

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Internet Voting Study Report

Key Findings and Recommendations

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- The shift to explore new modes of election delivery and voting options with the COVID-19 pandemic has thrust a spotlight on online voting.
- Ontario is the hub of online voting use in Canada and presents a great opportunity to learn about voter experiences with, and perceptions of, online voting.
- This report analyzes online voter exit survey data obtained from 31 municipalities in the 2018 Ontario municipal elections.

Online Voter Experiences

- Convenience is the primary reason given for casting an online ballot (69%), whether or not a respondent was offered other voting methods.
- Accessibility plays a larger role in attracting the youngest (aged 18 to 24 years) and oldest (aged 65+) online voters.
 - 96% of respondents report being satisfied with the online voting process. Middle-aged voters (those aged 45-64) report the highest satisfaction.
 - Rural voters, as well as those who report weak digital literacy, and voters in municipalities that required voter registration, are less likely to be satisfied.
- A majority of respondents commented that the online voting experience was “easy”, “simple”, “straightforward”, “convenient” and “secure”.
- While online voting is not a cure for apathy or administrative issues, it can help address some ‘everyday life issues’ respondents previously cited as a reason for not voting.

Recommendation and Future Use

- 95% of respondents say that they would recommend online voting to others.
- A majority of online voters indicate that they would be likely to vote online in future elections:
 - 96% in future municipal elections.
 - 93% in future provincial elections.
 - 91% in future federal elections.

Concerns About Voting Online

- The largest group of respondents (45%) say that they have NO concerns with online voting.
- About 40% of respondents cite concerns relating to the security of the online voting system or fraud.

Sources of Voter Information

- The Voter Information Letter or Package is the top source of voter information.
 - It has increased by almost 10% as the top information source since 2014.
- Newspaper, radio, and TV were more popular information sources for those aged 45+.
- Young people (aged 18 to 24) are much more likely than any other age cohort to have received voter information from ‘someone else’ such as via word of mouth from a friend or family member.

Demographic Considerations

- The average online voter is typically older (over 50 years of age), possesses some post-secondary education, is married, and average house hold has an income of around \$100,000.
- Young people are not the primary users of online voting.
 - This has less to do with the appeal of online services for youth — some of them clearly use it, want to see it, and say that it makes their participation easier — but is more a consequence of the non-voting behaviour of the age group.

Digital Literacy

- A majority of respondents have high-speed Internet access at home and this percentage has increased since 2014.
- Most respondents report having Internet access at home, using it frequently, and having “good” or “very good” confidence in their ability to use it.
- There remains a small digital divide in terms of access and literacy. This disproportionately affects those with lower incomes and seniors.

Recommendations

- A multi-pronged approach to communications is needed to reach voters of all ages, through both traditional and newer channels.
- Outreach and education about the online voting approach used is important to address voter concerns. This practice, along with continually updating and improving processes that vet online voting systems, can help to promote electoral integrity.
- The digital divide remains an issue and having programs and strategies in place to increase digital literacy and access among older voters, rural and remote voters, and voters with lower incomes is important to promote equal access to the digital ballot box.
- When possible, online voting should be used in conjunction with other voting methods to provide greater accessibility to voters.
- Ensuring that service providers have appropriate back-up services for third party providers can minimize the effects of potential outages.

