidence is required to register in Canada and vote.

Our voting, much like the UK's, is an open process. Candidate representatives are present and observe the vote and count process. It is a completely transparent, paper-based process; there is no electronic voting or counting at the federal level. It is a manual, paper count. Within the vote itself, two poll workers at all times issue the ballot. The voter provides identification to the workers, and once they receive the ballot their name is struck and they vote behind a privacy screen. They mark their ballot, and there is a stub with the number of the ballot that corresponds to the number recorded by the issuing officers. There is a comparison to see that the voter is coming back with the same ballot that they left with when they went behind the privacy screen. The stub is torn off the ballot and the ballot is placed in the box, and it is only opened in the presence of witnesses. It is a fully transparent and controlled environment.

Q163 **Baroness Pidding:** You have already told us a bit about different voting options that are unavailable in the UK, such as advance voting days and same-day registration. Is there any more you want to tell us about those and other methods to encourage greater voter turnout in elections, and how effective they are? What are the administrative challenges associated with providing those options?

**Stéphane Perrault:** We have talked about same-day registration. I think I mentioned that people can register on the day and with advance polls, which points to some of the voting options that we have in Canada. We offer a wide range of voting options to voters in Canada. Some 70% of votes cast are cast on polling day, and 30% of votes are cast prior to polling day through one of the several means that Canadians can use to vote. Those are the numbers from the most recent election, and they have been increasing steadily over the years. At the last election, 26%



cast their ballot on one of the four days for advance votes. We have a process that starts 10 days prior to polling day, on the 10th, 9th, 8th and 7th days prior to polling day, so there are four full days of advance voting. Anybody can attend advance polls, as long as they attend their own poll location.

At the last election, 26% of voters voted in advance polls. We know that one of the big drivers for that is convenience, but another important driver is the campaigns. Candidates and parties strongly push their supporters to vote early so that they can simply lock in the vote. That is very different from other jurisdictions, such as Australia, where advance polling is not as popular with the political class. In Canada, the political class pushes voters to vote early.

Voters can vote through a range of means, through what we call the special ballot, which is something that can be used at any time during the election process. Starting at the issue of the writ, people can go to any returning office in Canada and vote in advance through a special ballot. They can apply to vote by mail through special ballot. If they are living abroad, they can apply to be on the international register and receive automatically a ballot kit by mail, once the writs are issued. We use the special ballot for voting on campuses, and we have kiosks for work camps. There are a range of options for Canadians to cast their ballot, in hospitals and for seniors in long-term care facilities, to make sure that people have the opportunity to vote.

As for how this relates to increasing participation, there is no strong evidence. There is evidence in the US that same-day registration correlates with higher turnout, so there is a correlation in a jurisdiction that has same-day registration with higher turnout. Whether that is causation is another story. We do not have studies in Canada showing how flexibility of voting options impacts on participation. It certainly makes sure that people have very few reasons not to vote, in the sense that they have all kinds of options. Circumstances in their lives should not be an obstacle to voting, because we have a wide range of voting options. There is no data available that shows causation or correlation between voter participation and the increase in voting options. I may not have answered all the various aspects of your question. I may have skipped some elements.

**Lord Campbell-Savours:** What is your attitude to postal voting? I cannot work out where in the stats, within the 92%, there is a figure relating to any postal voting at all.

**Stéphane Perrault:** There are relatively low numbers of postal voting, and I can ask my colleagues to fill in the actual numbers. Where we have seen an increase in the last election is in relation to international votes, because in Canada the rules changed before the last election.

**Lord Campbell-Savours:** There is a low incidence of postal voting.

**Stéphane Perrault:** Yes.

**Lord Campbell-Savours:** Could that be because of your early voting system, because of the existence of the advance voting system? In other words, do you see it as an alternative?

**Stéphane Perrault:** It certainly could be. I do not have direct evidence of that. What we know is that early voting or the advance poll is increasingly popular. We had over 3 million in this election, which is a 33% increase from the last election, and the last election was a 75% increase from the election prior to that. The rate of uptake of the offer of the advance vote has been very high, but not so with mail voting, which has decreased.

**Lord Campbell-Savours:** Can I turn it back on you? If you did not have advance voting, do you think you would have a greater volume of postal voting?

**Stéphane Perrault:** We might. As a hypothesis, that is reasonable, but I do not know that. We would probably have to promote vote by mail more than we do right now, which would perhaps contribute.

**The Chair:** It would be helpful if we knew how you could get a postal vote. Can anybody ask for a postal vote, or is it restricted to people in certain categories?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Anybody can ask for a postal vote. There are two restrictions. One is that voters have to apply before the sixth day prior to polling day. That is because, when you apply for a postal vote, we strike your name from the voter list so that, if you show up at the polls when you have applied for a postal vote, you will be shown to have already voted. If Canadians who reside in Canada apply at any time from the issue of the writ to the sixth day prior to polling day, anybody can vote by mail. They must then ensure that their ballot is returned to Elections Canada by six o'clock on polling day. That is the cut-off. Unlike other jurisdictions, we do not continue to count mail ballots received after that deadline.

Those are the voters in Canada. International voters vote by special ballot. In their case, they can apply to be on the international register ahead of the election. They can also apply during the election, but by applying ahead they ensure that we will issue the voting kit as soon as the writs are issued.

**The Chair:** There must be people with health issues and people who may be called away to work somewhere hundreds of miles away who think, "Well, I might not be able to vote. I'd better get a postal vote". I am surprised that there are not rather more of those people than there appear to be.

**Stéphane Perrault:** If you are going to be away from your polling area for the election, and you know that in advance, you can vote by mail. We certainly see that; we have had elections in the winter, for example, when a lot of Canadians and seniors have gone down south, so there is a

marked increase in mail ballots in that category of voters. You can also vote at any returning office anywhere in Canada, and you can cast a ballot, which will effectively be the same thing as a mail ballot; it is a special ballot put into a double envelope. It is only collectable by the local returning officer wherever it is in Canada, and that returning officer is serving, essentially, as the mail delivery system.

**Lord Campbell-Savours:** In all your briefing material, I personally found the advance voting system the most interesting. Can you send us more material on how that actually works?

**Stéphane Perrault:** I would be delighted to do that.

**Lord Campbell-Savours:** To me, it was the most important part of the brief.

**Stéphane Perrault:** Advance voting is an interesting phenomenon, because it is generally not as well regarded in other jurisdictions. The Australians have reservations about it, whereas Canadian politicians are very eager to lock in their vote, so they push voters to vote in advance polls more aggressively as every election goes live. It becomes part of the strategy for parties to target and promote the use of advance polls.

In 2015, we had significant line-ups at advance polls in Canada. Significant is a relative term; it could be an hour or, in the worst cases, two hours. That was because we had a 75% increase that we did not foresee in advance poll registration. This time around, we increased the number of advance polls by 24%, the hours for advance polls were doubled by 50% and we simplified the process to make sure that it was faster. As a result, despite having 1.3 million more voters in advance polls—30% more voters—we appear, at least in this election, to have resolved the problem of line-ups, so there were no systemic line-up issues in the process. It is a labour-intensive process, and one of our challenges for this election has been to have the requisite numbers of staff on the polling day and on the four days for advance polls.

Q164 **The Chair:** In your role as the Chief Electoral Officer, you have certain responsibilities, we understand, in implementing public education and information programmes for students. Can you give us some insight on how that works, the sort of activities you do, and how effective they are?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Absolutely. I have a mandate to conduct education and information programmes, in particular for voters who face barriers. It is not a specific group but for groups in the general population that face barriers to voting. Increasingly, we have found it useful to work with stakeholder groups. In the lead-up to the last election, we had about 120 partner organisations. We provided them with information about the voting process and they leveraged their own networks and groups in their communities, such as new Canadians, indigenous Canadians, young Canadians and students. They became spokespersons for Elections Canada by sharing our information, so working with stakeholders is a very effective method of reaching groups that are harder to reach.

Returning officers in each electoral district hire what we call community relations officers. For example, at the last election we had over 1,500 community relations officers. They have a special pass, for example, for official minority languages or for areas where there are indigenous communities. A community relations officer will be assigned to work with those communities. In some cases, we have them for the homeless in urban areas or for seniors. Returning officers have the ability, and are encouraged, to hire community relations officers, so that during the writ period, during the course of the election, they engage with communities and help to explain how the voting process and the system work, giving them the information they need to participate.

We have civic education for youth. It is important to keep in mind that, in Canada, education is a provincial jurisdiction and not a federal responsibility, and we cannot affect or influence the curriculums of schools. What we can do, and have done, is to create tools for teachers. We create resources working with teachers, making sure that the resources fit the curriculums of all Canadian jurisdictions. For example, we have tools on geography and maths, and they will be used for election models or election geography. Students within their curriculum can use Elections Canada material with teachers to do activities that serve broader purposes.

We reviewed the education tools we issued in 2018. They have been quite popular; we had a 99% satisfaction rate from teachers. This is more of a long-term activity, of course, which we are building with stakeholders in the knowledge that, the more students know about the electoral process and about parliamentary institutions, the more likely they are to want to register to vote when they become 18. That is an important element.

We do not have good data on effectiveness. It is very hard to measure the impact on participation of any particular activity. We have some metrics—for example, on the satisfaction and uptake of our products, and the number of activities that are being done. Evidence of direct impact on participation is hard to have. We have performance measure frameworks for some of those provisions, particularly the civic education programme, and we have the Inspire Democracy programme, which is a programme of resources used by our community and network partners. We will conduct a formal evaluation in 2021, so we will have more information on the effectiveness of that, but it will not provide direct evidence of impact on participation. It will provide evidence of knowledge increase, for example, but not direct impacts.

**Q165 Lord Lexden:** Could you explain, first, how elections are funded and resourced in Canada and, secondly, what support and training are available to election administrators to ensure that they do their job well?

**Stéphane Perrault:** We have a unique funding model in Canada. We have two funding authorities. We have an annual vote, like most departments in Canada; our budget is voted annually. But the annual vote covers only the salaries of the permanent staff at Elections Canada

headquarters. It provides baseline funding for the salaries of headquarters staff and, for the upcoming year, approximately \$47 million will be voted shortly.

We also have what we call the statutory authority, which is a permanent authority that draws from the Treasury and the Consolidated Revenue Fund and covers all the other activities and expenses of Elections Canada, including in particular the expenses related to the conduct of by-elections and general elections. That statutory authority varies considerably, depending on where we are in the electoral cycle. I plan for some of the expenditures, I report on planned expenditure and I am accountable to Parliament for those expenditures, but I do not require parliamentary approval to spend, because that approval is permanently granted in the Canada Elections Act. That is what the funding model is, and if you have additional questions I shall be happy to answer them.

On support and training for administrators, the language around administrators may capture two different realities. The main reality is that returning officers and their staff do not have a permanent workforce outside the headquarters of Elections Canada. Returning officers are appointed for 10 years, but they work on a part-time basis. They have a monthly stipend, they receive between elections a small monthly fee, which covers ongoing support and engagements. They are part of the planning exercise for the election. We issue tasks for them, for example, to do with geography or polling divisions. They have to identify potential places for their own office, which they have to lease during the election, and for polling places. They have regular tasks, and we engage with them, so there is ongoing engagement with returning officers.

We changed the model of training for returning officers in the last cycle; we provided what we call just-in-time training. If there is a geography task in the next month, and they will be required to redo the polling division boundaries, we say, "Here's some software, and you have to train on that software just before the task". They are not trained a long time before the task so that they forget about it; they are trained just in time to conduct those tasks.

Our poll workers are an entirely impermanent workforce. All the poll workers are retirees, or students, or are otherwise for some reason available to work for us, but they are not permanent employees. Their training is conducted over a very short period of a number of weeks leading up to polling day, in a three-hour training session. There are very complex tasks to accomplish; in particular, there is polling-day registration in Canada and there are complex voter ID rules for polls and procedures. We provide a hands-on training approach where they are given certain scenarios. There is basic information, and then they get a hands-on approach to training using common scenarios that they will face, and they have guidebooks that they can use during the election.

**Q166 Baroness Mallalieu:** Can you tell us a bit more about the timetable, which I think differs from the one we have here? Here there is a set timetable of 25 working days from the Dissolution of Parliament. We

understand that you have a different approach and, in your October 2019 election, the period lasted 41 days. Can you explain, first, how the timetable is set and, secondly, what are the pluses and minuses for allowing longer election periods?

**Stéphane Perrault:** We have, as you do, a fixed-date election calendar in Canada. The difference between the UK and Canada is that our fixed date, which is the third Monday in October in the fourth year, is not legally binding on the Government of the day, although they are more or less politically bound by it. There are no legal shackles to prevent them calling an election. Other than that, you are correct that we have a minimum period of 36 days, which was established in 1996. We now have a maximum period, for the first time, at the last election, of 51 days. In the past, there have been longer periods; there is no legislated maximum period. The previous election in 2015 was a 79-day election, which was highly exceptional. Traditionally, we have had 36-day elections pretty much as a constant for the last couple of decades, so 79 days was an exception and 41 was a bit long.

From my perspective, 41 days is the optimal period. It is important, given that we need to hire some 250,000 more workers and we do not have any permanent staff; public servants do not work on polling day. We have to hire and train 250,000 Canadians to work at polls, mostly made up of retirees and students, and that all takes place during the writ period. Returning officers do not have offices open prior to the issuing of the writ, so when the writs are issued they have to identify a site and sign the lease, and set up the IT equipment, the hardware and telephone lines. That is what is required by the nature of our system, whereby there is no permanent capacity to run an election.

The third factor is the advance polls. As discussed, we have four days of advance polls, which start on day 10 and go to day seven, the 10th, 9th, 8th and 7th days prior to polling day. Voting actually starts in the 36-day calendar as if it was a 26-day calendar; it is earlier than in your calendar. Those factors make a 41-day calendar much more palatable and easier to administer than a shorter calendar. Between 36 and 41, we would prefer 41 days, but we can manage in 36 days. Shorter than that would be difficult.

Longer elections are not so difficult to administer, but they are more expensive for candidates and parties. That risks creating an imbalance in the resources available for parties and candidates. In 2015, the law on spending limits was adjusted to prorate spending limits in accordance with the length of the calendar. On that basis, a longer calendar would help parties and candidates with more resources, whereas a shorter calendar does not do that. The law was modified on spending limits so that they are no longer adjusted but are fixed irrespective of the length of the electoral calendar.

Q167 **Baroness Suttie:** As you probably know, the UK Government are planning to introduce voter ID at polling stations and to extend voting rights to all UK citizens living abroad, regardless of how long they have

been living abroad. Can you tell us a little about the Canadian experience of voter ID requirements and of extending voting rights to all Canadian citizens, even those living abroad?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Voter ID rules were introduced in Canada in 2007. They were not a response to any actual evidence of fraud. They were a response to a desire of parties and Members of Parliament to reimport trust into the process, but there was no actual evidence of systemic fraud. We have a fairly restrictive voter ID system in Canada. Voters are required to provide a single piece of government-issued photo ID with full name and address; effectively, that is a driver's licence, or in some jurisdictions the health card, but there are very few such documents that exist. Voters can also show two documents without photo ID, one with name and the other with name and address. Those documents must be on a list that the chief electoral officer approves—that I approve—as an acceptable piece of ID.

One of the challenges that Canadians face is proving their address. There are very few documents that exist with proof of address. To respond to that problem, the list of acceptable pieces is fairly long; there are about 40 pieces on it. It includes bank statements and credit card statements, or utility bills, which typically have people's address on them; that will be presented with another piece of ID at the polls. Most Canadians have no problem providing pieces of ID or proof of address, but there is a small subset of the population that does have such problems. Seniors in care facilities do not have documents with proof of address, and there are some seniors whose status has altered and so they do not have documents in their name. There are young Canadians who do not necessarily drive and who live with their parents and do not pay the bills. There are subsets of the population for whom the address is a challenge.

There are a number of things that we can do to alleviate that. We have had voter information cards since the last election, which are acceptable as proof of address with another document. In some cases, a voter can be vouched for, so an elector who does not have proof of ID and address can be vouched for by another elector who has proof of address and identity, and who resides in the same polling division. There are some restrictions. It is a bit more flexible for nurses in nursing homes, who are allowed to vouch for more than one voter, but otherwise you can vouch for only one.

Proof of address has been a bit of a challenge in Canada. It is not a major issue, but it is a bit of a challenge. If you are already registered, the proof of address is just another proof of your identity. You are the "John Doe" that we have on the register residing at that particular address; the address and geography work has already been done, and you have been assigned a particular poll in a particular area. When you go to vote, the only reason why you show your address is to confirm that you are the same "John Doe" we have at that particular address. It is really like a second factor authentication.

For the most part, accuracy in the system works well; it is well accepted, and there are very few who face major problems. For those who do—for example, homeless people and people in shelters—we allow attestation from administrators, who attest to their residing, or having resided recently, at that shelter. If you have more questions on that, I shall be happy to come back to it.

As for voting abroad, there was a Supreme Court of Canada decision in early 2019 striking down our previous rule, which was a five-year limitation. In the past, Canadians residing abroad could vote, provided that they were abroad for no more than five years. Some exceptions were allowed for people representing Canada abroad, but otherwise we had a five-year limitation. Under that regime, a fairly small number voted; there were 11,000, out of 16,000 on the register, which was a small subset of the electorate.

Following the Supreme Court decision, at the last election we extended voting for Canadians abroad, no matter how long they have resided abroad. Some had concerns about how extensive the rates will be. Our estimation, which we think is fairly accurate, is that there will not be a groundswell of votes. In this election, I think 33,000 Canadians voted from abroad, so it is not a very large number. About 6,000 voted from abroad whose ballots came in late. If those were recorded as having cast a ballot, there would have been more.

**Baroness Suttie:** Can I ask about voter ID and its introduction in 2007? Did you have an extensive information campaign explaining to voters in advance how it would work so that it was clear?

**Stéphane Perrault:** As a federal jurisdiction, we were the first jurisdiction to move to voter ID. Voters who voted provincially or municipally were not accustomed to having to prove their identity. There were some jurisdictions, such as Quebec, which had voter ID rules, but for the most part other jurisdictions did not. We had to give fairly extensive voter information, and we still do; it is one of the main themes in our voter information campaign. Now that other jurisdictions have aligned their rules more or less with the federal rules, there is general acceptance and awareness of voter ID rules.

Canadians living abroad have to provide proof of their citizenship, either through their passport, or a citizenship card, although very few Canadians have that. If you are applying from abroad to vote in Canada, you need to prove your full Canadian citizenship with documentary evidence. Canadians living in Canada attest to their citizenship by making a sworn affirmation.

**The Chair:** Are the people voting from overseas voting in the last constituency they voted in when they lived in Canada?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Correct. One issue is that we do not necessarily have evidence of where that was, so they have to attest to their previous address in Canada. Once they have attested to that, they can no longer



switch. There is no shopping around. They are locked into that. If they move when they come back to reside in Canada, they have to provide documents for proof of the new address, but otherwise they are locked into the previous place of residence.

Q168 **Lord Campbell-Savours:** Stéphane, you have given us a very comprehensive response to all our questions, but there is one little area that you might want to say a few words on. No systems are without their problems. What improvements are you working on in Canada?

**Stéphane Perrault:** You are quite right that no systems are without their problems. We are generally satisfied with our system, but we have to work on a number of things. Right now we are doing an evaluation of the last election to help us to guide our efforts. We knew immediately that one of the major challenges we faced in the last election was the workers. To recruit, hire and train 250,000 workers is extensive work and quite a challenge. Returning officers were unable to recruit and hire all the people they wished to recruit, and we had a number of people who were hired and trained and did not show up on polling day; we had over 10,000 of those, which caused some delays in opening polls on polling day.

That is a major challenge, and we need to work on ways to reduce the footprint of the workforce federally in Canada so that we rely on fewer of poll workers in future. This is a longer-term exercise, which ultimately will involve the use of some technology at the polls through the use of electronic lists so that we can automatically strike out voters and they can vote at the first available table and, with that, reduce the number of poll workers. But that is a long-term exercise. Before we roll it out for a national election in a country as large as Canada, we will have tested and piloted this in by-elections. It will take a bit of time to follow through, but it is an important area.

A second area of importance is youth registration. We still have a significantly lower registration rate for youth. For us, that means that 20% to 25% of young Canadians do not receive a voter information card, which is the basic tool we have for informing the public on ways to vote, where to vote and how to vote in elections. Improving voter registration for ages 18 to 24 is a priority. As I said earlier, we now have the tools to register future electors, and we need to work in provinces, especially in schools, to facilitate pre-registration of voters so that when they turn 18 they will automatically be registered.

There is a third area, which is certainly not unique to Canada, and it relates to trust. We see a decline in trust in institutions around the world, not just in Canada. We are concerned about loss of trust in the electoral process. We have made a number of efforts in that area; we do quite extensive social media monitoring during the writ period. We correct misinformation about the voting process, if it is misinformation that could impede participation, about days for voting, for example, or places for voting. Otherwise, we do not intervene on social media. What we probably need to do more as we move forward is proactively to

communicate the safeguards we have and explain to Canadians all the measures that exist to detect, deter and prevent fraud in the electoral process so that Canadians are better informed than they have ever been about elections.

**The Chair:** You have been very helpful indeed. It has been very good. Thank you very much for being able to be with us. Good afternoon from us and good morning to you.

**Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you. I know that there is at least one follow-up. If there are additional follow-ups, I shall be happy to respond with any additional information that you require.