



Appearance of the Chief Electoral Officer before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on the Main Estimates 2022-23

Fact Sheets	Lead
Cost of general elections, 37th (2000) to 44th (2021) (including GE45 readiness)	CFO
Financial trends (2015-16 to 2022-23)	CFO
Statistics on staff at Elections Canada Headquarters	CHRO
Status of political financing files from the 44th general election	RA-PF
Future of work	CFO-Procurement, Facilities, and Workplace Innovation
Production of additional election information products in Indigenous languages	PACE/EEI
Elections Canada's Nunavut Inuktitut "facsimile" experience	PACE/CFO
Complaints received by EC on Nunavut's election material	OCOS
Supporting documentation	Lead
Publication of Main Estimates 2022-23	CFO
Official transcripts of appearances on PROC's study on the inclusion of Indigenous languages on federal election ballots	RA-IRPPA
Summaries of appearances on PROC's study on the inclusion of Indigenous languages on federal election ballots	RA-IRPPA
Letters to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the CEO's February 17, 2022 appearance Following the CEO's March 29, 2022 appearance 	RA-IRPPA
Information from post-election surveys <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preliminary POR Results on Trust in GE44 Preliminary Survey results from the GE44 National Electors Study Executive summary from the GE44 Survey of Candidates EC surveys and planned publication dates 	PACE

** Binder prepared for the appearance of the Chief Electoral Officer before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on May 5, 2022 on the subject of the Main Estimates 2022-2023.*



Appearance of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Main Estimates 2022-2023

COSTS OF GENERAL ELECTIONS, 37th TO 44th

	Minority Governments						Estimated	Estimated
	37th G.E. (2000)	38th G.E. (2004)	39th G.E. (2006)	40th G.E. (2008)	41th G.E. (2011)	42nd G.E. (2015)	43rd G.E. (2019)	44th G.E. (2021)
Number of Electoral Districts	301	308	308	308	308	338	338	338
Number of Electors on Final List	21,243,473	22,466,621	23,054,615	23,677,639	24,257,592	25,939,742	27,373,058	27,509,158
Number of Voters	12,997,185	13,683,570	14,908,703	13,929,093	14,823,408	17,711,983	18,350,359	17,209,811
EC Headquarters and Field Offices (\$ M)	\$175.8	\$223.1	\$227.2	\$230.3	\$229.3	\$367.6	\$436.2	\$563.3
Reimbursements to Parties and Candidates (\$ M)	\$24.8	\$56.2	\$53.0	\$56.3	\$60.4	\$104.1	\$64.6	\$66.7
Total Cost of Election (\$ M)	<u>\$200.6</u>	<u>\$279.3</u>	<u>\$280.2</u>	<u>\$286.6</u>	<u>\$289.7</u>	<u>\$471.7</u>	<u>\$500.8</u>	<u>\$630.0</u>
Cost per Elector (\$)	<u>\$9.44</u>	<u>\$12.43</u>	<u>\$12.15</u>	<u>\$12.10</u>	<u>\$11.94</u>	<u>\$18.18</u>	<u>\$18.30</u>	<u>\$22.90</u>
<i>Costs in Constant 2021 Dollars:</i>								
Total Cost of Election (\$ M)	<u>\$295.8</u>	<u>\$372.2</u>	<u>\$358.8</u>	<u>\$352.2</u>	<u>\$340.7</u>	<u>\$516.2</u>	<u>\$514.3</u>	<u>\$630.0</u>
Cost per Elector (\$)	<u>\$13.93</u>	<u>\$16.57</u>	<u>\$15.56</u>	<u>\$14.87</u>	<u>\$14.05</u>	<u>\$19.89</u>	<u>\$18.79</u>	<u>\$22.90</u>

Cost Comparison Note: Although the bottom line numbers have been adjusted to account for inflation (see [Costs in Constant 2021 Dollars](#)), there are other factors that influence the costs of general elections. Key factors are the number of electoral districts and polling stations, legislative changes, service improvements to electors, the length of the electoral calendar, increase to fees and allowances paid to thousands of election workers, and the number of candidates and political parties eligible for reimbursement of election expenses.

Explanation of Cost Increase between GE3 and GE4

Estimated Cost of GE3	\$500.8
Field Offices and Personnel, incl. Increased Rates of Pay for Field Workers	\$44.7
Pandemic Measures	\$42.0
Inflation	\$13.9
IT Infrastructure	\$12.8
Readiness cost due to timing of election	\$11.4
Elections Canada HQ	\$11.2
Length of election period	(\$6.8)
Estimated Cost of GE4	\$630.0

Appearance of the Chief Electoral Officer on the 2022-23 Main Estimates

Elections Canada Financial Trend 2015-16 to 2022-23

(\$ Millions)

	Year-end Actuals as per Public Accounts						44th GE ⁴		
	2015-16 (42nd GE)	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20 (43rd GE)	2020-21	2021-22 Main Estimates	2021-22 Current Forecast	2022-23 Main Estimates
Appropriation ¹	29.4	28.3	31.9	32.2	41.5	51.5	48.9	51.5	49.3
Statutory - Operating	49.9	59.0	81.3	96.1	81.4	69.5	77.1	66.5	78.7
Total Operating (Appropriation & Statutory)	79.2	87.2	113.3	128.4	122.9	121.0	126.0	118.0	128.0
Statutory - Event / Non Discretionary ^{2,3}	407.2	15.2	18.2	55.4	448.0	87.8	46.9	537.3	75.5
Grand Total (Appropriation and Statutory)	486.4	102.4	131.5	183.7	570.9	208.8	172.9	655.3	203.5

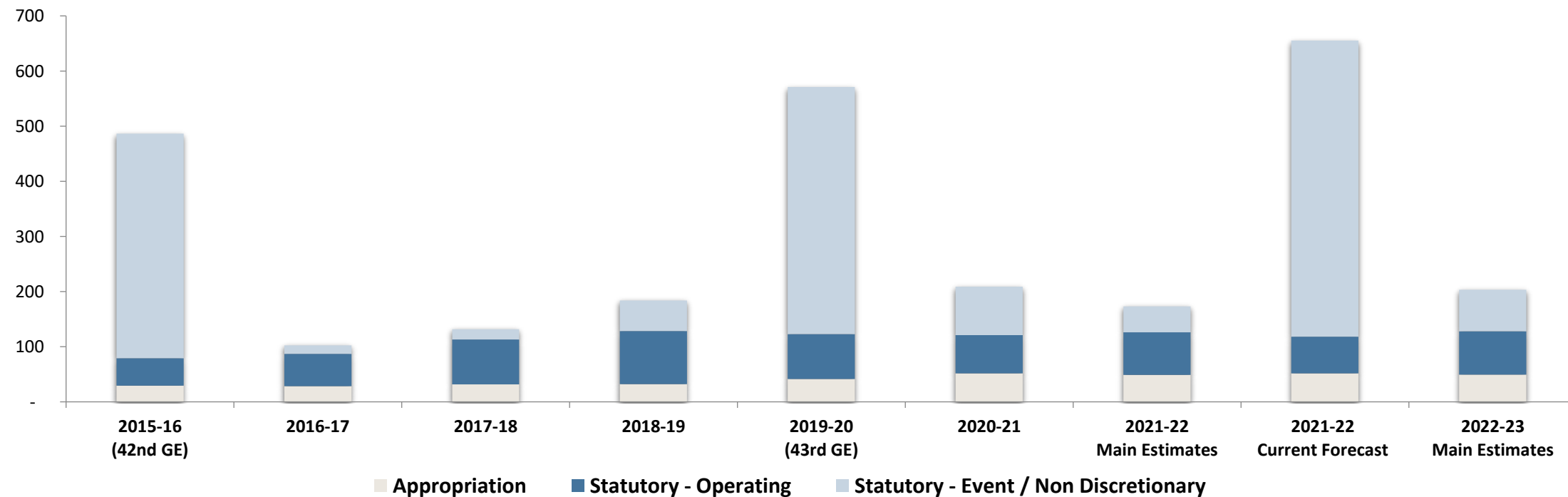
¹ 2021-22 Main Estimates excludes expected funding to be received in-year such as the carry-forward, new collective agreements, reimbursements of Paylist items, etc.

² 2021-22 current forecast is higher than Main Estimates mostly due to the delivery of GE44, which was not planned at the time of Main Estimates since its timing was unknown (minority government).

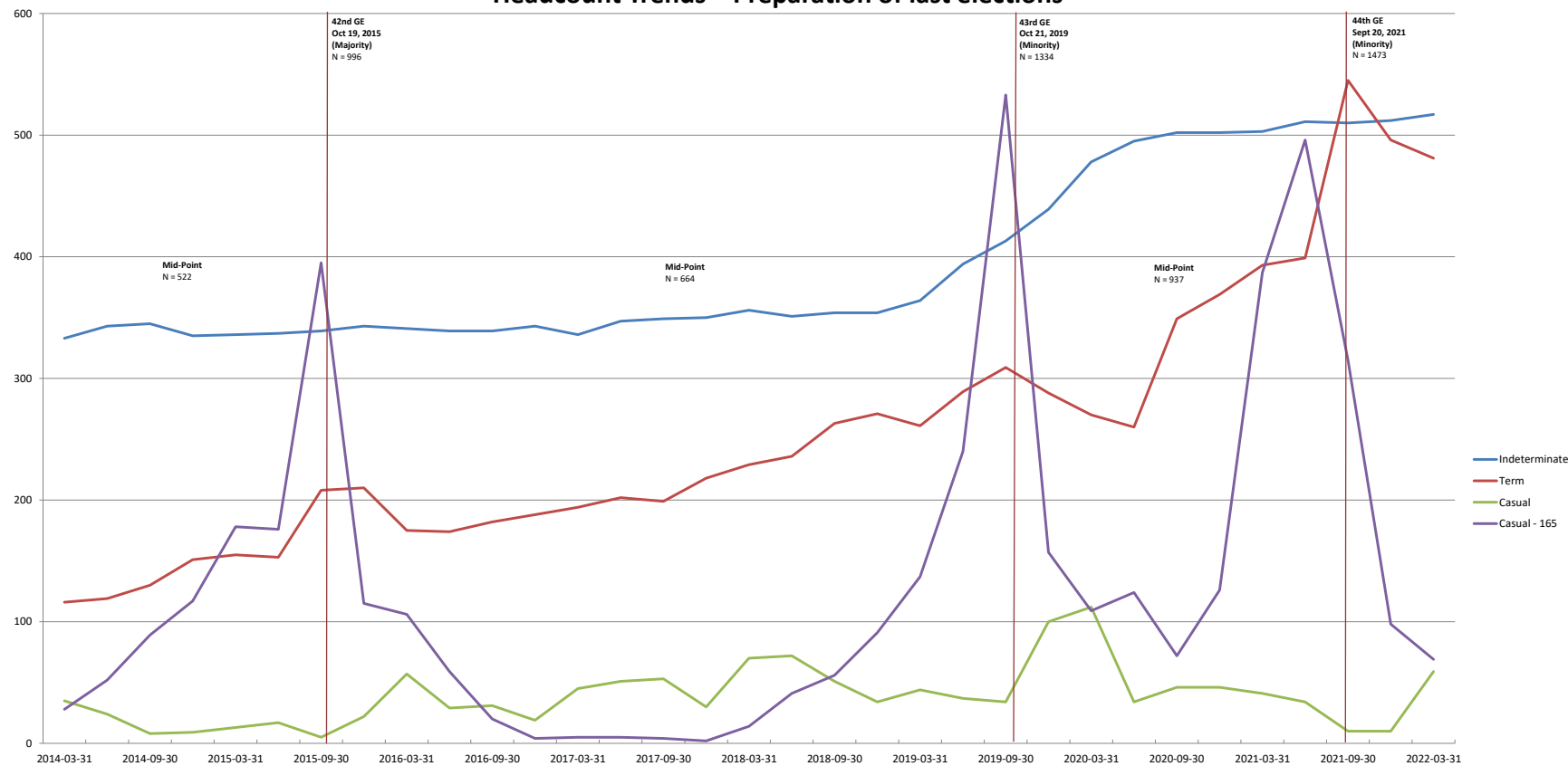
³ 2022-23 Main Estimates includes some Readiness costs for the next general election in the context of a minority government.

⁴ As published in Planned Spending section of the 2022-23 Departmental Plan.

Totals may not add up due to rounding.



Office of the Chief Electoral Officer Headcount Trends – Preparation of last elections



Indeterminate employees: Indeterminate employees are those appointed to the Public Service whose tenure in the position is of an indefinite duration

Term employees: Term employees are those appointed for a specified period in accordance with the *Public Service Employment Act*

Casual workers: Casual workers are hired for specified periods that may not exceed 90 working days in one calendar year

Casual 165: Casual workers hired in the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer for the purposes of undertaking duties related to an election or a referendum. In this case, the maximum of 165 working days in a calendar year is permitted by the *Public Service Employment Act*.

Fact sheet

Status of Political Financing Files from the 44th General Election

Key Messages

- The filing deadline for candidates' and third parties' electoral returns was January 20, 2022, 4 months after election day. The deadline for parties is May 20, 2022.
- All eligible candidate campaigns received a first installment of reimbursements at the end of October 2021.
- We will issue accelerated reimbursements to eligible campaigns by the end of September 2022.
- The target is to complete the review of selected candidate returns within 12 months of the filing deadline (by January 20, 2023).

Facts

- There were 2,011 candidates, 22 parties and 105 regulated third parties* participating in the 44th General Election (GE).
- There were 976 candidate campaigns (or 49%) who were granted extensions to file by the CEO (similar to previous GEs).
- To date, Elections Canada has received (complete or partially complete) and published the following*:
 - 95% of candidate returns; 1852 published online;
 - 83% of regulated third party returns; 87 returns published online;
 - 14% of party returns (due date is May 20, 2022); 3 published online;
- The audit of candidate returns has started. The target is to complete the review of selected returns by January 20, 2023.
- We are significantly outpacing our activities for GE43, which were strongly affected by COVID-19, in terms of the receipt and initial processing of returns, publication online and audit completion.
- Candidate campaigns that have failed to file all mandatory documents have been informed that, unless they seek a court extension:
 - They are in non-compliance with the *Canada Elections Act*;
 - They will not be able to be a candidate at a future election;
 - If eligible, they are forfeiting their reimbursement of election expenses.
- Starting at GE43, Elections Canada adopted a risk-based audit approach in the performance of its audit activities across all political entities.



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Estimates 2022-2023*

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- Candidate electoral returns are selected for audit on the basis of the level of risk of non-compliance with the *Canada Elections Act*.
- Data analytics is used to help focus audits in areas where the likelihood and severity of risks are the greatest while at the same time identifying possible anomalies.

**Statistics as of April 27, 2022*

Fact sheet

Future of Work

Key Message

- Elections Canada (EC) has established a Future of Work project to address the people, space and digital components required to formalize a hybrid work model.

Facts

- In the summer of 2020, at the outset of COVID-19, it was announced to staff that EC would embark on a Future of Work project that would encompass people, space and technology and look at where, when and how we work. A Future of Work champion and project team were identified.
- EC is introducing and formalizing a hybrid work model; this is a flexible model that supports employee work-life balance and wellness, helps reduce EC's environmental footprint and enables recruitment and retention of a diverse and talented workforce.
- Employees whose positions are deemed suitable for telework based on the operational requirements of their functions will be able to request full-time or part-time telework agreements.
- The approach follows central agency (Treasury Board) guidance and aligns with the core principles of consistency, flexibility, transparency, equity and service excellence.
- Employees are being provided the necessary training, tools (physical and digital) and guidance to perform their work effectively and safely in a hybrid work model.
- Preliminary cost estimates for the project are in the magnitude of \$850K over two years.
- Cost savings will be realized through the eventual reconfiguration and reduction of workspaces. It is also hoped that this will lead to increased retention of employees.
- EC is engaging and collaborating with other government departments to leverage and share work being done.
- EC is following an iterative and agile approach to implementing hybrid work and will continually monitor, evaluate and adjust the approach to ensure objectives continue to be met.

Fact sheet

Production of Additional Election Information Products in Indigenous Languages

Key Messages

- Elections Canada already develops some election information products, such as the undated *Guide to the Federal Election* and the *Voter Identification Tear-Off Sheet*, in 16 Indigenous languages (in digital format only).
- Additional election information products, including products at local offices and polling locations, could be adapted and translated into Indigenous languages to further reduce information barriers to voting.
- Election information products for local offices and polling locations are developed months in advance and are included in kits ready to be shipped to each electoral district (ED) once an election is called.

Facts

Election information products currently available in Indigenous languages

- The undated *Guide to the Federal Election* and the *Voter Identification Tear-Off Sheet* are offered in the following 16 Indigenous languages on the Elections Canada website and through our outreach partners:

Atikamekw	Innu (Montagnais)	Mohawk	Oji-Cree
Blackfoot	Inuktitut	Moose-Cree	Plains Cree
Dene	Michif	Nisga'a	Saulteaux
Gwich'in	Mikmaq	Ojibway	Stoney

Selection of Indigenous languages for additional election information products

- Based on Statistics Canada data on mother tongue and using the hypothetical threshold of 1 per cent of electors in an ED to offer products in an Indigenous language, election products would be developed in 17 languages spread out over 27 EDs. Based on the same data, these EDs would cover 72%-78% of Indigenous electors who have an Indigenous language as their mother tongue.
- If measured by the use of language spoken most often at home, again using Statistics Canada data, 12 languages spread out over 18 EDs would meet a hypothetical 1 per cent threshold. These EDs would cover 82%-86% of Indigenous electors who speak an Indigenous language most often at home.
- Elections Canada currently develops products in 11 of the 17/18 Indigenous languages mentioned above.

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Election information products for local offices and polling locations that could be adapted, translated, and printed in multiple Indigenous languages ahead of an election:

- Eligibility poster (Canadian citizens, 18 years and older...)
- Accepted ID poster
- Accessibility Feedback poster (+ form and box)
- Health and safety measures posters – if required
- Directional signage
- Voter Identification tear-off sheets (pads)
- Welcome to your polling place cards
- Tent cards indicating language spoken at each table

Timeline / Considerations

- Developing products in multiple Indigenous languages would require a longer production period and will generate minimal additional costs for translation and printing. It would make the assembly and distribution of the kits a bit more complex as they would need to be customized based on the Indigenous languages spoken in each ED.
- Consultations with stakeholders representing Indigenous communities will be required to determine which products would best meet their needs.
- Overall, it is estimated that approximately 6 to 8 months would be required to complete the production cycle.

Additional communication products could be developed in Indigenous languages (in digital or printed format) in the longer term. An analysis and consultations would be required to determine which products would best meet the needs of Indigenous electors.

Communication/Outreach Products:

- Explainer videos available on the general election (GE) website
- Infographics available on the GE website
- Customized handbook for Indigenous Community Leaders

Other public facing products for electors:

- On-line registration form
- Vote by mail kits, including instructions

Tools and manuals for election workers

- Depending on the policy, Elections Canada headquarters (ECHQ) may produce tools and manuals for election workers in Indigenous languages. This is out of scope for now.

Other Considerations

- In some cases, contracts with suppliers may need to be amended or awarded.
- Given the relatively low volume of documents to print, we expect minimal economies of scale, resulting in a higher cost per unit (when compared to EN/FR equivalent products).
- Guidelines and further analysis would be needed to determine which products can be developed in the short, medium and long term.



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- ECHQ would have to carefully plan the distribution of material with returning officers ahead of the next GE. This will be particularly important for instances where kits would be specific to particular polling divisions or polling site (as opposed to a blanket distribution across the ED).

Fact Sheet

Elections Canada's Nunavut Inuktitut "facsimile" Experience

Key Messages

- Elections Canada's introduction of a ballot facsimile in Inuktitut during the last general election (GE) was a positive experiment that the agency would like to expand in other districts, using both other languages and a more systematic approach.
- The costs related to the ballot facsimile were minimal. It's important to note, however, that Inuktitut translation is done through the Translation Bureau, where translators are readily available. Additionally, the ballot facsimile costs included minimal content to translate, and a small quantity to print.
- Initial estimates of the printing cost of facsimiles of lists of candidates in electoral districts (EDs) where 1% of the population has that Indigenous language as mother tongue, is about \$40,000 to \$60,000 per GE.

Facts

- For the first time during the 2021 GE, Elections Canada provided electors in Nunavut with posters of the final list of candidates in Inuktitut.
- Large posters (24x36) were hung at entrances and in polling locations, and small posters (8.5x11) were placed at voting tables for electors to refer to when marking their ballots.
- A significant effort was required to produce these posters on time, a process that ran in parallel with the ballot production process, and which took place in the National Capital Region.
- This activity was conducted within a very small window on the electoral calendar (Day 21-Day 19) in order to be delivered on time to Nunavut to be included in the poll workers' kits and sent on to the various polling locations in the electoral district.

Costs

- Production costs for the Nunavut facsimile for GE44 include:
 - Translation: \$195 + taxes
 - Printing: \$365 + taxes (for 60 large posters and 100 small posters)
 - Design: no cost - done internally
 - Distribution: no cost as it was sent along with the ballots
 - **Total production cost was approximately \$560 (+ taxes)**

Projected costs for large-scale deployment

- Initial estimate of the printing cost of facsimiles of lists of candidates (as they appear on federal ballots) in Indigenous languages, in EDs where 1% of the population has that Indigenous language as mother tongue, is about \$40,000 to \$60,000 per GE.

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- A rough estimate of translation costs, totaling approximately \$15,000, is included in the Annex. Translation costs are based on an average rate based on Indigenous languages that Elections Canada currently translates.
- There are 27 EDs where an Indigenous language is the mother tongue of at least 1% of the population¹.
 - In 20 of these EDs, only 1 Indigenous language meets the 1% threshold.
 - One ED (Northwest Territories) has the highest number at 5 Indigenous languages.
- In EDs with more than one Indigenous language meeting the threshold, there are two possible approaches to printing the facsimiles:
 - All languages could be provided on the same facsimile, or
 - Different facsimiles could be provided for each language.
- Based on the 1% threshold, above, the *Directive* rates² and further assumptions below, the estimated total printing cost of facsimiles for these 27 EDs would be:
 - Same facsimile includes all languages: **\$41,626.89**, or
 - Different facsimile for each language: **\$59,057.16**.

Note: This does not include other costs such as production and creating the facsimile images, shipping, translators, etc.

Lessons Learned

- This activity was successfully completed, and because it was done as a separate product, it did not jeopardize the ballot production timeline.
- The availability, on short notice, of translation services and independent quality assurance in Inuktitut also contributed to a successful outcome.
- The ballot production process for Nunavut being handled from the National Capital Region facilitated the process. Other unique shipping and logistical arrangement may have resulted in more challenging circumstances.
- It appears that Elections Canada has not directly received feedback from electors, either positive or negative, about this approach. Only a few complaints were received in Nunavut on the absence of Inuktitut on the ballot.

¹ Information provided by Data Analysis and Performance Measurement team

² The rates within section 5 of the Elections Canada *Directive on Certain Field Acquired Goods and Services in Conduct of Electoral Events* EC 11780 (*Directive*) were used to calculate the estimates of printing the facsimiles.

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Annex: Estimated translation costs

Indigenous Languages used at 44 th GE	Indigenous Languages for Ballots at 45 th GE	Estimate Translation Cost for Indigenous Language for Ballots
Atikamekw	Atikamekw	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
Blackfoot	Blackfoot	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
Denesuline	Denesuline	2 EDs x \$400 = \$800
Gwich'in	N/A	N/A
Inuktitut	Inuktitut	3 EDs x \$400 = \$1,200
Innu (Montagnais)	Innu (Montagnais)	2 EDs x \$400 = \$800
Michif	N/A	N/A
Mi'kmaq	Mi'kmaq	3 EDs x \$400 = \$1,200
Mohawk	N/A	N/A
Moose Cree	Moose Cree**	10 EDs x \$400 = \$4,000
Nisga'a	N/A	N/A
Ojibway	Ojibway	5 EDs x \$400 = \$2,000
Oji-Cree	Oji-Cree	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
Plains Cree	Plains Cree	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
Saulteaux	N/A	N/A
Stoney	Stoney	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
	Naskapi*	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
	Dogrib (Tlicho)*	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
	Inuinnaqtun (Inuvialuktun)*	2 EDs x \$400 = \$800
	Gitxsan (Gitsan)*	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
	North Slavey (Hare)*	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
	South Slavey*	1 ED x \$400 = \$400
		Total = \$14,800

*New Indigenous Languages cost are unknown.

EE&I list lists “Cree**” likely because we don’t know which type of Cree to use. We indicated “**Moose Cree**” since it is one of the Languages EC translates into and because the list already includes “**Plain Cree and Oji-Cree**”.

EC will likely continue to translate products in the five Indigenous languages currently included in our list even if they aren’t part of the 1% threshold. We will need to analyse which products will be developed in those languages and where those products should be distributed.

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Complaints received by EC on Nunavut's election material

Key Messages

- EC offers a range of services and information in Inuktitut to electors in Nunavut before and on election day, as well as at polling stations. In that regard, six (6) complaints/questions were received for the 44th general election. The Languages Commissioner of Nunavut also forwarded to EC some concerns that its office received, including with regard to the availability of information on health measures in Inuktitut.
- EC is working to improve its Inuit-language service offerings in Nunavut.

Facts

Service offerings in Inuktitut in 2021

- In Nunavut, Elections Canada implemented an awareness program that emphasized partnerships with organizations that serve Inuit and Inuit-language speakers, as they are in the best position to communicate with those electors in a way that respects Inuit culture.
- Each registered elector in Nunavut received two voter information cards indicating where and when to vote, as well as information on the accessibility of their polling station: one in English and French, and one in English and Inuktitut.
- Elections Canada also prioritized hiring poll workers who speak at least one Inuit language. In 2021, nearly all poll workers at polling stations outside Iqaluit spoke at least one Inuit language. In Iqaluit, the polling station had at least one person on site who spoke an Inuit language. Recruitment messages were translated into Inuktitut for Nunavut, and some training documents for election workers were translated into Inuktitut. In 2021, central poll supervisors in 23 communities were Inuit.
- Election workers who spoke an Inuit language were encouraged to broadcast registration and voting information on their community's local radio station.
- A "facsimile" type ballot in Inuktitut was made available to electors. Large posters (24x36) were placed at the entrance to polling places, and smaller ones were available on the voting tables so electors could refer to them before marking their ballot.
- Elections Canada also provided products, such as the Guide to the Federal Election and the list of accepted ID, in Inuktitut. These products were available on the website and through our partners. The voter information campaign also included radio, television and print advertisements in Inuktitut.

Complaints and questions received

- In total, six complaints/questions were sent to Elections Canada. Two of them involved the posting of health guidelines only in English on election day and came from members of the local media. The others were sent by community members who pointed out that the names of candidates and their political parties were not available in Inuktitut on the ballots.
- The Languages Commissioner of Nunavut also sent two letters to the CEO (August and December 2021) in which she raises concerns about the availability of Inuit-language election and health information. Among other things, the letters mention the lack of

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Inuit-language signs in advance polling stations, as well as the unavailability of special ballots in Inuktitut.

Health poster not translated into Inuktitut

- Another concern raised by the Commissioner that drew local media attention was the lack of a health poster (masking requirement) in Inuktitut on election day.
- The returning officer was informed that territorial health authorities had announced mandatory masking throughout Nunavut for the first time since the pandemic began, the night before election day.
- On the morning of the election, Nunavut's Chief Public Health Officer confirmed that the measure applied to the elections.
- Anticipating having to ask electors to wear a mask in Iqaluit's busy central polling place (11 polling stations) and wanting to ensure that the election was conducted safely, Iqaluit's central poll supervisor created and printed a poster on mandatory masking in French and in English.
- This poster on the masking requirement was used only in Iqaluit's central polling place because of the anticipated heavy traffic and was an isolated incident.
- Elections Canada strives to improve its Inuit-language service offerings from one election to the next. The exceptional circumstances of the 2021 elections highlighted the importance of making our processes more agile with a view to continuing our efforts toward reconciliation and developing cultural reflexes, even in times of crisis.

	2020–21 Expenditures	2021–22		2022–23 Main Estimates
		Main Estimates	Estimates To Date	
		(dollars)		
Military Police Complaints Commission	4,946,675	4,852,883	4,852,883	4,884,675
National Arts Centre Corporation	59,238,129	37,854,709	59,920,409	44,294,459
National Capital Commission	153,713,387	155,981,730	187,981,730	154,216,469
National Film Board	71,749,922	65,581,512	70,644,492	65,648,446
National Gallery of Canada	54,490,639	45,756,671	51,956,671	45,756,671
National Museum of Science and Technology	38,544,965	28,514,196	43,117,196	31,514,196
National Research Council of Canada	1,648,655,313	1,332,387,047	1,616,242,939	1,437,388,224
National Security and Intelligence Review Agency Secretariat	12,251,375	30,194,919	31,394,919	28,250,676
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council	1,488,475,254	1,380,311,368	1,416,949,031	1,356,077,377
Northern Pipeline Agency	236,169	571,820	571,820	572,250
Office of Infrastructure of Canada	5,492,387,892	6,840,813,406	10,440,871,614	9,349,873,712
Office of the Auditor General	100,128,705	117,356,715	118,856,715	119,881,702
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer	208,830,161	172,866,204	172,866,204	203,509,925

Schedule 1 A-26 (Appropriation Only)

Items for inclusion in the Proposed Schedule 1 to the Appropriation Bill
(for the financial year ending March 31, 2023)

Unless specifically identified under the **Changes in 2022–23 Main Estimates** section, all vote wordings have been provided in earlier appropriation acts.

	OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER	
1	– Program expenditures	49,335,030

Office of the Chief Electoral Officer

Raison d'être

The Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, commonly known as Elections Canada, is an independent, non-partisan agency that reports directly to Parliament. Its mandate is to be prepared to conduct a federal general election, by-election or referendum; to administer the political financing provisions of the *Canada Elections Act*; to monitor compliance with electoral legislation; to conduct public information campaigns on voter registration, voting and becoming a candidate; to conduct education programs for students on the electoral process; to provide support to the independent commissions in charge of adjusting the boundaries of federal electoral districts following each decennial census; to carry out studies on alternative voting methods and, with the approval of parliamentarians, test alternative voting processes for future use during electoral events; to provide assistance and co-operation in electoral matters to electoral agencies in other countries or to international organizations.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Infrastructure and Communities is the designated person for the purpose of tabling the Chief Electoral Officer's administrative reports in Parliament, including the Departmental Plan and Departmental Results Report.

Organizational Estimates

	2020–21 Expenditures	2021–22 Main Estimates	Estimates To Date	2022–23 Main Estimates
			(dollars)	
Budgetary				
Voted				
1 Program expenditures	51,533,545	48,941,118	48,941,118	49,335,030
Total Voted	51,533,545	48,941,118	48,941,118	49,335,030
Total Statutory	157,296,616	123,925,086	123,925,086	154,174,895
Total Budgetary	208,830,161	172,866,204	172,866,204	203,509,925

2022–23 Main Estimates by Purpose

Budgetary	Operating	Capital	Transfer Payments	Revenues and other reductions	Total
			(dollars)		
Electoral Administration	112,959,453	.....	.....	.....	112,959,453
Regulatory Oversight	27,987,678	.....	1,620,000	.....	29,607,678
Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Administration	7,011,500	.....	.....	.....	7,011,500
Internal Services	53,931,294	.....	.....	.....	53,931,294
Total	201,889,925	.....	1,620,000	.....	203,509,925

Listing of Statutory Authorities

	2020–21 Expenditures	2021–22 Estimates To Date	2022–23 Main Estimates
		(dollars)	
Budgetary			
Electoral expenditures (<i>Canada Elections Act</i> and the <i>Referendum Act</i>)	144,113,278	109,150,110	133,675,262
Contributions to employee benefit plans	12,541,187	11,921,176	13,592,033
Expenditures under the <i>Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act</i>	303,195	2,515,000	6,546,500
Salary of the Chief Electoral Officer (<i>Canada Elections Act</i>)	338,956	338,800	361,100



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

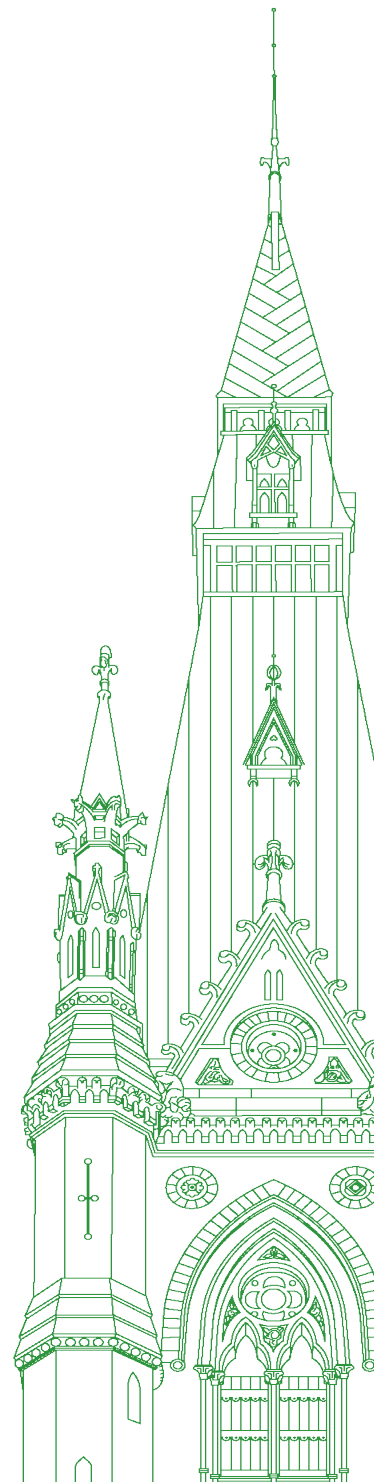
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 013

Tuesday, March 29, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 13 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to start its study on the inclusion of indigenous languages on federal election ballots.

[English]

Before getting into our business, I want to have the approval of the budget for the indigenous languages study. Are we all okay with approving that?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's excellent.

Mr. Clerk, please continue providing us with lunch. If the chilly weather maintains, some have suggested that soup would be welcome, but we know it's not easy choosing a menu for this many people.

Ms. Idlout, MP for Nunavut, is joining our committee today, as well as Madam Gill and Mr. Schmale. Welcome to our committee.

I will remind all committee members, new and returning, that I would appreciate all comments being made through the chair. When they are not made through the chair, I tend to have to interrupt. I would prefer not to do that, because our meeting is a very important one, so please be mindful that all comments for everyone go through the chair.

Today we have Mr. Stéphane Perrault, the Chief Electoral Officer, and his officials.

Mr. Perrault has asked for some additional time to properly acquaint us with this issue. I think that is absolutely suitable.

Mr. Perrault, what I will do to minimize my comments is to ask you to introduce whoever is accompanying you today.

I will turn the floor over to you. Welcome to PROC committee.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

This morning I have with me Anne Lawson, deputy chief electoral officer, regulatory affairs; Monsieur Michel Roussel, deputy

chief electoral officer, electoral events and innovation; and Madame Karine Morin, who is my chief of staff and responsible for languages issues in the agency.

Let me start by saying that improving services in indigenous languages is, in my view, an important aspect of offering a more inclusive electoral process and reducing barriers for indigenous electors. More fundamentally, I believe that it is part of reconciliation. Although we currently offer information products in several indigenous languages, we are working to improve our processes and service offering. This includes the consideration of indigenous languages on the ballot and on a range of information products that can be made available at the polls.

Before considering changes to the federal ballot, it is important to understand the existing legal and operational ballot production regime. The design and content of the ballot is set out in some detail in the Elections Act, including a schedule that contains a visual image.

These requirements relate not only to language, such as the use of the Latin alphabet and the alphabetical ordering of candidate names, but also physical characteristics, such as a counterfoil and a stub, with lines of perforations separating them. These special characteristics mean that current ballots can be printed only by a relatively limited number of suppliers, and are printed and distributed within a very tight time frame.

While the name of the candidate may be in any language using a Latin alphabet, candidates must provide proof of identification when they are nominated, and this name is then used on the ballot.

For political parties, the party name appears on the ballot in the language the party chooses. There is no requirement for a party to have a bilingual name. Currently, there are three parties that have a name only in French, and one uses an English-only name. These names are not translated on the ballot.

Under the Act, the ballots must be printed in the very narrow window that exists between the close of candidate nominations, 21 days before polling day, and the very first day of advance polls, which is 10 days before election day. In large and remote ridings, getting the ballots printed and distributed across the riding in time for advance polls is already a significant challenge.

That said, we see four different options for the use of indigenous languages for federal ballots. Each option raises specific policy, operational and electoral integrity concerns that need to be considered by this committee. All but one of them require legislative changes. For ease of reference, I have supplied a placemat that reviews the four options and the main associated questions that they raise, mostly for Parliament.

[Translation]

One option would be to offer a multilingual ballot that includes one or more indigenous languages in designated constituencies. This first raises an important question about what threshold of an indigenous population in a constituency would be required before including an indigenous language and whether a cap on the number of languages on a ballot is necessary.

Some have suggested ballots should be made available to indigenous voters in their own language in constituencies where they represent 1% of the population. A bill to that effect was tabled. In practice, if measured by the mother tongue of indigenous Canadians, a 1% threshold would mean administering ballots in 17 indigenous languages in 27 constituencies, with up to five indigenous languages in some constituencies.

The use of printed ballots with more than two languages raises important questions regarding accessibility and design. Putting the names of parties and candidates in multiple languages on a ballot risks making a crowded, busy text that may be difficult for some voters to comprehend, especially voters with low literacy levels or an intellectual disability, as well as voters with a visual impairment. It would be critical to test the ballot design with user communities prior to the legislative enactment of this model.

Madam Chair, I've passed around a copy of a PDF document. This ballot was used in the constituency of Saint-Boniface—Saint-Vital in the last federal election.

• (1110)

Of course, this is an extreme example. Some ballots have only three candidates' names on them. That said, when we think about ballots, we must consider this type of complexity if we need to add languages.

A ballot in a language other than English and French requires the transliteration of candidate names and the translation of party names. Elections Canada isn't an expert on indigenous languages. We currently provide information products in 16 indigenous languages. We know that, for some of these languages, there are very few experts and that translation timelines are sometimes substantial. This significantly affects production timelines and the whole electoral calendar, which would need to be extended. Multilingual jurisdictions typically use other processes or solutions to provide ballots in the elector's preferred language. These processes include the use of electronic voting machines that allow electors to choose the language of their ballot. For example, this happens in the United States. Sometimes, logos or symbols can also be used instead of names to represent parties on ballots.

Another option would be to amend the act to allow for a separate indigenous language ballot. This option reduces ballot complexity for electors. However, it poses additional challenges with regard to

production and distribution timelines. In addition, assuming that the two ballot options would be available throughout a given constituency, the secrecy of the vote could be compromised in places where members of one linguistic community are few in number. Having a distinct ballot used by only certain voters within a polling division could identify the voting choices of these voters. As a result, I don't recommend separate ballots.

[English]

A third option, which is a variation on the multilingual ballot, would be to pursue an approach similar to that used in territorial elections in Nunavut, where candidates who wish to do so can provide their names to appear on the ballot in the Inuit language. An amendment to the act could permit candidates to provide an indigenous language name for use on the ballot, alongside their name in English and French. Federal parties could also be entitled to provide indigenous versions of their names to be used on ballots in certain ridings if they wish. This would be consistent with the current approach, where parties can but are not required to have their names both in English and in French.

Although this option would remove the need for independent translation or transliteration of ballots, it raises other questions or considerations for Parliament. Candidates must currently provide documentary evidence of their name. Would this requirement be kept for indigenous names as well as for French and English names—two documents? If not—and I'm assuming not—would Elections Canada have to validate the transliteration? In addition, who would determine—the candidate or the party—which version of a party name is used in which riding? Finally, it is important to note that under this model indigenous electors would not necessarily be offered a ballot with all candidate and party names on the ballot.

The final option, which I recommend and which is used in some jurisdictions, does not require legislative change. Elections Canada would provide and can provide a facsimile of the ballot in an indigenous language for voters to use behind a voting screen. During the 2021 election, the last election, Elections Canada experimented for the first time with the use of a ballot facsimile, with the preparation of posters reproducing the ballot in Inuktitut displayed near the voting booth in all the polling stations in Nunavut. I've brought—and we've shared—copies of both the poster and the facsimile that was laid on the table for electors to see and to make the comparison. Despite some production challenges, we were able to produce the facsimile just in time for use at advance polls.

In consultation with indigenous communities, I would like to expand testing of this approach in other districts, using other languages, although I also plan to expand the deployment of information products in indigenous languages at the polls to reduce barriers and to ensure that the voting experience of indigenous Canadians is more reflective of their identity. This will allow us to become more familiar and agile at using indigenous languages in the voting process outside of Nunavut, which to date is the only Canadian jurisdiction with experience in this area. We will be able to work with candidates and parties to test facsimiles, including transliteration of candidate names and, where appropriate, translation of party names. We can also test out the timelines for the printing and production process.

In conclusion, Madam Chair, I understand the significance of this issue for indigenous Canadians and I am committed to increasing the use of indigenous languages in the electoral process, but I also urge this committee to consider carefully the complexities around the use of multilingual ballots. I do not recommend legislative changes at this stage, but to instead pursue and expand the use of facsimile ballots in other indigenous languages. This experience will help Elections Canada and this committee to take further and better-informed steps in this important area.

• (1115)

Thank you, Madam Chair, for inviting me. Of course, I'd welcome questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

Those were great introductory remarks. Even with two interruptions, you stayed under 10 minutes. I appreciate that and the thoroughness of your comments.

We will now start our six-minute round, beginning with Mr. Vis, who will be followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[Translation]

Afterwards, it will be Ms. Gill's turn.

Ms. Gill, will you or Mr. Therrien be speaking?

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Will I be the first to speak?

The Chair: No, you'll have the floor after Mr. Turnbull. Is that okay?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes.

The Chair: Afterwards, it will be Ms. Idlout's turn.

[English]

Mr. Vis, the first six minutes go to you.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you to all the witnesses from Elections Canada today. This is a very fascinating subject.

My first question relates to special ballots or early voting.

In the last election, given the facsimile option, did Elections Canada accept special ballots, which I believe were written in Inuktitut?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I did not raise it in my remarks, but it's an important issue.

That's something Parliament would have to consider. Under the current legislation, we do not accept languages other than those using the Latin alphabet, so the candidate name has to be written on the special ballot as it is officially in the candidate nomination in order for it to be accepted.

If we were to have special ballots in indigenous languages, it does raise a question when we're compiling the results in Ottawa for the mail-in ballots that go to Ottawa in a national vote. Then we would be dealing with quite a diversity of languages and alphabets, so whether that would include the special ballot is an important consideration. In the last election, it did not. In Nunavut, we had only the facsimile for the regular ballot, both at advance polls and at regular polls.

The Chair: Just because this is a friendly conversation, that felt really good, but when the conversation is not so friendly it's always nicer to go through the chair. We'll do that when we're having a friendly conversation and not a friendly conversation.

Mr. Brad Vis: My apologies, Madam Chair. I took the red-eye last night, so right now I'm not as sharp as I usually am.

Through you, Mr. Perrault mentioned in his introductory remarks concerns about printing special ballots in indigenous languages. Given that it's already the case in Nunavut that ballots are printed in indigenous languages, how much of an impediment would it be for Elections Canada to have ballots printed in indigenous languages in that territory specifically?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There are very different situations across the country in different indigenous languages. In the case of Nunavut, translation is available within 24 to 48 hours, and we probably could have the ballot printed in Inuktitut. However, this would require an amendment to the legislation, and the policy considerations that I raised would be there.

Would all names be translated? Who would validate the translation? In the territorial collection, in Nunavut, the candidates themselves put forward their name. The name is not translated; it is taken as is from the candidate.

There are a range of policy issues there. There's the ordering of names on the ballot.

This is feasible, but it requires legislation to set the rules around the ballot format.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Chair, through you to Elections Canada, I understand that after every election, and sometimes in between elections, Canada goes to the voters of our country and asks them about barriers to participation. In any of the surveys conducted by Elections Canada to date, has the language of the ballots been flagged as a barrier to participation by indigenous Canadians?

• (1120)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I can come back to that. Maybe my colleague has the answer.

I do not believe our surveys address the linguistic barriers for indigenous electors. I do not believe that is a category that we capture in our surveys, but I stand to be corrected by my colleagues. Unfortunately, we do not have that.

What we know is from what we learn on the ground in terms of serving electors in those communities and working through the AFN to engage first nation communities across the country during the election period.

We use different means to do that and we have a range of tools to support that, but I do not have data to share with this committee on this topic.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Chair, how much time is left?

The Chair: You have a minute and a half.

Mr. Brad Vis: I have one final, quick question.

Madam Chair, if we were to have indigenous languages on the ballot, what section of the Canada Elections Act would have to be amended?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, we can come back with information on that. There are a number of sections that would need to be amended. They're not hugely numerous, but we have that information and I could share it with the committee after this session.

Mr. Brad Vis: Madam Chair, finally, on special ballots, I think with foreign voters that would equally apply to further amendments to special ballots being mailed in from another country. Is that correct?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, is that for Canadians abroad?

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes, for Canadians abroad.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Any changes to the language used on the special ballot would require a legislative amendment. It would also involve, presumably, some translation. The ballot itself, of which I have a copy here, has French and English on the back. I don't know whether we would want to translate that into several languages. That would create challenges in terms of ensuring that the right ballot goes to the right person. We probably want to keep it as simple as possible because of the diversity of electors we're dealing with for mail-in ballots, and keep the ballot as light as possible.

That would require changes to the legislation.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I'm good.

The Chair: That's excellent.

For clarification, are you saying every language we would like to add to a ballot would have to be added into legislation?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The legislation right now presumes two things. First, it uses the Latin alphabet. Secondly, it uses the name as it appears on the candidate nomination supported by voter ID. That could well be in Greek, English, French or an indigenous language. There's no restriction. As long as the ID supports it, it's acceptable. However, the alphabet has to be the Latin alphabet.

The Chair: That's brilliant. I just wanted that clarification. Thank you.

Mr. Turnbull, you have six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to Mr. Perrault and team for being here. I'm sorry I couldn't be there with you in person. Nonetheless, I have lots of questions, as always, and look forward to this study. I think it's a really important one. I was a member of PROC in the last Parliament, where this was suggested under some other work we were doing on Bill C-19, which was more pandemic-focused. I'm really glad we're returning to this now, because I think it's really important work.

Mr. Perrault, I'm glad to hear about your commitment to incorporating indigenous languages and increasing indigenous participation. I think we all recognize that those are not exactly the same. Indigenous participation is far more than just including indigenous languages on ballots. This is an important aspect of that conversation. Thank you for outlining the four options and for contrasting them with some of the policy, operational and electoral integrity challenges or concerns you have. I think that's really helpful. Your opening remarks were quite well taken.

I have three lines of questioning. We'll see if we get to all of them. One of them is trying to unpack the conversation a little in terms of the threshold. One of the options you highlighted in your opening remarks on multilingual ballots was the threshold of 1%, which I think is interesting for us to consider. I wanted to contrast that. I understand that in the last election, you already tried to incorporate supporting documentation in indigenous languages. Based on the work you already did in the last election, what languages were selected? How did you make decisions about which indigenous languages to offer supporting documentation in?

I think that might highlight how you determined that threshold or what threshold was kind of implicit in what you were already doing in the last election. Could you unpack that for us a bit?

• (1125)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes—

The Chair: Through the chair.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Through the chair.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Absolutely.

Madam Chair, I'll separate the two things. First, with the threshold we used, we were assuming that the threshold was based on mother tongue. It could be based on language first spoken at home, or it could be based on the written language that is understood. We may not have data on all of these criteria, so that is something we need to unpack to understand which threshold we use. For the purpose of today's presentation, I used the mother tongue threshold.

On the 16 languages we use, that has been built over time, based on Statistics Canada data regarding mother tongue. It also includes some more historical groups for which, in the past, based on demand, we have offered products. It's a mix of percentages and on demand.

I can't give you a clean answer. I can certainly say that if we were to apply the 1% threshold, the 17 languages I speak of in my remarks largely overlap with the 16 languages for which we currently offer information products. I think there are a few that differ, but they mostly overlap.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Perrault. I appreciate that.

What other options might there be for defining the threshold? I'm interested in that, because I think you've talked about a couple. It sounds like it's related to capacity mother tongue or percentage of the population who speak that indigenous language. Are there any others you can think of that we might consider?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, it's a very good question. That's why we want to experiment further. I think we need to look at the threshold but also look on the ground at the demand and the capacity to offer translation or transliteration.

I don't have an answer today. I think one of the things I want to do in the next election is try to explore as much as possible, using those languages that we currently use, and see where we can go and where we find obstacles. It may be that, given the calendar in an election, some may not be possible despite a threshold. I would come back to this committee on that.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Great. Thank you for that, Mr. Perrault.

Through the chair, you also highlighted, Mr. Perrault, ballot facsimiles. I thought that was a really interesting potential solution, which I think you highlighted as having a lot of potential. I'm wondering whether you got any response and positive feedback on that in Nunavut in the last election. Could you tell us about any feedback you received?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, we didn't receive very much feedback. We had no complaints about it. We had some complaints about a few of our items, for example a "Vote Here" poster

that was not translated, which I think should be translated. We had some comments about that, but not about the facsimile.

It may be simply that people who live in Nunavut expect to see Inuktitut in documents, so I would speculate that it is something that is not a shock to them. They would expect to see that, so seeing it, they were happy about it. At least, they didn't complain about it, but there's not much we can say from that.

We learn about the processes in terms of our capacity to do it in that language, but there's a lot more that we need to learn.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I have one more question, through you.

Mr. Perrault, in your opening remarks you talked about "in consultation with indigenous communities" and testing this approach further. Based on a need for regular consultation and the commitment you have to indigenous participation and incorporating indigenous languages into ballots or ballot facsimiles.... I know Elections Canada has other advisory groups. Specifically, do you think it would make sense to have an indigenous participation advisory group that could also focus on this issue of indigenous languages? Do you think it would be a good approach to have ongoing consultation and communication?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, it's something that we are currently exploring. I've asked for a program review on how we serve indigenous Canadian electors, and that will include a review on how we engage. In that program review, we will be bringing on board some indigenous Canadians.

One of the questions we want to look at is whether we need an ongoing committee to support us, so that's part of the work ahead for us.

• (1130)

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm going to chime in one more time. Do you have somewhat of a plan as to where you would like to see this expanding? Is that information you could share with the committee?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We do not, at this point. We're in the process of setting up the group.

Increasing the language in terms of the pilot project we did in the last election is something that we will work on in the coming months, but at this point I don't have much to offer this committee beyond that. We are getting started on this.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank the people from Elections Canada for joining us today.

I find your comments very intriguing. I have hundreds of questions. I'll ask several different types of questions, so that I can pinpoint potential grey areas to address. You spoke a great deal about usage and you also mentioned the land. I want to know whether the choice of languages is based solely on these matters when it comes to the services already provided.

We're talking about ballots. However, in terms of voter turnout, the availability of information in people's respective languages remains a barrier. We're talking about 17 languages and 16 languages already included in the services provided. I want to know how many languages there would be, ideally, if usage weren't the only factor.

I also want to know why one of the 17 languages wasn't selected. At least, that's what I understood at the start of your presentation.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: The number 17 refers to the 1% population threshold of indigenous people who should be served in their first language. This amounts to 17 languages in Canada. We're currently using 16 languages in our publications on identification and voting. Some information is available in 16 languages. These languages were chosen partly on the basis of population thresholds and partly because of previous requests from some communities.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: It's about usage and demand.

I imagine that this poses a challenge for you, given that the number of languages is much higher. Is it possible to serve the entire population in their mother tongue or is that unrealistic?

I thought about the facsimiles idea. It can work well in communities. Sometimes, more than one language is spoken, and sometimes only one. I'm trying to imagine an indigenous voter in downtown Montreal. It's a place with multiple diaspora communities.

How would things work with facsimiles? How many languages would be available in the voting booth?

I'm wondering what can be done, whether this model has limitations and whether, at some point, it will be necessary to find another approach in order to serve the entire indigenous population.

The Chair: I want to say one thing.

[English]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Answer through the Chair, please.

[Translation]

The Chair: Indeed. I also want to let everyone know that I'm very flexible. When questions come up, if you need more time, I'll

give it to you. We want to get more information today. This is a very important discussion.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Okay.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, Madam Chair.

I think that all paper models have inherent limitations. Some governments in other parts of the world use electronic machines, which make things much easier. Just as you do on the Internet, you choose the interface, the language, and so on. In an electronic environment, the doors to accessibility are wide open. However, it's different with a paper model.

You must consider the feasibility, even in terms of what I consider the simplest model, the facsimile. You couldn't possibly produce a very large number of facsimiles. It would create confusion.

I don't have all the data. However, I know that a number of constituencies have five indigenous language communities, each representing at least 1% of the population. Even with a facsimile model, five language communities is a lot.

I don't really have an answer for you. If you really wanted to have multilingual ballots that included indigenous languages, you would need an electronic voting system.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

We need to look a little further ahead. Certainly, we're finding solutions. However, we can see that many things are already happening in this area. This is part of the discussion on electronic voting.

I have more questions.

Obviously, there wasn't really a consultation. You said that you can't really determine, although you could guess, whether this would affect voter turnout. How did you decide that it was necessary to take further steps so that indigenous voters could see, for example, the names of candidates in their own languages?

Did you receive any complaints or comments from all the first nations? Where is this request coming from?

We're hearing a great deal about the 1% threshold, but perhaps other requests don't relate to that threshold.

Is there a widespread call for this? Do people know that this possibility exists?

I'm asking because there are people from indigenous communities in my constituency. I know that some of them mustn't even be aware that this possibility exists.

I'm asking a very general question, again.

• (1135)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I think, Madam Chair, that we've tried to improve the services provided to Canadians and to take into account Canadians in special situations.

In the case of indigenous people, the reconciliation process, of course, gives us a different perspective. A long time ago, we started to provide information in indigenous languages. We also have different programs that help indigenous voters at the polls. This was our first time using a facsimile. Of course, you and I both know that Bill C-309 last spring clearly showed needs in this area. It was welcomed by all the committee members. I wanted to conduct the experiment in Nunavut. I believe that, at that time, it was the easiest place to adapt and test a facsimile.

That's how we reached this point.

The Chair: Do you have another brief question, Ms. Gill?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes, Madam Chair. I had one, but I forgot it. There was a connection, of course, but I'll come back to it later.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Idlout, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): *[Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:]*

Thank you very much.

I'd like to thank you for involving me in dealing with very important issues, and I'm very happy that I am involved.

We have good interpreters, and you have given me opportunities to sit on other meetings, which has been wonderful for me. We need to talk about our culture and our way of doing things. Thank you.

I have a question. We all know that elections are a human right in Canada. There is a Constitution, and indigenous languages are entrenched well there.

We have a lot of things to do in Canada. We need to deal with indigenous languages and deal with them importantly and properly, and we want to continue to use our languages and strengthen them. The Government of Canada needs to help us to strengthen the bodies of Inuit organizations to entrench and enrich languages.

Are you open to dealing with the rights of indigenous people? I'd like to understand what you think.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Certainly, I'm open and willing. I believe, as I said at the outset, that the presence of indigenous languages at the polls is an important element of making sure that the voting experience is reflective of indigenous people's identity. To me, that is a significant step in the process of reconciliation.

I'm not saying that everything can happen immediately. We need to work on this, but as I said, I'm committed, Madam Chair, to

working on this and to increasing the presence of indigenous languages where I can. We'll learn from that and I'll come back to this committee. We'll see what progress we've made and where we can take it from there.

Absolutely, you have my commitment to that, Madam Chair.

• (1140)

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

[Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:]

I'd also like to thank you for involving Inuit in voting. It was very impressive what they did in the community in Nunavut.

There are many people who do not speak English. We speak Inuktitut. There are many people in Nunavut who have to travel south for their treatment or for hospitalization. English does not work. We need Inuktitut. There are so many people who go south to get their treatments, yet they have to use English.

There are many people who went to Iqaluit to vote but were unable to. They were told to get out because they didn't have proper policies and procedures on elections and on languages. It's no wonder. When they're not in their community and they have to travel, they need to vote, too, but it's not allowed.

How can you, as the Government of Canada, help us with the proper procedures, especially for people who do not speak English? Voting and ballots are very important to Canada and to us. Our rights should not be ignored, especially when there's a national election.

Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: If you will allow me, our service model is currently based on Canadians serving their fellow Canadians in their community. Normally, at the local level in indigenous communities, we are able to find people who speak the language—that's where they come from.

I understand, however, that in Nunavut, a lot of travel takes place. People are going to Iqaluit, where there is more of a mixed linguistic community. We are generally able to offer language services in the language of the people, but it's not always as easy as when you vote locally.

I understand that when you vote in Iqaluit, you have to vote by special ballot, which is a complex process. You're voting away from your polling division. The list is not the list for other polling divisions; therefore, you have to use the special ballot. It is a more complicated ballot.

We have a service called CanTalk, which offers, for a special ballot at the office of the returning officer, translation in 24 indigenous languages. I'm eager to hear if there are problems with that service in Iqaluit and whether we can improve it.

I recognize that voting outside of the polling division and outside of your community involves a more complex process, which is the special ballot.

The Chair: Would you like one more question, Ms. Idlout?

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Many Inuit in Nunavut speak only Inuktitut. When elders are ready to vote.... They're half of the population now. They're not enough.

Can you consider, as a government, helping Inuit elders by giving them interpreters? They need access to their language, especially during elections. Elders are important.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you, Madam Chair. I certainly will look more deeply into this.

Obviously I'm not in Nunavut at the scene there, but I will be there this summer to discuss this very issue. I intend to travel there with other chief electoral officers of Canada at the provincial level.

My understanding is that there is generally service in Inuktitut at the polls but that this is not equally true in Iqaluit. I understand that. We need to see how we can improve the services there. If it is your understanding that it's mostly an Iqaluit issue, then I'd like to hear that from you.

My apologies; that was through you, Madam Chair.

• (1145)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

I think that this is a moment of reflection as well. When Ms. Idlout speaks, we get to understand her in English and in French, yet when we are communicating, she does not have that same ability to hear it in her language. I just want to put on the record that I am noticing this. I know we are taking steps as a country and as a government, but obviously we have a lot further to go.

Your insights are very welcome here today. Thank you for the information you always share. I just wanted to put that on the record, because I've not experienced this yet. Thank you for broadening my horizons, as well.

Mr. Scheer, we are starting with you for five minutes, followed by Ms. Sahota. Then it will be Madam Gill for 2.5 minutes, Ms. Idlout for 2.5 minutes, Mr. Schmale for five minutes and Ms. Romanado for five minutes.

Mr. Scheer, I will turn the floor over to you.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. I have a couple of clarification questions.

The commissioner described the pilot project. I think you referred to it as putting up posters in polling locations using what I believe you termed "a facsimile" of the ballot, with indigenous languages and how that would translate into the ballot.

One of the practical concerns or issues you flagged about using these types of languages on the ballot was related to who would validate the translation. I believe that's how you put it.

I am just wondering if you could explain the process to validate the translation for those facsimile posters. Whose version do you take, or on what basis do you have confidence that this is the proper translation—the proper transcription, I guess, for lack of a better word?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you. Madam Chair. I think that's a very important question.

In the last election, when we did this, it was translated.... Normally we work with the translation bureau. They offer many indigenous languages, but not all, and we had to do the translation, basically, over a 24-hour cycle in order to get the ballots produced, printed and distributed.

The tight time frame does not allow validation, at this point in time, and this is something we'd have to discuss with political parties. These names were not validated. They are not official ballots either, so there is a benefit to that. It's unfortunate if there are errors, and we'll try, of course, to avoid that.

However, until we learn more about our ability to translate quickly and turn that around, I believe it is risky to introduce additional languages on an official ballot. This was a tool for assistance, but there was no time in the process for validation, either by candidates or by parties.

The Chair: Mr. Scheer.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I appreciate that. I guess the point is that there's a different level...partially because the ballot requirements aren't laid out in statute, but also because the official ballot would have to be 100% certain. You would have to have an extremely high level of confidence that there is accuracy on the ballot itself, whereas with informational posters, you have a bit of leeway there. It's a bit easier to amend. If you catch a mistake, you can likely amend it a lot more easily than reprinting tens of thousands of ballots.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Moreover, Madam Chair, if we are late—this time around, we were able to arrive just in time for advance polls—with a poster, it's unfortunate. It's very unfortunate, but it does not compromise the vote itself. If we have to do a more complex ballot, we have to be sure that we can produce it in time for the advance polls. There is no way around it. We have to be certain about that.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: This was the first election in which Elections Canada used this pilot project.

• (1150)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: For a facsimile of the ballot, yes, it was the first time we've done this.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Has Elections Canada had time to do any kind of analysis of how the project worked, and have you drawn any conclusions from that, or is it too soon after the last election to accurately summarize how it went?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It was a fairly simple project last time around, because we were familiar with the translation into Inuktitut and we were able to do it in time. That was the biggest aspect of the test.

I think there is much more to learn as we try different languages and we see whether we have some space for validation, before an election, for example, of the party names, what names the parties want to see on the ballot and how they want to see their names reflected.

It was the beginning of an experiment, but there is so much more that we need to learn in this area.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Scheer.

We will now move to Ms. Sahota for five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I also want to say that it was really nice to hear Ms. Idlout being able to speak in her own language here today. That was an important part of the work we did at this committee many years ago, but there is more to do, obviously, because we are not able to have it translated back to her in her language.

That being said, I think it's important—just as the Chief Electoral Officer has said—for us to make inroads and take steps, because it's not just about voter turnout, although I do think in certain areas, though perhaps not in all areas, it will have an impact. It's also about including indigenous people and making them feel included in the process. It's about reconciliation, and it's about promoting the languages.

I want to know a little more about the phone service that's being provided in 24 languages currently. Does the Chief Electoral Officer know how much that phone service is utilized? Are there languages other than those 24 indigenous languages in which the phone service is provided?

I have found that perhaps the service is there, but in terms of when it is utilized in the ridings, the service isn't as accessible as we may think it is.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's a good point, Madam Chair. I don't have the exact number, but if I remember correctly, there are hundreds of languages beyond indigenous ones. It's a very large number.

However—and I don't have hard data on this—anecdotally I am told that there is very little uptake, so we need to look at how we promote the use of this. It is a service only at the office of the returning officer and at additional satellite offices. It is not something

that can be made available at the polling places. It's for people who use a special ballot or who come to the RO office in order to register and who may need some assistance. At that point, we have the CanTalk system available to them.

It is perhaps something that needs to be promoted more, because it does not seem to have a lot of uptake, but I don't have hard data for the committee.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you have to go into the office in order to use the CanTalk service, or can you call from your home and be connected to the CanTalk service?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: My understanding is that it's available only in the office.

The Chair: Part of why I ask that you go through the chair is to provide the interpreters that break, for anybody hearing in a different language. As somebody who does appreciate interpretation into official languages and who is hoping to expand those, I think we need to be mindful of the work that our interpreters do.

Could we continue our comments through the chair, Ms. Sahota?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'm sorry.

Maybe first I'll just make a comment, because I didn't realize that service, Madam Chair, was available in my riding. There are many languages spoken in my riding, not to mention the fact that Punjabi is one of the most popular languages. I believe that as of the last census, it was the third most widely spoken language in Canada.

Many of these speakers have no idea that this is available, but there are a lot of issues. I think I'm digressing, not that I am here today to advocate for those languages being on the ballot or anything like that. I truly feel this is the proper first step to be taking.

Madam Chair, through you to the Chief Electoral Officer, first of all, I'm very confused about the language being used on the posters. According to my understanding, fax mails are faxes that are sent out, but you can correct me. That was always my understanding, so I was a little confused when I read the material at first.

Are the posters placed in each individual voting booth, and have there been issues raised in terms of people being able to follow these posters, or ballots that are wasted at the end of the day? Do you see that happen more in certain communities than in others?

• (1155)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Again, Madam Chair, this was an experiment in Nunavut. The requirement that was made was that we would have posters on the wall and another copy, which I shared with you, at the voting table for people just to look at, so they weren't using that.

I'm not aware of problems with that. That doesn't mean there weren't instances where the document was not available, but I've not received any complaints in that regard and I'm not aware of instances where it was not available.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Would it be more helpful perhaps to provide this also in the actual voting booth? I believe that would be a little easier for the person voting.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, it was on the wall and the intent was to have it also at the table of the voting booth where the electors were. The intent ideally would be to have it posted in the booth so that they could see side by side the ballot in Inuktitut and the regular ballot that they use to mark, that they use to vote, so that they can align them.

In Nunavut, with three candidates, it was a fairly simply comparison and the translation was fairly easy.

The Chair: Do you have one more question?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No, that's fine.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, you have two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair.

This might be more of a comment than a question. I've been thinking about the 1% population threshold per constituency. It may have taken a little too long to address it earlier. My own constituency of Manicouagan has two indigenous communities, the Innu and the Naskapi communities. These communities speak two languages that, while similar, are different. We've talked about voter turnout, which is one of the reasons for the measures implemented.

I want to humbly state an impression based on my thoughts. As part of the reconciliation process, this approach could help to keep these languages alive. The Naskapi people in my constituency represent about 1% of the population and they're really quite isolated. Perhaps this approach would help keep their language alive.

We've seen that, since 2011, the Innu language as a mother tongue has been in decline each year. Some very famous Innu people have relearned their language. One example is Natasha Kanapé Fontaine. We can think about what happened with the residential schools. Sometimes, Innu isn't even the mother tongue of these people. As part of the reconciliation process, I think that this approach could be a way to protect indigenous languages. I'd like to hear your thoughts on this.

I want to add that, although we're talking about the 1% of the population per constituency, when it comes to electoral redistribution, indigenous people deal with something quite random and arbitrary. I wanted to share these thoughts. I was thinking that all languages should be protected. I can imagine all the difficulties that this can entail. Yes, we have the turnout issue, but we also have the responsibility to keep these languages alive.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I want to make two points.

The first concerns the significance, but also the difficulty, of the threshold. This has been discussed, I believe. The data on spoken and written languages is fluid. We're talking about writing here. Written language is also important in this case. We need to establish thresholds, but it isn't easy. When we conduct our tests, we must work with the communities to determine their needs, beyond the

figures provided by Statistics Canada, to ensure a qualitative aspect.

The other very important point concerns reconciliation. You spoke about it. We—and I'm including my predecessors here—have always considered that we're providing a service. We know that, in many indigenous communities, about 40% of the people don't want polling stations on the reserve. It isn't that we don't provide the service. They don't want the service. I must respect this wish. It's part of reconciliation.

In my view, increasing the presence of indigenous languages, not only on the ballot, but also around the polling stations, is a way to begin reconciliation. Telling community members that these are their polling stations will perhaps, regardless of the turnout or figures on this issue, lead to greater acceptance of the stations on reserves.

• (1200)

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Madam Idlout, about two and a half minutes go to you.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

From my understanding and my reading, you have 12 distinct language families that are listed and that they use every election, or do they get retranslated every election? Inuktitut languages use different dialects. Are you making sure that every dialect is covered, understood and serviced to Inuit?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you.

Madam Chair, the question is also a good reflection of the complexities of the issue that we have to deal with. We are not experts in indigenous languages, so we need to rely on others, and in particular the translation bureau, to provide their expertise to support us in the documentation.

It's a partnership that needs to take place. It's not something that Elections Canada can deliver on its own. We will never have the expertise to deal with all the indigenous languages and the dialects. I know it's true in Inuktitut. I know it's true in other communities where there are different dialects.

We have to rely on the experts and, necessarily, there will be a choice made as to what is the appropriate version or dialect used in our documentation, but that is something that involves the communities, the translation or transliteration services that we obtain, and us. It's a very complex issue.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

About elections, about ballots, the language itself in English is the same. They're giving the same messages, but it changes in the different languages. If you're going to translate it into Inuktitut, or into the Cree language or any other indigenous language, you need to understand that if Elections Canada is not going to change its style or procedure, it's an impairment...it's not proper if they cannot change the languages.

[English]

I don't think the English terminology changes very much between elections. If you are translating documents into indigenous languages, there wouldn't need to be that many changes to indigenous documentation as well. I'm just asking if you reuse the same terminology—for example, in Inuktitut—that would have been used in the previous election.

Secondly, to go to my next question, in your experience, what are the time frames for translating these materials, knowing that you've given us times when an election is called? Basically, the terminology doesn't change. It's only the names that change, so it doesn't sound like it should be that much of a barrier to translate these documents into indigenous languages.

● (1205)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, that's quite correct.

If you look at our information products, you see that they're stable. Unless there are changes to the legislation, we typically do not revisit them, or we may because we want to improve them, but most of the documents themselves remain stable and therefore are reused over time. Translation is not an issue.

The timelines, of course, vary. Most service standards are between 10 and 20 days, and sometimes more than 15 days, but that's for fairly long documents. As suggested by the member, that does not apply to the name on the ballot. Even the party name, if we can work in advance with parties and get agreement on the translation and transliteration, we can have that resolved.

Candidates names, though, are a bit of a different matter. It's a small document, I agree, but the time frames that we're talking about are not days but hours. In Nunavut, for example, on the close of nominations, 21 days before election day, in order to have ballots at the advance polls on day 10, the image of the ballot has to be finalized on the night of day 21. There are not an extra 24 hours in the schedule for that, so we need somehow to find the time to do the translation there and squeeze it in.

Inuktitut is fairly accessible in terms of translation. It's not equally true of other languages, and there is no time there for validation. If a candidate who does not speak the language does not have the opportunity to verify, we have to find out how that works in the process and how long we extend the time frames to allow this, because right now there is just no space in those 10 days for that.

I'm not saying it shouldn't be done and it's not possible. I think we have to learn through the experiment of facsimile, running the risk in a facsimile that it may not be available on the first day of advance polls—we'll see what happens there—and build the expertise to then come back and see whether it is appropriate, useful and

feasible to include that on the ballot itself. I think we need to work through the experience.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

Now we will go for five minutes to Mr. Schmale.

Mr. Jamie Schmale (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to ask a question to Elections Canada, through you, to continue on actually what they just mentioned a second ago about the ballots.

We talked about ballots on election day and the problems and concerns you have with timelines. Maybe I'll pick up with what you were talking about with advance polls and the challenges that would entail for the staff locally, but also centrally as well.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, it's very tight for advance polls, and we want to make sure there is time for quality control once the ballots are printed.

I have a time sheet that I can share with the committee of every step that goes into the production of the ballot. It's really by the hour. There is the first step, which is confirming the image to make sure it has the right names in the right order, that there are no mistakes. It goes to the printer. Then there is a sequence of events. I've shared, I think, the copies, but I can share actual ballots where you can see the stub, and that takes a fair amount of time.

Then we need to check to make sure there are no mistakes, and mistakes do happen. We have seen ballots that are misprinted, so there's a very rigorous process that needs to take place to make sure we do not have improper ballots at the polls.

I'm not sure, Madam Chair, if that was....

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Yes, there was more about the timelines. I think the answer to that question is it's tight to begin with. It's even more challenging for advance polls.

Madam Chair, through you, did Elections Canada receive any complaints about people not being able to vote, since we're talking about mostly in the north, specifically Nunavut? Did anyone complain, or were there any reports or complaints about not being able to vote because of the current languages used on the ballot?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No. We mostly have communications in Inuktitut, but we have received complaints that some of the language, for example that bright yellow sign that says "Vote" with Elections Canada on it, unfortunately, is not translated. I think that's something we could change, because it's apparent for people in Nunavut when they see that. That's not in line with their expectations and experiences. It's striking for them, because they are accustomed to that.

• (1210)

Mr. Jamie Schmale: You have lots of time to do that, and it's standard, as you said, with your other material.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, that's something we prepare in advance. It's a lot easier to improve the overall presence of indigenous languages in the rest of the material than it is for the ballot itself, which is very sensitive.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Madam Chair, Elections Canada, from what I can tell through the documents, does try its best to get a local indigenous person who speaks the language wherever possible. Were you able to fill all the positions in the north with someone who could speak the local language?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I don't have a specific answer to that. I know that in some cases we have to fly people in to fly-in communities because there's a lack of resources, but it is exceptional. I would say the vast majority, especially when you look at remote and indigenous communities, we hire locally, and these people tend to speak the language. I'm not saying it's wall-to-wall, 100%, but I think it is the exception.

We have an elders and youth program. It's something I want to look into. The uptake of that has gone down. The elders and youth program is one whereby we hire an elder and a youth to come to the polls and assist voters, including for linguistic assistance. It's a good program, but I think the uptake has gone down. That's something I want to look into.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: That was my next question: Is there some kind of program available? You answered that, and it's building, as you said, and more interest is coming online for that.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes. We want to revisit what we're doing. We saw some challenges in the last election, and we want to understand how we can better engage with the community on an ongoing basis, rather than just during an election. We've struggled over the years to maintain permanent connections with indigenous communities outside of the election. It complicates matters in terms of hiring but also in terms of understanding their needs if it's all rushed during the election. We're looking into that as part of a broader program review on first nations.

Mr. Jamie Schmale: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Is that it? You had 20 seconds left.

It was nice talking to you. Thank you for interacting with me instead. You're always a great addition, Mr. Schmale. Thank you for joining us.

Ms. Romanado, five minutes go to you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Through you, I would like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I have a couple of questions. One is with respect to deployed Canadian Armed Forces members. The Chief Electoral Officer mentioned the difficulty or the challenge if the CEO had to identify each individual deployed officer and whether or not they needed a specific ballot in an indigenous language. I just want to double-check with the Chief Electoral Officer if I understood that correctly.

For those who are deployed overseas who receive a ballot, I'm assuming it's a special ballot that then gets returned to Canada. Would that still be possible to have, since they're voting in their last electoral district or the one that they have selected? How difficult would it be to make sure they received a ballot, should they wish to have one with an indigenous language on it?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: They would vote by special ballot, and this is a blank ballot with a limited amount of information, like the name of the candidate. We would need to see how we could translate and keep the content as light as possible in order to have it as flexible as possible.

As I said, currently any language used is the language of the candidate's name as it appears on nomination, whatever that language is in the Latin alphabet. The issue is, if we open it up to other alphabets, how it is presented to the voter and also how it's counted back in Ottawa, with different languages and different alphabets.

We have candidates and party representatives who are at Coventry, at our warehouse, where this count takes place. The people who do the count are referred by parties, so it's not clear that they would be equipped to properly understand handwriting in a different alphabet. That is a challenge and a concern. I have to say that I have some reservations about using the write-in ballot in a diversity of languages for that reason.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

That is something we noticed in the last election. A lot of special ballots were rejected because of additional marks on the ballots themselves. Whether it was a cute little heart sign or a smiley face or something, the ballots were actually rejected because of the extra markings. This is something that would be a concern for me.

I have a question for the Chief Electoral Officer with respect to the candidate process. Candidates are required to collect signatures. In cases of communities with large indigenous populations, are they accepting the actual nomination forms with the various signatures with a language other than English and French in terms of addresses and so on? Do they have the capacity to make sure that, in terms of validation, the electors who have signed the nomination forms are in fact electors in the riding? I know that it often happens that if the handwriting is illegible, the local returning officer may reject certain signatures.

What efforts have been made in that regard?

• (1215)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Through you, Madam Chair, the returning officer has to be able to ascertain, as the member indicated, that this is a signature from an elector residing in the electoral district. The elector does not have to be registered, but they have to reside in the electoral district.

The returning officers are not equipped to look up addresses in different alphabets or languages. That is just the reality. Of course, there may be the occasional returning officer who would be able to do that, but I cannot guarantee that service offering.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

I have two very short questions. I'd like to know how many indigenous people are employed at Elections Canada in the higher ranks who could assist with respect to indigenous languages but also with cultures and so on. As well, what can candidates be doing to assist in this regard?

For instance, in my community often candidates will make the little ballot and show where the candidate falls on the ballot. We do that often in terms of our campaign literature. What can we be doing as well to make sure that we're using it as a teachable moment in our own communities and in every community, including all 338 ridings, to educate people—for instance, if I have a larger Mohawk community in my riding—and to make sure that I'm actually conveying that as well? I know we do that for other languages, but what can we be doing?

Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I'd have to give that last question more thought.

On the first question, in the senior ranks right now of Elections Canada we do not have self-identified indigenous Canadians. We have in the past, but currently we do not. We have a small number at headquarters, but they're not senior.

As we recruit returning officers—and we do have a lot of openings, if anybody is listening out there—we hope to hire, as much as possible, returning officers who are reflective of the communities where they serve. That certainly includes, in large indigenous community ridings, the hope that we can bring in some indigenous returning officers. We do have some, but again, I don't have official data on that. It's more anecdotal.

In terms of senior ranks, as I indicated earlier, as part of the program review we want to bring in some people at the executive level who are indigenous Canadians to help us in that program review, so that it's not us on our own doing this. There is an engagement with the communities, but for the team itself, we are hoping to bring in, and we are going to bring in, some executives with that background.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange. We will now move on to Mrs. Block for five minutes, followed by Ms. O'Connell, Madam Gill and Ms. Idlout. I'll tell you who else later.

Go ahead, Mrs. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to our witness for joining us today.

The more I read the information that was circulated to us, the more I recognize what a set of complex issues Elections Canada faces in regard to ensuring that all Canadians are able to participate in the democratic process and cast a ballot in a general election.

When I look at the conversation we've had today and reflect on it, I go back to Mr. Perrault's opening comments in regard to the fact that you are currently offering information products in several indigenous languages. You stated that you were working to improve your processes and service offerings. The bulk of your comments were centred around ballots and having various indigenous languages on the ballot.

We also talked about the range of information products that can be made available at the polls. I appreciate the comments by my NDP colleague in regard to how some of those products probably aren't being prepared at the last minute, or wouldn't need to be prepared at the last minute, so could be readily available in a timely way.

I wonder, though, if you could comment a little on the processes, because the service offerings are different. I also want to know whether you're facing similar problems or complaints from the other territories or other remote indigenous communities.

Lastly, are you aware of or in conversation with any other jurisdictions around the world that might be dealing with issues similar to those here in Canada in regard to indigenous communities and the barriers we're facing during general elections, specifically maybe even the Commonwealth? Is there a forum where you are able to have conversations with other countries around these issues?

• (1220)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, starting with the last point, there are several forums. There are a few countries that share the same characteristics as us in terms of our first nation communities and political system. We engage regularly with Australia, which, of course, does have an indigenous community and does have some challenges. However, even there, their realities are different.

I would say the same thing in regard to Canada. Even within the country, the realities and the challenges faced by the different indigenous communities are vastly different. We talked a lot about Nunavut, but Nunavut is a jurisdiction where there is a large predominant population that uses Inuktitut. It's an official language. There are expectations. There's an alertness to the issue of language in Nunavut that results in complaints that we're not necessarily seeing elsewhere. That doesn't mean there shouldn't be products made available, of course, but the reaction varies considerably, as does our ability to provide products. It's hard to find, even within Canada, a "one size fits all" approach—which I don't think is where we want to go—and even more so at the international level.

I'm not sure if I captured the full question. I think there might have been a question on the service offering, and I'm happy to speak to that if that's the desire of the member.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

Through you, Madam Chair, I would just go back to my earlier intervention, where I was focusing more on improving your processes.

Given the testimony you've just given, is Elections Canada being proactive in identifying some of the issues that might exist in parts of the country other than Nunavut, that perhaps don't have that readily available acknowledgement or knowledge of what needs to take place when it comes to Elections Canada and the kinds of communication that are available to those communities?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That's why we want to look at how we can engage those communities on an ongoing basis. It's to get a better understanding of those needs and those realities, which we do not have right now.

The first step is to build the capacity to engage better on an ongoing basis in order to have a better view of the needs. There are things that we know, of course, and language is one. We work with the AFN, and the AFN has identified that as a significant barrier, so that's an important area.

The other important area that we know about is advance polls. We've increased the offering of advance polls over the years in urban and semi-urban Canada, but the offering has not increased in remote communities. We need to be able to offer more flexible options. As I said in my last appearance, we could have a single day of advance polling in remote communities. Where it's a very small community, we can't hire for three or four days, but we can for one, so there's a lot more flexibility in the services at advance polls, to avoid the rigidity of having a single day of voting that may not be suitable for everyone in that community.

These are the things we're looking at right now. We can make improvements on that fairly rapidly, but in the longer term it's building the relationships and building the engagement capacity so that we can better understand the needs and realities.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Block.

Ms. O'Connell, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions will be through you to the witnesses.

Thanks so much for being here. I want to follow up on a couple of issues that were raised by my colleagues. You touched on ballot translation. We've talked a lot about it, but what is stopping you in this time—in between elections—from having already produced those voting signs and whatnot? Even in minority governments, you have years, in a lot of cases, so why are they not yet produced, if that was something you heard?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I think there's a misunderstanding. They are produced. They are electronically available right now. We have PDFs of all of these documents, and if we need to alter them in some way, we can do that at any time. This is not about waiting until the election.

When the election kicks off—leaving aside the ballot here—these documents are made available to community relations officers, who work locally to see which products are suited to the community—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I have limited time. I don't mean to interrupt.

Madam Chair, through you, when were they produced? If they weren't available in the last election.... For example, there's the voting sign that you acknowledged caused some feedback.

When were they produced, and in how many languages?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I'll clarify. We have essentially two main products, Madam Chair, in 16 languages. They are the voter identification rolls and the "ways to vote" products. Not everything is in 16 languages. The voting signs are not and, as I indicated, that's an area that I would like to improve.

There are more products that we can work on.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Again, Madam Chair, what is your timeline to produce the materials that aren't translated? Again, we're out of an election, and that was specific feedback that you heard.

What are the timelines to produce the materials that aren't translated?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: We'll have to decide which languages, among the many, we are going to do this in, to begin with. There's the translation time and the production of the physical material time. It's not extremely long. This is something that we can do.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Again, Madam Chair, that's my question. What's your timeline to do it?

If you're deciding.... I don't understand. I understand production time. Even in elections, we have a short window and I have to print materials and things like that, but this was an area that was raised.

How long will it take for Elections Canada to determine these other materials? What languages are you going to produce them in, and then what is the print time, so that, should an election be called at any moment, you have these materials?

My colleague made the point that there are certain materials that do not change—outside of ballots—every year. In what timeline will you have those materials in specific regions that need them? When will you make the determination of the languages? When will they be printed and ready to go to be shipped out at a moment's notice of an election?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I don't have the answer to that, specifically. As I said, I have a team that's being set up to look at a range of issues. This will be one of the issues that they will be looking at.

I don't expect that it will take an extraordinary amount of time to decide which will be the priority products and the priority languages, but they will evolve over time. What we have if there's an election next fall may be different from what we have if there's an election in 2025.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to have some timelines communicated back to this committee. If you have a team coming forward.... I'm going to use that “vote” sign. I don't see why an election next fall versus an election in three years would change the timelines around the production of a “vote” sign, but I'm going to leave that there, because I think the point is made.

Elections Canada has additional panels set up. In terms of these committees or this panel, first, are you going to set up a formal panel, Madam Chair? Secondly, what is going to be constituted in this?

We look at things like the situation in Kenora, and what specifically happened there. You touched on advance polls, but Elections Canada has already had some flexibility in having advance polls. They weren't always executed or taken in the last election. In one of the media responses...and I think even in your last testimony before this committee, you said that you weren't aware of those issues at the time. It seems like there's no rapid response team to be able to address it in a riding or a polling station and feed it up to somebody in such a way that it can actually be addressed before election day.

Is this going to be part of any look ahead? Are you going to do town halls in these communities to find out what the issues were?

I promise I'm wrapping up, Madam Chair.

What I've heard a lot today is that you “haven't heard that yet”. I'm wondering if you are going to go there to speak to the people who have been impacted.

• (1230)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, many points have been raised here, and I'm not sure I have them all down.

Rapid response is an important issue, as is understanding when to brief up to headquarters and the CEO. I'm doing regional meetings across the country starting next week and in all of May. It is one of the topics I'll be discussing with returning officers. We need to make sure we understand clearly what the issues are that need to be briefed up.

The issue in Kenora was partly that problem—that there was no briefing up and we were not aware—and partly a problem of planning. We need to plan in advance, not just responsively, Madam Chair, for those single days of advance polls. Normally, it's four days. The legislation was changed just before the previous election.

Our focus in this election was on pandemic measures, but we need to look at how we can use that, not just responsively when there's an issue, but in a planned way to increase advance polls and reduce the necessity of making last-minute changes, which are so problematic.

It's a two-track answer, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

Mr. Fergus, thank you for sharing your time with Ms. O'Connell.

I think you're right; there are two tracks. You have the things that are not going to change. The “vote today” is a sign that's been around since...I'm not even sure how long, but I've always seen it. We can be prepared for some things. With other things that change, I can understand where the challenge would occur. That's just an understanding of things that don't change. Have we started planning to get those prepared? Maybe we're planning on saying something other than “vote today” at some point, which I don't see us doing, but maybe there's a different vision.

That was a very thorough and exciting exchange. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, you now have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will ask two final questions. I would like to ask more, but I only have time for two.

My first question will be about thresholds.

We talked about the 1% threshold. We'll see how the pilot projects and consultations go, but I'd like to know if it would be possible to include people who are relearning their language in that 1%. These would be people for whom the language is not their first language, but who say they are learning it.

Would this be possible?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I don't think so, Madam Chair. I'm not even sure that Statistics Canada has that data.

The problem is access to sources. We have data from Statistics Canada for certain categories, but those are not there.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: They don't exist.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's right.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: That's fine.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There is the matter of the threshold, but also the matter of maximum languages, as I mentioned earlier. If five languages meet the threshold, should we include all five languages?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I would like to ask another question, Mr. Perrault. I only have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Go ahead.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: We are talking about the quantitative aspect, but you said that there was also the qualitative aspect. I would like to know what these qualitative criteria are that you were referring to.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: All this shows the need for discussions outside of election periods. These are not things that can be decided within an electoral calendar. Returning officers need to be able to have conversations with community representatives to understand their needs in advance, in order to prepare for this.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: If we talk about quantity and add quality to it, then it also changes that 1% figure.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes. I'm using the 1% as a barometer, because it was in a bill. I mention it to provide a frame of reference.

• (1235)

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Yes.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I refer to it also as it tends to reflect quite closely the languages we use in our information materials. I'm not saying that we will necessarily use this criterion for pilot projects.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you.

The Chair: Do you have any other questions?

Mrs. Marilène Gill: I have finished. Thank you.

The Chair: As you can see, I always give you time, because you ask good questions. We also want to get good answers.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: You are very generous, Madam Chair. I think I've gone over my time on a few occasions.

Thank you.

The Chair: You're welcome.

We'll continue with Ms. Idlout.

[English]

You have two and a half minutes, give or take. Please take your opportunity.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

In looking at these communities, 170 different languages are being used. It's clear that we use our language strongly.

Colonialism has a big share of the blame. It destroyed our language. We lost our language. I'm asking you how you can get help to revitalize indigenous languages and Inuit languages?

To revitalize them, how can you help us? This language of ours, Inuktitut, is very precious and important to us, and we do not want to lose it.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I appreciate the weight of those words. I think that obviously Elections Canada has a limited impact, in the sense that it will take efforts by many institutions working together to revitalize that, but I do think that, symbolically, having indigenous languages used around the political process, around the electoral process, is important.

It was mentioned, I think, by another member. It means that these languages have political weight. It means that indigenous people are welcome in their language in the political community, and that's why I say it's at the core of reconciliation.

Ms. Lori Idlout: What do you need?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Well, as I said, I'm looking to improve and to expand. I think I have the tools right now in the legislation, in terms of doing the facsimile. I think that from there we'll need to learn about capacity, translation and turnaround for production, and report back to this committee and see how it was received—whether the members of the community appreciate it or want something different from what we're doing, and whether it's feasible.

It's the beginning, quite frankly, in that regard. We have to accept that we know little and that there's a lot to do. Our role is to begin that process and to come back to this committee with more information.

The Chair: Ms. Idlout, I'd like you to know that the next Conservative slot has been given to you. You have five additional minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

I have a question for you. It is the first time I've heard about electoral issues. How can we help each other to handle our responsibilities for elections? We Inuit and indigenous peoples look very carefully at issues. Can you please tell me more about how you can help to communicate to the indigenous peoples of Canada instead of them not being heard, especially about elections?

• (1240)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, as much as I don't like to do this, I'll turn the question around: How can you help me? How can you convey to me the challenges that your communities face? How can you be the voice of those communities in terms of their experience?

I'm sitting here in Gatineau and Ottawa. I don't have this daily experience, and I'm not there on polling day at the polls. I have staff there.

I think you're right. We need to hear from the communities. As elected representatives in particular, your experience is critical for us to understand how we can improve.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you very much. I have a question.

Like he said earlier, they're working hard to meet the needs of indigenous people, especially elders. Can you please tell us about your support, because it's very interesting and it impacts us and impacts the communities.

[*English*]

Very briefly, I'm hoping you can describe the elders and youth program you mentioned earlier, because I think it's a great opportunity to inform indigenous Canadians about this program that I didn't know existed. I think if more people are aware of it, there's going to be more appetite to use it.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, in a nutshell, very simply—and my colleague can intervene and add as necessary—it is a program whereby, in indigenous communities, we hire an elder and a young member of that community to be present at the polls to welcome the voters and assist them through the process, including by providing translation where it is required. It's a program that has been in existence for several elections now.

Monsieur Roussel, who's been here longer than I have, may know the exact time that it was put in place. I've heard anecdotally that we're having more trouble staffing it and the take-up is not as great. That's something I want to look into, because I think it's a very valuable program.

Mr. Michel Roussel (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation, Elections Canada): Madam Chair, what the Chief Electoral Officer said is true. Over the past 10 years, when we recruit election officers at the polling stations, we also emphasize more and more recruiting in the communities. We're looking for a system in which Canadians serve their neighbours. There are other Canadians...and it's something that we strive for in the indigenous communities as well.

Ms. Lori Idlout: How much more time do I have?

The Chair: You have another minute.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

Perhaps if I tell you a bit of a story, you will understand more of what I'm talking about. It was good working through papers...and also with other issues that are of concern to the indigenous people of Canada.

I need help with this. Our language, through the computer, through technology, is available. It's a great tool to revitalize our language and to teach and show people that we have a real, live lan-

guage. Indigenous people's languages are available through many communications.

The Chair: I think that was more of a comment.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: It was a very thorough exchange and very much appreciated.

Before I hand the floor over to Mr. Gerretsen, we have a witness list that we agreed to. We have witnesses who are not able to join us or have not responded. Mrs. Block made a suggestion, and that invitation has been sent out.

Mr. Therrien provided us with a couple of other names of people he would like to see invitations go to, and before we extend those invitations, I wanted to bring that to this committee. Are we okay with those invitations going out, so we can have a high diversity of representation for the study?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: To the clerk, please send out those invitations, and let's see if we can get them here for the April 7 meeting.

Mr. Gerretsen, you have five minutes.

• (1245)

Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Thank you.

Madam Chair, if I understood Mr. Perrault correctly when he was answering Ms. O'Connell's questions and trying to address some of her concerns, he talked about engaging with members in the individual communities. I thought I heard him say that he would make sure that the RO is engaged.

Can he confirm whether or not it will actually be the ROs engaging, or him and his office directly? I think the latter is more important.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I will be doing some direct engagement. It is a very large country. As I said, I'm going to Iqaluit this summer, and I'm hoping to have some meetings there with members of the community, but the returning officers play a central role in their community.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: I can appreciate that, Madam Chair, and I think that the information to get back from the returning officers—if he is going to be utilizing returning officers to do that—is important, but I think it has to feed into the overall strategy. I don't think the information can be left in the returning officers' hands, assuming that they will utilize it. He is committed to, if not engaging directly, making sure that all that information is funnelled back to him so that we know where the buck stops.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, of course, absolutely.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay.

In terms of the consultation that he's doing, I want to think that he is doing it proactively.

Can we have some assurance that this work is going to happen in anticipation of trying to determine problems, as opposed to always just reacting to problems that might have happened already?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Of course, the goal of making sure that we engage is to anticipate the needs and avoid the problems. It's to anticipate not the problems, but the needs.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay.

Earlier on in the conversation, Madam Chair, I heard Madame Gill ask some questions about the wider availability of supporting indigenous languages throughout the country as opposed to in specific areas. I think in her example she referred to the case where somebody in Montreal wanted to vote. I understood the discourse, and if I heard him correctly, Mr. Perrault's reply basically was that unless we go to some form of Internet voting, where there is the availability in electronic voting to make things more widely available, it wouldn't be possible.

Did I understand that correctly?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: To have a wide diversity of languages available in writing where there's a small percentage of population is not possible in a paper format. This is why you have, Madam Chair, jurisdictions like California or other American...that use digital interfaces. It may not be voting from home, but it's a voting machine interface that allows the voter to choose the language of that interface.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Good. I'm glad to hear that, Madam Chair, because I think that the lion's share of the difficulty in providing the service is providing it once, and repeating it 337 more times. Other than the fact that the cost associated with the hardware to do that might be cumbersome, I would suggest it's an investment for the country. There are other ways to do it, like he's saying now. I understand that you could have more of these machines, maybe in certain areas where you're expecting a larger turnout of people who are relying on them, but then in any other polling location, such as one in downtown Montreal, you could have just one.

Does that make sense, through you, Madam Chair?

• (1250)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, it makes sense; however, we are a far cry from introducing electronic voting machines in the federal electoral process. This is not allowed in the legislation, and this is not an avenue that I understand Parliament to be wanting to explore.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: My questions were more along the lines, Madam Chair, of how we ensure that the ability to communicate is there. I understood the complexity of that in the responses to Madame Gill around the challenges with upscaling from a few remote locations to the wider public.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I'm not sure we're referring to the same thing. My exchange with the member, as I understood the question, was about providing a diversity of languages in a single electoral district with a single-ballot format, which led me to refer to voting machines.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay. That's fair enough.

I guess I'm not that far off from what he's suggesting. I'm just saying that I don't know if it has to be the actual voting process as much as the ability for proper communication.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: That might be able to be handled without including the actual electronic voting part.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Correct. That is handled currently only at the offices of returning officers and additional offices through the CanTalk translation service, but not at regular polling places.

Mr. Mark Gerretsen: Okay.

Those are all my questions, Madam Chair. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that great exchange.

It got me thinking a bit, Mr. Perrault.

I have to say, committee members, massive kudos to all of you for the thoroughness of your questions and for what we've been able to learn today. I think this was actually very fruitful, and not really what I was expecting. I'm very pleased with the conversation.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Sorry. That's being honest.

I think what I find kind of fascinating in my head, as somebody who was born and raised in the Waterloo region, whose parents immigrated to Canada, whose first language isn't English, was the comment that you haven't received any complaints. Well, when there's no understanding of what's taking place, how do you expect to receive a complaint? I couldn't help but go through just a series of thoughts in my head as to what my grandparents and everybody else went through, and yet we're immigrants. We're not the first people of the land.

I think that's where this conversation is such a thorough one when it comes to the importance that we put on the true nation-to-nation relationship. I want to appreciate the fact that you recognize the importance of indigenous-led. I want to acknowledge that I think you understand there is a diversity of indigenous communities, and that they're not a monolith. I think we've started some important work, but we have a lot further to go. I know that this PROC committee has done a lot of work in this space, as have others.

I want to put a quick question to you, if I may. Well, I'm the chair, so I'm going to.

Have you have been doing some of this work with other districts or other countries that are also in this space? Are you asking other CEOs, such as in New Zealand, what their best practices are and what they've done?

When I think about electronic voting and whether the will is there or not, it took a global health pandemic for the Parliament of Canada to come into the 21st century and have hybrid so that we were able to vote electronically. It's because the work is so important. If voting is so important, I think we need to start having these tough conversations to see where it's going. Maybe the will then will come. I think a lot of things in the country that parliamentarians have advanced have been things we never would have been able to do if there weren't the political will. Then we brought more people along. So I think this is a very important conversation for us to get comfortable with being uncomfortable with.

We have about three minutes left, Mr. Perrault, if you would like to answer that question. You can always send our committee more information.

Ms. Lawson and Madame Morin, if you'd like to quickly put your voices on the record as well, I would appreciate hearing from you—and from Mr. Roussel, always.

I'll pass it to you, Mr. Perrault.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I'm trying to keep track of the question, respectfully, Madam Chair.

I realize that one of our responsibilities is to explore other ways of voting. Even though it's not happening now, it may happen some day. We need to stay abreast of what's done elsewhere. We look at prototypes sometimes for some form of electronic special ballot voting. It's not in the legislation, but we need to keep thinking about and exploring ways to vote, because the circumstances can change quickly. The agility is not always there if you've not done the work ahead of time. That is an important part of our mandate.

We have exchanges through different forums internationally. As I said, on the issues of serving indigenous Canadians and reconciliation, we're having a meeting this summer with all provincial and territorial CEOs in Iqaluit.

If you are there, I would be happy to meet you there and invite you there, if possible.

That is a common issue and area of interest for all chief electoral officers in Canada. We are going to explore ways and see how we each deal with these challenges and try to find best practices.

• (1255)

Ms. Anne Lawson (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Regulatory Affairs, Elections Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair. It's always a pleasure to appear before this committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Karine Morin (Chief of Staff, Elections Canada): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I can reassure you. In developing the document that you have in front of you now, we consulted with many jurisdictions, including Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, Alaska, and even Australia. However, it's a little different for Australia, because the majority of indigenous languages are spoken there and not written. This has really been taken into consideration in presenting a range of options. This summer we will continue this work with our Canadian counterparts.

Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Michel Roussel: Madam Chair, thank you for the opportunity.

I wish to assure you of our commitment to assisting the work of the committee and, more importantly I suppose, to see a real improvement in the way we serve first nations indigenous communities across Canada. Please don't take my word for it; we have to earn your trust.

The Chair: Thank you so much for this great conversation. I look forward to its continuing on Thursday.

We will have three organizations appearing on Thursday and four representatives. We have the language commissioner of Nunavut, Nunavut Tunngavik, and also the Réseau jeunesse des Premières Nations Québec-Labrador. We will continue this conversation, and then we will use the remainder of the time for other committee business.

Please, everyone, keep well and safe. We'll see you on Thursday.

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

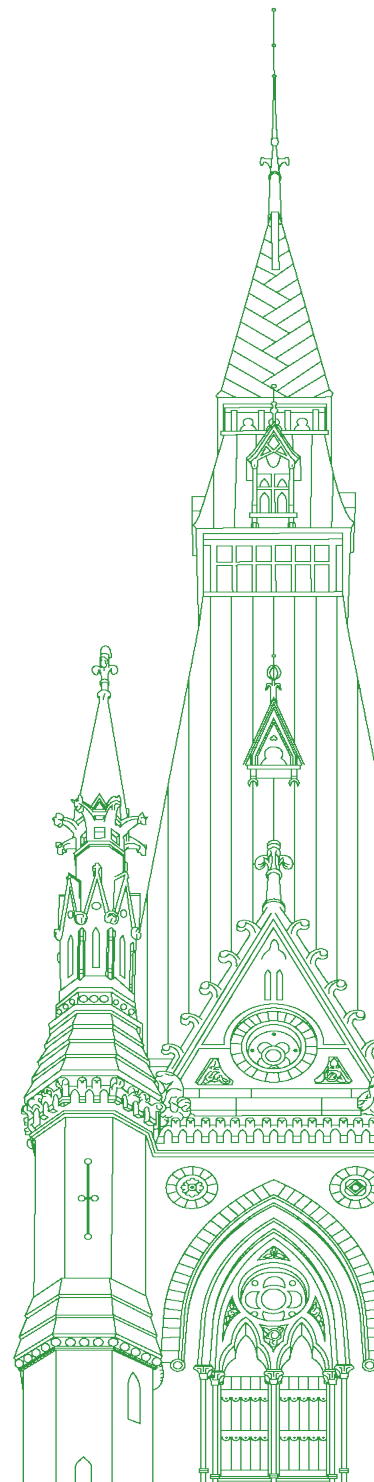
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NUMBER 014

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Thursday, March 31, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, March 31, 2022

• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 14 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting, for the first hour today, to continue its study on the inclusion of indigenous languages on federal ballots. For the second hour, the committee will move in camera to continue its consideration of the draft report on the review of the conflict of interest and ethics code for members. The clerk sent out a new version two of the draft report on Tuesday.

In order to go in camera, I will briefly suspend the meeting.

I'm going to take a moment to acknowledge that we are in the Wellington Building, and part of why we are in the Wellington Building is to ensure that we have indigenous language interpretation.

Today, we have been informed that we will not have Inuktitut language interpretation available in this building. I do hope the interpreter is all right. I'm not sure of all the details, but I do know that I'm disappointed that the resources and access are not there.

I also want to state on the record that one of our witnesses today had asked for interpretation, and as members of Parliament, ensuring that it is available is something we've been fighting hard for.

I do want to apologize to that witness for it not being available. Should the witness want to come back at a time when language interpretation is available, I am confident the committee would welcome the return of the witness at that time. I want to state that on the record.

Does anybody want to make any comments on that?

I can assure you that the clerk is working to make sure we do have language interpretation available in the future, and it is something we will address moving forward.

Ms. Idlout.

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): I want to acknowledge the effort you've made to make sure that I could speak in my mother tongue. I really do appreciate it. I appreciate the challenges as well.

I want to share that while it is disappointing, I'm willing to proceed in English as I think the witnesses we have today are very important given the information this committee will gain from its work.

I'm willing to proceed in English.

Qujannamiik.

The Chair: I thank you for those comments.

Today we have the following witnesses. That was a perfect segue to let everyone know that Ms. Aariak, the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut, is with us.

Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated is here. Aluki Kotierk is the president.

We have, from First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network, Monsieur Cédric Gray-Lehoux and Monsieur Shikuan Volant.

[Translation]

We're going to take a few minutes so that everyone can make their comments.

[English]

I do tend to have about five minutes for opening comments. I will just let everyone know, because we have new and returning members, that we are continuing in the hybrid format. If you have something of substance the committee needs to share, I won't be very flexible with time. Please do take this time for committee members to be able to gain from the expertise and knowledge that you are providing.

With that, I will pass the screen over to Karliin Aariak.

Commissioner, welcome.

Ms. Karliin Aariak (Commissioner, Office of the Languages Commissioner of Nunavut): *Qujannamiik.*

First off, Madam Chair, I also am disappointed. I was hoping to speak in my mother tongue of Inuktitut today, but I also recognize the challenges. I appreciate the challenges and the efforts that you guys went through to make sure I was able to speak in Inuktitut.

Madam Chair, honourable members of the committee, *qujannamiik* for inviting me today. It's an honour for me to appear before you.

Nunavut is a jurisdiction like no other. It has three official languages: Inuktitut, which includes Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun; English; and French. The majority of Nunavut residents speak Inuktitut as their mother tongue. In fact, a majority of Nunavut Inuit speak primarily Inuktitut, despite significant declines in its use.

Election ballots used in municipal and territorial elections across Nunavut include Inuktitut. I think there is no reason for the Government of Canada to adhere to a lesser standard. At a minimum, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples requires Canada to ensure that interpretation is available to electors who prefer to use Inuktitut when casting their ballot. However, the secrecy of the vote will be compromised if we rely solely on interpretation services to facilitate an elector's participation in the democratic process.

This is especially true of small fly-in communities where Inuit electors could have concerns about others knowing how they voted. This is why it is vital to use interpretation services only when strictly necessary and when there are no other options. In this case, there is a clearly viable option of using Inuktitut on ballots in federal elections, just as it is used in municipal and territorial elections across Nunavut.

The Inuit Language Protection Act requires the use of Inuktitut in public signs, posters, reception and client services. The ILPA applies to federal agencies, departments and institutions. Despite this, Elections Canada has failed to implement its Inuit-language obligations to comply with ILPA in Nunavut. My office advised Elections Canada of its ILPA obligations, since Nunavummiut had filed concerns which attracted significant media attention.

I'd like to give you five examples of admissible concerns that our office has received. In example one, Inuktitut was missing on posters directing voters where to vote during advance polls. In example two, the dates and hours of operation for advance polling were not available in Inuktitut. In example three, information at the advance polling stations and information regarding special ballot instructions were not available in Inuktitut. In example four, the name of the organization, Elections Canada, was not provided in Inuktitut on the voter information card. In example five, we are experiencing COVID, and the "mask required" sign posted on a door during election day was only in English. My office has also received concerns that syllabics were not printed on the federal ballots, even though the current laws do not require this.

I therefore recommend the following to encourage the inclusion of all Nunavummiut in the federal electoral process. Recommendation number one is to amend the Canada Elections Act to include both Roman orthography and Inuktitut syllabics on federal election ballots. Recommendation two is to amend the Canada Elections Act to use Inuit-language text in Elections Canada public signs and posters that is at least as prominent as English and French. Recommendation three is to create and implement a policy and procedure specific to Nunavut to ensure that Elections Canada complies with its obligations as set out in the Inuit Language Protection Act. Elections Canada must take effective measures to remove all barriers to participation of Nunavut Inuit electors in the democratic process.

UNESCO marked 2022 as the beginning of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages to ensure indigenous peoples' rights to preserve, revitalize and promote their languages.

• (1110)

I also want to quote what is stated in the preamble to Nunavut's Inuit Language Protection Act:

Deploping the past government actions and policies of assimilation and the existence of government and societal attitudes that cast the Inuit Language and culture as inferior and unequal, and acknowledging that these actions, policies and attitudes have had a persistent negative and destructive impact on the Inuit Language and on Inuit;

It is imperative for federal agencies, departments and institutions such as Elections Canada to commit to taking all necessary steps for the usage, preservation, revitalization and promotion of the Inuit language in Nunavut.

Qujannamiik, merci, and thanks for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner, for those opening comments. It's great to have you here with us.

I will now be turning the screen over to President Kotierk.

Witnesses, I would ask, if suitable, if you would keep your cameras on. Then we can see everyone for the whole time. It's nice to see faces even though virtual.

I've just received a nice note from Ms. Idlout to say today is also National Indigenous Languages Day. I think it's important that we acknowledge that.

Thank you for that information, Ms. Idlout. I knew that and heard about it on the news this morning. It's all the more reason and very timely that we're having this conversation today. It's really important that we acknowledge and recognize the resources and supports that are needed to go with any changes we make to make sure that it is successful.

President Kotierk, welcome.

• (1115)

Ms. Aluki Kotierk (President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.):
[*Witness spoke in Inuktitut*]

Good morning, Chair, and members of the committee.

I thank you for inviting me to present to you as you undertake a study on the inclusion of indigenous languages on federal election ballots.

The topic today is very important. It is especially important with the backdrop of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, 2022 to 2032. As was just pointed out, today is National Indigenous Languages Day.

I am joining you virtually from Iqaluit, Nunavut. Nunavut is the only province or territory in Canada where the mother tongue of the majority of the population is homogeneously neither French nor English.

In fact, in 2016 the Canadian census painted a very clear picture. For Nunavut there is a heading that reads “official languages”, 11,020 English, 595 French; and a heading that reads “non-official languages”, 22,600 Inuit languages. Both federally recognized official languages are minority languages in Nunavut.

Nunavut Inuit expect to hear, see, read and speak Inuktitut in all aspects of their daily lives in Nunavut. This expectation includes participation in democracy through the casting of their votes.

Until being moved to communities between the 1940s and 1960s, Inuit continued to live nomadic lives and governed themselves with very limited government interactions. In 1950, Inuit were given the right to vote; however, according to Elections Canada, it wasn't until 1962 that all Inuit communities actually had access to voting services.

As voting citizens, we elect our representatives. We choose a representative thinking that they have a good understanding of our lived experiences and will be in the best position to be able to promote our interests and our views.

We expect elections to be fair so that all Inuit can freely participate in elections. During the most recent federal election in 2019, the voter turnout, according to Elections Canada, was 48% in Nunavut. This was the lowest compared to all other provinces and territories in Canada where the average voter turnout was 67% of all eligible voters. In other words, the majority of those who were eligible to vote in Nunavut did not vote and did not elect their member of Parliament. That is not good. It is not good for our democracy and it is not good for our country.

In a 2019 CBC news article, Iqaluit resident Elisapi Aningmiuq shared how she was asked to translate a sign that stated “mandatory mask” when she told elections staff at the Iqaluit polling station that the sign was not made available in Inuktitut. She translated one sign, but then declined when she was asked to translate more. Elisapi commented that it was not her job to do Elections Canada a favour when they were not prepared and that it was disheartening to see signs not made available in Inuktitut.

Worrying about the impact this may have on unilingual Inuktitut speakers, Aningmiuq said that it's just not acceptable not to see Inuktitut in the signs that are meant for our community.

The reality is it is quite common in our daily lives as bilingual Inuktitut-speaking and English-speaking Inuit to be expected to provide interpretation and translation services.

One important way to encourage Inuit to participate in the democratic process is to reduce every possible barrier for them to vote.

It is commendable that Elections Canada has taken some initiatives to address the issue. For example, in the 2019 election, Elections Canada translated the voting guide, voter information cards and some other material into Inuktitut, and their information campaign included ads in Inuktitut among other things.

• (1120)

To date, however, Inuktitut is not on the ballot, and the efforts by Elections Canada are inconsistent, ad hoc and depend on the goodwill of the staff of the day.

We need a consistent system that is legally required in order to provide these services in Inuktitut and other indigenous languages.

As I begin my conclusion, I want to point out how commendable it is that the current government has made reconciliation with indigenous peoples an important priority. Supporting indigenous peoples in Canada and the right to vote in their own language could be an important step towards the goal of reconciliation. It would help us feel as indigenous people that we are an important part of the democratic system. It would demonstrate respect for our language, our culture and our world view as a self-determining people. We would have a stronger sense of our ownership in Canadian democratic institutions, which would provide a stronger foundation for Canada to move forward with indigenous peoples and make Canada stronger.

To recap, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated supports putting indigenous languages on ballots in ridings with a substantial presence of indigenous peoples and supports giving voters the right to request special ballots in the indigenous language of their choice no matter where they may live. Such an initiative would make us stronger as a country and would contribute towards the goal of reconciliation.

Qujannamiik.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for your opening comments.

[Translation]

Let's continue. We have with us two witnesses from the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network. If I understand correctly, Mr. Gray-Lehoux will be speaking.

Welcome, Mr. Gray-Lehoux.

[English]

Mr. Cédric Gray-Lehoux (Spokesperson, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network): *Wela'lin*, Madam Chair.

Weli eksitpu'k. Good morning, everyone, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

Today I am here as spokesperson for the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network, as well as president of the same organization.

Our reflections will be shared by one of my co-spokespersons, Shikuan Vollant, and it will be done in French.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Mr. Shikuan Vollant (Spokesperson, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network): *[Witness spoke in Indigenous language.]*

[Translation]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[Witness spoke in Indigenous language.]

[Translation]

Members of Parliament, members of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, you have brought to our attention a request regarding the feasibility, challenges and benefits of translating ballots into First Nations, Métis and Inuit languages.

First of all, we would like to stress that we support all initiatives that in any way enhance or revitalize our languages. However, we would like to take this opportunity to answer your question about the benefits of including these languages on ballots.

First, we must tell you that ballot translation is not a priority when it comes to revitalizing our languages. On average, about 40 per cent of Indigenous people, or fewer than one in two, vote in federal elections. There are many reasons for this, but no study has mentioned ballot translation as a solution to this abstention. Above all, we imagine that this measure would cost an enormous amount of money. If the goal is to revitalize our languages, that money would be much better spent elsewhere, such as to recognize and financially compensate our elders, build spaces in which we could meet to learn our languages, or organize trips with our younger community members.

Your committee is not mandated with making these decisions, but if the House is looking to support our nations, we have ideas and would be happy to discuss them with you.

Lastly, as spokespersons for the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network, we would also like to stress the importance of not taking any more measures that increase the environmental burden that we are all experiencing. Translating ballots into the 60 First Nations, Métis and Inuit languages would inevitably add to the waste generated by elections.

In conclusion, while we would again like to emphasize the good intentions of this measure, we do not believe it is a priority. The money that would be earmarked to implement it could be better invested in our communities, and we denounce its environmental impact.

[Witness spoke in Indigenous language.]

[Translation]

Thank you.

● (1125)

The Chair: Thank you very much for sharing your comments with all of the members here at the committee.

[English]

We're going to start with a six-minute round.

I understand it's Mr. Vis, followed by Mr. Turnbull, Madam Gill and Madam Idlout.

Mr. Vis, you have six minutes.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all of the witnesses for appearing today.

My first question will go to the languages commissioner from Nunavut, Ms. Aariak.

If, for example, residents of the territory were able to write on a special ballot in Inuktitut, do you think voter participation would increase?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: If I understand your question correctly, you're talking about special ballots, and if they were able to write—

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes, special ballots.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: In Nunavut, it's already expected, as I mentioned, in territorial and municipal elections. They are already in syllabics. That's the reason why our office, I believe, received concerns regarding federal elections, even though there's no obligation. Inuit already expect that. We're already practising having Inuktitut syllabics in our ballots in Nunavut.

I recognize the fact that there is some information that Elections Canada made available in the past federal election in the Inuit language. Having the Inuit language on ballots would help in increasing the voter turnout.

I also want to point out the fact that our orthography uses syllabics and Roman orthographies that are basically in the English alphabet and the syllabics that we do use. We use both of those orthographies.

Mr. Brad Vis: The commissioner of Elections Canada pointed to the fact that they had serious infrastructure issues with printing ballots and that printing ballots in syllabics, for example, would be very hard for them to accomplish. I am speaking in advance of an election. I'm assuming that you, as the commissioner of elections in Nunavut, already have that capacity.

Do you think that is a barrier? Do you think that the printing of ballots in two or three different languages is a reason we shouldn't include your indigenous language on a federal ballot?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: The issue they're coming across with infrastructure is something they have to deal with.

In my opinion, if we have our language on the ballots, it will definitely help. Nunavummiut will be part of the democratic process. I think it is very important to include Inuit and indigenous people in Canada, especially in Nunavut, since we already have these rights recognized in Nunavut.

Mr. Brad Vis: To be clear, have you, as the elections commissioner in the territory, ever faced infrastructure challenges printing ballots in multiple languages?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: As languages commissioner of Nunavut?

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: They've never had issues.

● (1130)

Mr. Brad Vis: They've never had issues. That's what I was looking for.

Thank you.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: I'll also add that it's the same thing with the municipal election. The territorial election is one and municipal elections are another. In that regard, there have been no issues that they have faced.

Mr. Brad Vis: I'm glad you pointed out some of the concerns about printing information in Inuktitut for voters, and I know Elections Canada did recognize that.

Hearing it from you, I see that the problem might have been more acute than what we were led to believe at the last election.

If I take anything away from this meeting, it's that there is a minimum standard that has to be met that has not been met to date. That's very problematic for me to hear.

I want to thank you for sharing that information.

Elections Canada recommended that one way of moving forward would be to have the ballots printed, like a copy of the ballot, a facsimile of the ballot, in Inuktitut beside the English version.

What would you think of a compromise along those lines? The ballot wouldn't necessarily be in the indigenous language, but a copy of the ballot in the indigenous language would be available in each voting booth.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: If I understand you correctly, when people go out to vote, there would be a copy inside the booth for—

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: That would be a help, but it's not on the ballot. What we're talking about is including Inuit language on the ballots.

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Skip that. Let's get the Inuit language on the ballots.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay. Thank you.

That was very helpful.

I have no further questions.

The Chair: That was very helpful.

Thank you, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Turnbull, six minutes go to you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses for being here today.

I'm getting a bit of an echo. Can you hear me okay?

The Chair: We can. We don't have an echo.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: That's great. Thanks.

Thank you for being here. I really appreciated your testimony.

We heard from the Chief Electoral Officer earlier this week. In his remarks, Mr. Perrault highlighted four different options.

He also talked a bit about the pilot that was done in Nunavut in the last election. There was some attempt to translate and provide some of the election materials in Inuktitut. Some of you have ac-

knowledge that there's some effort there, but you've also pointed out that that was insufficient.

When I asked the CEO of Elections Canada whether he had received any feedback from the people in Nunavut, he didn't seem to have much to say in terms of direct feedback.

I want to give you an opportunity. You've given some feedback here. In general, Ms. Kotierk, you said there was a low turnout in the last election. Do you think that was a result of the pilot not being successful?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: *[Witness spoke in Inuktitut]*

[English]

Thank you for the question.

As Mr. Vollant indicated, there are many factors why there is low voter turnout. I indicated in my remarks that the ability to vote is still something fairly new—since the 1960s—that we've been exercising. As Commissioner Aariak has indicated, Inuit expect to be able to participate in the democratic process in Inuktitut. Any efforts to ensure that Inuktitut is available on the ballots will help to make it less intimidating and make it something that we feel we're a part of.

There have been instances where I've heard candidates say on the community radio, for instance, "When you go to vote, my name will be in the middle," if there are three candidates, or "If you go to vote, my name will be the last one." They do that because it's not in Inuktitut, and to give people the confidence that they're going to vote for the person that they want to vote for.

To me, that's adapting to a system that is not serving our needs.

● (1135)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for your remarks. I appreciate that response.

Mr. Vis also mentioned what the CEO said was his preference, which seemed to be the ballot facsimile. That is a copy of the ballot that could be translated into Inuktitut, and put in the voter booth, so that electors could reference it when they're filling out the ballot.

I think the reason the CEO was saying that would work.... I think it goes beyond just Nunavut. You acknowledged in your opening remarks that Nunavut is unique in its jurisdiction, because the majority of electors speak one indigenous language, whereas in other parts of the country, there are many indigenous languages that are present in different jurisdictions. I think the CEO was trying to find a solution that might work for all indigenous languages and many jurisdictions across the country. There is consideration there.

This is a challenging issue. We're all committed to doing what's best here, which is moving along the path to ensuring that all indigenous languages are included to the greatest degree possible. I wonder whether, under that circumstance, considering all of the other jurisdictions, you think the ballot facsimile would be a good approach to take. I recognize that Nunavut might be somewhat unique.

Ms. Aariak, maybe I could go to you.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: *Qujannamiik*, Mr. Turnbull, for the question.

My jurisdiction is in Nunavut, and I would like to acknowledge that. These language rights are in Nunavut. The federal department and government agencies have to abide by the language legislation in Nunavut already. This is why my recommendation was for Elections Canada to have a specific policy and procedure for Nunavut electors, because this is a jurisdiction that recognizes not only the official languages of Canada—English and French—but also the Inuit language.

Because of the uniqueness of our jurisdiction, we expect our language rights to be respected. We expect to be able to be involved in the electoral process and to have our language be visible and used.

Does that answer your question?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: It does, yes. Thank you very much for that.

I guess what I'm wondering, then, is whether Nunavut would have a different approach from other jurisdictions around the country, from your point of view. I recognize that you're advocating for your jurisdiction. That makes perfect sense, and I would never fault you for doing so; that's for sure. I'm just thinking more broadly, as Elections Canada has a mandate to serve the entire country.

From an elections standpoint, I'm wondering whether you think the approach in Nunavut should be unique to Nunavut, with maybe a different approach needed for other jurisdictions. What would you say to that, Ms. Aariak?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: That would support the recommendation I mentioned where I would like Elections Canada to have a specific policy and procedure for Nunavut because of our jurisdiction and the legislation we have. I think it would be a great opportunity to start off by working better within the jurisdiction of Nunavut.

I also recognize the fact that there were some efforts being made by Elections Canada in the last federal election to expose and have more communications and material in the Inuit language, but again, there were some shortfalls. Because in Nunavut we're in a jurisdiction where language rights are strong, I think it would be a great start. For the other jurisdictions, the ballot....

I'm sorry. How do you say that? English is my second language.

• (1140)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: No problem. It's the ballot "facsimile".

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Yes. I could see the ballot facsimile working in other jurisdictions, but in Nunavut we're advanced in recognizing our Inuit language rights. My recommendation, as mentioned, is to have the Inuit language in Roman orthography and in syllabics on the ballot.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Madam Chair, I note that Mr. Vollant has also raised his hand.

Maybe he could respond quickly, if you are okay with that. I don't want him to feel excluded.

The Chair: We would not want that.

Go ahead, Mr. Vollant.

[Translation]

Mr. Shikuan Vollant: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to make one little comment. What we and our Inuit sisters are saying may seem a little contradictory, but that is not the case. In fact, this may be an opportunity for the members of this committee to finally realize that each people, each nation, is unique.

I am 30 years old today and I am part of one of the last generations that speak our language perfectly. The important thing is to promote our language so that our young people can learn it. I have a lot of nephews and nieces who no longer speak our language and speak more English with YouTube than they speak Innu-aimun, my mother tongue.

I don't think that would help us. An example is my mother, who is 69 years old today and does not really speak French, who has a lot of trouble speaking, but still votes. I don't think it would be useful for us, farther south, to have the opportunity to vote in Innu. The important thing really is funding for learning our languages. Whether you speak French or English, you learn to speak before learning to read and write. Having ballots in our language would not do anything for us.

If you want First Nations members to vote more, give them a reason to do it. It isn't a question of making it easier to vote; it is a question of giving a real reason to vote. That is what is important for us.

The Chair: Thank you for those comments.

I now turn the floor over to Ms. Gill.

You have the floor for six minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Tshinashkumitin to utshimau, to utshimau Gray-Lehoux, and to all the witnesses who are with us today.

I have to admit that as a member for the North Shore—and that doesn't apply just to the North Shore—I am very pleased to see young people today. It is rare for young people to appear before our committee and all parliamentary committees. I also sit on the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs. We should hear from young people more often. Mr. Vollant said just now that he is 30 years old. In some Indigenous communities, people are very young. I am thinking of Atikamekw in particular, where 65 per cent of the communities are made up of people younger than 30 or 35. I am very old, compared to them. We should invite them more often.

I found one presentation very interesting. For one thing, yes, we are all acting with good will. There is a difference between the situation in Nunavut and the situation where I come from, on the North Shore. Adding Indigenous languages to ballots in federal elections will not be an incentive for people in Nunavut to go out and vote in greater numbers. Nor is that what will revitalize Indigenous languages. I say "where I come from, on the North Shore", but Mash-teuiatsh is right next door, in Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean. The same is true for the people of Mashteuiatsh.

I also want to wish everyone a happy National Indigenous Languages Day.

If Indigenous languages were to appear on ballots, it would still be progress. Then we would ensure that Innu-aimun, for example, was promoted in our polling stations. Indigenous people would at least see their language occupying visual space.

If we had electronic voting, would young people like that? The environmental footprint would not be the same if we decided to hold an electronic vote. Even if we agree that this would not revitalize Indigenous languages—we are not there yet—might some people find it worthwhile? I'm thinking of elders, in particular, who would see their language come back to life in other ways, even if in writing.

Of course, my questions are *forutshimau* Vollant and *utshimau* Gray-Lehoux.

• (1145)

Mr. Shikuan Vollant: Hello, Ms. Gill. It's been a long time since we saw each other.

Ms. Gill is our MP.

This is a very difficult question. When another entity appropriates the language... Do you understand what I am getting at? Yes, it's nice. When you go to the hospital, you see the words "*Kuei*, *Bonjour*, *Welcome*". It's written in several languages. But I don't think I feel more welcome or more at home because of that.

As a Quebecker, you will say "*Kuei*" to me out of respect, but you will also say "Hello" to me, because that word belongs to you. It is a matter of belonging.

The Canadian constitution doesn't belong to me. My laws come from the spiritual laws of my ancestors. That is what is important to me. That is what my everyday life is based on.

As I said, my mother, who doesn't really speak French, will vote somehow, it's her own choice. In fact, you met her on September 30, and you thanked her for being there. I don't think that if she saw the word "*Kuei*" it would change anything. The word "vote" doesn't even exist in the Innu language. Do you understand? The word "vote" doesn't work. We aren't going to reinvent the wheel. My mother wouldn't feel more at home.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: If find what you are saying really interesting. I wasn't thinking of talking about culture, but it is unavoidable.

In the Innu language, the word "vote" doesn't even exist. Today, I wanted to talk about the Innu-aimun identity. People have told me that the word "identity" doesn't exist in that language, just like the word "vote". In terms of culture, even if we want to translate or in-

terpret those words, it can only be literal. That doesn't even convey what you want to say as a nation. That is what you're telling me. There is a language and we see it written, but it doesn't correspond to your values and to what you would like to communicate.

I absolutely don't want to put words in your mouth, but that would be a relative appropriation and lack of understanding of what you want, that is, that programs be funded so the language could be taught and so you could live in your language, speak your language at work and at home and more or less everywhere. That is more important to you than what appears on the ballot, is that right?

Mr. Shikuan Vollant: Yes, that's what is most important to us.

Mr. Gray-Lehoux was just saying that you learn to speak before reading and writing. I'm going to be honest with you [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] I always have trouble reading 95 per cent of the words in my language, Innu. Reading my language and speaking it are two very different things. It takes experts to write it today.

For a young person, it would be much easier to read the words "Vote for Marilène Gill" than to try to invent a word they have never heard or read, one that would be very long. That is much easier for us young people.

As I said earlier, find a way for members of the First Nations to feel at home, so more of them are able to vote.

Honestly, as long as the Indian Act exists, Indigenous people are not going to feel at home in the House of Commons.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Mr. Vollant.

I have one more question, but I might go over my allotted time. Madam Chair, may I ask it? If not, I can wait until later.

At the last meeting, we talked very technically about the threshold of one per cent of people in a riding being speakers of an Indigenous language in order for that language to be included on ballots. That is just a proposal at present, but, as I pointed out to the Chief Electoral Officer, I think it could have repercussions elsewhere, for other Indigenous languages or other issues, not just on ballots.

To summarize, the proposal was that we offer this service if at least one per cent of people in a riding speak the language in question. I had some reservations about this. For you, Quebec is already an arbitrary kind of space. We aren't talking about Nitassinan; that is something else. You live in Nitassinan.

In addition, there is the subject of electoral boundaries, which mean that Mashteuiatsh is not part of the North Shore, the effect being to reduce your demographic weight.

Whether we are talking about ballots or other decisions the government makes, do you think that these kinds of quantitative thresholds—leaving aside the qualitative aspect—are going to stand up?

I am thinking about people I know, like Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, whom I have referred to, and Michèle Audette, whom I was speaking with yesterday. Ms. Audette told me that she had to relearn Innu-aimun herself.

Personally, I really have the impression that quantitative criteria like those used in the proposal are not the ones we should be relying on for creating a place for Indigenous languages.

I would like to hear your thoughts on that subject.

Tshinashkumitin.

• (1150)

Mr. Cédric Gray-Lehoux: [*Witness spoke in Indigenous language.*]

[*Translation*]

I would like to answer that question. This is one of the things that guided our considerations concerning [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] 11 nations in Quebec. I recognize that my northern sisters' experiences are different, given that their language is relatively homogeneous within their territory. Within Quebec and Labrador, however, there are 11 nations with 11 distinct languages.

We think it would add a level of complexity, and certainly a financial burden. That money would be put to better use to create places for connecting with the land and with our elders, to maintain those cultural connections, that for hundreds of years have been systematically destroyed by the institutions put in place. Without going into too much detail, I think we understand one another.

To us, it is more important that young people are able to learn their language before we invest in a system that does not necessarily represent them. We really have to give priority to creating systems for learning the language. Then we could maybe move toward recognition of the Quebec and Canadian electoral system.

It really has to focus first on our young people and their needs to reconnect with their language and their culture.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: [*Member spoke in Indigenous language.*]

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Idlout, you have six minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut*]

[*English*]

I first want to say thank you so much to all the witnesses for coming here on National Indigenous Languages Day to speak about indigenous languages. I think it's such an important topic and it's important to hear the varying opinions about our language and about the investments we need to focus on. That to me is such a huge indication of how deep the impacts of colonialism are, so I do appreciate all the different views.

My first question will be for the languages commissioner, Karliin Aariak.

With Canada's adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples a few years ago, Canada has international obligations. Article 13 of UNDRIP says that countries need to make sure indigenous peoples understand colonial political processes.

Do you feel that UNDRIP has been respectfully enforced by the federal government with regard to indigenous voting?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut*]

[*English*]

Thank you for the question, Lori, and thanks for the opportunity to answer your question.

I'd like to actually get to another article in UNDRIP, which is article 5. It provides that indigenous peoples have the right "to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State."

While Canada is making plans to implement UNDRIP, article 5 and article 13 should be focused on. As you mentioned, article 13 requires subscribing states to take effective measures to ensure language rights are protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples "can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings".

While the government and Canada are committed to UNDRIP's implementation, going through this, making sure that the Inuit language is on the ballot would definitely help in the right direction. More needs to be done. I think we should especially take Nunavut as a priority. Why? Because we already have language rights in Nunavut. It's a unique jurisdiction. Why? Because Nunavummiut are expecting ballots in the Inuit language and getting information and being involved in this political process inclusively in our language. Why? Because my office is still receiving concerns regarding the electoral process, the fact that there is not Inuit language material or that the ballots are not in Inuktitut.

There needs to be more done, but I think focusing on Nunavut because of its unique legal rights, language rights, jurisdiction would be definitely a positive move.

• (1155)

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

My next question will be for President Kotierk.

Could you share your experience? You've been elected as the president of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, and NTI has been holding elections with Inuktitut on your ballot for many years now. I wonder if you could share your experience in ensuring that Inuit have Inuktitut on the ballots.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut*]

[*English*]

I was actually going to echo Commissioner Aariak's comments about Inuit expecting it to be on ballots. It's always been a given, particularly for Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated and the regional Inuit associations as organizations representing Inuit, that the information would be available in Inuit languages and that the ballot would incorporate Inuit languages. To do otherwise would be quite shocking, I think, for many Inuit.

I know there had been a comment made earlier in terms of Elections Canada and their mandate to serve the whole country of Canada. I think with public institutions, the mandate is to serve the public majority. One thing that I've continued to convey—and it's obvious to me often that I'm not articulate enough—is that, for instance, Canada recognizes officially two languages through the Official Languages Act of Canada that was enacted in 1969. When they were working on modernizing it, I was trying to convey that the political landscape of Canada had changed. There is now a jurisdiction where the official languages of Canada are not a majority public language. Public institutions trying to serve the public need to keep that in mind and make sure that they are meeting the needs of the public majority of the jurisdiction of Nunavut.

I think it's crucially important that all public institutions keep that in mind. I also think that it is not helpful for us to have a discussion about whether resources should be allocated to something else other than ballots. In my view, and I think in the view of many Nunavut Inuit, the expectation is that Inuktitut is available in all aspects of our lives, in all public essential services. That includes being able to vote.

Qujannamiik.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Could you share your experience on ensuring that Inuktitut was on your ballots during NTI's electoral process?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut*]

[*English*]

Each time there's an election, we contract people to provide the services to support our elections, to ensure there are individuals in each community who are able to conduct the election, and to ensure that the materials for candidates regarding the nomination process as well as all the information required to become a candidate are available in Inuktitut. In addition, for candidates we provide an example of what the name would look like in Inuktitut and ensure that the candidate approves that the syllabics are the way they want them to be written on the ballot.

I think following this meeting, if you're okay with it and there is an opportunity to provide written submissions, I'll make sure to submit information to the chair about how our electoral process works for Inuit organizations.

• (1200)

The Chair: Thank you. That would be very appreciated.

Commissioner Aariak, even just the comments you're sharing with regard to what you're hearing show the importance of language and who can communicate with whom. I would love to hear about some of that as well, in writing, if you don't mind sharing that with our committee. That would inform very well the work we're doing.

We were going to go into other business today, but I do think it's been a very fruitful conversation and the insights that you're all sharing are appreciated by all. If it's okay with our guests and you're able to stay, we would like to do a second round of questions. I'll try to be better at keeping time so we stay a little more on time, but the substance is so important that I do think it's important that we be able to complete thoughts and get to where we're going.

Is it okay with our guests to stay? Are you okay to stay with us for another half hour or so?

That's perfect. Thank you.

We will start with Ms. Block, followed by Ms. Sahota for five minutes each, then Madam Gill and Ms. Idlout for two and a half minutes, and then Mr. Scheer and Mrs. Romanado for five minutes.

Ms. Block.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and through you I would like to thank all of our witnesses for joining us today. It has been awesome to hear the testimony they are bringing forward on this very important issue.

I do want to follow up on the line of questioning of my colleague Mr. Turnbull. He was highlighting that the Chief Electoral Officer has a mandate to address these kinds of barriers across the entire country so that perhaps when we look at addressing the barriers that have been brought forward by those individuals from Nunavut, that will open the door to all kinds of other conversations that need to take place.

I have a question for the languages commissioner of Nunavut.

I believe, Ms. Aariak, you suggested there could be a specific policy for Nunavut based on the demographics and the official languages that exist in Nunavut. It might tie in with a question for Ms. Kotierk. When it comes to something you said in your opening remarks around the need for a substantial presence or a significant number of individuals in order to provide this kind of service, we have heard various numbers suggested.

I'm wondering if, Ms. Aariak, you would speak to the specific policy.

Then, Ms. Kotierk, could you speak to what you believe would qualify as a riding having a significant indigenous population?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: *Qujannamiik.*

I'll start by answering the first question you directed to me.

The recommendation that I mentioned earlier in my opening statement is the fact that our office has had correspondence with the elections commissioner. We've had correspondence indicating where there are shortcomings. We've had correspondence on sharing the concerns that our office is receiving. We've had correspondence regarding the fact that because in the Elections Act it's not necessary to have the Inuit language in the ballots...but recognizing that there are language rights in Nunavut.

So I come with this recommendation to you, which has also been given to Elections Canada, to create and implement a policy and procedure specific to Nunavut to ensure that Elections Canada complies with its obligations. Elections Canada has obligations, and so do federal departments and agencies, that are set out in the Inuit Language Protection Act in Nunavut. ILPA requires Elections Canada to communicate with and provide certain services to the public in the Inuit language.

I'd like to go to a special section of ILPA. Section 3 obligates Elections Canada to use the Inuit language to display public signs, display and issue posters, and provide reception services in client or customer services that are available to the public. There are obligations already for Elections Canada set out in the Inuit Language Protection Act. This policy and procedure that I have recommended not only to the committee but also to Elections Canada is to ensure that they will make sure they are doing their due diligence to ensure that they are following what they're obligated to do under the Inuit Language Protection Act.

Does that answer your question, Mrs. Block?

• (1205)

Mrs. Kelly Block: Yes. Thank you very much. I appreciated that clarification.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Ms. Kotierk, did you want to speak as well?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: No.

The Chair: We'll go on. Is that okay?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Yes.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, you have five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you to the witnesses, I'd like to ask a question of the commissioner first.

You mentioned that the voter turnout in the 2019 election was 38%. That is quite low. Of course, we want to make sure we increase that voter turnout. Let me preface this by saying that I don't think this is the only reason to include indigenous languages on the ballot, especially Inuktitut in Nunavut. I think you or the other witnesses mentioned respect for language, having ownership over the political process, and of course the right to self-determination. All those things are very important and are obligations under UNDRIP.

I would like to know what the turnout is for municipal and territorial elections currently. Could you give me a comparable for a similar election around that time, or at least for the last couple of elections?

The Chair: Commissioner Aariak, are you there? That question from Ms. Sahota was for you.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Oh, I'm sorry.

I believe the voter turnout number that was mentioned was from President Kotierk.

Am I correct, Aluki?

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Yes, the number was from there, but either of you can answer. I'm sure you may have material as to what the voter turnout is for territorial and municipal elections as well. I could hear from both of you.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Both of us can provide written information for you on that, if you'd like.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Is it because you don't have an exact number with you today?

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's quite all right. Is there a ballpark figure that you would know? Is it more than 38% or is it less than 38%, do you think?

• (1210)

Ms. Karliin Aariak: Aluki, with your experience, did you want to add to that?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I was just going to say I would prefer that we provide the information. We'll find out what the voter turnout was for the territorial election and municipal elections. I don't have that on hand.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'll move on to a different question. This goes to all the witnesses.

In your experience, have some types of consultations already taken place regarding this issue in Nunavut, and what have been the outcomes of that consultation process? What do you hear from the residents of Nunavut in terms of seeing their language being used on the ballot?

It was referred to a bit in some opening statements. I wonder if you could speak to that a little more.

Mr. Cédric Gray-Lehoux: Our political adviser, Simon Dabin, did a research project for his doctoral thesis on exactly this question of indigenous voting within the federal system. We will be sharing that with you later.

In our opening statements, we mentioned some of our findings. There hasn't really been any research that shows that including indigenous languages would increase the vote, knowing that there is quite a complex reason behind indigenous peoples not voting, those numbers being about 40% of participation.

However, we will be sending the information on that research project, just to make sure that you have the most up-to-date information.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. Unless there's a comment from somebody else, I'll move on to my next question.

We were talking to the CEO the other day. Some of the questions posed to him were about creating an advisory council on how to go about incorporating indigenous languages into the ballot.

Do you have any suggestions as to how the Chief Electoral Officer or Elections Canada could go about doing that? In terms of contracting the right assistance, should they have somebody in house to be able to provide all the materials or should they be contracting the services that you contract with for the municipal and territorial elections right now, that the territory of Nunavut contracts out?

We just heard that Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. also has contractors that they use for their ballots.

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: I think the first step in terms of Nunavut would be to contact Elections Nunavut, which conducts the elections for the territorial government and the municipalities, to see how their process works.

I already indicated that I sent information about how our elections work in the Inuit organizations.

The Chair: Does anybody else want to comment on that?

Thank you so much for that exchange.

We'll now go to Madam Gill.

[Translation]

Ms. Gill, you have two and a half minutes.

Mrs. Marilène Gill: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I know I took a lot of time just now, but I would like to ask one last question. Obviously, we could talk about this at greater length with Mr. Gray-Lehoux and Mr. Vollant.

I did understand just now that translation did not encourage participation by Indigenous people in elections, nor did it help to revitalize Indigenous languages. In fact, we talked about our sisters from Nunavut, where the situation is different from the situation for the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network.

If it neither encourages participation nor promotes revitalization, what use would it serve?

Mr. Cédric Gray-Lehoux: In our comments, we began by saying that we acknowledge all the efforts that may be made to promote the First Nations languages.

The problem we are facing often comes down to the fact that there are 11 different Indigenous languages in Quebec. There was reference to a 1 per cent threshold earlier. The peoples are relatively nomadic, and we often have to move, for school and jobs, for example. So we would have to make sure that our 11 languages are represented in every polling station and every riding. We think that might be too heavy a burden, not just for electors, for also for poll workers.

That is why we recommend that this money be used more effectively, when it comes to revitalizing our language and putting systems in place to support our young people.

That said, we recognize the importance of going ahead in certain ridings and situations, including the situation of our northern sisters. Obviously, we support our sisters' arguments.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Vollant.

[Translation]

Mrs. Marilène Gill: [Member spoke in Indigenous language.]

[Translation]

Mr. Shikuan Vollant: I would like to add something.

My colleague [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in Quebec and Labrador, but there are 43 First Nations communities. That could be a linguistic and logistical nightmare, because we would have to make sure the correct pronunciation and correct written form was used in each community. I don't write, and don't even speak, the same Innu as is spoken in Natashquan, in Unamen Shipu or in Pakuashipi. We all have our differences, and that is the beauty of our languages.

The Chair: Thank you for those comments.

Ms. Idlout, you have two and a half minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: *Qujannamiik.*

I think my question will be for Aluki.

I appreciate the difficult dichotomy that we are faced with in terms of language and culture and how the electoral process is very colonial for first nations, Métis and Inuit communities.

At the same time, we're sitting here trying to understand what the barriers are to increasing voter turnout. I think what we need to understand may be from the Inuit perspective, and I'm asking you specifically, Aluki, because I know you had to be elected as the president of NTL and how, within the Inuit culture, there may have been different ways of selecting leaders for our communities.

Could you try to describe what the barriers might be that Indigenous people experience in trying to reach such activities like voting?

Ms. Aluki Kotierk: [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut*]

I think you raised a really interesting point in terms of culture. That was one of the reasons I wanted to share when Inuit were able to vote starting in 1962, because Inuit were moved from the land to communities. Part of being moved from the land to communities was not only a drastic cultural and lifestyle change in terms of the economy, wage economy, going to school, participating in a community in the way we do now, but also voting for an individual was something that also had to be learned.

In our nomadic family camp systems, leaders would become leaders based on their knowledge, their skills and family members going to individuals based on their expertise on specific issues. The idea of leadership in terms of an election is a different concept and is raised on occasion in our communities when there are discussions about [*Witness spoke in Inuktitut*] or someone who's able to make decisions about things. The irony is now having individuals who speak both English and Inuktitut being in positions even when they're fairly young to be leaders, and I think that's in contradiction to the way our culture would often function very recently in living history. That adds an additional barrier to how things are done.

I think it's quite uncomfortable for Inuit candidates in the way they go around saying, "Vote for me. I have the best skill set. Vote for me. I will be capable of doing this. Vote for me. This is what I will do for you." Culturally, the idea of self-promotion is quite frowned upon, because we're all part of our communities. Each of us, regardless of who we are and what we do, have an important role in our community, so no one is to be put on a higher pedestal than that of someone else. It becomes quite uncomfortable even for candidates to be asking for people's votes, so that adds to how there may be.... We talked a little bit about the different factors as to why there may be lower voter turnout. I think that might be one.

I'll leave it at that.

[Witness spoke in Inuktitut]

• (1220)

The Chair: Thank you for those words and that information.

Mr. Scheer, the next five minutes go to you.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate the testimony that we've heard today. It's been a great discussion, and I think we can all agree on the goal of facilitating participation in elections. Some of the discussion has touched upon some of the challenges that many speakers of Inuit and indigenous languages face on a more general basis.

Mr. Vollant, I was wondering if you could expand a bit on the comment you made about directing resources toward ensuring that the ballots are printed in more languages than just English and French. You said that members in your community have other areas where they believe the investment of those resources could have a bigger impact. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but that's the impression I got.

Could you speak about some of the areas where you might consider resources like this being directed, instead of focusing solely on the ballots? What other types of programming or services may help the people you represent have more ability to use their indigenous languages?

[Translation]

Mr. Shikuan Vollant: Thank you for that question, Mr. Scheer.

Language happens in the home first. I learned Innu when I was young, because my mother always spoke to me in that language. It is a matter of investment, culture and language, but it also affects an individual's well-being and holistic healing.

If I have children one day, how am I going to manage to teach my language if I am not well? This issue even involves social and psychological services. It is truly far-reaching. We see only the tip of the iceberg, but everything underneath is extremely large. If we want to preserve our culture, and if we want to learn all our languages, we have to be well in ourselves.

We must first love our identity, something that is not given to all members of the First Nations, because we still suffer abusive treatment like systemic racism. Will I want to be Innu if I have to go to the hospital? Am I going to be embarrassed to speak my language,

even if there is an Innu interpreter there? Am I going to be afraid of experiencing racism or hate? It is very far-reaching, Mr. Scheer.

In an ideal world, the Innu nation would encourage parents to speak to their children in Innu at home, and that is how we could revitalize our language. However, it is very difficult, Mr. Scheer, because starting in primary school, we learn the alphabet in French, not in our languages. For a child who goes home after speaking French all day, do you think it is easy to speak Innu with their father or mother? No, Mr. Scheer, it is very difficult.

To revitalize the language, we have to dig a lot deeper. On the question of studies, the Institut Tshakapesh can tell you what to do and what would be a good idea when it comes to the Innu language. However, seeing the tip of the iceberg isn't enough; you have to look at what is underneath. That is very important.

It is not sufficient to write in Innu on a ballot, Mr. Scheer. I myself, Shikuan Vollant, don't recognize the Canadian constitution as my own, so I don't go out to vote. I think it was our MP, Marilène Gill, who asked what could be done to encourage the First Nations to vote. Make it something we want to do and give us a way of recognizing ourselves in that institution. That is the question.

Thank you.

• (1225)

[English]

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Madam Chair, I don't have any other questions on this now so I will hand my time over to either one of my colleagues or one of the other committee members.

The Chair: Mr. Vollant helped you spend all your time. That was a really good opening question, and I think the perspectives he was able to provide are actually quite informing and even relatable a little for myself.

I'm the child of immigrants from India and we spoke Punjabi at home. Then all of a sudden I went to school and it was in English. I said, "What's going on here?" It was challenging because I lived in Canada outside of my house and it felt like I lived in India in the house. Language is very important. I really appreciated that exchange.

Mrs. Romanado, we go over to you for five minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and through you I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

This has been excellent testimony for us and, in fact, will help feed a subsequent study that we will eventually be doing in terms of the 44th election. I think this is very beneficial for us to understand not just the question of indigenous languages on ballots, but also the barriers for indigenous peoples to participate in the democratic process.

I want to follow up with respect to a question one of my colleagues had when the Chief Electoral Officer was here. She inquired about what the Chief Electoral Officer was doing in between elections to prepare.

Based on the testimony from Ms. Aariak, it is clear that documentation for municipal and territorial elections, for instance, a “vote here” sign giving directions, already exists, so it's not a question of reinventing the wheel. The information is already available.

Ms. Aariak, you mentioned that you have been in correspondence with the Chief Electoral Officer. Perhaps this would be more a question for the chief electoral officer for Elections Nunavut, but has there been any proactive approach to reach out to your organization to get assistance in making sure that documentation that needs to be translated for federal elections is also in line with what you're doing? It strikes me that the Chief Electoral Officer did not have a poster—and you mentioned this in example one—directing voters where to vote in advance polls for a federal election when it exists at both municipal and provincial.

Even more disturbing for me is example 5, where it said a “masks required” sign posted on a door during the election was only in English. I quickly went on the Public Health Agency of Canada website to look up information regarding coronavirus, and there was a drop-down menu where I could select the Inuktitut language and proceed to print a poster in the official languages of Nunavut about mask requirements and so on.

If this information already exists, how is it that the Chief Electoral Officer cannot proactively make sure that this information is provided to you?

I am quite concerned that for some reason this is not happening. I would hope, as my colleague said in the last meeting with the Chief Electoral Officer, that in between elections this outreach and pretty basic googling is happening so this is not an issue at the next federal election.

Would you and any other witnesses like to comment on that?

• (1230)

Ms. Karliin Aariak: I believe that was directed to me, if I'm correct.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Yes. Thank you.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: The process within our office in receiving concerns is we have to go through an investigative process, contact the obligated body, and when it is with Elections Canada we have done so.

Before the federal election in 2021, I did correspond in the beginning of my tenure as the languages commissioner ahead of the elections of the previous concerns that our office had received.

The response that I did receive was the efforts and the list of what Elections Canada was doing to ensure there was more infor-

mation available. That was promising, but why did my office continue to receive concerns during 2021?

There are still issues that need to be addressed. Thank you for pointing out the one about masks, because it was already over a year that we were experiencing COVID.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Absolutely.

Ms. Karliin Aariak: I would also like to mention that many resources are available in the Inuit language. There is also an Inuit language authority in Nunavut. Their objective is to standardize Inuit terminology. Is that something Elections Canada can go to? The sole purpose of the Inuit language authority is to standardize English and Inuktitut terminology.

There are also many other resources. Microsoft Bing Translator just came out with an instant translation.

Even so, in the correspondence I received from Elections Canada, they have contracted out to ensure that instant translation was available. If that was the case, why was that not used for displaying the “masks mandatory” poster? That would be for Elections Canada to answer.

There are resources and there should be better efforts made. It is recognized by law in the jurisdiction of Nunavut.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much for that.

I want to reiterate thanks to you for reaching out. At the end of the day, I think it's up to the Chief Electoral Officer to also be proactive to do these kinds of outreach efforts and to make sure that the information you and the people of Nunavut need is provided to them in real time and in their language.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I think I can speak for all committee members and anybody watching at home to say that this was a very informative panel. You have all brought a lot of knowledge and experience with you. I really want to thank you for providing us the extra time as well.

Please do not hesitate to write to us or submit any documents or anything that you think is important for the committee. We look forward to receiving it.

With that, I hope everyone keeps well and safe. I look forward to seeing you again soon.

I will suspend for about two minutes and we'll switch over to in camera, so we can continue with our work.

Thank you.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

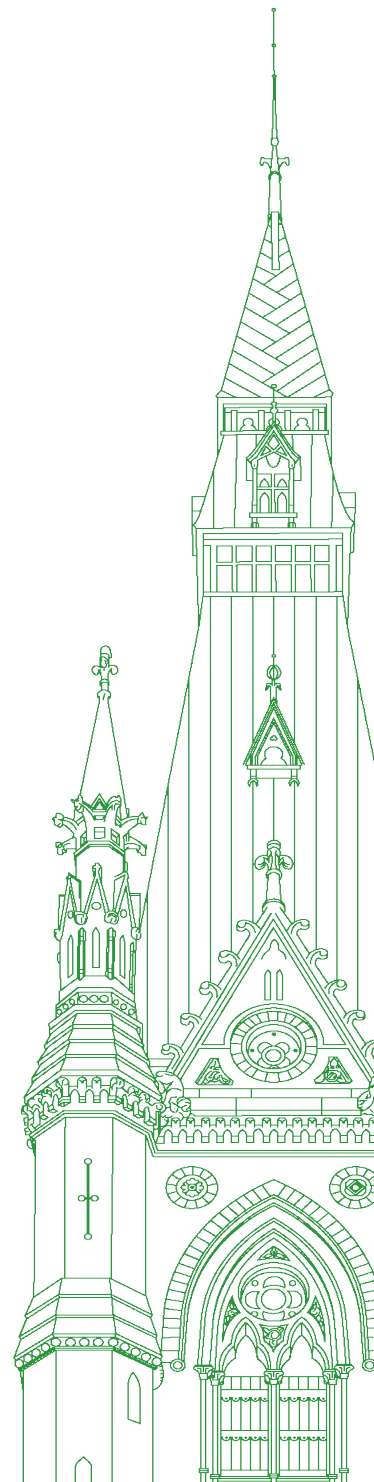
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 015

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to continue its study on the inclusion of indigenous languages on federal election ballots. That will be our focus for the first hour.

Before we go any further, I would like to welcome a new member to the committee, Marie-Hélène Gaudreau.

Welcome to the committee, Ms. Gaudreau.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Good morning.

I'm pleased to be joining you.

The Chair: I would also like to thank Mr. Therrien for all his hard work.

We have to elect a new vice-chair.

It has been moved by Ms. Romanado that Ms. Gaudreau be elected. Is everyone in agreement?

Since everyone is in agreement, I declare the motion carried and Ms. Gaudreau duly elected vice-chair of the committee.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: It's a privilege to be vice-chair of the committee.

[English]

The Chair: Our first panel of witnesses comes to us from the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and the State of Alaska. They are Stephen Dunbar, chief electoral officer, Elections Northwest Territories; Dustin Fredlund, chief electoral officer, Elections Nunavut; and Samantha Mack, language assistance compliance manager of the Alaska Division of Elections. Welcome.

In that order, we will have quick five-minute opening comments. I'd just like to assure all of you that if you are providing substance for the committee to help us in this study, I will not cut you off, but if you are not providing us relevant information, I will probably get you to move on so that we can get to questions and answers. That's just as you know.

With up to five minutes, we will start with Mr. Dunbar.

Welcome.

Mr. Stephen Dunbar (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Northwest Territories): Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for the invitation to appear before you today.

The Northwest Territories has 11 official languages: Chipewyan, Cree, English, French, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun, North Slavey, South Slavey and Tłıchǵ. The ability to converse in an indigenous language ranges from under 200 for Inuktitut to over 2,200 for Tłıchǵ. While these numbers may seem low in a national context, it is important to note that, in our smallest communities, most residents speak an indigenous language.

Our governing legislation, the Elections and Plebiscites Act, currently makes no provision for anything other than the candidate's name and photo on the ballot. As the committee may know, there are no political parties represented in the Northwest Territories legislative assembly, and efforts to introduce party politics have, thus far, been unsuccessful.

In 2016, the territorial government introduced amendments to the Vital Statistics Act, to allow for names to be registered using indigenous characters and diacritics, instead of the Roman alphabet. While these amendments have not yet been brought into force, some residents have started reclaiming indigenous names. As one member said, during the debate on the amendments:

...it also sets the stage for self-identity of First Nations people. You know, the irony of our existence in North America and the world stage is that we all have Anglicized names and Christian names. Our culture is not really reflected in our English names. So this provides an opportunity for people to distinguish themselves as First Nations and Indigenous First Nations around the world.

Under our legislation, a nomination form requires a candidate to indicate the given name and surname by which they are commonly known in their community. There is no requirement to present government-issued documentation, and the ballot would reflect the name as stated in the nomination paper. Figure 1 is an example of what our ballot would look like with indigenous names.

The 1992 plebiscite on the boundary between Nunavut and the Northwest Territories had the plebiscite question translated into 10 of the 11 languages, with Cree being the exception, as interpretation could not be provided in the plebiscite time frame. The proclamation and instructions for voters were also produced in 10 languages. Depending on what languages were commonly spoken in the electoral district, the ballot could have up to four languages included on it. Figure 2 has the English, French and Inuktitut ballot that was used in the eastern Arctic electoral districts.

I'll conclude my comments with some of the issues we face in producing materials in official languages. The languages bureau that was used in the 1992 plebiscite no longer exists, so there's no longer a one-stop shop to have materials produced into all official languages. We are reliant upon individual contractors who may not have the time to quickly turn around materials. The cost to translate materials can also be significantly different, depending on the contractor's rates. There may be considerable variation in terminology between dialects of the same language, so not all speakers may understand the materials produced in that official language. Figure 3 includes examples from three dialects of North Slavey from the Sahtu region, all translating the word "vote".

Finally, care must be taken to ensure that proper orthographic tools are installed on computers to support indigenous fonts. The default settings in word processors can present indigenous fonts using incorrect diacritical marks. Figure 4 has some examples of what can happen when using default settings when opening a document.

I would be pleased to respond to any questions the committee may have. Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much for that insightful information.

We will now move on to Mr. Fredlund.

Welcome.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Nunavut): *Qujannamiik Iksivautaq.*

Thank you, Madam Chair and committee members, for the invitation to appear before you as part of the study on the inclusion of indigenous languages on election ballots.

I am honoured to share with you some of the work that my office does in promoting and advancing Inuktitut in Nunavut's democracy, not only as an obligation under the Nunavut Elections Act, but simply because Nunavummiut rely on us for information in their own languages.

An important tool in the voting process are the ballots upon which we express our democratic choice. Our ballots include candidates' names in any of Nunavut's official languages, French, English and Inuktitut, which we've heard from some of the previous speakers include Inuktitut, which is written in syllabics, and Inuinnaqtun, which is written in roman orthography, the common alphabet that we use in English and French.

Inuktitut names are personal and deeply rooted in Inuit customs and culture. We rely on candidates for the spelling and transliteration

of their names. These are provided to our office during the declaration period and are included on the ballot.

Fortunately, my office does have the capacity in-house to ensure that each name written in Inuktitut syllabics accurately depicts the candidate's choice. This capacity is also necessary to decipher the write-in ballots, to ensure that the voter's choice—written in any official language, including syllabics—is accurately recorded. I have provided the committee with a few examples that depict our multi-language ballots.

Koana. I welcome any questions you have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. That was excellent.

Samantha Mack, we will go to you for your opening comments.

Ms. Samantha Mack (Language Assistance Compliance Manager, Alaska Division of Elections): *Uvlaasatkun.* Thank you, and good morning.

My name is Samantha Mack. I am Unangaġ, from King Cove, Alaska. I come to this work in language access from a previous background in academics, focusing on the self-determination of indigenous peoples. This work is very important to me.

If you don't already know, Alaska is currently undergoing the implementation of ranked-choice voting for the first time in our voting process. As such, my department has recently launched a vast educational campaign, which is being carried out in nine Alaska native languages, in addition to Spanish, English and Tagalog.

For us, the inclusion of indigenous languages in the elections process very much does not end with simple inclusion in the ballot, but is all-encompassing, including items like outreach advertising and all public communications from the division of elections. We also utilize a panel model wherein multiple speakers of each indigenous language meet in a panel to translate together. We feel that this is a best practice in terms of indigenous translations, and it works out quite well for us in regard to accuracy and things like that.

Much like Alaska, Canada's role in the colonization of its indigenous peoples and the ongoing impacts of that mean that the inclusion of indigenous languages in the electoral process is a really important first step. I look forward to this discussion.

Thank you for inviting me.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We also are looking forward to this great discussion.

We are going to start with six-minute rounds, starting with Mrs. Block followed by Mr. Turnbull.

[Translation]

We will then go to Ms. Gaudreau, followed by Ms. Idlout.

[English]

Ms. Block, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Firstly, thank you to our witnesses for joining us today, as well as for this study.

Through you, Madam Chair, I would direct my first questions to Mr. Dunbar.

I'm imagining that there are multiple indigenous languages represented in the different ridings in the Northwest Territories. If that is the case, what is the process for producing ballots in multiple indigenous languages?

• (1115)

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: The ballots in the Northwest Territories only have the candidate's name and photo on them. We don't have the requirement to print anything other than the name and photo on the ballot. We are in the process of trying to make sure that we have a lot of e-voter information published in the indigenous languages spoken in that electoral district.

If we were looking at the Mackenzie Delta electoral district, the languages there would be Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun. If we were looking at the Monfwi electoral district, we would only be looking at Tłıchǫ and English.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much for that.

What types of materials would you be producing in order to provide information to the constituents?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: We would be producing signs that say "vote here" and "polling place" in the various languages.

There will be information about what you require to vote. If there is a voter ID requirement.... For instance, an elector here must show proof of their identity and residency. Obviously, a driver's licence or government identity card would be optimal, but in a lot of our small communities, fewer than half of the residents will have government-issued ID. We would be looking at a health card in conjunction with something else, whether that's a utility bill, a lease, a mortgage or a hunter's card.

Those are the things we would be looking at, and we will have posters produced in each language outlining what materials you can bring to prove your identity.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

Through you, Madam Chair, you also identified that there were some issues with regard to the timelines and dealing with multiple contractors.

Can you define for us how you have mitigated some of those issues?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: At the moment, we haven't really mitigated any of them. We are in the process of gearing up for the 2023 general election. We are starting this work right now. I am meeting

with our languages commissioner next week to start laying out our preliminary plans and getting some feedback from her on what steps we can take.

One of the examples I used was about the different dialects in North Slavey. This language is spoken in a region of the territory that is over 280,000 square kilometres, and these communities are fairly well spread out, so we want to ensure that whatever materials we produce will be understood by electors in each of those communities. We may need to look at producing things in each dialect at that point.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you for that.

I believe the next question I'm going to ask could be answered by either Mr. Dunbar or Mr. Fredlund.

Could you describe for us how long your official election periods are, typically?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: I can start and pass it on to my colleague.

Our elections are 29 days long by law.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Our elections are 35 days.

Mrs. Kelly Block: They're thirty-five days. Okay.

By what point are candidates required to be officially registered? Is there a certain time frame before the elections are going to take place? When do you have to have your candidates in place in order to be able to produce all of the materials?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: For the Northwest Territories, because we don't have political parties, they have until the 25th day before polling to get their nomination papers in to be listed on the ballot. That's the first five days of the campaign.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: We were similar to NWT when we split. We just lengthened our election period, but it's the same concept. It's in the first five days, so between 35 days and 30 days prior to the election.

• (1120)

Mrs. Kelly Block: My last question that I would put to you both, through the chair, is what sort of feedback have you been given about language being a barrier for federal elections?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: I can't speak to any feedback we have received about federal elections. We had a by-election here in February and some of the feedback we received was because we did not have time to produce the materials in Chipewyan. That was a barrier for some of the elders to be able to cast their vote. Due to a COVID outbreak, that election was done by mail-in ballot.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: In conjunction with the federal election in 2019, we had our municipal elections, which we hosted. Our advance vote was on election day, so we shared many of the same venues with Elections Canada in 2019. Anything that leaves my office is in all four languages. Our Twitter account is in all four languages. Our ballots are in all four languages as requested, whereas Elections Canada didn't...it's just English and French.

We had the signs posted side by side on the wall. Ours were in all four languages and Elections Canada's signs weren't. Obviously, we heard a lot from people. They were sometimes confused between the two organizations. We took a lot of phone calls from people complaining to us about our languages production, but in the end, it wasn't ours. It was Elections Canada's, so we got confused in that sense.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We'll now move to Mr. Turnbull.

You have six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair. I'll split my time with my honourable colleague, Mr. Fergus.

Let me start by thanking the witnesses for being here. I really appreciate your testimony today.

For me, what we heard from Elections Canada during this study in the initial meeting was a kind of one-size-fits-all approach. At least, I took from some of the testimony we heard that perhaps there needed to be a solution that could work for every jurisdiction if Elections Canada were to implement a solution on this important topic.

I think that assumption got challenged in the last panel of last week, when we heard from individuals from Nunavut that indigenous languages being included on ballots was really important to them. In terms of other jurisdictions, it wasn't necessarily the top priority for other indigenous speakers. That was interesting for me to note. It challenged a couple of assumptions there.

Perhaps I'll go to Mr. Dunbar first, because the Northwest Territories has many indigenous languages.

Do you see an approach that really recognizes the regional differences of indigenous languages spoken in those areas? What would you advise Elections Canada to do in terms of being able to accommodate as many indigenous languages as possible? I know it's a tough question, but I'd be interested in hearing your perspective on that.

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: Thank you, Madam Chair.

There are probably two comments that I'll make on that.

First, we were one of the first jurisdictions—if not the first—to include the candidate's photo on the ballot. There were numerous reasons for why that first took place about 20 years ago. In part, it was to ensure that electors who may not have full literacy, or who may be able to speak indigenous languages but not to read them, would be able to identify the candidate by sight. That is one of the actions that Elections NWT took—I believe it was for the 2003 general election—to ensure the ballots would be more accessible to all electors.

The other action is that the returning officers in each electoral district will arrange, if there is a need for it, for interpreters to be available at each polling place. Because we have fairly small communities, we have one polling place per community, so there's a need for one interpreter in each community. In the communities where you have multiple languages spoken, we do make efforts to have interpreters for each language, but obviously that is not always possible. I don't think I've fully answered your question, but that is the best effort we make at the moment.

• (1125)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you very much.

I think that's my three minutes, Mr. Fergus, so I'll pass it over to you.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): I'd like to thank the honourable member.

I also want to thank all the witnesses who are with us today.

My question is along the same lines as Mr. Turnbull's, and it's for Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Fredlund.

As Mr. Turnbull said, Elections Canada takes a one-size-fits-all approach, but in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, the language that appears on the election ballot can depend on the community. In some communities, the languages used for the election ballot are English, French and Chipewyan, but in other communities, the language used for the ballot is the most widely spoken language in the community.

Do I have that right?

[*English*]

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: For plebiscites, yes, the plebiscite question would be translated into the language that is commonly spoken in that electoral district, but not for a general election because we don't have the languages on the ballot.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Mr. Fredlund, the information on the sample election ballot you provided appears in Latin or Roman characters, as well as in an indigenous language.

How do you determine which indigenous language will be used for the election ballot? Does it depend on the electoral district or riding?

[*English*]

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Yes, for the example you see, this is exactly what a ballot would look like. Of the 25 communities, 23 use syllabics, the language you probably don't read. Then two of the communities use the roman orthography, but as you've noticed from the last example, it's written in Inuinnaqtun. This is exactly what a ballot would look like.

We have 100% compliance, so everyone in each community has their name in English and in Inuktitut syllabics regardless of whether they speak Inuktitut. If it's someone from southern Canada who's moved to Nunavut who wants to run, they also have their name provided to us in syllabics. We strongly encourage it, and we have 100% compliance when it comes to this.

[Translation]

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Mr. Fredlund.

I think my time is already up, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

Ms. Gaudreau, once again, welcome to the committee. Please go ahead. You have six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair. That's very kind of you.

I read what the witnesses from the last two committee meetings had to say, and that helped clue me in for today's discussion.

I appreciate the useful and specific answers the witnesses have provided in regard to organizing an election and making decisions about how candidates' names appear on election ballots.

I would nevertheless like to hear more from them on the proposal being studied by the committee.

To my mind, we need to determine how we can be inclusive of indigenous peoples—as part of the truth and reconciliation process—in a realistic and achievable way that aligns with the values of democracy, of course.

I believe it was Mr. Dunbar who said that, 20 years ago now, a recommendation had been made to include candidates' photos on the ballot to ensure that all voters, in Quebec and in Canada, who could not read their mother tongue or who were not literate would know who the candidates were. The issues the committee members discussed at the previous meetings may have pertained to omissions, errors and such.

I want to use the five minutes I have left to hear what each of the witnesses has to say on the subject.

Mr. Dunbar, what is the first step we should take to ensure that our recommendations reflect our desire to include indigenous languages on election ballots as part of the truth and reconciliation process?

• (1130)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: Certainly reconciliation is an issue that we, as chief electoral officers, will be discussing later this summer in Iqaluit as well. It's an ongoing process and, for Elections NWT, one of the first steps that I'm certainly interested in taking is ensuring that someone who has an indigenous name would be able to see their name reflected on the ballot as they would spell it, and that may require using non-roman orthography.

On the ballot that I provided to the committee, you will see there are two names on there, one with Chipewyan spelling and one with Tłıchų. There is a glottal stop in Chipewyan that, if it is removed in

an anglicized form, you lose the meaning of what the name actually means. If you remove the glottal stop, you've lost all the context of what that name in Chipewyan actually means. For us it would be very important to ensure that, if a candidate came forward with a Chipewyan name and Chipewyan spelling, we would include that name as they spell it on the ballot. We would not try to anglicize it because I feel that would be quite offensive to their identity, to their name and to the spirit of reconciliation.

I'll pass it on to Mr. Fredlund from there. Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Go ahead, Mr. Fredlund.

[English]

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: I'm an instrument of my politicians. My work is not something that I make up. They meet, like you, and they tell me how they'd like to see my office proceed, when it comes to running elections.

If you're asking for my personal views on reconciliation, and how it would work with Elections Canada and indigenous languages, I can only tell you how my office does it, and from the examples, everything that comes out of my office is 100% in all four languages.

I will agree with my colleague, Mr. Dunbar. It's very important for people to be able to express their names publicly, and how they want them to be written, transliterated, and said. During Project Surname in Nunavut, everyone was given either English names or anglicized names. Many people still don't recognize their name, even though on paper that's their name. Typically, on a ballot, their name would be written in anglicized words, or they would be provided a surname from the government at the time.

Allowing people to write their name however they want, many elders will put their Inuktitut syllabic names without finals. It would be like writing in English without vowels. We accept that, because that's how they want to write their names.

In essence that's what—

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Fredlund.

That helps me understand the specificities of indigenous peoples, who want their language to be recognized, including the different ways in which they write their names. It's important to make sure that is clearly understood. I also really appreciate what the other two witnesses said in terms of wanting to explain their experience.

Ms. Mack, I want to know what you think of what the Northwest Territories and the Yukon are doing. Perhaps it could serve as a model for Quebec and the rest of Canada when it comes to the inclusion of indigenous peoples.

• (1135)

[English]

Ms. Samantha Mack: I can't really speak to the full extent of the progress so far in the specific areas that you have mentioned. I do think that what Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Fredlund have discussed in regard to the intricacies of even alphabet and name is really important. The construction of the ballot, and what the ballot physically looks like in terms of [Technical difficulty—Editor] direction, is also a really important question.

The most fundamental question is to ultimately make sure that everyone who is looking at [Technical difficulty—Editor] digital or physical piece of paper [Technical difficulty—Editor].

Fortunately, in our case that's not—

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Ms. Mack.

The Chair: Thank you everyone.

Go ahead, Ms. Idlout. You have six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): [Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:]

Thank you to all the witnesses who have just spoken. Your comments are very important, and I think we all have a clearer understanding, especially in terms of indigenous people and voting.

Thank you for inviting me to speak as a witness. I have enjoyed listening to other witnesses regarding this important issue. As an Innu, I have always known that language and culture are intimately connected, but I have been intrigued by this system's attempt to isolate language in the context of voting. I believe the attempt to separate language and culture is another indication of the impacts of colonialism. While initially voter turnout may have been high, voter turnouts declined, and remained low for generations.

Can you speak to that in terms of funding?

The Chair: Ms. Idlout, is your question going to everyone?

Ms. Lori Idlout: It's for the NWT and Nunavut.

The Chair: Perhaps we'll start with Mr. Dunbar again, followed by Mr. Fredlund.

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: *Qujannamiik*, Ms. Idlout.

We have a budget process that we go through with our legislative assembly. They have given us contract dollars that we will be using for interpretation services to be able to translate materials into languages. There is no one in my office who speaks all 11 official languages. I think we cover off two at the moment. I would say we are adequately resourced to translate materials into all 11 official languages, the caveat being that it is not always possible to turn around materials in a timely fashion given that we don't have a one-stop languages bureau like there used to be in the 1990s.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Thank you for the question, Ms. Idlout.

Absolutely, the legislative assembly, where my budget comes from, has always been very generous when it comes to ensuring

that all of our information is in all four languages. It's never a question of being underfunded for that.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:]

I want to ask this of everyone because I think everyone understands it, especially those of us with an indigenous background.

As indigenous people, we are growing in population and numbers. I am sure there will be fundamental issues that we'll be facing in the future.

Are you prepared for the increase in population, especially in the NWT because you have 11 different languages? Are you prepared to accommodate the growth of populations? What are you doing to meet the needs that you will face with the increasing populations?

• (1140)

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: One of the actions we'll be taking, especially in regard to languages in some of the electoral districts where they are predominant, is working with the regional indigenous governments to ensure that the translations we are producing.... As you said earlier, you can't separate culture and language. We want to ensure that a lot of the materials we produce are actually reflective of the culture and the language being spoken in a community. Take some of the translations of the word "vote", for instance. It's a literal translation of the letter "x" in some of the North Slavey dialects. We want to ensure that we are working with the indigenous governments to ensure that we have captured not just the literal translation, but the spirit of the word as well.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: It's always important. Our population is increasing. Even though in this last general election we saw a slight decrease in voting, we can attribute that to COVID-19.

In preparations, my office always ensures that our Inuktitut language and Inuinnaqtun language are strong. Four or five of my staff are Inuktitut first language speakers, and we bring in a French-language specialist who helps us out during the election periods. Our office has native speakers of French and Inuktitut. Of course, Inuinnaqtun is a bit more difficult. We live in Rankin. This is not Inuinnaqtun central, but we have good connections with people in the western Arctic to help us out with that.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you.

We are going to proceed with the second round of questions for this panel, and then we'll have Ms. Idlout for the next panel and just do the first round with Ms. Idlout.

Mr. Scheer, it's five minutes to you.

Hon. Andrew Scheer (Regina—Qu'Appelle, CPC): Thanks very much.

I just have a quick question for Ms. Mack. I believe you were listing some of the languages that you offer services in or produce materials in. I believe I heard you mention Tagalog as well. Is that correct?

Ms. Samantha Mack: Yes, that's correct.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Obviously, a lot of the discussion flows from some of the things we've heard about reconciliation and acknowledging the unique role the government has with respect to indigenous languages. Of course, Tagalog would, as far as I understand, not fall into that type of category, but is maybe more the offering of services to people who require it because it's their language. Is that the spirit of why that language would be included in the services you offer?

Ms. Samantha Mack: The requirement for Tagalog is a federal requirement. With that, both the spirit of the inclusion of the language and the simple legal requirement means that it is a necessity in various districts of the state. Therefore, in order to make sure that we have as many people involved in the voting process as possible, we do try to produce materials in as many languages as we can find translators for.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: You mentioned it's a federal requirement. Is that specific to Tagalog, or is there a requirement that once a language reaches a certain threshold in terms of percentages of the overall population, then that must be included? What would the regulation be that would make that a requirement?

Ms. Samantha Mack: The federal requirement concerns the Voting Rights Act, section 203. It says that, if 5% of the voting population speaks a particular language and speaks English less than very well, that language becomes triggered for requirements for the election process.

• (1145)

Hon. Andrew Scheer: That is interesting. I appreciate that clarification because that does open up a whole other rationale or motivation in the inclusion of different languages. If the goal is for federal governments, departments and services to be relevant, or at least have an impact on people's lives, then they need to facilitate that understanding. It is a little bit of a different philosophical approach than some of the reconciliation ideas, but they all lead to the end result, with the difference being that, in your system, this is much more expansive. That would really open up the possibility for literally almost any language.

Ms. Samantha Mack: It certainly would.

In regard to the spirit of reconciliation, as you've been discussing, the federal requirement for indigenous languages lists language groups. We have a federal requirement for Yupik instead of the various languages within Yupik. Our role as the *[Inaudible—Editor]* in reconciliation is to then to figure out which specific Yupik languages will be produced.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: Indigenous languages then have their own set of criteria, I suppose, that are more unique than just any language that might attain the 5% rule?

Ms. Samantha Mack: I think we can definitely say that.

Hon. Andrew Scheer: I only have one other question, and I'll open this to any of the panellists who would like to respond to it. We're looking at the inclusion of indigenous languages on the ballot itself. A number of you have talked about the number of languages that are used in your jurisdictions. I was wondering if anybody would like to comment on the dynamic of providing services or support at the polling locations, beyond just the ballots.

In other words, I've scrutineered before at different levels of elections, so I have often had people who were maybe in the wrong polling location, who may not have the right ID or who have questions about some of the aspects of the voting process. Is it a requirement in any of your areas to provide that ability? In our federal system, we have deputy returning officers, the DROs, who oversee the polling locations and answer questions.

Is there a need, requirement or rule for the ability to have somebody who could speak to people who may only use that one indigenous language? In addition to having it on the ballot, is there any requirement for the staff operating the polling locations to be able to offer clarification, instructions or support in indigenous languages as well?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: There is no requirement under our legislation, but our returning officers and deputy returning officers would be expected to make efforts to ensure that if there is a language being spoken in that community, we'd have interpretation available. Electors are also allowed to be assisted by a family member or friend who can help interpret for them.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Yes, we are legally required to have poll workers who speak the language of the community. That's where it says so. It doesn't say, "French," "Inuktitut" or "Inuktit"; it just says that whatever languages the communities speak, our poll workers must speak that as well.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for that great exchange.

Mrs. Romanado, the next five minutes go to you.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Through you, I'd like to welcome the witnesses here today. I'm especially excited to hear from our colleagues from Elections Nunavut and Elections Northwest Territories, and, of course, Ms. Mack from the Alaska Division of Elections.

My first question is to Mr. Fredlund.

We heard from Ms. Aariak, the language commissioner of Nunavut, at our last meeting. I'd like to know if you've had any meetings with our Chief Electoral Officer for Elections Canada, Mr. Perrault.

• (1150)

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: The chief electoral officers from across Canada meet as a group at least once a year, so yes, I've met with Mr. Perrault numerous times.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: The reason I'm asking this is we had heard that there was some difficulty with Elections Canada having, for instance, a poster that says, "vote here," in the appropriate language, or having documentation about wearing masks at the polls in the appropriate language. I'm hearing from you that at the municipal elections, you had signs in four languages and the Elections Canada signs were merely in two. The translations already exist.

I wanted to know if there was any opportunity to share information, so that there's not a duplication of efforts, but that it's available to Elections Canada, so that they don't have to reinvent the wheel and reprint.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Thank you for the question on efficiency and whether sharing between the federal agencies and territorial agencies always works out 100%.

Absolutely, this is something that we're working on. We're always in discussions. No one's ever going to say no to sharing our Inuktitut and our translated works.

Keep in mind that our rules are different. Elections Canada rules are different from our rules. It's not just a blueprint. It's a bit more than that.

Unfortunately—or fortunately—the last two federal elections coincided with two of our general elections. Both of our offices are extremely busy and we don't really have much time to interact and ask each other how it's going. That's kind of where it stands.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Another point in that regard is that you mentioned your election is 35 days long, similar to a minimum of 36 days for a federal election. It's comparable. However, your nominations need to be in between days one and five, whereas in the federal election, it's up to 21 days prior to an election. It seems there's a discrepancy in Nunavut with the requirement for nomination forms to be in, compared to the federal election. Perhaps that could be something that we look at with the Chief Electoral Officer, to see if he requires additional time to get those names of the candidates translated, and so on and so forth. Maybe that's something we need to look into.

My next question is for Mr. Dunbar.

You also mentioned—through you, Madam Chair—that the “vote here” signs for a polling place were in appropriate languages in the specific districts, and that posters about what kind of ID is required were already translated. My question is similar to the one I posed to Mr. Fredlund.

Is there an opportunity for collaboration between the federal government—the CEO of Elections Canada—and you, to make sure that there are some synergies in translation?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: The materials are not translated yet. That is something that we are in the process of starting right now. Certainly, we would welcome any opportunities to collaborate with our colleagues at Elections Canada.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Perfect. Thank you.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have left?

The Chair: You have 45 seconds.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I won't be able to get into my question at length. I know Madam Sahota has questions, but I'm not sure if she'll just take it in her next round.

Thank you.

The Chair: I will add the 30 seconds to your next round.

[Translation]

We now go to Ms. Gaudreau for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm going to ask my question in quiz form, and I'd like the witnesses to answer with a yes or no.

Ms. Mack, Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Fredlund, you know how federal elections work.

Are you aware that Elections Canada can provide election materials in 16 languages?

[English]

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: No, not all 16.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

[English]

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: No.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Ms. Mack, were you aware?

[English]

Ms. Samantha Mack: No.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Okay. I'll move on to my next question.

I've learned that, in indigenous communities, the meaning of a word can depend on the culture, even in the same language. French, for instance, has a number of similar words that do not mean the same thing.

I was surprised to learn that the translation of the word “vote” differed depending on the community.

Is it possible to translate words in an accurate yet culturally specific way?

• (1155)

[English]

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: That's something we are certainly working on and is one of the areas of discussion we'll be having with indigenous governments. Some indigenous governments are in the process of trying to standardize language; others are not. They're trying to respect the dialects in those communities. It's an ongoing discussion.

I suspect that for some regions of the Northwest Territories, we will have a more uniform translation and for others, it might be community-specific.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Dunbar.

What do you think, Mr. Fredlund?

[English]

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: We have lots of different dialects within Inuktitut-speaking communities. Our translations come straight out of Rankin Inlet. Our Inuktitut is from a small town just north of Rankin Inlet. It doesn't meet the standard of Grise Fiord. It's a separate dialect, but amazingly, Inuktitut speakers understand each other enough that the gist, the ideas, the names of things are accurate. We don't have to do it in 25 different dialects.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Idlout, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

Those language issues are very important to us, as we know. Why do you think places like Nunavut and the Northwest Territories are able to provide language services in four different languages for municipal and territorial elections yet Elections Canada struggles to provide those same services in federal elections?

The Chair: To the interpreters, we did not get the substance of what was said. I would just like to give a moment to the interpreters to provide us with what Ms. Idlout has shared with us.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

I'm not getting the French interpretation.

[English]

The Chair: Mr. Clerk, are we getting it? Perfect.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Great.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Can we please have the question read into the record in English, with translation, please?

A voice: Okay. I'll try again.

Why do you think places like Nunavut are able to provide language services in four different languages for municipal and territorial elections, yet Elections Canada struggles to provide those same services in federal elections?

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: I can speak for Nunavut's experience. We live and breath Inuktitut, so for us it's not a question of difficulties or challenges. This is what we do, so I can't speak to what Elections Canada's challenges are.

Thank you.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

We understand what your issues are. What feedback have you heard from indigenous communities regarding the languages act for elections? Have you heard suggestions about how access to voting can be improved in this regard?

• (1200)

The Chair: I would open the floor to both Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Fredlund to answer.

Go ahead, Mr. Dunbar.

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Certainly, the feedback we receive is that doing more indigenous languages is always welcome, and it's certainly something that our office is now undertaking over the next years to try to improve and increase the amount of services we can provide in indigenous languages.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Thank you, Madam Chair.

That's a great question, Ms. Idlout.

I think one of our strengths is that the majority of the office staff speak Inuktitut, but I think the dialectal differences are something that we struggle with all the time.

Moving forward and as Nunavut standardizes Inuktitut in the next 100 years, we'll have one level of Inuktitut [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] across the territory. That's one of our struggles. It's to ensure that people in Grise Fiord understand our translator from Chesterfield Inlet.

The Chair: Would you like Ms. Mack to answer?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Yes, if she wants to.

The Chair: Ms. Mack, would you like to answer as well?

Ms. Samantha Mack: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair.

In regard to how voting access can be improved for languages, again, our biggest struggle has been with the dialectal differences, as Mr. Fredlund mentioned. That is precisely why we subscribe to the panel translation model to bridge that divide of standardization versus specificity. The translation panels have been really instrumental in making sure that those kinds of content [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] across a wide geographic area.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Vis, five minutes go to you.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): I'll wait until the next panel.

The Chair: Can I go to Ms. Sahota? She wanted to be on this one.

Mr. Brad Vis: Yes. That's fine.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota, you have five minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for all three panellists. What is the voter turnout for your territorial and state elections?

We'll start with Northwest Territories and Mr. Dunbar.

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: The number is failing me off the top of my head. I know that it is certainly highest in our regional centres and lowest in Yellowknife. I believe the overall voter turnout was around 50% or 51% in the last general election.

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: Pre-COVID, it was in the high sixties. In our last general election, during the height of our pandemic, it was in the low fifties.

Ms. Samantha Mack: Depending on whether or not it's a general election year, our voter turnout averages between the high 40s and low 60s percentile.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: The next question I have is for Mr. Dunbar.

You had said that you have materials translated in about 11 or 12 languages to provide during the election, but the actual ballot is only in two. Is that correct?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: We are in the process of translating materials into the 11 official languages of the Northwest Territories. The ballot produced here for a general election just has the candidate's name as the candidate would spell it. There are no other words on the ballot. It is just the candidate's name and their photo.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Their name can be spelled in any language, however they choose?

• (1205)

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: We would print their name as they wrote it on the nomination paper.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: When you went from the two languages back to increasing the number of languages that you're going to produce materials in, what thresholds were you looking at when making those decisions?

When you had picked the two, was it by the percentage of people speaking the language? What made you switch that perspective?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: We've never stuck with just two languages. The Official Languages Act enshrines official language status for all 11 languages. For the plebiscites in 1982 and 1992, those plebiscite materials and questions were published in 10 official languages, with Cree being the exception due to an interpretation—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: That's interesting, Madam Chair.

The sample you gave was only in French, English and one indigenous language. However, you had provided the material in 11 languages. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Stephen Dunbar: Yes, the example provided there is the eastern Arctic electoral district ballot. However, in some of the western Arctic electoral ballots, there could be up to four languages on the ballot. For Mackenzie Delta, that would have been Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun. For the Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh electoral district, that would have been Chipewyan, English and French. For the Hay River electoral districts, it would have been Chipewyan and Cree, as well as English and French.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Madam Chair, Mr. Fredlund had mentioned earlier that they have in-house capacity there and where they don't have the in-house capacity, they have good relations and connections in other communities that can help them out.

What would his advice be to our committee and to Elections Canada regarding building up in-house capacity or contracting services, perhaps through some of the same service providers they use or creating some sort of advisory group? Could I get some feedback that we can bring back to them?

Mr. Dustin Fredlund: My office is always open for any agency that wants to find out more about Inuktitut or Inuvialuktun terminology or anything. We would extend our resources to assist any agency, including Elections Canada.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you to all of the witnesses here today.

The Chair: That was very fruitful and very exciting.

On behalf of PROC committee members, I would like to thank our witnesses for joining us today, and the insights you provided. This is a very invigorating conversation.

If something comes to your minds later, do not hesitate to write to our committee. I can assure you that members will appreciate any insights or intel that you can provide from your vast experience.

I hope that you have a good rest of the day, and we look forward to continuing this important work. Thank you.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1210)

The Chair: We are going to continue our study on indigenous languages on ballots. Our second panel will include the MP for Nunavut, Ms. Lori Idlout. Welcome to our committee.

This session will start with opening comments from you. We look forward to hearing from you.

We will go through one round of questions from each of the parties, and we will ensure that the Conservative Party has extra time.

Mr. Vis, I'll start with you, and if you want to share some of that time with anyone else, you're welcome to. Then we'll move to the Liberals, followed by the Bloc and then completing with the NDP.

Ms. Idlout, welcome to PROC committee.

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you for inviting me to speak as a witness. I have enjoyed listening to other witnesses regarding this important issue.

As an Inuk, I have always known that language and culture are intimately connected, but I have been intrigued by this system's attempt to isolate language in the context of voting.

I believe the attempt to separate language and culture is another indication of the impacts of colonialism. While initially voter turnout may have been high, voter turnouts declined, and remained low for generations.

The president of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Aluki Kotierk, pointed out that in the last federal election, the voter turnout in Nunavut was only about 34%. Indeed, the voter turnout in Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.'s election was approximately 17.5%.

I must share that Nunavut has shown that elections in Inuktitut, along with English and French, can and do work.

Procedurally, there is a precedent, but as I pointed out, ensuring indigenous voting by providing indigenous languages is not sufficient in and of itself. Voters are greeted at the polling station by an Elections Canada employee who speaks English or French. The elder may not understand what the employee is saying, so the elder is usually assisted by the kindness of someone else.

I will speak to what I have experienced, and seen in Nunavut. Many Nunavummiut voters enjoy the freedom of being able to vote in their mother tongue during a territorial election, or during a designated Inuit organization election. This is their right.

With the exception of the pilot project in the 2021 federal election, this is not a norm. The ballots had roughly transliterated Inuktitut names, and phonetically spelled party names in syllabics in the last federal election. This is not a norm.

According to the 2021 census, the population of Nunavut is 36,858, of whom 85% are Inuit. There are 25 Nunavut communities. Each community and region has its own struggles, and experiences when voting. It is imperative to understand that these are complex issues without simple solutions.

• (1215)

One specific example is the consequence of medical travel. Hundreds of Nunavummiut are forced to travel to Iqaluit or the south for medical services and treatments. In Iqaluit, those medical travellers wanted to exercise their right to vote in 2021. However, they were turned away because they were not residents of Iqaluit though they were residents of Nunavut. Therefore, they were denied their fundamental right to vote. Through the assistance of my campaign team, some were able to vote, but many were turned away. This is an example of how Nunavummiut must constantly fight to exercise their basic rights. Nunavummiut should not have to lose their right to vote because they are on medical travel.

I will summarize my comments regarding staffing. There are many unilingual Inuktitut speakers, especially Inuit elders. As a unilingual speaker on election day, an elder must have a proper ID. They are greeted at the polling station by an Elections Canada employee who speaks English or French. The elder may not understand what the employee is saying, so that elder is either assisted by the kindness of someone else or goes to the polling station not knowing what to do. With the exception of the pilot project de-

scribed earlier by Elections Canada, the ballot is in English or French. Most elders cannot read English or French.

During my campaign, when it became evident that the ballots would not have Inuktitut, I had to describe to people that my name was the one in the middle, between two other candidates. This is not acceptable in a modern Canada. This is not reconciliation.

Another example involves the complaints process. Often when complaints are being made to the chief returning officer, if interpretation or translation is not provided, then a unilingual elder will have to depend on someone else to file the complaint. Sometimes it is not worth filing a complaint, because the person receiving the complaint literally does not speak the same language.

Prior to colonialism, first nations, Métis and Inuit had their own ways of identifying elders. Inuit in smaller camps based leadership on exemplary skills of hunters, sawmen or seamstresses. Inuit still have local leaders who are unique to our culture and way of life.

I learned, since my election, about the hereditary chiefs of the Wet'suwet'en. The chiefs in the territory within British Columbia are not elected as are those in the colonial system created as the Indian bands. The hereditary chiefs will have authority over the use of their lands, for the most part. I am sure we have all heard about the infringement of their rights and about the pipeline going through their territory without proper consent.

We must learn how best to respect indigenous governance to ensure Canada lives up to its commitments to reconciliation.

As a witness in this committee, I want to include the following recommendations for specific and immediate action.

• (1220)

One, learn from Elections Nunavut, which has extensive experience running elections in four official languages.

Two, hire full-time indigenous interpreter-translators within Elections Canada for those indigenous communities that need them. This will help build the necessary expertise and corporate knowledge for the department regarding indigenous languages for future elections.

Three, streamline the complaints process for unilingual indigenous people to voice their concerns. This needs to be made very clear and be improved.

Four, conduct a further study on indigenous governance within Canada's democracy as another form of reconciliation.

Finally, number five, ensure that the federal Government of Canada respects indigenous cultures in order to build the trust that is necessary for real reconciliation.

Thank you for allowing me this time.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to thank all the committee members for the leniency in providing that extra time for the opening comments. I'm sure certain words in English versus Inuktitut would probably take longer as well, so that was very appreciated.

We are going to go into basically an unlimited amount of time, it will feel like, with Mr. Vis. I will look forward to you, followed by Mr. Ferguson, I believe, Madam Gaudreau and then Ms. Blaney.

Go ahead, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, MP Idlout, for being at committee today. I went to your territory once. It was about 12 or 13 years ago. I went to the Nunavummiut legislature. It was in session, and they took a break from the session. What I remember from the chamber was that all of the interpreters were around the chamber to represent all of the languages. They all went into the lunch room afterwards. I was standing there, and they invited me in. I had a traditional Inuit meal with all of the translators. I had caribou, beluga whale and another type of whale. They even used their traditional knife. That was the one experience of my life where I really learned a little bit about what you said about connecting language and culture. It's an experience that will stay with me forever.

You made five recommendations just now in your opening remarks. This is our third day studying indigenous languages on the ballot. I've come to the personal conclusion—not even with my colleagues, but just me personally—that I almost feel that the situation in your territory is very different from the rest of Canada. That largely goes back to the 1993 land claims agreement that was supported by 85% of the Nunavummiut people. When that agreement was signed, were there provisions for culture and language that the federal government had to respect as part of that reconciliation process?

• (1225)

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

That is a very good question.

I am so proud that you came to the Legislative Assembly of Nunavut. It's good to know you that had a chance to eat with the interpreters. The interpreters are held in the highest esteem, because they are very capable and knowledgeable people.

With regard to the boundary, under article 32 on social and cultural development, anything can be included in there in terms of culture and languages. There are no really clear clauses in the articles in the land claims agreement, and they're not really clarified right now, but they are included in the land claims agreement.

Mr. Brad Vis: I'm just going to make sure that I got that correctly. Article 32 is not very clear about the use of language specifically.

Ms. Lori Idlout: I'll say it in English. Article 32 within the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement addresses language and culture. It addresses social development too. I think it's purposefully vague about what is meant by social development. It doesn't clearly define what is meant by social and cultural development for Inuit by purpose, because I think when the land claim was crafted, they wanted

more room for it to be interpreted properly, not to make limitations on what would later become interpretations of that article. There is no specific wording about voting or elections, but that would be the article that I refer to when it comes to language and culture.

Mr. Brad Vis: Would it be feasible for the Tunngavik corporation to come forward, because I'm assuming they still have regular negotiations with the federal government, and maybe make a request to the federal government that, in the unique circumstances of the territory of Nunavut, federal elections be in the recognized languages of the territory as part of its unique agreement with the Government of Canada through the 1993 Nunavut Land Claims Agreement?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Just to clarify this a bit, when the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement was negotiated and signed, it was signed between the Government of Canada, Nunavut and Tunngavik, the organization that is now Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated. It wouldn't necessarily be a request by NTI to ensure that languages are in Inuktitut because of it being enabling for other acts, including the Nunavut Act. The Nunavut Act, as enabling legislation, allowed for the Government of Nunavut to have authority over how elections would work within the territory of Nunavut, so that's more within the jurisdiction of the Government of Nunavut.

Mr. Brad Vis: Okay. Is it your objective, in putting this study forward, to ensure that indigenous languages are on the ballot in your territory or possibly across Canada? If you were to walk away at the end of this term and in the next federal election we have your language on the federal ballot, would that be considered a success for you?

Ms. Lori Idlout: That's a great question. I would love for all indigenous languages that exist in Canada to be incorporated into every ballot that is possible. If there are known to be more Ojibway people in northern Ontario, for example, then northern Ontario should have Ojibway on the ballot. I think we have a precedent we can follow, which is the Northwest Territories. It has 11 official languages, and from what I understood in their testimony this morning, they were describing that they're able to determine which communities and which areas in that territory have more of each of those different 11 languages to make sure that those languages are reflective of the needs of the community.

This is definitely something that I would love for all of Canada. We've seen it in Nunavut and the NWT, so if we can do it in populations where there are more indigenous people, then we should accommodate the needs of indigenous people in all of Canada.

• (1230)

Mr. Brad Vis: I see that perspective, but I think in Nunavut it could almost be easier than in other parts of Canada, largely because of the threshold question that MP Sahota raised: What would be an acceptable threshold for the inclusion of an indigenous language? Consider how that relates to our two official languages and especially what other Canadians would feel about having languages that aren't part of the Official Languages Act on a federal ballot. That would be problematic for some people, probably most likely for the Québécois.

What would you say about thresholds?

Ms. Lori Idlout: That's a great question. I think what I would say about thresholds is that the extent of language loss in indigenous communities should be the threshold. If there's been more language loss, then Elections Canada should work harder to help promote and protect that language.

Elections Canada can have a role to make sure that languages are being protected, even through the ballot and materials towards becoming a candidate. Making sure that elections are all available in those languages should be the threshold. The more the language loss, the more that Elections Canada should work harder to ensure that those languages are on the ballot.

Mr. Brad Vis: If you were to amend the Elections Canada Act, what sections do you think would need to be amended? Have you considered putting forward legislation yourself in this Parliament?

As part of the agreement that the New Democratic Party made with the governing Liberal Party in your coalition, have you guys—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Brad Vis: This is a fair question. There are broad definitions of what a coalition is in the Webster's Canadian Dictionary.

My question is, when two political parties, if you want to do this....

The Chair: Mr. Vis, I would say that your line of questioning has been quite informative, and I would ask that you continue.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you.

Was an agreement made to include amendments to the Elections Canada Act between the New Democratic Party and the Liberal Party? I believe that there were some lines in there on reconciliation. Was an amendment to the Elections Canada Act a part of the agreement made between your two parties?

Ms. Lori Idlout: To respond to the first part of your question about legislation, bills that I might want to see, I can refer to my predecessor, Mumilaaq Qaaq, who developed a bill that I am looking over right now to see if I would want to introduce that as a private member's bill. However, I have to consider that with my party as well.

I have considered it. I have looked at Mumilaaq's bill that she developed before it died on the Order Paper.

On the second part of your question, I have not had any conversations with the Liberal government about what changes I might propose in regard to this confidence agreement that we have with the Liberals.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you for the exchange. I appreciated it.

The Chair: That was a very thorough exchange, Mr. Vis. Thank you for that.

Mr. Fergus, you have six minutes.

• (1235)

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Idlout for your testimony, and also for your initiative.

I'm going to go back to a question that I asked of the commissioner for the Northwest Territories and also to the testimony that was provided to us from the CEO of Elections Canada.

Elections Canada seems to have a one-size-fits-all perspective. I always like to say that we're the sum of our experiences. Some people would say that we're the victims of our experiences.

It would appear that because we have two colonial official languages that exist across Canada, the effort is made to always provide, regardless of where you are in the country, fully accessible material in both languages. That's a good thing.

What I was hearing from our testimony in the first panel today, and I think what I'm hearing from you, especially in your conversation with Mr. Vis, is that you're looking for recognition and a respect to include indigenous languages on material, including the ballot, where it's appropriate. If you noticed, I didn't use the word "threshold". I'm not looking to some...kick in a percentage and all of a sudden it's there, but where it's appropriate.

Is my understanding of what you're seeking correct? If not, please—

Ms. Lori Idlout: Yes, I think so.

Part of the reason I became a parliamentarian was that I wanted to have influence, where I could be part of helping to protect and promote first nations', Métis' and Inuit's—Inuit specifically with me being an Inuk—place in Canada. There have been too many atrocities that we've all experienced, and there have been too many times where "reconciliation" is a buzzword. I wanted to be part of something where I helped to make sure that it's not just a buzzword and that we talk about actual reconciliation.

A part of reconciliation has to include finding ways to protect and promote indigenous languages in Canada. The elections process is one of those ways. It's not the only way by any means, but it has to be a way that we respect these indigenous rights that do exist. We're not just talking about exercises in democracy. We're also talking about the existence of the rights of first nations, Métis and Inuit. That's what I'm looking to ensure that we do as parliamentarians, to make sure we're helping to respect those rights and to make sure those rights are upheld.

Hon. Greg Fergus: In your testimony to the committee today, I found myself outraged at the fact that there were many members who happened to find themselves, for a whole bunch of reasons, in a different part of the territory and tried to exercise their right to vote but had no effective access to understanding the process or to people who could help guide them through that process so that they could vote appropriately.

I know that my constituents, if they moved or if they were serving abroad, could go to any mission or go to any voting booth and seek to vote. They could write in on the ballot, but it's because most of the people in my constituency speak English or French. They have that full freedom to do what you would expect one would be able to do in your territory but can't effectively do that because of the language barrier. Is that a correct understanding of your testimony?

Ms. Lori Idlout: Absolutely. I was so saddened to hear that people had been turned away from voting. To also have to work that hard just for the basic right to vote is such a sad story in Canada.

Hon. Greg Fergus: I agree.

• (1240)

Ms. Lori Idlout: We know that Canada as a democracy is founded on its right to vote so it really is.... From my perspective, from the people who I represent, from Inuit, we have been oppressed for generations. It was shoved down our throats that our culture does not belong, that we must practise Christianity, that if we speak Inuktitut we'll be whipped with a metre stick, that if we speak our language, if we sing our songs, we're going to be beaten. It's very difficult for Inuit to even go to complain because of those generations of oppressive atrocities towards first nations, Métis and Inuit.

When I was hearing—I forget his name—the one from Elections Canada saying that there have been no complaints, that is just an indication of how strong those government officials are because they're still afraid to go to complain. It's still not an exercise that we can do as easily as other cultures, but that world view and those behaviours are changing. I'm so proud to see more Inuit, more first nations and more Métis becoming more determined and voicing themselves. We are seeing those changes and we need to continue to promote more first nations, Métis and Inuit to exercise their voices.

Hon. Greg Fergus: May I have just one last question? It will be a brief question.

The Chair: I would appreciate a very brief question, and a very brief answer.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Idlout, I would like to ask a very practical question. We've heard testimony now at two meetings, where we've compared the voting turnout at territorial elections to the voting turnout at a federal election, the latter being significantly less than the turnout at territorial or municipal elections in the territories.

Would you ascribe that largely to the lack of respect we have shown the folks in your community?

Ms. Lori Idlout: The impacts of governments, churches, and the RCMP are still very deep within our communities, and because of that, it's very challenging. When I was campaigning, for example, I heard many people say, "What's the point of voting, when it's not going to make any difference?" Many first nations, Métis, and Inuit have lost the sense of using their voice, because their voice doesn't matter.

We all need to work harder to make sure that we hear first nations, Métis, and Inuit, and make sure that when we're hearing them, we're making decisions that have better impacts for their communities.

Hon. Greg Fergus: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have six minutes. Go ahead.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, thank you for giving me the opportunity to ask several questions and to make an observation.

I hope those who are following the committee's proceedings and discussions regarding a possible amendment to the Canada Elections Act will take something away. By engaging in a dialogue over a number of hours, we have had the chance to share our views, better understand the issues and show the openness that is so often called for.

Ms. Idlout, even though we may not be able to achieve everything we should by the next election, does the dialogue we have initiated answer your plea at all? As a parliamentarian, I keenly felt it.

• (1245)

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: That's a great question.

When it comes to indigenous languages, more can always be done.

I was fascinated. I don't know if you heard the witnesses who were here a couple of witnesses ago. The two young men who appeared indicated how important it was to invest in actual programming that ensured they had the ability to learn and speak in their languages. I was very impacted by their statements, because it showed the generational differences that we're experiencing between cultures.

More can be done within Canada's programming, but having this dialogue at this committee is also an important aspect of that.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

The year 1995 marked a very important time in my life. At the age of 18, I felt the need to learn English in order to be taken more seriously in Quebec and Canada. I went to Hawaii to learn English. The experience of the indigenous community in Hawaii is completely different from the experience here. There, people shared a sense of unity, and I even learned Hawaiian in high school. For me, it was part of the culture.

We have two official languages in Canada, but now I realize that things are often tough as a parliamentarian, even in French. I won't call it contempt, but it is still clear today that our differences lead to breakdowns in communication. That is why I am here, as a member of the Bloc Québécois. I can certainly appreciate the steps that have to be taken.

Much of what the witnesses said focused on the measures that could be taken in advance to recognize the various languages—16, in this case—to help revitalize those cultures and to foster a sense of pride among those speakers.

A few days ago, I went to La Conception, in my riding of Laurentides—Labelle. I visited the site of a future indigenous cultural centre called Kina8at, which brings cultures together and helps people discover them to encourage an appreciation of our differences.

Ms. Idlout, I'd like to hear your comments on the outcome of this process.

Do you think we will have taken a significant step down the path of truth and reconciliation with this study?

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: I think the work of this study could play a small part. I know that when it comes to reconciliation, it can't just be compartmentalized. The part of this committee could make a dent in it.

For example, we don't need to have all 16 languages on all of the ballots, but if we know that in Nova Scotia there are more Mi'kmaq, we should make sure that the Mi'kmaq languages are on those ballots in Nova Scotia. If we know that there are more Gitksan in B.C., we need to make sure that ballots are available in Gitksan in B.C.

There are opportunities where we can learn procedures that have been used in the NWT, where they know there are pockets of specific indigenous people. We could use those pockets of indigenous people as a model to say that's where we can target those languages. I think it's possible to compartmentalize toward success.

• (1250)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Ms. Idlout.

The Chair: Thank you to the both of you.

We now go to Ms. Blaney for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

As always, all my questions will go through the chair.

Ms. Idlout, I want to thank you for your work here and for the words you shared with us today. I really admire it. The conversation we're having today is really important.

I'm really moved by the story you told in your testimony about literally having to tell your constituents, "My name is the one in the middle." That really is a good reminder of how challenging it can be to feel like you even have the right to vote, if all you know when you walk in is that the middle name and those symbols mean that person. I also found it really interesting in the testimony the idea of having photos beside the names.

I would like to ask you a question. The first part of the question is, what do you think about the photos by the name? Does that also assist people who have challenges?

Also, how are we going to see the indigenous population start to vote more? I represent over 20 first nations communities. The voter turnout locally in their own nations is very high, around 90%. They get out and they vote, but when it comes to the federal election, it's a lot lower.

What do you think impedes indigenous voters from casting their vote, and what do you think can be done to increase voter turnout among those communities?

Ms. Lori Idlout: It's a great question. Thank you.

For sure it's about learning to understand just how deep the impacts of colonialism have been, especially when it comes to the ballot. As I was mentioning, first nations, Métis and Inuit have been forced away from their world views. When Elections Canada is hiring staff, those staff have to be trauma informed. If they're not trauma informed, then their behaviour is going to seem very colonial. They are so used to just ordering people around and saying, "Do this," which are the very symbols of colonial behaviours towards first nations, Métis and Inuit.

I think there might be a lack of interest in practising this right to vote when you're voting for people who will ultimately be part of that system. As I said earlier, part of this ongoing conversation we need to have is about making reconciliation real. What are some tangible things we can do that show we are trying to do better for first nations, Métis and Inuit?

I can see why the voter turnout would be a lot higher for first nations because they know that those first nations groups are going to fight for their rights. To have someone represent you who you know will fight for your rights is someone you know you'll want.

To the second part of that question, I think we have to do a better job as parliamentarians in how we do our work. One thing I'm always shocked by when I go back to my riding is, first, how thankful my constituents are that I visited their communities but also how uninformed they are of the services that are available to them within their communities.

There still doesn't tend to be a lot of understanding of what Service Canada does or what Elections Canada can do. I think that as parliamentarians we all can do a better job of informing our constituents of the services that they should be allowed to have, the services that they can expect to have from the Government of Canada, and making sure that legislation, policies and programs are better reflective of the cultural needs of first nations, Métis and Inuit.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

Something that is very apparent is that there needs to be more work done in this area. What do you think Elections Canada could do about hiring local indigenous people as interpreters, potentially, maybe even as cultural interpreters to raise awareness of what the best process is to move forward to engage that population?

I think this is important because this is a measurable outcome. If we can see some action, we can actually say, "This is the percentage of indigenous people who were voting, and now it's this." It's so measurable. It seems like something we should invest in.

• (1255)

Ms. Lori Idlout: Yes, for sure. That's a great question, too.

I think we've heard some great examples as well, shared by witnesses, including just making sure that Elections Canada has more interpreters who are available, not just for election day but within their staff. I think they need linguists, too, to make sure that they have a better understanding. Cultural interpreters, too, I think are a great idea.

I think it was the NWT elections office that said it would meet with indigenous organizations. The indigenous organizations know who their populations are. I think Elections Canada could meet with indigenous organizations like the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, these national organizations that work with their people to make sure that their rights are being advocated for.

The Chair: Do you have a final comment, Ms. Blaney?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I don't think I have enough time for my final comment. I'll leave it at that. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Idlout, on behalf of PROC committee members I would like to thank you for your testimony and your time with us today. As I say to everyone, you're always welcome to send us more information, which we will definitely consider as we continue

with this report. You've been a fabulous addition. Thank you for your time.

Voices: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Kudos to all committee members for the informative questions.

I will just remind committee members that on Thursday we will meet again. In the first hour we will have Jean-François Daoust, assistant professor, University of Edinburgh; Dwight Newman, professor of law and Canada research chair in indigenous rights in constitutional and international law, University of Saskatchewan; Allison Harell, professor, political science department, Université du Québec à Montréal.

For the second panel, we'll have the Institut Tshakapesh, with Marjolaine Tshernish, general manager; as well as First Nations Education Council, Denis Gros-Louis, who's the director general.

We look forward to continuing this study. With that, I wish everyone a really good day. We'll see you on Thursday.

The meeting is adjourned.

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44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

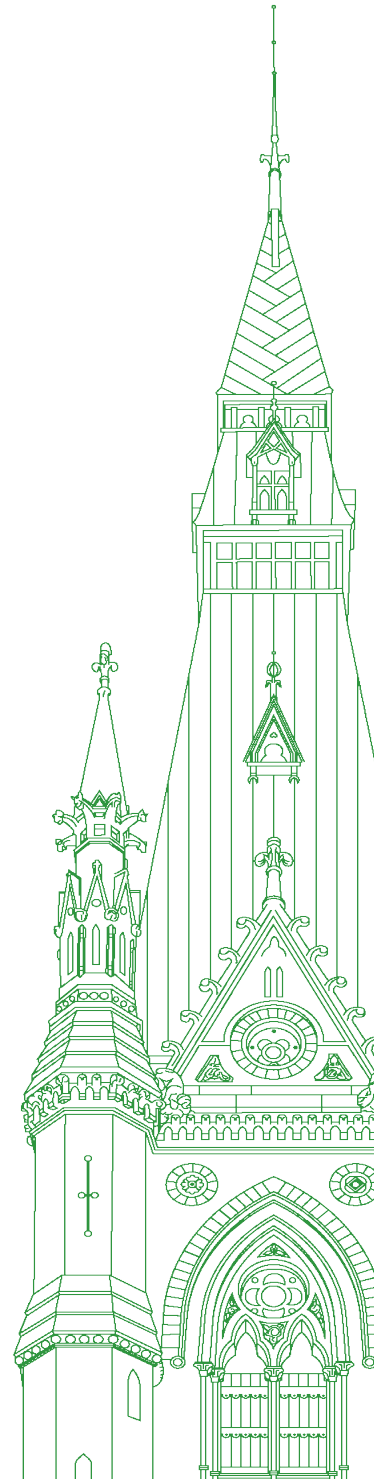
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 016

Thursday, April 7, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Thursday, April 7, 2022

• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good morning everyone.

I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 15 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

In the first hour of the meeting, the committee will continue its study on the inclusion of indigenous languages on federal election ballots.

[English]

We have two panels of witnesses again today, joining us virtually. The first panel will include Jean-François Daoust, assistant professor at the University of Edinburgh; Dwight Newman, professor of law and Canada research chair in indigenous rights in constitutional and international law at the University of Saskatchewan; and Allison Harell, professor in the political science department of the Université du Québec à Montréal.

On behalf of PROC committee members, I would like to welcome you all here today. We will get right into it, with up to five minutes for your opening comments.

We'll start with Monsieur Daoust.

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-François Daoust (Assistant Professor, University of Edinburgh, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, everyone.

When I learned the subject of today's discussion, I saw three separate components.

First, we have to look at the principles and values of our society that would lead us to include, or not, indigenous languages on federal election ballots. This is a fundamental discussion described as "normative" that relies on the values of Canadians.

The second component is the technical aspect. How might it work and be applied in practice?

The third and final aspect is the involvement and potential consequences from what we know of empirical studies of election participation by indigenous people.

I am going to focus on the first and third components: the normative aspect and the empirical documentation aspect, leaving aside the technical considerations.

With respect to the normative aspect, we have to consider the values of our society. What are they? How can they be reflected in public policy and improve the electoral process? Obviously, Canadian society claims to be inclusive.

In political terms, and in connection with the electoral process, that means promoting inclusion of all groups in society, so that as many people as possible are able to participate in the political process, especially in elections, which are a key moment in our democratic cycle. In order for as many people as possible to participate in elections, we have to pay particular attention to the groups that systematically participate less in democratic life in our society.

In many regards, Canadian society in 2022 is not inclusive of indigenous communities. Indigenous people face systematic barriers and this means that they participate less in democratic life as compared to non-indigenous people.

It therefore seems entirely consistent and desirable to enable indigenous people to vote with instructions in their language that would be included on their ballot. For that reason, I think we should approach this question with a somewhat sympathetic view of this kind of initiative and its aim of inclusion.

I am now going to talk about the empirical aspect. I think the big question we have to ask ourselves is this: can we expect an increase in electoral participation by indigenous people as a result of this measure?

In my opinion, that is probably not the case; if it were, their participation would be very limited.

We should expect an increase in electoral participation if and only if this measure meant that it became easier for indigenous voters to go and vote and if this consideration, the ease of voting, has a major influence on their decision of whether or not to vote.

Although samples of data concerning indigenous people are very limited, the large majority of people obviously find that voting is either very easy or somewhat easy.

Second, we know that ease of voting is not one of the most important considerations that influence people's decision as to whether to vote or stay home on election day. In other words, the people who abstain from voting do so for other reasons that are not associated with how easy it is to vote.

In conclusion, with respect to the normative aspect and inclusion of indigenous people in Canadian society, I don't see any reason not to include indigenous languages on ballots.

However, with respect to the empirical aspects, from my reading of the documentation, we should not expect a significant increase in electoral participation by indigenous people, because the reasons why they abstain often lie elsewhere than in the ease of voting. While this bill is noble from a normative point of view, it does not consider those factors, for example indigenous people's interest in Canadian politics.

With that said, my conclusions are based on relatively limited research data and on samples gathered from indigenous people.

I think we have a great need for further studies to help us think about these questions. I am thinking, in particular, of the study by Patrick Fournier and Peter John Loewen published in 2011 and the study by Allison Harell, who is with us today, and her colleagues that was published in 2010.

That concludes my statement.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you so much.

[Translation]

You have given us a lot of information. Thank you very much.

I'm going to ask everyone to speak a bit more slowly to help with the interpretation and so that everyone is able to understand the remarks in the language of their choice.

It's now your turn, Professor Newman. You have the floor for five minutes.

[English]

Professor Dwight Newman (Professor of Law and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Rights in Constitutional and International Law, University of Saskatchewan, As an Individual): Good morning, honourable members. I'm Dwight Newman and I work as a professor of law and Canada research chair in indigenous rights in constitutional and international law at the University of Saskatchewan. I appear today as an individual.

Proposals to add indigenous languages to election ballots in Canada have circulated in recent years. There's a new imperative to thinking on these matters insofar as Canada adopted last year the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, or UNDRIPA, which received royal assent on June 21, 2021.

Amongst its provisions, section 5 of that act establishes a statutory requirement for the government taking "all measures necessary to ensure that the laws of Canada are consistent with the Declaration." That's a far-reaching statutory obligation, and it bears on many topic matters that are seldom discussed.

Article 13.2 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has a clause requiring that states "take effective measures to ensure...that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means".

That clause of that article has received very little attention in the UNDRIP scholarship, but it represents an important commitment concerning participatory rights of indigenous peoples. Partly because article 13.2 establishes rights for indigenous peoples as collective entities, though, rather than pertaining to individuals, article 13.2 probably does not mandate any specific requirement of ballots being available to individual indigenous voters in indigenous languages.

However, the adoption of such a practice would certainly be in accord with the underlying objectives of the UNDRIP. The enhancement of indigenous participation in democratic decision-making accords with the declaration and represents good policy in a democratic state meant to have full involvement of all voters.

Sections 3 and 5 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, protecting the right to vote and rights against discrimination, may well offer stronger legal arguments against impediments to voting. As with other barriers that Elections Canada has worked to overcome, there are arguments for it to overcome linguistic barriers, particularly in the case of individuals who use other languages and have limited proficiency in English and French.

In some ways, Canada is behind on these issues, notably as compared with the United States. I draw the committee's attention to the 1975 amendments to the U.S. Voting Rights Act that added section 203, which established various forms of language assistance in districts where that was needed for minority language communities. That's decades back that the U.S. has done this, and there have been challenges at times on implementation, which has not always been smooth, but there has been a statutory commitment there in U.S. legislation.

In the context of indigenous peoples, though, the U.S. has had some ongoing challenges. Here, I would draw the committee's attention to the March 2022 "Report of the Interagency Steering Group on Native American Voting Rights", which was just reported to the White House and has examined a range of factors affecting indigenous participation in elections. There is discussion of language factors, but there is a wide range of other factors that need to be taken into account, which raises questions about what are going to be the most effective means of enhancing indigenous participation in elections.

With regard to the language issues at hand, there are a number of key questions to consider, which I know this committee has already been discussing in some ways: whether Nunavut is a special case and where there's a particularly strong argument; what population cut-offs might bear on whether it works to provide translation of ballots in a particular riding; issues concerning what particular form of indigenous languages might be used on ballots, whether in the form of syllabics or in transliterated forms in the context of languages that have both versions; and other issues concerning the costs generally and whether those costs might be more optimally invested in other ways of supporting indigenous electoral participation.

There are many things that we could talk about. I'll just say that there are also many options the committee could consider in terms of the most effective ways of advancing indigenous electoral participation in cautious ways. The use of sample or facsimile ballots is an option, rather than changing the main ballot. Other forms of language assistance are possible. The committee could also think about something like a pilot program in the context of Nunavut that would test things out in one riding before making Elections Canada try things out across the country all at once.

• (1110)

I'll stop there and just say that there are big questions about bridging principle, the aims of legislation and what legislation can and will achieve in practical ways.

It's wonderful to see the committee working to live up to commitments of supporting indigenous electoral participation. It's important to do that right.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor Newman.

Now we go to Professor Harell.

Five minutes goes to you. Welcome.

• (1115)

Dr. Allison Harell (Professor, Political Science Department, Université du Québec à Montréal, As an Individual): Thank you. Thank you for the opportunity to be here, Madam Chair.

I'd like to acknowledge that I'm calling from the unceded territories of the Kanien'kehá:ka nation on whose land the Université du Québec à Montréal is located.

I'd also like to situate my comments. I speak for myself as a specialist in the study of electoral democracy, and I'm particularly interested in my own research in how various groups and people can build a more inclusive democracy. My remarks this morning will be focused on what research in this area tells us.

I'd like to raise three issues that are worth considering when thinking about the inclusion of indigenous languages on ballots.

First, I think it's important to think about this issue from the perspective of barriers to political participation. We know quite a bit—and my colleagues have mentioned it on the committee this morning—about the reasons that people do not engage in federal elections in this country. In a past study that I conducted with Dimitrios Panagos and Scott Matthews in 2009 for Elections Canada, we showed that, as we have seen across many countries and contexts,

socioeconomic resources are an important barrier to all electors. This is true as well for indigenous people's participation in electoral politics. Yet we've also shown the importance of trust in the federal government and the salience of indigenous issues as mobilizing, especially for young indigenous electors. Here, I think, is where our findings are important for the current discussion before the committee.

The presence of indigenous languages on ballots is an important symbolic gesture to indicate that Canada is interested in the participation of indigenous peoples in the electoral process, that their voices are important and that we want to make sure that they're included in that conversation.

Indigenous peoples were, as you know, one of the last groups in Canada to have restrictions on their voting rights removed, which was in 1960, and historically have participated in federal elections at some of the lowest levels, though this varies across individual elections as well as across indigenous nations.

It's important to note that participating in elections is a choice, and while it is important for free and fair elections to remove barriers to participation, many indigenous people and nations choose not to participate in Canadian elections.

I'm not speaking on behalf of these communities in any way, but I think it is important to recognize that Canada's colonial history means that we need to ensure that indigenous people can participate on their own terms in our electoral processes while acknowledging that some may not see the electoral process as either legitimate or their own.

Making ballots multilingual could be a step to increase the legitimacy of the electoral process for these electors, and perceptions of legitimacy not only support broader participation but are also important for the health of our democratic system.

This brings me to my second point. As the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada pointed out to this committee on March 29 of this year, the diversity of languages, the complexity of the production timelines and translations and the current regulatory framework make putting in place multilingual ballots a challenge.

I don't want to discount the organizational challenges that implementing this change would create, but I would like to point out that the presence of a ballot in one's own language can have multiple benefits. There are symbolic benefits. The importance of recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples, cultures and languages to exist and be included cannot be understated.

There is also a benefit of access for indigenous peoples to participate in their language of choice. For indigenous electors who speak a language other than English or French and prefer to speak a language other than English and French, English and French only ballots can create an unfair barrier to participation.

I think there's also a benefit towards reconciliation. If we're serious about reconciliation with indigenous peoples, then beyond the symbolic and access benefits to indigenous peoples themselves, we need to make a strong statement as settlers that indigenous nations are on equal footing with English and French in this country.

This brings me to my final point. I'm not an indigenous person; I'm a settler on these lands. I think the key issue for considering indigenous languages on ballots should be whether indigenous nations and electors want them in order to fully participate in the electoral process. While there may be costs and challenges in implementing multilingual ballots, I think reconciliation requires a serious commitment on our part to make accessible the electoral process to indigenous electors in their own language.

I'm glad we're having this conversation today, and I'm glad to be taking part in it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Professor.

We will now get into six-minute rounds starting with Mrs. Block, followed by Mr. Turnbull. We have Mr. Turnbull, Madame Gaudreau and then Ms. Idlout.

Mrs. Block, you have the floor.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Through you I would like to welcome our witnesses to our meeting, and thank you very much for being here and joining us and providing us with your testimony.

I'm going to start by directing my questions through the chair to Professor Newman.

Welcome, Mr. Newman. It's good to see you joining us from Saskatchewan.

We have heard in previous testimony, or it has been suggested in previous testimony, that Canada is under a legal obligation to include indigenous languages on federal ballots, but in your comments you stated that there was no such obligation set out in UNDRIP.

Is there any other legislation, to your knowledge, that would make such a requirement?

• (1120)

Prof. Dwight Newman: The strongest argument, in my view, would come from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the possibility of an argument that there is an impediment to the right to vote and/or non-discrimination rights. If there were a successful argument along those lines—and I am not aware of any case law that has gone in that direction—it would probably bear not just on indigenous languages, but also on other minority languages in ridings that have populations that are similarly situated in some

respects in terms of speaking another language and not having proficiency in English or French at the highest of levels, and thus facing a barrier.

Beyond that, I wouldn't be aware of other legislation.

There would be some who might make an argument around section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, but I don't think it can easily apply to a federal election process, as opposed to providing general rights concerning maintenance of indigenous languages.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

You also mentioned that UNDRIP establishes rights for indigenous people as collective entities, rather than as individuals.

Can you explain that difference and the impact it has on indigenous individuals in the political process?

Prof. Dwight Newman: UNDRIP, in some of its articles, uses the terminology of “indigenous peoples” having certain rights. In other articles it uses the terminology of “indigenous individuals” having certain rights, or certain rights are held by “peoples and individuals”.

In the context of article 13.2 on political proceedings or legal and administrative proceedings, the reference is to “indigenous peoples”. A natural reading of the language there would end up suggesting that it concerns the opportunity of peoples through their representatives to participate in political processes or legal processes. If there is a duty to consult issue where representatives of an indigenous people are concerned, they would certainly have rights that arise due to article 13.2, but it doesn't necessarily imply rights for individual indigenous voters in the context, say, of an election process even while there may be sound policy arguments for that, and welcome reasons for that in light of broader values.

But I don't take the view that there is a specific legal right that would arise there.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

Perhaps this is my last question, as I don't know how much time I have left.

You did touch upon facsimiles of ballots. Would facsimiles of ballots in indigenous languages provided in voting booths be an alternative that would also be in the spirit of UNDRIP as it is currently set out?

Prof. Dwight Newman: Looking at some of the literature on the United States, they use the term “sample ballots”, which are somewhat the same idea as a facsimile ballot that I think Elections Canada talks about.

Insofar as that removes a barrier, it could be an effective way of removing a barrier and meeting the legal concerns that would arise there, as well as some of the policy concerns.

Obviously there is a different symbolic connotation to that, and the committee would need to weigh that, and those engaged with this issue need to weigh that over time.

But there are challenges with changing the ballots themselves in terms of accessibility for others. A crowded ballot raises issues for access by persons with certain disabilities, so there are complex choices to be made, is what I would say. If there can be effective ways of surmounting barriers while avoiding problems, that's probably always good policy.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

This is my final question. Are you aware of any other jurisdictions that are either addressing this issue after adopting UNDRIP or looking at including indigenous languages on their ballots?

• (1125)

Prof. Dwight Newman: I'm not aware, at the present time, of others that have made specific moves on this issue after UNDRIP. There may be some of which I'm unaware.

As I mentioned, the United States, even since 1975, has made some efforts around this issue, although in the State of Alaska there had to be litigation around this. There were complexities confronted, partly because of issues of multiple dialects of languages and how those would be used in different parts of a constituency or whether all of those would somehow appear. There were some challenging questions. The United States has made these efforts for decades.

I'm not an expert on the American context. It would be worthwhile drawing significantly upon some of that experience and finding out more about it.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

We will now go to Mr. Turnbull for six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks to all of our witnesses for being here today. I'm really finding this discussion rich. I know we're just beginning today's discussion, but we've been building, meeting over meeting, a really good, in-depth analysis of this important issue. Certainly, our last meeting revealed testimony that was really impactful for me. All of the meetings, I would say, have done that.

Maybe I'll start with Mr. Newman. I'm interested in picking up on the theme of UNDRIP. As you said, UNDRIP received royal assent in the Parliament of Canada in June 2021. I note that we often say that UNDRIP now has to be implemented, but I'm wondering about this. From your perspective, Professor Newman—I know you've spoken to this already in some of your opening remarks—are there any other articles within UNDRIP that obligate the government to respond to this very important issue of indigenous languages being included on ballots? I note you've already mentioned article 13.2. I have that in front of me here. I find that really relevant. I also have looked at articles 1, 9 and 15, and I wonder if you have any comments on any of the other articles within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

I'll throw it to you first. Thanks.

Prof. Dwight Newman: Thank you. I'm just pulling up my copy of UNDRIP, if we're getting into further articles of it.

I'll say, first of all, with respect to the commitment on what's sometimes called "implementation", Canada has passed a particular statute that has two key obligations in it. One concerns an action plan to pursue the objectives of the declaration. The other part is a commitment to seek the consistency of Canada's laws with the provisions of the declaration. Those are two key commitments.

In respect of other articles of UNDRIP, they may shed light on the broader objectives of it. Certainly, article 1 is with respect to general provisions of international human rights law. If your suggestion is that this gives rise to an obligation in respect of indigenous languages in voting, it would be in the context of that obligation potentially arising with respect to other language communities as well. Article 9 concerns rights to belong to an indigenous community or nation and wouldn't bear directly on federal election processes, in my view. Article 15, concerning general provisions on the cultural rights and dignity of indigenous peoples, again sheds light on the objectives of the declaration, as all the articles should be read together. Again, it wouldn't bear as specifically on something like a federal election process.

Article 13.2 is the one that is, in my view, closest to the issue. Although, as I've suggested, in some ways the reading gives rise to limited consequences in specific terms, even while the broader objectives of indigenous participation in decision-making would call for good policy that promotes indigenous languages in this context.

• (1130)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that detailed response. I do appreciate it. Perhaps we can go deeper into that discussion.

I do also want to pick up on a theme that Ms. Block brought up, which was also something you mentioned, Mr. Newman, in your opening remarks about other jurisdictions. Specifically, in regard to the United States, you said that Canada seems to be a little behind compared with them.

I'm interested in whether there are any other jurisdictions around the world that we can use or learn from in terms of a model for this, such as whether they've used a phased approach to this.

Certainly, we've heard contrasting views that for Elections Canada there are significant operational challenges. I think some of those probably need to be overcome. I think we're in a position here to give some direction. I'm interested to note how maybe other jurisdictions have overcome some of the challenges and how they've done so over years or decades.

I would go to Mr. Newman first and then ask the other panellists if they'd like to weigh in.

Thanks.

Prof. Dwight Newman: The other panellists may have more to add on some of the other jurisdictions.

The most natural comparators for Canada on indigenous issues would be jurisdictions like the United States, Australia and New Zealand, in terms of some shared political practices combined with the nature of the colonial experience, the proportions of the population, and so on.

I understand that Elections Canada is in some discussions with the Australian context. They would be better prepared to shed light on that.

I looked mainly at some of the scholarship on the United States, a country that has been much more active than Canada in some respects on this issue. Someone going back to the history of 1975 could look into how it was that they managed to make the adjustment so quickly versus what one hears about the challenges Elections Canada thinks it would face.

Others may have more to add on other jurisdictions.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'd be happy to hear from the other panelists if they have any remarks.

I know that my time limit is up, Madam Chair, so I'll leave it at that, and maybe others can weigh in.

The Chair: Maybe I can allow a quick 30 seconds to the other two panellists.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Unfortunately, I am not knowledgeable enough beyond the Canadian case and the U.K., but I assume that New Zealand and Australia, as mentioned, would be the cases to consider.

Dr. Allison Harell: May I also intervene, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yes.

Dr. Allison Harell: I won't add anything additional to what Mr. Newman brought up, except to say that during the COVID pandemic, the jurisdictions at provincial and federal levels experimented rather quickly with a number of alternative voting options. One other additional option to explore was the use of special ballots. I think we learned a lot over the last 18 months about the ways in which those can be used effectively to help voters have access who won't be able to vote on election day.

The Chair: Thank you for that addition.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Madam Chair, I have an aside before asking my questions. I would like to wish you publicly a happy birthday, which was yesterday.

Once again, I'd like to thank our guests.

I was particularly impressed by Professor Daoust's remarks. I would like to come back to what he said about principles and values.

Initially, we talked several times about the technical aspect, and several solutions have been proposed. What can we do, now, to promote inclusion? I see that everyone has good intentions, but we should not amend the legislation just to look good or so the amendment is symbolic only. I am sure that my colleague will agree with me on that.

I would like Professor Daoust to explain a bit about what we might expect, if we enacted this bill in time for the next election. What will the subsequent impact of this inclusion on the truth and reconciliation process be?

• (1135)

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Thank you for your question.

Yes, I think it's important. However, we seem to be assuming that symbols are minor and of no great consequence, as if something symbolic has no substance. As Ms. Harell said, symbols sometimes have effects that influence other attitudes, including political attitudes.

It was suggested that trust in the federal government, for example, may encourage electoral participation. Measures like these have the direct effect of reducing the cost of participation and making the vote more accessible and easier, and may have a very limited direct impact in themselves. But if measures like these affect other considerations, for example the fact that indigenous people may have more trust in the government, and spills over onto other attitudes like that one, including interest in politics, it might have a bit more more substantial impact.

I don't think we could expect a major impact, for the reasons I gave in my opening statement. Even in the indigenous samples, the people think it's easy to go out and vote. The main objective of this measure is to facilitate the act of going and voting. Since it is already easy to do that, the impact may certainly be limited. It is mainly symbolic, but it can have indirect effects that are more important than the direct effects.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, I don't know whether our witness had the opportunity to hear the earlier testimony.

I wonder about that too, for one thing. We are going to look at the figures, to find out how much all this might cost. There are good intentions and the gesture is a noble one. So all indigenous communities will be respected in doing all this. At least, that is what we hope.

In the earlier testimony, we wondered what we can do in advance to generate interest among people in participating in democracy. As has been said, we have a colonial past. We have to name it, accept it and act.

Could Professor Harell tell us more about this?

Dr. Allison Harell: Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak at greater length.

In my opinion, we shouldn't say that the indigenous people don't participate in democratic life. What we observe is that they don't participate in political life this way. A number of processes have been put in place in the communities and they have their own political activities.

I think we should rather ask how we can generate interest in participating in this type of democratic process, within the Canadian state. I think the indirect effects that Jean-François Daoust talked about are important, because this is an indication that these processes concern them too and that we want to include them.

I agree with Mr. Daoust: in the short term, making participation easier will probably not mean that we'll see a significant rise in the rate of political participation.

If we talk about including them in the Canadian state, I think that may have consequences in the long term on real participation, more active participation.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: If I understand correctly, Madam Chair, the witnesses are saying that this is actually a first step, but there should be a continuum of concrete measures. That may be an investment, for example. The legislation in place should go a bit further, to highlight the positive consequences associated with increasing participation.

I know my speaking time is almost up and I will have only two and a half minutes in the next round.

Professor Newman, I just want to make a brief comment.

I like the idea of the pilot project. We can make a big shift, but we can also open a little window, reassess the situation, and adjust our aim.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1140)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Gaudreau. Thanks also for your birthday wishes.

Ms. Idlout, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout (Nunavut, NDP): [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Before I begin asking my first questions, I want to first say thank you for providing an interpreter for me so that I'm able to speak in my language.

I want you to envision—every one of you—all the voters. If you were able to read and write in syllabics, in Inuktitut languages, you would understand what I'm saying. I am really thankful that I'm able to speak in my own language.

The first question I want to ask is of Jean-François Daoust. In your research, have you conducted studies on the impact of colonialism on indigenous engagement and politics?

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: No, I have not done research that related specifically to colonialism and indigenous people's interest in politics. However, I have taken an interest in related subjects.

In a study I co-wrote with Martin Papillon and Simon Dabin that was published recently, I measured the effects on indigenous people when they had the opportunity to vote for indigenous candidates in their ridings. We observed that it has a positive effect. It isn't about the effect of colonialism as a general concept, but I touched on it a bit, and we observed that there is a positive effect when indigenous voters have a chance to vote for an indigenous candidate.

I don't know what you mean, more specifically, when you talk about research, but I haven't published that kind of research.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you.

I also want to ask if you have cumulated your research results? Have you compiled the results of your research pertaining to Elections Canada? Can you please tell me if there is any such record of the studies you've done?

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Our results have been published and the gross data come from Elections Canada. I could send you the reference. It is an article that was published in the *Canadian Journal of Political Science* by Simon Dabin, Jean-François Daoust and Martin Papillon. The data comes from Elections Canada and has been published.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

When you collected your research, did you consult with indigenous peoples about what they think about Elections Canada?

Thank you.

[English]

Have you collected data on the extent of indigenous employment in elections offices?

• (1145)

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: We didn't interview indigenous people to ask their opinions about voting and Elections Canada. We studied the data, because this was a quantitative empirical study.

Regarding employment of indigenous people at Elections Canada, I think we added control variables that measured the average age of the population in a riding, income, and education, for example. That's what I recall, but I could be mistaken.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

I'm not sure if I was clear in my question. I just wanted to ask if you have collected data on how many indigenous people were employed by Elections Canada.

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Unfortunately, we didn't collect that kind of data.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

When you collected data, did you find in your studies whether the number of indigenous voters had increased? Has there been any significant difference in the number of indigenous voters when there's a federal election?

Thank you.

[Translation]

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: We focused on the number of candidates, not the number of indigenous voters. We didn't look at how the number of indigenous voters varies over time.

Thank you for your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

We're going to the next round now.

I kind of saw a hint that we could do this. Usually I go to the whole second round, but we're actually going to do one from each party for the second round. It will be five minutes for Mr. Steinley, followed by five minutes for Ms. Sahota, followed by two and a half minutes for Madam Gaudreau, and then two and a half minutes for Ms. Idlout.

Clerk, we'll then switch over to the second panel.

Mr. Steinley, you have five minutes.

Mr. Warren Steinley (Regina—Lewvan, CPC): Thank you very much, including to all of the witnesses who have brought forward their testimony today.

I did notice a couple of common themes in a few of the presentations. I'll ask Mr. Daoust and then Mr. Newman a couple of questions on where there were similarities in their presentations.

One thing that you both said was that language may not be one of the biggest issues with voter turnout for indigenous people across the country. I think that comes with the idea that they're a little less trusting of government sometimes. People really do have some issues around their ability to vote.

One issue was that socio-economic resources are barriers. There were a few other issues.

For this study that we're doing on languages, what would be the two biggest issues that both of you see in trying to have larger participation by our indigenous people across the country, other than having a language on the ballot?

Let's have Mr. Daoust and then Mr. Newman respond, please.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: Sorry, I missed the first part of the question because I was lost in translation, but I picked up the very last bit.

Yes, the cost of voting or accessibility of voting is not the most important factor that predicts whether someone is going to vote or not. This is true for both indigenous people and non-indigenous people.

You mentioned the two most important factors. From the latest study that I recently published, it's political interest—which can be linked to trust, although it is quite distinct—and having a sense that

voting is a duty, not a choice or a right. Of course, the word “duty” and the perception of voting as a duty is quite normatively loaded. It raises serious questions, especially for indigenous communities.

I would say the two factors are political interest and voting as a duty.

• (1150)

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much.

Mr. Newman, do you have something to add to that?

Prof. Dwight Newman: One thing that I'll add is the importance of reaching out to indigenous communities across the country to hear from them what the different barriers are. I referenced the report of the Interagency Steering Group on Native American Voting Rights in the United States, and that's one of the things they did.

The situation of different indigenous communities in different parts of Canada is very different, and the reasons that may stand in the way of voting are going to vary a lot between those different indigenous communities. You may hear that in Nunavut, the language issue is very important. There may be other issues that are significant elsewhere.

I would agree with those that have been raised. I would agree with Professor Harell's comment earlier that, in certain specific places, there are indigenous nations that don't regard the Canadian state as legitimate; thus, they don't participate in election processes. That's a different factor in its own category in a sense, but general issues around just having the policies that reach out to indigenous communities....

I hope that all parties will continue to develop policies that support the futures of indigenous people in Canada and the economic opportunities that they need. I think voter interest will be enhanced when indigenous people see all parties coming forward with good policies that advance their opportunities in life.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much, Mr. Newman.

The trust factor, I think, falls on all of us who are politicians around this table to reach out and make sure that we build that trust with different groups across the country. That's something I heard loud and clear from both of you as well.

I am very interested in the U.S. 1975 amendments that happened in a few jurisdictions around language assistance. Is that something we could look at doing? Not to reinvent the wheel, but is there proof that this language assistance program since 1975 in certain jurisdictions has improved voter turnout among native Americans in America? Not to reinvent the wheel, but is there any documentation that this language assistance program has benefited voter turnout?

Was it Dr. Newman who made that comment? Is there any proof that it helps out, and could we replicate something like that program?

Prof. Dwight Newman: I haven't looked at the empirical literature on the results of that across the United States. There, hopefully, would be scholars who have, and it would be worth looking for their scholarship on the effects of that. There have been various equivalents to ridings designated based on over 5% of the population with indigenous languages and other languages: Asian-American languages, Latino-American languages, etc.

It would be worth looking at that data and what the effects have been for various language communities.

Mr. Warren Steinley: Thank you very much. That's my time.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, the next five minutes go to you.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you to the witnesses, I'd like to first ask Professor Harell if she could comment on some of the questions that were raised in Professor Newman's opening remarks. There were a lot of questions. I feel there were more questions raised than answers as to how this committee should recommend going about moving in this direction.

Should we or should we not present these ballots in places where there are already territorial elections happening in this way? Do we go beyond that or do we provide proportional cut-offs, or "thresholds" as some may call them, depending on the population? If there's more than one language that is predominantly used, how many languages do we put on the ballot? Are syllabics used, or should syllabics also be introduced?

I was wondering if Ms. Harell can comment a bit and help us understand what we should be recommending to Elections Canada. There's a lot of will to try to move in this direction and do better. You mentioned in your opening remarks that we should be doing whatever indigenous communities would like us to do.

That's to Professor Harell.

• (1155)

Dr. Allison Harell: Thank you for that.

I would start by saying, to reiterate a point that Professor Newman made, that consulting with the communities that are concerned seems to be of the utmost importance to find out what they think are feasible solutions to be able to get languages on the ballot.

That being said, the operational challenges are important, and I think I said that in my opening remarks. One of the things that is important to think about in doing that is.... I wouldn't suggest taking baby steps, but a pilot project, going with something that seems operationally feasible, at least in the short term, makes a lot of sense at my end. I'll tell you why: Going all in and having it be a disaster is worse than doing it step by step in a process to build on capacity for doing this.

A failed experiment could have larger consequences for people's trust in the system than a sort of step-by-step process of getting these in place in a way that's feasible and makes it not a problem when an elector shows up at a voting booth to vote.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What, in your opinion, would be the best way to consult with indigenous communities on this? Does the witness feel that this committee should be doing that work and consulting communities, or does the professor think that some type of in-house council within Elections Canada, an outside advisory group or something of that sort should be undertaken?

Dr. Allison Harell: Professor Newman may have some things to add to this, but I think building capacity within Elections Canada makes a lot of sense and to have that.... In every step of the way, consultation is probably a good thing, but building in-house capacity within Elections Canada to explore the options with people who are reaching out to the communities makes a lot of sense to me.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do any of the other panellists have anything to add?

Prof. Dwight Newman: I would say all of the above are valuable. There may be limits to how many of them can be done, but any engagement by the committee, by other designated individuals on behalf of the committee or by Elections Canada developing its capacity would be valuable.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How much more time do I have, Madam Chair?

The Chair: You have one minute, but I think Dr. Daoust would also like to add something.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Please go ahead.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: I fully agree. The first part was about when, and I would say probably as soon as possible. Otherwise, I fully agree with what has been said.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Madam Chair, in the previous committee meeting, Ms. Idlout also mentioned that, rather than looking at thresholds of population or language use, we should be doing this from a different perspective of maybe where languages are dying out. I'm wondering if any of the panellists have comments to make about that.

The Chair: We'll do a quick round robin. Perhaps we can start with Professor Newman, followed by Dr. Harell and then Dr. Daoust, which will bring us to time.

Professor Newman.

Prof. Dwight Newman: It depends very much on what the objectives are. If the objectives are to enhance electoral participation or opportunities for electoral participation, it makes the most sense to work with situations where languages are in active use and, in fact, in use in place of English and French.

Where languages are dying out, there are very important policy objectives to undertake to support the survival and revitalization of indigenous languages. I'm not sure election ballots would be the first policy step that is most fruitful on those matters. I can understand the sentiment, but in my view, it's far more important to invest in other supports for those languages in terms of survival and revitalization.

Dr. Allison Harell: I concur with Professor Newman.

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: I fully agree.

The Chair: It is absolutely excellent to see a little bit of consensus forming among the witnesses.

Thank you for that great exchange.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

When we talk about investments, I recall the saying that you have to walk the talk. We are going to have to take action and not just limit ourselves to saying that something needs to be done. The bill we are studying seems to me to represent an opening toward more inclusion.

Some witnesses this week told us that ballots in the Northwest Territories or Nunavut showed a photograph of each candidate.

Our witnesses today may not have an answer, but why is it, in our legislation, that we don't have photographs for federal elections? What do our witnesses think of that idea, given the diversity of dialects, the extent of the copying that would result, and everything else?

Dr. Jean-François Daoust: I think that would open the door to a number of unfortunate consequences. We know that people sometimes use heuristic indicia and shortcuts when they vote, in particular in some less important elections, like municipal votes.

The mere alphabetical order of the candidates can already have consequences at the municipal and national levels. The presence of images or photographs of the candidates could certainly open the door to unfortunate consequences.

That is not a firm and final opinion, but it is what comes to my mind when I'm asked the question.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you.

Ms. Harell, do you have anything to add?

Dr. Allison Harell: I think we have to look for creative solutions.

If the photographs seem to offer multilingual information, I think we should consider that option, just as we use the parties' images and logos. We can imagine all sorts of possible markings that would not call for translation into five or six languages on a single ballot.

I think Mr. Daoust's considerations are appropriate. It might raise questions in terms of the quality of the information, but I think that type of solution must be on the table when we think about voting.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I think I have a bit of time left.

Mr. Newman, you can have the floor.

Prof. Dwight Newman: I agree with the other speakers that we have to look for creative solutions.

However, even if a solution looks creative, we also have to consider the unforeseeable effects and the other problems that might arise, as Professor Daoust said.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Mr. Newman. Your French is excellent, I would note in passing.

The Chair: I think the same thing. It is very good.

Thank you for this discussion.

Ms. Idlout, the floor is now yours for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

I have spoken with the interpreter and informed her that I'll be asking all of my following questions in English. At your discretion, I will be asking a series. I have seven questions that I would like to ask Professor Newman.

You have already answered my first question, which was, are you bilingual? I've now heard that you are.

My next question is how often do you vote in federal elections?

Prof. Dwight Newman: I vote in each federal election that takes place—unless I've missed one along the way. I can't say that for sure. But generally speaking, I have attempted to.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you.

Has there ever been any procedural reason that you were not able to vote?

Prof. Dwight Newman: I've faced issues with location at times, when I was travelling or was located overseas at the time of some elections. That's why I say I'm not certain I voted in every one that I was eligible to vote in.

I welcome Elections Canada's taking steps on those issues of accessibility when people are away from their riding.

Ms. Lori Idlout: During those times when you have had to, was the information provided to you in all languages that you understand?

• (1205)

Prof. Dwight Newman: It was. Indeed, that would be something to highlight with regard to the concerns that could arise, not necessarily with regard to the information on the ballot but to the availability of information in other contexts.

I, of course, benefit from being in locations where I can easily access the Internet. I know very well that in Nunavut there are concerns about Internet access in some communities at times—or at least around bandwidth speed. That's an issue in some other parts of the country as well.

Elections Canada needs to try to make information available in all pertinent ways.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you so much.

Do you feel that your language rights are adequately protected?

Prof. Dwight Newman: As an English-speaking person, I don't have any difficulty with language rights of my own.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Do you think that indigenous people deserve the same language rights protections that English- and French-speaking Canadians receive?

Prof. Dwight Newman: I think there, indeed, should be protections for indigenous language rights. Whether they would be identical to English and French in a country where these are the two official languages and are used by much larger numbers of people presents some issues, especially considering the large number of indigenous languages. But the protection of indigenous languages raises very important rights issues and should receive a great deal of attention, especially given the cultural significance to indigenous peoples of their languages.

Ms. Lori Idlout: Thank you.

What obligations does the Indigenous Languages Act give to the Government of Canada?

Prof. Dwight Newman: It's been awhile since I've been looking at all of the parts of it, so I wouldn't be placed to set out all of the obligations from that act today.

Ms. Lori Idlout: My last question is this: As a form of reconciliation, is it not time that we turn empathy into action?

Prof. Dwight Newman: I would totally agree that we need action urgently on various issues concerning indigenous peoples in Canada. Empathy goes only so far. There needs to be real action on a lot of different issues, and that needs to be in consultation and co-operation with indigenous peoples across the country, who are in a variety of different circumstances on different issues. It's a straightforward point to say that we need action on various indigenous issues in thoughtful ways that work well for everybody and that are responsive to all indigenous rights, obviously.

The Chair: I thank you both for that exchange.

I will just state that I am a chair who tries to have comments go through the chair because it's challenging for interpreters to translate otherwise.

As we have these conversations on language.... I know you had two and a half minutes. We provided you with four minutes and 22 seconds because it's important that we have these exchanges. In future, I would just be mindful of our guests who join us to provide us with information. We're not in a traditional courtroom.

I would like to thank our witnesses for your thoughtful comments. If there is anything else you would like our committee to consider, please do not hesitate to provide it in writing to us.

I really want to say that it was quite informative. I hope you keep well and safe. I hope the sun shines more often in April than not—and we look forward to continuing this important work, all of us together.

With that, we'll be switching over to the second panel. We'll take a 30-second pause so we can test the mikes.

Thank you.

• (1205)

(Pause)

• (1212)

The Chair: I would like to welcome committee members back to the second panel for today. We're continuing our study of indigenous languages on ballots.

I would like to welcome to our committee Marjolaine Tshernish, general manager of Institut Tshakapesh; and Denis Gros-Louis, director general, First Nations Education Council.

We will start with opening comments of up to five minutes.

We will start with Ms. Tshernish.

Welcome.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish (General Manager, Institut Tshakapesh): [The witness spoke in Innu-aimun.]

[Translation]

In my language, I greet everyone present.

Thank you for your invitation, which confirms the great importance of dialogue before implementing major projects to benefit the greatest number of people, including First Nations members.

I am Innu from the community of Uashat mak Mani-utenam on Quebec's North Shore. I am the Executive Director of Institut Tshakapesh, I am the general manager of the Institut Tshakapesh, an organization that has been working for what will soon be 45 years with our nation to preserve and promote Innu-aimun, our mother tongue.

In this context, it appears to us that First Nations and Inuit members would have the opportunity to fully exercise their rights as citizens, with access to documentation, including ballots, in their own language. They must also be greeted and served in their language.

A meaningful way to give First Nations the right to be heard is to recognize them as a nation and to recognize their language, culture and identity. It is now time to go beyond simple tokenism and officially take concrete action by seeing them as having an important political role to play. Participating in the development of a legislative framework, in this case including indigenous languages on federal election ballots, is a step forward.

Many of our members do not see themselves in Canada's current democratic process. They feel excluded and therefore powerless. So, to express their resistance, they abstain from voting in federal or provincial elections or refuse to participate in the Statistics Canada census. All of this has enormous consequences for our communities, especially in terms of socioeconomic conditions, to name just one.

Indigenous peoples have greatly contributed to Canada's development over the millennia and continue to do so.

I will end this section by saying that I have only scratched the surface.

Now I will discuss the importance of being able to use one's own language.

One of the permanent and fundamental characteristics of an individual's development is their identity. The most significant pillars of this identity are the ability to speak one's own language and familiarity with one's own culture. Using our own language helps us form a vision of the world and our sense of belonging to a nation and, most importantly, defines who we are and where we come from. Indigenous peoples have formed a close relationship with and have great respect for nature, including all living things. This is our way of life. To us, respect is a fundamental value that must be mutual.

According to the Public Inquiry Commission on Relations between Indigenous Peoples and Certain Public Services, residential schools have had a long list of enormous intergenerational impacts. I trust that you are sufficiently aware of the consequences of these impacts on the threatened disappearance of Indigenous languages and the profound changes that this has had for our communities. Of course, we cannot make everything black and white, but the many consequences suffered by First Nations are less than stellar.

Cohesion in a democracy requires all Nations to be included. According to 2011 data, there were 1,400,685 First Nations and Inuit members and their numbers have been growing since then. This demographic weight represents hope for the future of young people, provided that they feel welcome in the democracy.

Accessibility with respect to various government structures is possible if everyone is taken into account. The government of Canada has at its disposal all the reports of the Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples and the Hawthorn-Tremblay Commission, to name but two, to establish or reestablish genuine, healthy and respectful relationships.

First Nations have the right to participate in the development of Canadian society, to access the same benefits enjoyed by all Canadian citizens. All the recommendations and concrete solutions are outlined in these studies. It takes political will to create a fair and just society for all.

Thank you for listening.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you for your comments.

We will now go to you, Mr. Gros-Louis. Welcome.

[English]

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis (Director General, First Nations Education Council): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll express myself in French.

I will need seven minutes, if you'll allow me.

[Translation]

Kwe, hello.

[Member spoke in Wendat.]

[Translation]

My name is Denis Gros-Louis. In my language, that means "men who works for freedom".

[Member spoke in Wendat.]

[Translation]

I am taking part in the meeting today from the unceded territory of my nation, Wendat Land, near Quebec City.

My name is Denis Gros-Louis and I am the Director General of the First Nations Education Council. I would like to reassure Ms. Idlout, the member for Nunavut, and tell her I am bilingual: I speak French and English. I would also like to thank the member for La Prairie, Mr. Therrien, for inviting me today, and all of you. We are meeting to discuss a very important subject.

The First Nations Education Council is an association made up of eight of the 11 nations of Quebec for the purposes of education: Abenaki, Algonquin, Atikamekw, Wendat, Pekuakamiulnuatsh, the Wolastoqiyik First Nation, Micmac and Kanien'keha:ka.

The Assembly of First Nations Quebec-Labrador has delegated the task of testifying before you today to the FNEC, my organization. I also have the approval of the Chiefs Committee on Education to present issues that are specific to Quebec. Our organization also has the mandate of accommodating and supporting the coordinator of the regional committee on ancestral languages here in Quebec.

I hope the information and recommendations I will be providing you with will be useful in your study to allow the translation of ballots in federal elections into indigenous languages. This study is a good first step that would mean respecting our languages, and I see it as a gesture toward reconciliation.

In Quebec, we have 11 indigenous languages, some of which have their own dialects. Their vitality varies, depending on the community: some are in a state of dormancy, while others are spoken regularly and are the language used in schools. Some elders in our communities are unilingual: they speak only their own language. When they leave their community, they become foreigners in their own country.

Our languages are the vehicle for expressing our vision of the world. They are the thread that connects the past and the future. In other words, they are the cornerstone of our identity. But the link between identity and First Nations turnout in federal elections is much more complex, as my colleague, Ms. Tshernish, explained.

To give you a quick picture, but one that is realistic and honest, I also have to point out that views are polarized in the nations and communities that belong to the FNEC regarding the issue of First Nations voting. Some nations are participating in this exercise, but others categorically refuse to do so.

Recent Statistics Canada data show that the reason most often cited by indigenous people for not voting is political. We absolutely do not feel like stakeholders in federal matters. This refusal is based on reasons that sometimes go back to the very existence of the Canadian Confederation and, of course, its Indian Act, which has not always had a positive effect on our nations.

Whether because the First Nations are affirming their sovereignty or because they do not feel respected or involved in the issues, there are numerous reasons why voters from these nations are disengaged.

Overall, the identity question is central to the thinking you are doing to have a positive effect on First Nations turnout. What do you have to do for us to get out and vote? An Elections Canada study of changes in First Nations turnout shows that the communities in Quebec have the lowest turnout in federal elections: approximately 27.8 per cent, while the average turnout in Canada seems to be about 34 per cent.

Who is on the ballot, what are the issues presented, and how are they presented? All of that certainly has a big impact on our communities' interest and participation in the electoral process. In other words, solutions and initiatives will have to go beyond just translating ballots into our languages to show your respect for our languages and cultures. It will all have to be sincerely and concretely aimed toward reconciliation.

• (1220)

Translation of ballots into indigenous languages is a good way of promoting the languages. We teach our languages in our schools, and seeing them reproduced on a ballot obviously represents a good way of seeing the world and encourages us to participate in the electoral process. When language is marginalized, however, it often marginalizes our cultures and the visions of our member communities.

You could also observe certain colonialist positions stated before the courts through the conduct of the government machine and the positions taken before those courts, often to develop programs that do not generate interest in federal politics, because those policies are still harmful in 2022.

Last week, representatives of Elections Canada said in their testimony that translation was an expensive exercise, whether because of the time, the quality control, the planning or some other reason. Well, a simple speech saying it's expensive doesn't encourage our communities to participate in the electoral process. So I would like respect for our languages and reparation of the harm caused to them and to our cultures not to be seen as having a price. As a former public servant in the elections branch of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, I can tell you that policies intended to increase turnout are a matter of honour and responsibility. Access to a democratic right was restored to us only a few decades ago. That has to be taken into consideration, as well.

I spoke about identity and maintaining languages. Well, in Quebec, we find ourselves facing a unique situation in terms of language. We are witnesses to the colonialist approach of the provincial government in the way it updates the Charter of the French Language. This government's efforts hinder the use and maintenance of our languages, and at worst downgrade them, and flout the modern treaties in force. Some of our members don't understand or don't see government action, whether at the provincial or federal level.

So we have four recommendations. First, to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's call to action No. 57, it is important

to offer awareness training to senior management and staff at Elections Canada, focusing on our history, but also on the intercultural skills that officials at Elections Canada should have.

Our second recommendation consists of creating consultation and collaboration connections between Elections Canada and the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, which is the guard dog for indigenous languages in Canada.

Third, as was proposed in the Assembly of First Nations report on First Nations voter turnout, and in order to improve turnout in Quebec, you should make sure that information for voters is not just on the ballot, but also in a document that we have worked on with the Atikamekw nation. It goes beyond the vote and is designed to help unilingual speakers to understand the process and how things proceed on voting day. It should be offered to the 10 other indigenous nations in Quebec, of course.

Fourth and finally, it is also important to make sure that the images presented in the booklets reflect our nations' identity.

Thank you.

• (1225)

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We are going to start six-minute rounds with Mr. Vis, followed by Ms. O'Connell, Madame Gaudreau and Ms. Idlout.

It's six minutes to you, Mr. Vis.

Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Have the Innu people of northern Quebec signed, or are they in the process of working on, a reconciliation agreement with either the Government of Quebec or the Government of Canada?

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: Not to my knowledge, no.

[English]

Mr. Brad Vis: To Mr. Gros-Louis, are any of the nations you are representing today in the process of signing a modern treaty or reconciliation agreement with the Government of Canada or the Government of Quebec?

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: The eight nations that are represented by our council are involved in reconciling an education agreement framework that hopefully will be forthcoming. Recognizing our language will be part of the education value-added of the agreement.

Mr. Brad Vis: Do any of those nations plan on making a recommendation that would incorporate some of the points you made today regarding Elections Canada and the process of indigenous participation in federal elections, to your knowledge?

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: To my knowledge, we are going to work on safeguarding, protecting, enhancing and defending the rights of our language, whether at the federal and/or provincial level. What we're interested in is to value all of the efforts we're doing to work with our youth to grow in our education programs with pride. When there are barriers, such as not understanding the ballot or having to support the elders in reading the ballots, what you're proposing in your studies will be of value and a step forward.

With regard to going beyond that in a comprehensive modern treaty, it's beyond my mandate today and it's not at the core of what we prepared for.

Mr. Brad Vis: Thank you, and I understand.

At the education council, of the youth you represent, how many can fluently speak their indigenous language or how many are in the process of learning that language as part of their core educational requirements today?

• (1230)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: Is the question for Mr. Gros-Louis or me?

Mr. Brad Vis: It is for both of you.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Go ahead, Ms. Tshernish.

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: Each nation has its own rate of speakers. There are indicators of the vitality of the language for each community, and they don't apply to the entire nation.

The Innu nation has nine communities in Quebec and two in Labrador. I would say that in some communities that are remote from the major centres, the rates of language retention may vary between 70 and 90 per cent. That is an approximate picture of the situation for the Innu nation.

What is important to know is that a language can disappear completely in two or three generations, which is not very long.

[English]

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: From the First Nations Education Council's point of view, of the eight nations we represent, six still have fluent speakers in our schools. We do have immersion up to grade 2 for the majority of our schools. Of the two nations that have lost their language, in one of them we're starting to see, in our elementary schools and when the kids play outside, that some of them are now starting to speak in Wendat amongst themselves. That means the ongoing revitalization process and the investments made by our teachers, by the Canadian Heritage language program and by our own decision to safeguard our languages are working out.

Mr. Brad Vis: That's very helpful.

[Translation]

Ms. Tshernish, have the Innu of northern Quebec asked the provincial government to produce ballots in indigenous languages in provincial elections?

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: We haven't made that specific request to the government. What is interesting is that you are the ones taking these initiatives.

Our organization and the band councils work at the local level to promote the use of the language in the community. To preserve a language, it has to be spoken by the community and be transmitted by the parents. If we want to reinforce the use of our language, it is very important to keep up this community work.

We have an important job to do internally. We would like the provincial and municipal governments to be able to help us promote and enhance our languages.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

Just because we are going a little bit longer, I would not be surprised if we only have one round of questioning, so I was generous there. I will do the same with Ms. O'Connell.

We go over to you for six minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

All my questions are through you. The first is actually to both witnesses.

Mr. Gros-Louis, you spoke about the 11 languages in Quebec and the different dialects. We also heard witnesses from I believe the Northwest Territories, which also had, I think, 11 various indigenous languages.

In the Northwest Territories, we heard that they were able to provide, in provincial or municipal elections as one example, the language of that particular community or riding, as we would know it, or voter district. But from an Elections Canada perspective, that nimbleness of ballot printing by riding and language translation, I think we can see there are some challenges with the time lines.

To Ms. Tshernish, you also mentioned that all nations must be respected. I wrote that down because if we are able to move forward and there are multiple indigenous languages with multiple dialects, some using syllabics and some of it being translated, how do we best respect all nations and languages given the number of languages to make sure they're reflected in the communities—which I think both of you have talked about—and ensure that residents of those communities are actually using them.

How can we best respect those language rights, or how do we best choose which languages are most commonly used in various parts of the country?

That's a big, long question there, but I'll leave it open to both of you who have some advice and guidance for us.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: I am going to speak in the Innu-aimun language. We have standardized the writing of the Innu-aimun language in order to develop the corpus. The Innu language consists of three dialects.

The Cree language is standardized. However, if we find a Roman alphabet letter that we also respect, we write it.

For constituencies on the North Shore, ballots are not written in all three dialects; they are only in one. However, it might happen that some words can be written in three dialects.

Another idea would be to write certain words on the voter information card that you send to the communities. It might be titles or subtitles only. It might also be words of welcome placed in the locations where people go to vote. When you do advertising, you could include certain First Nations languages.

[English]

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: If it's the intent of Parliament to provide guidance to Elections Canada to do that, Ms. O'Connell, I would add that, first and foremost, Elections Canada doesn't have the expertise nor the capacity to do that.

It's a simple fact of reaching out to our communities. They will tell you who wants to have it done in their language. We'll do the translation. As I said, the Atikamekw nation was one member of the First Nations Education Council that has done it.

The process to go through the day and to be prepared and interested in the elections is already done. You know that eventually there will be an election, so therefore you can start working on it right away. You don't need to wait for that. Being proactive is a gesture of reconciliation.

In the previous panel there was a question about pictures. We do work with pictures. A lot of our languages are visual and cannot be translated because of all the stories that are behind them. It would create a sense of respect to have more visuals in the guidelines and preparation. As you see, we have a lot of pictures within the Atikamekw communities that have been used. Therefore, that can be started right away. You don't need to wait for the calling of the election and the writ to drop to do that.

In September 2018 in the Canadian Journal of Political Science, there were three researchers, Dabin, Daoist and Papillon. I guess Daoist was a previous speaker. They said clearly that, "Higher voter turnout in Indigenous communities corresponds with a higher proportion of Indigenous candidates."

We saw what happened in Kenora in the last election. Three fly-in communities didn't get their ballots on time. There was a first nation candidate who could have had a shot at being voted in.

It's stuff like that, as I said, and being proactive. We'll do the translation for you, no problem. That would be an engagement.

• (1240)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

I'm sorry, it's really hard; I don't mean to cut you off.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have? Can I pass it to my colleague Ms. Romanado?

The Chair: Yes, you can, really quickly.

[Translation]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to thank both witnesses for their remarks.

Mr. Gros-Louis, you showed us a document earlier. Would it be possible to send it to the clerk so he can distribute it to the committee members?

I have asked the witnesses several times whether the Commissioner of Canada Elections had communicated directly with the partners to ascertain whether already translated documents could be used. I'm thinking, in particular, of a poster that read "Vote Here", but in the local language. It would seem that this is not the case.

Thank you very much for your testimony and for saying you are prepared to work with anyone for accessibility to be possible for all indigenous electors.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Ms. Romanado, the document I have here is an Elections Canada document. It was translated in collaboration with the Atikamekw nation. So I will be pleased to send a government document, an Elections Canada document in this case, to the clerk.

Some hon. members: Ha, ha!

The Chair: Thank you for that exchange.

Ms. Gaudreau, you have six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning to our witnesses. I am really very happy to have you hear this morning.

We have just witnessed one of the noteworthy moments in our meetings. We saw that a lot of tools were already available. During our meetings, we have learned that there were already 16 documents translated into different languages. I hope this meeting will lead you to believe that we want to build, establish and continue the dialogue with you. This is particularly true of the Bloc Québécois.

In fact, in the riding of Laurentides—Labelle, there are three First Nations communities: the Atikamekw, the Algonquin and the Mohawk. A cultural centre is going to be created that will enable Caucasians to better understand and know about the various indigenous cultures.

I heard you talk about the first step. We have met with Mr. Gray-Lehoux and Mr. Vollant of the First Nations of Quebec-Labrador Youth Network. I think you know them. They told us that there was training and accompaniment for having an experience. But I would like to know whether that first step will be really decisive, since, from what they said, a lot has to be invested for each community to be able to reappropriate its language and culture, or preserve them.

I would like to hear from our two witnesses on that subject.

Mr. Gros-Louis, you have the floor.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Thank you.

In fact, the work of negotiating a regional education agreement between the federal government and the 22 member communities of the First Nations Education Council virtually ended 20 minutes before this meeting started.

I hope I am not revealing a scoop, but progress was made thanks to an important gesture of reconciliation: the fact that in the approach to education, we are catching up, to enable the communities to have the same tools as in the Quebec provincial system.

One of the pillars of the First Nations Education Council's approach is to incorporate the very important component concerning languages and cultures in our schools, in addition to the provincial curriculum. We absolutely insist that our youth...

• (1245)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Mr. Gros-Louis, forgive me for interrupting you. We have just opened a big door concerning what is happening in Quebec, but I absolutely have to ask you another question that has more to do with the federal government.

Ms. Tshernish, you have the floor.

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: Is this a question concerning language or is it a broader question that also has to do with inclusion?

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: That's right, my question has to do with inclusion. Does it necessarily involve ballots? According to the First Nations of Quebec-Labrador Youth Network, there really has to be money paid and help provided directly in the communities.

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: There have to be increasing numbers of small gestures so that it becomes obvious that we are included. The most important thing is really inclusion.

We also have to be consulted and respected. There has to be respect for what we are, and especially for how we do things, for our know-how. Our approach is different in relation to work and our values, in particular. You can see this everywhere. Our way of thinking is also different and it is important that we be respected.

As well, the word "decolonization" is important. We really have to undertake a major process of thinking about what we were before signing on to your institutions, your ways of doing things and your type of administration. Before that, we operated differently.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Ms. Tshernish, you opened a door for me.

I would like to get your opinion about the respect, openness and understanding shown by the federal government.

I would like to ask the witnesses to tell us, in 45 seconds, what they think of the Indian Act. I would like them to tell us, being perfectly frank, what their opinion is on that subject.

I would start with Ms. Tshernish.

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: My personal point of view on the Indian Act is not limited to the Act. It concerns everything that flows from it, like the system of band councils.

It also concerns the relationship with the federal government, which imposes a way of operating on us, of appointing our repre-

sentatives, of managing our programs and our services. For us, accountability is backwards.

The way we see the exercise of power is different. Normally, the entire population is involved.

We feel that a way of operating is really being imposed on us that doesn't look like us.

I'm afraid that we will end up losing our identity and our collective memory.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm sorry.

Mr. Gros-Louis, you have the floor for a few moments.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Public servants have a number of tools available to work on reconciliation, to rebuild trust, and, most importantly, to enable the communities to develop, in spite of what the Act requires. Sticking to the framework of the Act takes too long. Today, we want fast, concrete actions.

The Indigenous Languages Act and Bill BILL C-92, An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, made it possible for the communities to get their languages back, to reappropriate them and to preserve them.

I won't talk about the Indian Act today, because we don't have enough time. But I could come back.

Each of the tools available has to be used. We have to reverse the trends.

What can Canada do to enable the communities to get out of the framework imposed by the Act? It has to get involved with the languages, work with us to produce translations and manuals. That is how trust will be rebuilt. The Act doesn't create an atmosphere of trust, but the people who administer it have a responsibility and a duty to maintain that trust with us.

• (1250)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

The review of the Indian Act is not really the mandate of our committee. We have allowed this conversation to keep going, because it is relevant to the discussion.

Ms. Idlout, you have the floor for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member spoke in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, I want to thank the witnesses for appearing, and I ask them, through the chair, to respond.

The first question I have is this. Have the depths of the impacts of colonialism affected voter turnout?

I'd like both of you to respond to my question.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: I was waiting for Mr. Gros-Louis to speak.

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: I can't hear the interpretation. So I'm going to ask for a translated copy of the member's question. I could answer it in writing.

[English]

Nakurmiik for asking your questions of us.

The Chair: This is part of our learning and working.

[Translation]

Ms. Tshernish, I'll give you a moment to answer.

[English]

In English, we were able to get the translation from Inuktitut, but we did not receive it in French. I want to note that for the record.

Mr. Gros-Louis, we'll make sure you get that information so we can get answers.

We'll go over to you, Ms. Tshernish.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: I think I can give you part of the answer.

After Confederation, we had to wait 84 years for registered Indians and other indigenous groups in Canada to get the vote.

Today, the First Nations peoples don't just vote, they are also engaged in local, territorial, provincial and federal politics.

Of course, having been excluded for a number of years meant that we were able to implement our own local policies and have our own way of administering our affairs.

Having been faced with exclusion probably meant that we didn't feel involved in the entire process. We were not included in the decisions, we were not included in developing the policies. Obviously, that had an impact on turnout.

That's my interpretation of the question.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member speaks in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

Thank you for your response. I would like to hear a response from both of you to my next question and the importance of—

[Translation]

The Acting Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger): Excuse me, Ms. Idlout. Mr. Gros-Louis, are you hearing the interpretation?

• (1255)

[English]

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Yes, I've put my self on the English channel so that I can hear. I figured that out.

[Translation]

Hon. Bardish Chagger: Ms. Idlout, you have the floor.

[English]

Ms. Lori Idlout: [*Member speaks in Inuktitut, interpreted as follows:*]

On the importance of reconciliation, is it not time to turn empathy into action?

Mr. Denis Gros-Louis: Absolutely, Ms. Idlout.

As I said earlier, there have been concrete gestures of reconciliation in the last couple of months—years probably—and we're going to witness that today with the federal budget, with all of the rumours that Indigenous Services Canada will become the wealthiest department.

My point is not so much about money; it's about changing the culture of behaviours. You had representatives of Election Canada saying that it's expensive to translate. It's not expensive. It's the price of freedom. It's the price of working together. It's the price of collaborating together and growing together on our lands.

I would say that the gestures are more important than the money, and from Elections Canada's point of view, reaching out to our communities and developing documents like the one I keep showing off will be....

If all departments, not only Indigenous Services Canada—because some of their old-school public servants are still reluctant to understand that they're working to enable our communities to grow. They are still in the old fashion of trying to protect the Crown, and every time they do that, they lose in court. That's why I'm hopeful that the education agreement for Quebec will be such a positive move forward.

[Translation]

The Chair: Ms. Tshernish, would you like to say something?

Ms. Marjolaine Tshernish: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Reconciliation is important, with the communities' neighbouring towns, precisely in terms of their relations with each other. Those relations is where we could feel a lot of racism and exclusion, and experience occupying the territory without knowing one another, without visiting, without considering each other.

Reconciliation is for everyone. It means taking an interest in the people you share the territory with and with whom you are developing a region, for example. It also means considering our relationship with the town, the province, and Canada.

That is really how reconciliation happens, but also by apologizing, forgiving, continuing to work on development, but hand in hand, considering everyone and respecting everyone's differences.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Thank you for your time today. I have to say that it's probably one of the best gifts anyone can receive, and on behalf of PROC committee members, I would like to thank both of you for sharing with us.

Please do not hesitate to provide us anything additional in writing, including the Elections Canada document, which we would like to have as part of the items we will reference as we draft our report.

With that, I hope both of you keep well and safe. We look forward to continuing this work together.

For PROC committee members, I would like to put two things on the record.

The first is that on March 31 we were not able to have Inuktitut interpretation for this study. I would like to notify all committee members that the Translation Bureau has sent us an official letter of apology and is working to ensure that there are better resources, and to ensure that we can actually have adequate resources when it comes to ensuring that interpretation is available. I want to make sure that we put it on the record that they instantly followed up on that. They're taking it very seriously. We will continue to push to ensure that the resources are there. I'd like to thank everyone for the way we were able to handle that and move forward.

Secondly, subcommittee members received an email regarding how we can move forward when we return from the two con-

stituency weeks. I have asked that when we return on April 26, we continue with the report on the Conflict of Interest Code. I'm not going to say that we'll complete it, but we're going to try. On Thursday, April 28, we would actually be starting with both the intent of the motion from Mrs. Block as well as—as the committee had agreed—the intent of the motion from Mr. Turnbull. I am asking that we have lists of witnesses for Mr. Turnbull's motion by April 14.

We've laid out a way that we can all work together to make it work. I want to thank everyone for that. We're not in camera, so we can't really get into the details of it, but please do share it with your members.

Madame Gaudreau, did you want to say something quickly?

● (1300)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, what is the deadline for submitting our witness list?

The Chair: You have until Thursday, April 14, 2022, but if there are problems, let us know. If you want, we can receive it on April 12.

[English]

Are we all good with that agenda? Perfect. Thank you.

I hope everyone keeps well and safe. Happy April. We'll see you at the end of this month. Take care.

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Meeting Information	
Date	March 29, 2022
Topic	<i>Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots</i>
Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer Michel Roussel, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation Anne Lawson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Regulatory Affairs Karine Morin, Chief of Staff
Other (follow-ups, motions, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sections of the <i>Canada Elections Act</i> that would require amendment Ballot production timeline
Opening Statements	
The opening remarks of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) can be found here: English/French	
Questions by Subject	
Nunavut (special ballots, facsimile)	
<p>When asked if special ballots written in Inuktitut were accepted by Elections Canada (EC) during the last general election (GE44), the CEO mentioned that under the current legislation, candidates' names need to be written using the Latin alphabet. He added that offering special ballots in Indigenous languages would raise questions for the compiling and counting of results in Ottawa since counters and observers may not be properly equipped to understand a variety of languages.</p> <p>In response to a question about the printing of special ballots in Indigenous languages in Nunavut and how much of an impediment it would be for EC to add Indigenous languages on the ballots in that territory, the CEO indicated that in the case of Nunavut, translation is usually available within 24 to 48 hours and that EC could probably have the ballot printed in Inuktitut. Amendments to legislation would be required and this would also involve some policy considerations such as translation, validation of translation, ordering of the names on the ballots as well as the format of the ballot.</p> <p>When asked about the facsimile option used in Nunavut during GE44 and the feedback EC received, the CEO explained that EC did not receive much feedback and that while it did not receive any complaints about the facsimile itself, it did receive some about a few other items that were not translated in Inuktitut (yellow "vote" sign). The CEO added that EC has learned about its ability to offer products in a language other than the two official languages and stated that it is easier to improve the overall presence of material than to translate ballots.</p> <p>In response to a question about the facsimile model and its limitations, the CEO explained that all paper-based models have inherent limitations and that for some jurisdictions elsewhere in the world that use electronic machines, accessibility is not an issue. He added that in a paper-based environment, it would be impossible to produce a large number of facsimiles. He explained that, in some electoral districts, five Indigenous language communities would meet the 1% threshold, which is a lot for a facsimile model.</p> <p>When asked about the validation of translation for the facsimile posters used in Nunavut, the CEO explained that EC normally works with the Translation Bureau, but had to do the translation itself. He added that translation and validation had to be done within 24 hours of the close of nomination in order print and distribute the ballot in time. The CEO stated that at a time when deadlines are tight and may not allow for translation and validation, he considers it risky, for integrity considerations, to add languages to an official ballot until more is known about the matter. He also reiterated the need to have ballots ready for advance polls so as not to compromise the vote (while being late with a facsimile is regrettable, it does not</p>	

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compromise the election).

Operational considerations (translation, production timeline)

On a question about translation, the CEO noted that EC is not an expert and must rely on the expertise of the Translation Bureau and that translation timelines vary (usually 10-20 days and sometimes more). He suggested an agreement with the party to have the party names translated/transliterated in advance). He added that a new process would have to be put in place to translate and validate the candidate's name after the close of nominations and mentioned, in passing, that EC currently has a quality control process in place with a very short turnaround time.

When asked about the timelines to produce election material that is not already translated, the CEO explained that EC has to decide which languages to use, identify the translation time and proceed with the production of the material. He added that EC will be looking at that and it should not take long for a decision to be made.

On a question about the collection of signatures for the candidate nomination process in languages other than English and French, the CEO explained that the RO has to ascertain that the signature is from an elector residing in the ED and may not have a way to validate the information in other languages.

Policy considerations (threshold)

On a question about the 1% threshold, which languages were selected and why, the CEO stated that EC assumed that the threshold was based on mother tongue, but it could be based on language spoken at home or on written language that is understood. He added that for the purpose of EC's information products, mother tongue was used and that the data came from Statistics Canada as well as information based on demands over the years. In addition, the CEO indicated that if EC were to apply the 1% threshold to ballots, the 17 languages identified with the 1% threshold would overlap with the 16 languages in which EC already offers communications products.

The CEO explained that when it comes to threshold, more data is needed to understand and that EC needs to work with Indigenous communities to better understand their realities. He added that EC also has to look at the demand and capacity on the ground and explore as much as possible to see what are the obstacles that may be encountered.

In response to a question about the possibility of including people who are relearning an Indigenous language in the 1% threshold, the CEO explained that it depends on Statistics Canada and that this data is not available.

Legal considerations (amendments to the CEA)

On a question about the CEA and the sections that would need to be amended, the CEO said a number a section would need to be amended and suggested to share this information with the committee.

Participation in the electoral process (Indigenous rights, advisory group, CanTalk)

When asked if the language on the ballot has been identified as a barrier Indigenous electors' participation, the CEO responded that EC surveys do not address linguistic barriers and added that what EC knows is what is learned on the ground. He also mentioned that the Assembly of First Nations has identified languages as a significant barrier to participation in the electoral process.

On a question about Indigenous' rights, the CEO explained that he is open and willing to improve the presence of Indigenous languages at the polls by ensuring that the voting experience reflects Indigenous people's identity. The CEO also explained that he has to respect the fact that some Indigenous communities (40%) do not want polling stations on reserves. The CEO also said that symbolically, the use of Indigenous languages in the electoral process has a political weight in itself.

On a question about requests from First Nations, the CEO explained that EC has always sought to improve service offerings to Canadians and that the reconciliation lens offers a new perspective. He added that Bill C-309 tabled last spring clearly pointed to a need.

When asked about how EC can provide more help to Indigenous communities, the CEO explained that the service model is currently based on Canadians serving fellow Canadians in their community. Normally, in Indigenous communities at the local level, EC is able to provide services in Indigenous languages, but the CEO acknowledge that the situation in Iqaluit, which requires electors to vote by special ballot, is a complex issue. The CEO informed members that EC has launched a program review and is exploring the possibility of having an Indigenous participation advisory group that could focus on the issue of Indigenous languages on ballots. The CEO indicated that he wants to better understand the needs and realities of Indigenous communities and that EC needs to be more engaged on an ongoing basis, even outside the election period. The CEO added that he also knows there is a need for more flexibility for service at advance polls.

On a question about CanTalk and its use, the CEO said that service is provided in approximately 24 Indigenous languages and hundreds of languages in total, but anecdotally, there is very little uptake and it needs to be promoted more. The CEO also explained that it is only available at the Returning Officer's (RO) office and is not something that can be made available at the polling places.

Miscellaneous (recruitment, collaboration with EMBs, rapid response team)

On a question about recruitment of election workers speaking an Indigenous language, the CEO said that the vast majority of people are hired locally, but EC does not have data to support this claim. He also mentioned the elders and youth program and specified the uptake has gone down and that it is something he wants to look into. He indicated there is not a self-identified Indigenous person at higher ranks, but some are working at EC headquarters (ECHQ) and as ROs in the field. The CEO added that as part of the program review, EC wants to bring in some Indigenous Canadians at the executive level.

When asked about conversations with other electoral management bodies at the national and international levels, the CEO explained there has been collaboration even though there are only a few countries dealing with the same realities as Canada. He explained that issues for Indigenous communities inside Canada are different and reactions are not the same. He also noted that provincial and territorial CEOs will meet in Iqaluit this summer.

On a question about a rapid response team, the CEO said that understanding when to brief up to ECHQ is important. He added that regional meetings across the country are starting next week and this specific issue will be discussed. The CEO referred to the situation in Kenora, where there was no briefing and reiterated the need for EC to plan in advance and proactively in order to reduce last minute changes.

Meeting Information	
Date	March 31, 2022
Topic	<i>Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots</i>
Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Karliin Aariak, Languages Commissioner of Nunavut Aluki Kotierk, President, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. Cédric Gray-Lehoux & Shikuan Vollant, Spokespersons, First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network
Opening Statements	
<p><i>Note on language: throughout the meeting, witnesses used the term “Inuktitut” to refer to Inuit languages. This term is inclusive of all dialects used in Nunavut, and as such is used in the notes below.</i></p> <p>Karliin Aariak, Languages Commissioner of Nunavut (LCN)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elections Canada (EC) has failed to comply with the <i>Inuit Language Protection Act</i> (ILPA), territorial legislation that requires that Inuktitut be used in full equality with other official languages. Ms. Aariak’s office has notified EC of this, through the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO). In the last election, for example, Ms. Aariak’s office received reports that information about advanced polling dates and instructions for special ballots were not provided in Inuit languages. Ms. Aariak also received complaints that syllabics were not used on the ballot itself, as is the case in all municipal and territorial elections in Nunavut. Recommendations: 1) That the <i>Canada Elections Act</i> (CEA) be amended so that both roman orthography and Inuktitut syllabics are provided on the ballot in Nunavut; 2) That EC should include Inuktitut on all signage and materials at least as prominently as English and French; and 3) That EC should implement a policy / procedure specific to Nunavut to ensure EC complies with the ILPA and takes meaningful measures to remove barriers to Nunavut electors. <p>Aluki Kotierk, President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc. (NTI)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Kotierk noted that based on the last census, Inuktitut is the mother tongue of the majority of people in Nunavut, more than either English or French, a fact that makes this territory unique. While it’s commendable that EC has taken some initiative in recent elections, EC’s efforts have been ad hoc and have depended too much on the staff of the day. As a meaningful next step, legislation is required to ensure Inuktitut is on the federal ballot. Ms. Kotierk also supports the inclusion of Indigenous languages on ballots in EDs with a substantial presence of Indigenous peoples and giving the voters the right to request a special ballot in an Indigenous language of their choice, no matter where they may live. <p>Shikuan Vollant, Spokesperson for the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Youth Network (FNQLYN)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Vollant supports any initiatives to strengthen and revitalize languages, however ballot translation is not of high priority to him. The reasons for low voter turnout in some Indigenous communities are complex, and no study reviewed to date has found ballot translation to be a solution for voter abstention. Expressed concern about the possible environmental harm of producing paper ballots in many more languages across the country. Although the witness understands the good intention of these efforts, the inclusion of Indigenous languages on ballots would cost a lot of money that would be better invested elsewhere to revitalize Indigenous languages more directly and in more cost-effective ways. 	

Questions by Subject

Recent EC Recommendations (use of facsimiles, 1% threshold of language speakers)

When asked for her thoughts about the proposed use of a facsimile behind the voting screen (per the CEO's recent recommendations to the committee on this topic), Ms. Aariak responded/ reiterated that it is not the same as the use of Inuktitut on the ballot itself, and that she believes that having one's language on the ballot itself is more likely to increase voter participation.

When asked to speak to the potential challenges of providing Indigenous languages on ballots across other Canadian jurisdictions, Ms. Aariak explained that in her own jurisdiction, language rights are territorially legislated and apply to all federal agencies / departments in Nunavut. She reiterated her desire to see an EC policy / procedure specific to Nunavut that allows for the use of Inuit languages on the ballot, in roman orthography and Inuit syllabics. With respect to Indigenous languages in other jurisdictions, Ms. Aariak said that she could see the facsimile option working.

When asked for her response to the CEO's concerns about the difficulty of printing ballots on short timelines, Ms. Aariak said that even if there are challenges, this should be figured out, and that she is not aware of any printing / logistical issues in previous territorial and municipal elections.

In response to a question about the use of a 1% threshold of language speakers in a riding to provide ballots in that language, Mr. Vollant responded that there are 11 different Indigenous languages spoken in Québec, some of which have different sub-dialects between the 43 communities in Québec. This could make it difficult for EC to ensure that text is written and understood the same way in different communities. Mr. Vollant also explained that there is no direct term for "vote" in his Innu language, so to spell this out on elections materials in syllabics might be more confusing than helpful. As a result of these potential complexities and challenges, Mr. Vollant would prefer to see resources allocated to other forms of language revitalization.

Voter Turnout

When asked to explain how having Inuktitut on the ballot, or allowing Nunavut residents to write in Inuktitut on a special ballot, might improve voter turnout, Ms. Kotierk explained that Inuit people have only been able to vote federally since the 1960s, and having voting available in one's own language would make many people feel more included. She also mentioned that often it would allow Inuktitut speakers to confirm their vote for themselves rather than being instructed informally by others to simply mark the 'first candidate' or 'middle candidate.' Ms. Aariak argued that in Nunavut, the language is already expected and materials are already available in syllabics in territorial and municipal elections, so having the language on ballots would help increase participation. She also recognized that EC has taken initiatives, but they do not include languages on the ballot.

One Member asked Ms. Aariak and Ms. Kotierk to estimate voter turnout figures in recent municipal and territorial elections, given that turnout in Nunavut in the last federal election was quite low at 38%. Both witnesses said they did not have exact figures and would provide these as part of their written statements.

Regarding voter turnout, Mr. Vollant mentioned that as a part of their written statements, the FNQLYN will submit a paper written by a colleague on this topic. He later added that no research shows that including Indigenous languages on ballots would increase the vote, and the way to increase voter turnout in Indigenous communities is to give people a reason to want to vote.

Prioritization of Other Forms of Indigenous Language Revitalization

In response to the testimony of his fellow witnesses, Mr. Vollant commented that their differing positions is not evidence of conflict. Rather, he said it is evidence that different Indigenous groups have differing needs and priorities and reaffirmed his respect, despite their differing positions on the question of ballots.

When asked to expand upon his position that language on ballots is not a priority, Mr. Vollant explained that people cannot make use of ballots in Indigenous languages unless they are fluent, and that building and maintain fluency require significant resources. Regarding a question about what activities might be a better use of resources for language revitalization, Mr. Vollant emphasized that language is most easily learned in the home, and that for any language to be healthy, social support needs to be in place so that Indigenous people / families are healthy and feel comfortable embracing their identities.

Nunavut as a Unique Jurisdiction

When asked how Canada's obligations under The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) might apply to this issue of ballots, Ms. Aariak explained that ensuring Inuktitut is used on federal ballots would be a step in the right direction, but more needs to be done, as evidenced by the fact that her office is still receiving concerns. Ms. Aariak and Ms. Kotierk both asserted that Inuit language should be prioritized by EC because people in Nunavut have high expectations, due to the language rights set out in the ILPA and the frequent use of Inuktitut by other levels of government.

In response to a question about the barriers facing voters in Nunavut, Ms. Kotierk explained that the cultural context is unique. Firstly, she emphasized that access to federal voting is a fairly recent phenomenon, given that Inuit people were only recently moved from nomadic, land-based family units to static communities and were only given the vote in the 1960s. Secondly, she emphasized that cultural notions of leadership are based on experience and the idea that everyone has their own role to play, which means the self-promotion that comes with elections goes against the ways of many Inuit. Ms. Kotierk suggested that all these things might contribute to the lower voter turnout that has been seen.

When asked to provide more context about her desire to see policy / procedure unique to Nunavut, Ms. Aariak explained that her office has met with the CEO who has pointed to the fact that the CEA does not require the use of Inuit language on ballots. Ms. Aariak says she has argued in turn that the territory's ILPA should apply to EC and all of their signage / materials used in Nunavut.

Miscellaneous (experience in NTI elections, previous efforts of EC)

In response to a comment about the availability of signage and materials in Inuktitut, Ms. Aariak explained that before the 2021 election, her office corresponded with EC about concerns that had been identified during previous elections. They received back a list of things that EC was planning to improve for 2021. However, in the end there were some gaps, for instance signs about mask usage and COVID-19 that were only in English and French. Ms. Aariak wondered why, if EC had some contracts to ensure translation into Inuktitut, these were not used for all election materials. She mentioned that perhaps in future EC could liaise with the Inuit language authority (whose purpose is to standardize Inuktitut terms) for support.

Meeting Information	
Date	April 5, 2022
Topic	<i>Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots</i>
Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stephen Dunbar, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Northwest Territories (E-NWT) • Dustin Fredlund, Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Nunavut (E-NU) • Samantha Mack, Language Assistance Compliance Manager, Alaska Division of Elections (ADE)
Opening Statements	
<p>Stephen Dunbar</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The NWT has 11 official languages, 9 of which are Indigenous, ranging from 200—2200 speakers. • Recent amendments to territorial legislation give E-NWT the ability to use syllabics on ballots. • The candidate nomination form allows for “commonly known” names without ID; as a result, the ballot reflects the name as it is provided by candidates, regardless of language / orthography. • There are no political parties in the NWT, so ballots only contain photos of the candidates and their names, in whatever language / orthography it was provided. • There is no longer a one-stop translation bureau to produce materials in different languages; so having to deal with multiple contractors with varying availability, costs and timing can be an issue. • E-NWT is currently looking at producing more voter information in Indigenous languages (including “vote here” signs, and information about what is needed to vote (i.e.: ID requirements)). • There have been technical challenges at times with computers that do not register diacritics. • E-NWT will work closely with Indigenous governments to ensure respect of languages and culture. <p>Dustin Fredlund</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In territorial elections, all information put out by E-NU includes four languages: Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun (these are the two major dialects of Inuktitut), English, and French. • Translations of Inuit languages do not reflect all dialects, but all speakers usually get the gist. • Ballots include candidates’ names in Inuit languages using both the Latin alphabet and syllabics. • E-NU relies on candidates to submit their names; fortunately, the E-NU office has in-house capacity to ensure that names written in syllabics accurately show the candidate’s choice and to decipher write-in ballots to ensure voters’ choices in any local language are accurately recorded. <p>Samantha Mack</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alaska is currently implementing ranked-choice voting and recently launched an educational campaign on this subject in 9 Indigenous languages as well as English, Spanish, and Tagalog. • Alaska uses a panel model for all Indigenous translation, wherein multiple speakers of a language translate together to ensure accuracy and respect dialects. This is considered a best practice. • As in the American context, the inclusion of Indigenous language on ballots in Canada would be a very important first step towards greater inclusion of Indigenous electors. 	
Questions by Subject	

*This is an unofficial summary of the Committee proceedings – please refer to the official transcripts for clarification.

Current use of Indigenous languages in NWT / Nunavut

In response to a question asking what materials are provided in the NWT's 11 official languages, Mr. Dunbar responded that the materials they plan to produce for the next GE include: signs that say 'vote here' / 'polling place' and materials that explain what you need to be able to vote, including acceptable ID. Mr. Dunbar noted that in smaller communities, people are less likely to have official photo ID, so any instructions need to be clear about what alternatives forms of identification exist.

When asked to expand on issues of translation availability and timelines, Mr. Dunbar explained that he doesn't yet have an answer to this problem but is meeting soon with the NWT Languages Commissioner to seek advice, especially on the question of how to approach dialects.

When asked why the territories of Nunavut and NWT are more advanced in the provision of voting services in Indigenous languages (compared to EC), Mr. Fredlund responded that he can't really speak to what EC's challenges are, because in Nunavut, they are able to provide all election materials in all four languages by default. He added that a strength of his office is that most of the staff speaks Inuktitut, although the dialects do present some challenges. Mr. Dunbar's response was that E-NWT has been encouraged to do more on Indigenous languages, so they are continuing to improve their offerings.

In response to a clarifying question about the ballots used in Nunavut, Mr. Fredlund explained that most communities use Inuktitut syllabics, but some use Roman orthography, so both are provided on ballots. He also mentioned that in the previous election, E-NU had 100% compliance for candidates submitting their names in syllabics, even for those who only spoke English.

Feedback About Elections Canada

In response to a question about language-related feedback their offices have received, Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Fredlund both mentioned that their offices sometimes receive language complaints during federal elections, often because electors do not know that E-NWT/ E-NU are separate from EC. Mr. Fredlund also explained that in 2019, when federal and municipal elections took place at the same time, E-NU had all signage in all four languages, but EC did not, and his office received feedback from confused electors thinking that E-NU was responsible for signage.

With respect to best practices they would offer to EC, Mr. Dunbar mentioned that E-NWT was one of the first jurisdictions to include candidate photos on ballots, which has helped to bridge gaps in language and literacy. He also mentioned that returning officers are instructed to arrange for interpreters to be made available where needed. However, Mr. Dunbar noted that it is not always possible to confirm interpreters for each language. In responding to a related question, Mr. Dunbar and Mr. Fredlund noted that the provision of interpretation at the polls is not legislatively required in either territory, but ROs usually do their best to hire poll workers/ interpreters who speak the local languages.

In response to a question about what the witnesses would recommend EC do differently with respect to Indigenous languages, Mr. Fredlund responded that this is something that CEOs will be discussing this summer in Iqaluit. He also mentioned that he has met with and worked with the CEO of EC previously. Mr. Dunbar added that it is very important to be sure that names be included on the ballot as they are provided by the candidate, because anglicizing names often changes the meaning. Ms. Mack reaffirmed that the choice of alphabet, appearance of the ballot, and use of syllabics were all important questions.

When asked about the potential sharing of resources with EC when territorial and federal elections coincided, Mr. Fredlund said that E-NU would never say no to sharing information about Inuktitut or helping, but that we need to keep in mind that laws are different, sharing information is not necessarily just a reprint, and both offices also extremely busy when elections are coinciding.

Funding in Support of Indigenous Languages

In response to a question about funding for the provision of Indigenous languages, Mr. Dunbar explained that while E-NWT does not have speakers of all 11 languages in house, they are adequately resourced to provide all these languages. However, they cannot always guarantee a quick turnaround because they rely on contract translators. Mr. Fredlund, meanwhile, said that the Nunavut legislative assembly has always been able to provide the required funding for language translation.

Differing Dialects

When asked about the challenge of varying dialects within languages, Mr. Fredlund replied that his office's translations, which are completed in Rankin Inlet, don't always match exactly with local dialects, but are similar enough that different written dialects don't usually have to be provided for each of the 25 communities. He added that during election periods, his office also relies on connections in the Western arctic for dialectical support. Mr. Dunbar confirmed that dialects were certainly something his office will be working to address with local governments: some communities are trying to centralize their languages, and make uniform translations, while other communities may want to preserve unique dialects. Mr. Dunbar also used the example that in some dialects of one language, the roman letter 'X' translates literally to "vote," which could impact the design of 'vote here' signs. Ms. Mack offered that the use of translation panels has helped to improve dialectical challenges by allowing for a balance between specificity and understanding across a wide geographic area.

Language Legislation in the US (Alaska)

Ms. Mack was asked several questions about language rules and legislation in her jurisdiction of Alaska, US. In response to a question about why ballots are provided by the ADE in Tagalog (a Filipino language), Ms. Mack explained that there is a rule (in federal legislation) that if 5% of the voting population speaks a language and speaks English less than "very well," voting materials should be produced in that language. She also clarified that in the case of Indigenous languages, dialects within a language are considered one group under this 5% rule, but once that threshold is met, ADE may still decide to translate into several distinct dialects using their panel translation model.

Miscellaneous (Length of Election Period, Voter Turnout)

In response to a question about the length of the election periods in their respective jurisdictions, Mr. Dunbar replied that the election period in the NWT is 29 days by law (with candidates given until day 25 to submit their names), and Mr. Fredlund replied that in Nunavut it is 35 days by law (with candidates given until day 30 to submit their names). **In a later question on this topic, a Member noted that perhaps EC should be given a longer period between close of nominations and election day.**

Meeting Information

Date [April 5, 2022](#)

Topic *Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots*

Witnesses

- Lori Idlout, M.P., Nunavut

Opening Statements

- Election services in Indigenous languages are not sufficient by themselves. There are many unilingual Indigenous speakers, especially elders, and Elections Canada (EC) employees greet electors at a polling station in English and French. Some electors can only be assisted by the kindness of someone else.
- In territorial or local elections, Nunavut residents are used to, and have the right to, vote in their language.
- The EC pilot project in 2021 was not the norm; with the exception of the pilot, ballots in

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Nunavut are in English or French and candidates have to explain to electors the physical place of their name on the ballot.

- For an Indigenous elector, it is not always worth filing a complaint – the complainant can't file in English or French, and the person receiving the complaint may not understand if it is written in an Indigenous language.
- Ms. Idlout gave five recommendations for EC and the government: (1) learn from Elections Nunavut who has extensive experience in running elections in four languages, (2) hire full time Indigenous interpreters/translators to build capacity within EC, (3) streamline EC's complaints process for unilingual speaking Indigenous people to voice their concerns, (4) conduct further study on Indigenous governance within Canada's democracy, and (5) ensure that the federal government respects Indigenous culture in order to build the trust that is necessary for reconciliation.

Questions by Subject

Recruitment / Election Workers

When asked about the difference in voter turnout during territorial/local and federal elections and what can be done to improve voter turnout, Ms. Idlout explained that EC staff should be "trauma informed" so that they do not continue to portray colonial values when dealing with electors. She added that higher voter turnout during territorial/local elections can be explained by the elector's trust in the electoral process.

When asked about what EC can do to improve its recruitment strategy and advance reconciliation, Ms. Idlout said there should be more linguists and cultural interpreters on EC's staff, and EC should meet with Indigenous organizations, like the Assembly of First Nations, that work with their people and advocate for their rights.

Threshold

On a question about what would be an acceptable threshold for the inclusion of Indigenous languages on the ballot, Ms. Idlout said that the extent of language loss in Indigenous communities should be the threshold and indicated that EC can play a role in promoting and protecting the language through the translation of the ballot and election material. She added that the electoral process allows for the recognition of Indigenous people's right to vote and is therefore part of the reconciliation.

When asked if she would consider the committee's study a success if Inuit languages were included on ballots in Nunavut, or if ballots across the country should include Indigenous languages, Ms. Idlout said that when it comes to Indigenous languages, more can always be done and mentioned that she would like for all Indigenous languages to be incorporated on the ballot, when necessary.

Ms. Idlout explained that while there is no need to have 16 languages on the federal election ballots everywhere in Canada, it is necessary to have ballots available in Indigenous languages where Indigenous people live.

Miscellaneous/other issues (legislation)

When asked about her plans to introduce legislation, or if the NDP-Liberal agreement includes legislation to add Indigenous languages on the ballot, Ms. Idlout responded that she is studying Bill C-309, but has not had any conversations with the Liberal government on the topic.

Ms. Idlout brought up that many Indigenous people do not know what EC can do and parliamentarians

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Highlights of Committee Proceedings – Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC)

should do a better job in transmitting that information. She also said that legislation, policies and programs should be more reflective of the culture of First Nations, Inuit and Metis.

Meeting Information	
Date	April 7, 2022
Topic	<i>Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots</i>
Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jean-François Daoust, Assistant Professor, University of Edinburgh Dwight Newman, Professor of Law and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Rights in Constitutional and International Law, University of Saskatchewan Allison Harell, Professor, Political Science Department, Université du Québec à Montréal
Opening Statements	
<p>Jean-François Daoust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When discussing the principles and values of Canadian society, it makes sense to take proactive steps to increase the participation of groups that participate less in democratic life, for example, by including Indigenous languages on the ballot. While research is limited, the vast majority of electors find voting easy and ease of voting is not one of the major reasons people choose not to vote. For this reason, we should not expect a higher turnout if Indigenous languages are included on the ballot. <p>Dwight Newman</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The inclusion of Indigenous languages on ballots is not required by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), but would be a good step toward voter inclusion. There are a number of issues related to the inclusion of Indigenous languages on ballots that need to be discussed, including the threshold, the use of Latin alphabet vs. syllabics, the costs and the possibility of being able to use the money in other areas of Indigenous participation. Facsimiles are an option that could be tested rather than have Elections Canada (EC) make widespread changes across the country all at once. <p>Allison Harell</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Though past studies show that socioeconomic and trust in the federal governments are important barriers, including Indigenous languages on the ballots could be a symbolic gesture and could make the electoral process more legitimate to Indigenous voters. The CEO highlighted challenges for EC in creating multilingual ballots that should not be ignored, but the inclusion of electors' languages is valuable (English and French only ballots can create barriers). The threshold for inclusion of Indigenous languages should be whether or not Indigenous communities want them. 	
Questions by Subject	
UNDRIP	
<p>When asked about the legal implications under UNDRIP, Mr. Newman indicated that the Government of Canada is under no obligation to include Indigenous languages on the ballot. He added that the use of a facsimile would be an acceptable alternative in the spirit of UNDRIP as it would make the process more accessible by removing barriers.</p>	

Mr. Newman also specified that when it comes to Indigenous languages on ballots, the committee should mostly concentrate on article 13.2¹ of the declaration.

Lessons learned from other jurisdictions

When asked if other jurisdictions were facing similar challenges and what had been done to address them, Mr. Newman explained that Australia, New Zealand and the United States are natural examples given the nature of their colonial past. He added that it would be important to explore what the United States was able to accomplish in 1975 and how they were able to do it so quickly.

Ms. Harell added that it might be worthwhile to look at what was done with special ballots in provincial and territorial elections during the pandemic.

Increase inclusion and next steps

When asked about what can be done to promote inclusion, Mr. Daoust mentioned that though the inclusion of Indigenous languages on ballots might not directly impact voter turnout, the symbolic impact might have indirect effects on turnout by increasing the overall trust in the federal government in the long term.

Ms. Harell underlined the significant operational challenges and explained how starting with a pilot project that is feasible in the short term may be a better option. The failure of a rushed, widespread process could be disastrous and have serious long-term consequences. She emphasized that one of the most important steps to take is to consult and seek input from Indigenous communities to better understand how they can be further engaged in the process. The importance of building in house counsel within EC was also mentioned.

When asked about the advisability of having pictures of the candidates on the ballot, witnesses agreed that it is of importance to look for creative solutions that would not require translation or transliteration, while having to consider the unintended effects and other consequences that could result from these solutions.

Main barriers to voter turnout

All pointed out that of the main barriers to voter turnout, in addition to a lack of trust of the federal government and socioeconomics, is a general lack of interest in politics.

Ms. Harell explained the importance of consulting with as many Indigenous communities as possible in order to better understand the variety of challenges, as the situations may differ from one community to another.

¹ UNDRIP Article 13 :1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons. 2. States shall take effective measures to ensure that this right is protected and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and be understood in political, legal and administrative proceedings, where necessary through the provision of interpretation or by other appropriate means.

*This is an unofficial summary of the Committee proceedings – please refer to the official transcripts for clarification.

Meeting Information	
Date	April 7, 2022
Topic	<i>Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots</i>
Witnesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marjolaine Tshernish, General Manager, Institut Tshakapesh Denis Gros-Louis, Director General, First Nations Education Council
Opening Statements	
<p>Marjolaine Tshernish</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous electors must have access to services and documentation—including ballots—in their mother tongue. Indigenous people do not see themselves in Canada’s democratic process and feel excluded. This sometimes leads them to refuse to participate in federal/provincial elections or the Statistics Canada census. <p>Denis Gros-Louis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The committee’s study is an important first step, but the solutions must go beyond including Indigenous languages on federal election ballots. Many elders speak only one language and become foreigners in their own country when they leave their communities. In communities that are members of the First Nations Education Council (FNEC), views are polarized on the issue of voting in Indigenous communities; some take part and others categorically refuse to do so. The most common reason is political. Issues related to identity and language promotion are important and must be studied to better understand the issues related to Indigenous voter turnout. Mr. Gros-Louis made four recommendations to EC: (1) provide EC staff and senior management with awareness training focused on history and the intercultural attitude that should be adopted; (2) collaborate with the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages; (3) ensure that elector information appears not only on the ballot, but also in an information document available in Indigenous languages; and (4) ensure that the images presented in information booklets reflect the identity of different Indigenous nations. 	
Questions by Subject	
Exercising the Right to Vote	
<p>When asked about reconciliation and the fact that it involves the inclusion of Indigenous languages on the ballot, Mr. Gros-Louis and Ms. Tshernish both mentioned the importance of consultation, collaboration and respect in day-to-day work with Indigenous communities.</p> <p>When asked about the impact of colonialism on voter turnout, M. Tshernish mentioned that being excluded from the political process for so long has led to a decrease in participation for Indigenous electors.</p>	
Operational considerations	
<p>On a question related to challenges of producing ballots and on how to best respect language rights, Ms. Tshernish said that Innu written language has been standardized and explained that information products should be made available in Indigenous languages.</p>	

*This is an unofficial summary of the Committee proceedings — please refer to the official transcripts for clarification.



Highlights of Committee Proceedings – Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC)

M. Gros-Louis added that EC does not have the expertise and capacity and recommended that EC reach out to communities to learn more about their needs. M. Gros-Louis also mentioned the FNEC's willingness to help with translation of election material. He referred to the use of pictures in election material that would create a sense of respect for Indigenous electors and said there is a need to be proactive as part of the reconciliation process.

Miscellaneous/other issues

In response to a question about the request for ballots in Indigenous languages for the Quebec provincial elections, Ms. Tshernish explained that no specific request had been made to the Quebec government, as the work is done mainly in the communities themselves. She added that it is good for other levels of government to help promote the revitalization of Indigenous languages.



Our file: 2022-103793

March 24, 2022

The Honourable Bardish Chagger, P.C., M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Bardish Chagger:

I am writing to share information that was requested during my appearance before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on February 17, 2022, concerning the 44th general election.

Below you will find responses to the members' questions, with links to information on Elections Canada (EC)'s website and further details in the Annex.

Education Tools and Communication Approach on Preparing to Vote

Members sought information on the agency's education efforts and the approach taken to explain to voters—including new Canadians—how they should prepare to vote.

When a federal general election is called, Elections Canada launches a four-phase multimedia Voter Information Campaign to ensure that eligible electors have all the information they need on when, where and the ways to register and vote in a federal election. Phase one focuses on promoting registration. Phase two informs electors that they should receive their voter information card (VIC) in the mail telling them where and when they can vote, as well as what to do if they don't receive their VIC or if it has incorrect information. Some information products state that the VIC can be used as proof of address. The third phase promotes the early voting options (i.e. advance polls and the special ballot process) so that they can select the option that best fits their needs. The final phase focuses on the requirements to vote on election day (i.e. ID) and informs electors that they can register on election day if they haven't already done so.

Organic social media messaging and pro-active media outreach in the 44th general election encouraged people who hadn't received their VIC to visit the website to find out where to

vote. Additionally, web content about the ways electors can prove their identity made clear that the VIC was not required in order to vote.

Before for the 44th general election, public opinion surveys indicated that there would be an increased interest in early voting options due to the pandemic. In response, EC began promoting early voting options organically on August 15 (on its website, on its social media platforms and through media relations efforts) and launched the early voting options phase of the paid advertising campaign on August 28. The paid campaign on early voting options began one week earlier than in previous elections, two days prior to the close of candidate nominations. The first week of the early voting phase (August 28 to September 5) was delivered through digital media and focused on promoting voting by mail and informing electors of the applicable deadlines. The second week of the campaign (September 6–12) was the traditional multimedia campaign promoting the various ways to vote in advance (voting at advance polls, by mail and at an EC office).

EC delivered information about the voting options throughout the election period via social media, television, radio, digital ads, print ads as well as the EC website and the [Guide to the Federal Election](#), which was distributed to all Canadian households. Regional media advisors who are spread out in various regions across the country delivered key messages and proactive pitches to media starting at the beginning of the election period, and organic social media messaging started being shared after the writs were issued (sooner in the electoral calendar than it had been in past elections).

The Voter Information Campaign included ads in English, French and Inuktitut, as well as in 30 heritage languages (depending on the medium). The campaign also leveraged the general election website to provide target groups with digital information products in 16 Indigenous and 33 heritage languages, about where, when and the ways to register and vote.

Early voting options were also promoted through EC's Inspire Democracy network, which included 27 community organizations and stakeholder groups that had the capacity and reach to share information with groups of electors who face barriers to registering and voting (Indigenous electors, youth, new Canadians and electors with disabilities). These contracted organizations distributed Inspire Democracy learning materials, shared Voter Information Campaign materials in a variety of formats and languages and organized 139 community outreach events at which they presented information on how to participate in the federal election. In addition to these events, the Inspire Democracy team participated in another 26 outreach events and sent election information to 619 unique contacts via its election email series.

Annex 1 provides specific details about the Voter Information Campaign and how it presented the early voting options initiatives.

Natural Disaster Framework

Members requested additional information on EC's contingency plans for dealing with the impacts of climate change and natural disasters.

Over the years, EC has developed a disaster response mechanism and operational expertise that has allowed it to mitigate some of the worst effects of severe weather events on the election process. Key elements of the disaster response mechanism include: a) a calibrated legal framework in the *Canada Elections Act* (the Act) that allows for solutions that are appropriate to the gravity of the emergency event, b) a network of partners at the federal and provincial levels and protocols that enable effective and responsive cooperation, c) operational measures to offer adapted services to electors and d) extensive communication capacity. These elements are discussed below, as is their application to the forest fires that broke out during the 2021 election and devastated communities across British Columbia, including Lytton, BC.

A Calibrated Legal Framework

While the Act is highly prescriptive, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) retains administrative discretion that can be used to adjust certain aspects of the electoral process, notably in response to weather events. This can include, for example, changing polling locations within the electoral district or setting up special ballot kiosks to serve electors from various electoral districts.

Also, sections 17 and 179 of the Act allow for the Act to be adapted by the CEO to respond to unforeseen circumstances, and are the cornerstone of the natural disaster response framework. While there are limits to the adaptation power, it is nonetheless an essential tool that is used at every election to allow electors to vote and have their votes counted. In 2019, for example, I adapted the Act to allow for electors who were evacuated from communities across Manitoba to vote at a "super poll" in Winnipeg.

Finally, section 59 of the Act allows for an election to be postponed or cancelled in an electoral district in the event of a "fire, flood or other natural disaster." The provision requires first that the CEO certify that it is impracticable to deliver an election and then for the Governor in Council to decide whether to postpone or cancel the event in that electoral district. Postponing or cancelling an election is an extreme measure that must be used only in the last resort.

As part of its preparedness activities, EC informs political parties, through the Advisory Committee of Political Parties (ACPP), of the various measures that are available to deal with special circumstances such as extreme weather events. Annex 2 includes a presentation that was given to ACPP in June 2021 as we planned for the election.

A Network of Partners

EC maintains close working relationships with federal and provincial emergency management bodies. Information also flows to EC from a number of intelligence bodies constantly throughout the election period, including from Public Safety's Government Operations Centre. In the lead-up to and throughout an election period, EC receives constant information from weather services across the country and the senior management team is regularly updated with the latest information when a weather event unfolds.

Operational Measures

While the precise operational measures required will vary depending on the nature of the crisis, EC has the capacity to respond to a variety of emergencies.

A key element of operational responsiveness is the capacity to make human resources available to address crises on an emergency basis. Returning officers are able to hire additional office staff and election officers with as little of a delay as possible, and regional networks of returning officers coordinated by a regional field liaison officer ensure cooperation and the sharing of resources. In addition, Elections Canada headquarters (ECHQ) has "surge capacity" available that allow human resources to be dispatched on short notice from the National Capital Region to election districts where they are needed. In 2019, for example, a team from ECHQ was sent to Manitoba to establish a polling station to serve Manitoba Hydro emergency workers who were working to restore power far from the electoral districts in which they resided.

In the summer of 2021, given the exceptionally active forest-fire season, the Forest Fire Task Force was created to respond to ongoing forest fire emergencies across the country and support Returning officers.

Communications Capacity

EC maintains a media monitoring unit and a network of regional media advisors with connections to local media that provide EC with significant intelligence about circumstances on the ground. In addition, EC has the capacity to receive and respond to communications from electors across a range of social media platforms.

These communications services complement the community networks of local returning officers and other staff who have deep connections to their communities and a wide network of contacts across communities who can provide and disseminate information through informal channels.

EC also communicates regularly with registered political parties through the ACPP and provides updates throughout the election period.

Services for Evacuated Electors in the Electoral District of Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Including the Community of Lytton, BC

Members asked why EC did not offer a mobile polling station to evacuees of Lytton, BC.

During the 44th general election, fires in the region of Lytton Creek, BC, were among the most severe and a general evacuation of the village of Lytton and the Lytton First Nation took place. BC ended the declaration of emergency on September 21, one day after polling day.

During this entire period, I received up-to-date information multiple times a day from the region and supervised the activities of EC's Forest Fire Task Force. Information about general circumstances in the Lytton area was available to EC through direct communication with local election administrators, provincial emergency management officials, federal public safety experts and official weather services. However, information about the particular circumstances of individual electors was much harder to obtain. Evacuations had significantly dispersed the population and few evacuees had registered with government emergency services. Information from local returning officers indicated that many evacuees had relocated to other population centres such as Kamloops, Kelowna, Abbotsford and Chilliwack. EC made two attempts during the writ period to reach the Lytton First Nation via the Assembly of First Nations, but was unsuccessful.

While there is the option of opening a polling station for an electoral district outside of that electoral district during an evacuation, it is critical to know where the electors are, how many are concentrated in the area and their access to the poll, and to be able to communicate the services offered. For the evacuated electors of both Lytton and the Lytton First Nation, "out of electoral district" polls, mobile polls and transfer certificates were not viable options because the residents were spread out across the province and EC did not know of any concentration of evacuees where a mobile polling station could be sent on election day.

Given these circumstances, EC launched a media and communications campaign designed to reach electors in affected areas and advise them of their voting options, wherever they were located. Through social media, radio, television and locally distributed print materials, EC informed displaced electors of their voting options, emphasizing special ballot options (i.e. voting by mail or at a local office).

Evacuated electors were also given the option to vote in person at polls in Spences Bridge (the closest community). The polls in Spences Bridge were held on election day and all roads leading to Spences Bridge were opened by emergency services to facilitate voting. I also directed EC to work with Public Safety Canada to distribute flyers with messages about voting options in to locations across the BC interior where evacuees may have been displaced.

I trust that this information will be of assistance to the Committee and invite you to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large loop followed by a horizontal stroke and a small upward flick.

Stéphane Perrault
Chief Electoral Officer

Encl.

c.c.: Justin Vaive
Clerk of the Committee



Le directeur général des élections • The Chief Electoral Officer

Our file: 2022-103835

April 11, 2022

The Honourable Bardish Chagger, P.C., M.P.
Chair, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0A6

Dear Bardish Chagger:

I am writing to share information that I committed to provide in my appearance before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on March 29, 2022, during the Committee's study of *Inclusion of Indigenous Languages on Federal Election Ballots*.

The information included in the annexes to this letter identifies the provisions of the *Canada Elections Act* that would need amendment in order to have Indigenous languages added to the federal ballot (Annex 1), as well as the time and steps required for the production of ballots for a federal election (Annex 2).

I trust that this information will be of assistance to the Committee and invite you to contact me if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

Stéphane Perrault
Chief Electoral Officer

Encl.

c.c.: Justin Vaive
Clerk of the Committee

Annex 1: *Canada Elections Act* (CEA) Provisions Requiring Amendments to Include Indigenous Languages on Ballots

Candidate Nomination Process

- The prospective candidate must complete a nomination paper where they register the name that they wish to have appear on the ballot (**subparagraph 66(1)(a)(i) of the CEA**). The prospective candidate may request that a name by which they are commonly known be registered to appear on the ballot (**subparagraph 66(1)(a)(i.1) of the CEA**).
- Under **section 66(2) of the CEA**, the name of the candidate shall not include any title, degree or other prefix or suffix.
- Under **section 67(2) of the CEA**, a prospective candidate shall prove their identity with one piece of identification issued by a government or two pieces of identification authorized by the Chief Electoral Officer.

Ballot and Special Ballot Format

1. Ballot

- **Form 3 of Schedule 1 of the CEA** provides the ballot form. It includes an image of the ballot used by EC.
- Pursuant to **Form 3 of Schedule 1 of the CEA**, ballots are in English and French. Only Latin alphabet characters appear on the Form 3 ballot.
- Pursuant to **Form 3 of Schedule 1 of the CEA**, the CEA provides that EC has the obligation to provide ballots in both official languages. However, even if the names of candidates and political parties must be written using Latin characters, they do not necessarily have to be in English or French.
- **Section 117(1) of the CEA** provides that ballots shall contain the names of candidates arranged alphabetically. The mention of alphabetical order in **section 117(1)** refers to the Latin alphabet, as ballots are, for now, published in English and French.

2. Special Ballot

- Under **section 186 of the CEA**, special ballots shall be in accordance with Form 4 of Schedule 1, which includes an image of the ballot used by EC.
- **Form 4 of Schedule 1 of the CEA** provides the exact form of special ballots, which are in English and French. On these ballots, electors are asked to write the given name and surname of the candidate of their choice.
- Under **sections 213(2), 227 and 258 of the CEA**, electors shall write the given name and surname of the candidate of their choice. The CEA does not include any provisions regarding the language in which electors can write the name of the candidate of their choice. Pursuant to **Form 4 of Schedule 1**, it is presumed that

electors will use the Latin alphabet and one of the two official languages, as the ballot is available in English and French only.

- **Sections 269(2) and 279(2) of the CEA** provide that no special ballot shall be rejected for the sole reason that the elector has incorrectly written the name of the candidate of their choice if the ballot clearly indicates the elector's intent.
- **Paragraphs 269(1)(e) and 279(1)(e) of the CEA** provide that a ballot shall be rejected if there is any writing or mark on it by which the elector could be identified.

Requirements for Printing Ballots

- **Section 116(1) of the CEA** provides that ballots shall be printed according to **Form 3 of Schedule 1** as soon as possible after 2:00 p.m. on the 19th day before polling day.
- **Sections 116(2) and 116(3) of the CEA** provide that ballots shall have a counterfoil and a stub, with a line of perforations between the ballot and the counterfoil and between the counterfoil and the stub. In addition, ballots shall be numbered on the back of the stub and the counterfoil.

Miscellaneous

- **Paragraphs 385(2)(a) and 385(2)(b) of the CEA** provide that the leader of a political party may apply to register the party. To that end, they shall provide the political party's full name and the party's short-form name (or its abbreviation). According to **section 117(2)**, ballots include the political party's short-form name as referred to in **paragraph 385(2)(b)**.

Under the approach adopted by Parliament regarding the inclusion of Indigenous languages on ballots, other legislative amendments related to the production of ballots will inevitably be required in order to meet certain established deadlines and fulfill other CEA requirements, or to allow a successful implementation. As an example, the provisions related to the closing day for nominations, the length of the election period and the list of candidates must be modified to ensure a successful implementation of the selected approach. Annex 2 provides additional details on these timelines and on the production of ballots.

Annex 2: Ballot Production Timeline

Under the *Canada Elections Act*, ballots must be printed and distributed in the narrow window that exists between the close of candidate nominations, 21 days before election day, and the first day of advance polls, 10 days before election day. In large and remote ridings, getting the ballots printed and distributed across the riding in time for advance polls is already a significant challenge.

Below is an overview of the current ballot production process.

Days 34/33-21¹: Nomination period

Candidate nominations are open, and candidates may submit their nomination forms, including their name as it should be printed on the ballot. Nominations close on Day 21 at 2:00pm, with a deadline for withdrawals of 5:00pm local time. The ballot production process cannot start before this occurs as the list of candidates is not yet finalized.

Days 30-29: Ballot paper shipped to printing companies

Elections Canada liaises with printing companies to confirm logistical details. Any printers no longer available are replaced. Printing companies are spread throughout Canada to reduce shipping delays. Elections Canada then ships the ballot paper to the printing companies and confirms receipt by Day 24.

Days 21-18: Preparation of Ballot images

- Day 21 (2:00 pm): End of nomination process
- Day 19: (2:00 pm): End of the nomination approval process by Returning Officer (RO)
- Day 21-18: Preparation and verification of ballot images

Elections Canada headquarters (ECHQ) staff perform the following steps in preparing ballot images:

- a. Review information in any last-minute candidate nominations and ensure that names and other information are captured correctly into nomination system;
- b. Generate a list of candidates *Verification Report* for each electoral district (ED) listing the candidate and party names;
- c. Generate ballot PDF images for each ED;
- d. Send the *Verification Reports* to the ROs, who must confirm the information is correct and perform quality control of ballot PDF images

¹ These days indicate the number of days before election day, with election day being “Day 0”.

- e. After the RO has confirmed the information on the *Verification Report* and the ballot PDF for that ED has also passed a quality control inspection, ballot PDF images are emailed to the printing company.

There are approximately 20 EDs, covering the northern half of Canada, where the timely distribution of ballot booklets to remote polling stations is a challenge. These EDs are treated as a priority and steps (a) to (e) are completed by the evening of Day 21 (presuming RO verification of all nominations is done by that time). The remaining EDs are processed in batches and completed no later than 7:00am on Day 18.

If the RO identifies an issue with the information on the *Verification Report* or the ECHQ quality control inspection turns up a problem, the data for that ED must be corrected and the process restarted, with a new *Verification Report* and ballot PDF image.

Days 18: Ballot proof preparation

The printing company prepares a ballot proof for the RO to inspect and approve, prior to the start of printing. The RO inspects the proof using a checklist and authorizes the start of printing. If the RO discovers a problem, this step must be repeated.

Days 18-13: Production of the ballot booklets

The printing company prepares the ballot booklets for the advance polls. This includes these high-level steps:

- a. Make the necessary adjustments to paper sheets provided by EC for printing needs;
- b. Print images and individual serial numbers on ballots;
- c. Perforate each ballot and separate ballot from counterfoil and then counterfoil from stub;
- d. Assemble sheets into groups of 50 such that the serial numbers are in order;
- e. Cut sheets into individual ballots, add covers, and bind ballot booklets.

Printing companies have indicated that the perforating, cutting, and often serial numbers steps use separate specialized machinery operated manually with a slower production rate than printing. Many printing companies do not have this equipment, which limits options for ballot production.

Days 14-13: Delivery of first booklets to ROs

The printing company delivers the ballot booklets for the advance polls to the RO.

Days 13-11: Quality control of booklets and preparation for advance polls

The RO and their office staff perform the following tasks:

- a. Count the ballot booklets to ensure the correct quantity has been provided;
- b. Perform quality control of the ballots;
- c. Deliver some of the ballot booklets to the Additional Assistant Returning Officer (AARO) office, if applicable;
- d. Prepare and distribute the appropriate number of ballot booklets to the Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) and/or Central Poll Supervisor (CPS) of each advance poll in the ED, tracking every single booklet and who it is given to on the *Record of Ballots* and *Ballot Control Sheet*).

Days 11-7: Advance polls

During this period, quality control, such as making sure number of booklets received and serial numbers match the *Record of Ballots*, is done by election offices (EOs) and then ballots are issued at the polls. Once issued, DROs perform quality control as they use each booklet.

If the CPS contingency supply is not used during advance polls, these are returned to the office on Day 7/6 for use at ordinary polls. Each book is “checked back in” to the RO office.

Days 13-6: Preparation and delivery of election day booklets to RO

After the printing company has completed printing the ballots for the advance polls, they continue to print ballots for the ordinary polls, repeating the steps performed on Days 18-13 above, and deliver the ballot booklets for the ordinary polls to the RO.

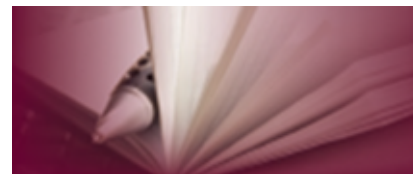
Days 6-1: Quality control of booklets and preparation for ordinary polls

The RO and their office staff repeat the tasks performed on Days 13-11, for the ordinary polls.

Day 0: Ordinary polling day

The CPS and DRO collect ballots, perform quality control, issue ballots as needed and track their usage.

Trust in Elections Canada in the 44th GE Preliminary Public Opinion Research Results



PACE Research, December 2021

This research fact sheet presents preliminary results from the 2021 National Elector Study (NES) (39,568 respondents in the post-election survey) as well as the Survey of Candidates (1075 respondents) for selected measures related to general trust in Elections Canada and the conduct of the 44th general election.

Considerations

- Results are weighted so that the characteristics of respondents correspond to their respective populations.
- All 2021 data are currently being reviewed and may be revised before publication.
- Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding or omission of “prefer not to answer” responses.
- Results from 2019 are included as a point of comparison; however, no statistical testing has been conducted and any observable differences in results may not be statistically significant.
- The final survey reports will provide a narrative account of the results including any interactions with other variables that may help contextualize the results. Reports are expected to be available for internal dissemination in early March 2022.

Table 1: Selected measures from the National Electors Study

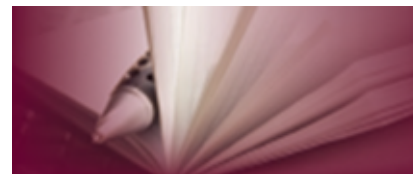
Electors	2021		2019
	Start of GE (W1a, n=8,371)	Post-GE (W2, n=39,568)	Post-GE (W3, n=21,435)
Overall, how much confidence do you have in Elections Canada?			
A fair amount or a great deal of confidence	86%	91%	92%
Not much or no confidence	13%	7%	6%
Don't know	2%	2%	3%
How strongly do you agree or disagree that Elections Canada is the most trusted source of information about the electoral process?			
Somewhat or strongly agree	89%	93%	91%
Somewhat or strongly disagree	8%	4%	5%
Don't know	3%	3%	4%
How fairly would you say Elections Canada ran the election?			
Somewhat or very fairly	--	87%	90%
Somewhat or very unfairly	--	7%	5%
Don't know	--	6%	6%
What level of trust do you have in the accuracy of the election results in your riding?			
Somewhat or very high trust	--	91%	89%
Somewhat or very low trust	--	7%	6%
Don't know	--	2%	4%



Table 2: Selected measures from the Survey of Candidates

Candidates	2021 Post-GE (n=1,075)	2019 Post-GE (n=1,172)
How fairly would you say Elections Canada ran the election?		
Somewhat or very fairly	76%	81%
Somewhat or very unfairly	20%	13%
Don't know	4%	6%
What level of trust do you have in the accuracy of the election results in your riding?		
Somewhat or very high trust	83%	86%
Somewhat or very low trust	13%	10%
Don't know	3%	4%

Preliminary Survey Results from NES GE44: Elector Knowledge, Expectations, and Experience of the Voting Process



PACE Research, February 2022

This research fact sheet presents preliminary results from the 2021 National Elector Study (NES) for selected measures related to electors' expectations, knowledge and experience of the voting process, with a focus on how informed and safe electors felt about the ways to vote in the election given the COVID-19 pandemic, and on how easy it was to vote in those ways.

Considerations

- Electors' expectations of the voting process were measured throughout the election period survey (53,731 respondents). All other results were measured in the post-election survey (39,568 respondents).
- Results are weighted so that the characteristics of respondents correspond to their respective populations.
- All 2021 data are currently being reviewed and may be revised before publication.
- Results from the previous GE(s) are included as a point of comparison; however, no statistical testing has been conducted and any minor differences in results may not be statistically significant.
- The final survey reports will provide a narrative account of the results including any interactions with other variables that may help contextualize the results. Reports are expected to be available for internal dissemination in early March 2022.

Observations

- During the election period, electors expected it would be easier to vote in person (96%) than by mail (67%). They also expected that they would feel safe voting in person (90%).
- After the election, 89% of electors said they felt informed about the health and safety measures in place at the polls for COVID-19; 96% said they felt informed about when, where and the way to vote in the election.
- Electors' awareness of the option to vote by mail was much higher for the 44th GE (70%) than for any previous GE (e.g. 23% in 2019).
- Voters reported that on average it took 5 to 6 minutes longer to vote at both ordinary polls and advance polls in 2021 than it did in 2019. Compared with the 2015 GE, election day voting times in 2021 were on average 3 minutes longer while advance voting times were 7 minutes shorter.
- Regardless of whether voters voted on election day, at advance polls, or by mail, the vast majority (>95%) said they found it was easy to vote, they were satisfied with their overall voting experience, and those who voted in person said they felt safe.

Elector expectations of the voting process during the election period	2021	2019
Electors who expected it would be easy to vote by mail	67%	-
Electors who expected it would be easy to vote at the polling place in person	96%	98%
Electors who expected they would feel safe voting in person, given COVID-19 health and safety measures in place at the polls	90%	-

Elector knowledge of the voting process after the election	2021	2019
Electors who felt informed about when, where and the ways to vote in the election	96%	-
Electors who felt informed about the health and safety measures for COVID-19 that were in place at the polls for the election	89%	-
Electors who knew unaided about the option to vote by mail in the election	70%	23%

Time it took to vote in person	2021	2019	2015
Average time it took to vote in person in minutes	13	8	12
At a polling place on election day	12	7	9
At advance polls	14	8	21

Ease of and satisfaction with the voting experience	2021	2019
Voters who said it was easy to vote (all methods)	98%	98%
At a polling place on election day	98%	98%
At advance polls	98%	98%
By mail	97%	90%
Voters satisfied with their overall voting experience (all methods)	96%	97%
At a polling place on election day	96%	97%
At advance polls	96%	97%
By mail	95%	95%
Voters who felt safe when they voted in person, given COVID-19 health and safety measures that were in place at the polls	95%	-

Forthcoming Survey Results

February 16

- **Results from the Labour Force Survey**
 - Non-voters' reasons for not voting

Q1 2022-23

- **Additional results from the National Electors Study**
 - Knowledge and ease of various aspects of the electoral process: registration, voter identification, accessibility
 - Opinions on the distance to and suitability of polling places
 - Awareness and evaluation of the Voter Information Campaign
 - Perceptions of the integrity of the election including vote by mail, the impact of disinformation and foreign interference/influence

- **Results from the survey of election officers**
 - Poll workers' observations on how smoothly the voting process went at the polling place
 - How safe poll workers felt when working with the safety measures in place for Covid-19
 - Difficulties of working the polls due to Covid-19 safety measures
 - Views on the quality of the working conditions
- **Results from the survey of recruitment officers**
 - Ease/difficulty of recruiting people to work the polls, reasons it was difficult
 - How often people were hesitant to work due to Covid-19 or the related conditions of employment
 - Ease/difficulty of hiring bilingual poll staff
- **Results from the survey of candidates**
 - Use and satisfaction with Elections Canada's products and services
 - Ease/difficulty of the nomination process
 - Satisfaction with Elections Canada's administration of the election in their riding
- All surveys: analysis of differences in results by subgroup – e.g. age, gender, region, youth, First Nations, persons with a disability, etc.

Survey of Candidates Following the 44th General Election

Executive Summary

Prepared for Elections Canada

Supplier Name: Environics Research Group

Contract Number: 005005-201001/001/CY

Contract Value: \$73,394.98 (including HST)

Award Date: March 26, 2021

Delivery Date: April 11, 2022

Registration Number: POR 140-20

For more information on this report, please contact Elections Canada at: rop-por@elections.ca.

Ce rapport est aussi disponible en français.

Executive Summary

A. Background and Objectives

Elections Canada (EC) identified the need to conduct a quantitative mixed-mode (online and telephone) survey of candidates for the 44th federal general election (GE) held September 20, 2021.

EC sought to learn about candidates' experiences with the electoral process in general and measure their levels of satisfaction with Elections Canada's services during the 44th GE.

The research objectives were to assess candidates' views and satisfaction regarding:

- nomination requirements and other candidate responsibilities
- administration of the election by EC and local returning officer
- EC's services, tools and products for candidates and their campaigns
- policy issues, technology and innovation

This research was conducted as part of the evaluation and development of EC's programs and services for candidates and to inform the CEO's reports to Parliament. The survey results will assist in the evaluation of EC's programs and services, notably by allowing for comparisons over time with previous federal general elections. It will also assist in identifying areas where EC's various products and services may be improved.

B. Methodology

This post-election survey consisted of 1,075 interviews with candidates from a list of 2,010 unduplicated records accounting for all candidates in the 2021 federal election, for a response rate of 53% overall. By mode, 643 respondents completed the survey online (60%) and 432 completed it by telephone (40%).

Attempts were made to invite all candidates in the election to participate in the survey. As an attempted census of the candidate population, there is no margin of sampling error for this study.

To minimize the impacts of non-response as a source of error, the survey results were weighted by candidate age and party, as well as whether the candidate was an incumbent and whether or not they were elected, to reflect the population characteristics of all candidates. More methodological information is provided in Appendix A.

C. Contract Value

The contract value was \$73,394.98 (including HST).

D. Report

This report begins with an executive summary outlining key findings and conclusions, followed by a detailed analysis of the survey data. A detailed set of banner tables presenting the results for all questions for the total candidate population and identified subgroups of interest is provided under separate cover. These tables are referenced by the survey question in the detailed analysis.

In this report, quantitative results are expressed as percentages unless otherwise noted. Results may not add to 100% due to rounding or multiple responses. Net results cited in the text may not exactly match individual results shown in the report figures or tables due to rounding.

E. Key Findings

Overall Satisfaction

Three-quarters of candidates (76%) were satisfied with Election Canada's administration of the 44th general election in 2021, lower than the result from the 43rd general election held in 2019 (85%). Close to nine in 10 (87%) expressed satisfaction with the way the returning officer ran the election in their riding, similar to 2019's result. The small proportion (12%) of candidates who were dissatisfied with their RO to any extent mainly felt that they had not been sufficiently supported.

Nomination Process

Three-quarters of candidates (77%) said it was at least somewhat easy to comply with the nomination requirements, comparable to 2019. Among those (22%) who said it was at least somewhat difficult, the main challenge they had was obtaining signatures (67%, significantly higher than the 39% obtained in 2019).

Close to nine in 10 candidates (89%) said they felt at least somewhat well-informed about the nomination process. Just over half (54%) said it was at least somewhat easy to collect nomination signatures despite COVID-19 restrictions. Relatively few candidates experienced difficulties in finding an official agent (20%) or auditor (13%); difficulties mainly related to finding someone who was willing or available to take on either task. Almost all candidates (94%) were satisfied with the timeliness of the nomination process (unchanged from 2019).

Political Entity Service Centre

Elections Canada introduced an online portal called the Political Entities Service Centre (PESC) for the 2019 election, providing candidates with an electronic means to access election materials and file nomination papers and financial reports. Fewer than half (47%) of candidates in 2019 used the portal, either personally or through an official agent or delegate. Use of the portal increased in 2021: Two-thirds of campaigns (65%) reported using the portal, including four in 10 (41%) candidates who personally used it.

The candidates mainly used the portal to download election materials (60%), also the top use in 2019. Just under four in 10 used it to submit financial returns (37%) or to access election results (35%), and three in 10 used it to maintain account information (31%) or to submit their nomination (29%). Three-quarters (76%) of candidates whose campaign used the portal were satisfied with their overall user experience to some extent, with just under one-quarter (23%) being very satisfied.

The main reason candidates gave for not using the portal was that they did not need to use it (34% of candidates).

EC Products and Services for Candidates

Close to nine in 10 candidates (85%) said EC products were at least somewhat useful to their campaign, the same result as in 2019.

Sixty percent (60%) of candidates reported that they used the lists of polling stations. Among them, just under half (48%) reported paper and electronic formats as being equally useful; the rest were more than twice as likely

to prefer electronic lists (33%) over paper lists (14%). However, among the 55% of candidates who used the maps of polling place service areas, 69% preferred the paper format of this product.

Among the 50% of candidates who used them, eight in 10 (82%) candidates were satisfied with the quality of the lists of electors. Of the 12% who used EC's tools to communicate with electors, candidates ranked the *Guide to the Federal Election* booklet (37%) and the infographics (36%) as the most useful communication tools.

Three-quarters (74%) of candidates reported they or someone else from their campaign attended an all-candidates briefing for the 44th GE. Just under half of all respondents attended personally (48%, comparable to 47% in 2019), either in person (31%) or via videoconference (17%). Eight in 10 (79%) who attended or were represented at the briefing found it useful; strong majorities attending by either method were satisfied with the in-person (91%) and online (89%) formats. When asked about Elections Canada's COVID-19 procedures and guidelines, two-thirds (65%) of candidates found them to be useful to some extent.

Almost nine in 10 candidates' campaigns (86%) contacted their local EC office during the election period, an identical proportion to 2019. Close to half contacted EC via email (47%), and one-third (32%) used the toll-free support line, statistically lower than the proportion doing so in 2019 (39%). The proportion of candidates satisfied with the services they received is high (eight in 10 or more) regardless of contact method (through the local office—90%; by email—85%; or the toll-free line—79%).

Candidates' Electoral Campaign

Despite the need for pandemic precautions during the 44th GE, seven in 10 (69%) candidates reported that they interacted with electors by going door-to-door, and almost six in 10 (56%) did other in-person events or outreach.

One-quarter (24%) of candidates provided the returning officer with a list of names of election staff to work at polling stations. The majority (55%) did not, with 28% of those candidates stating that they did not have anyone interested or competent to work at the polling stations.

Of those who reported that they used a voters list (68% of the candidates), almost all (96%) took measures to protect the personal information contained in them, usually by limiting access to them (51%) or by securing them (24%). Over four in 10 candidates (44%) took measures to ensure their campaign was accessible to electors with disabilities, most often by using wheelchair-accessible venues (26%).

Just over one-third (37%) were aware of reimbursement incentives when deciding to run as a candidate, but only a few of them (8%) say this had a major or moderate impact on them.

Voting and Reporting Process

Seven in 10 candidates (69%) were satisfied with the locations chosen as polling sites for advance polls and election day, including a third (33%) who expressed strong satisfaction. Both of these proportions are lower than in 2019 (when 84% were satisfied, including 44% who were very satisfied). One-quarter were dissatisfied to some extent; this was mainly due to having too few advance polling stations (29%) or their being too far away (27%). Respondents also mentioned they were dissatisfied due to not enough polling stations being available on polling day (26%).

Overall satisfaction with the way the voting process went was close to eight in 10 (78%), comparable to 2019 (81%). The top reasons for dissatisfaction are long line-ups at the advance polls (31%) or on election day (29%) or issues with EC staff (25%). About one in six candidates (16%) said they or their representatives witnessed

problems related to the voter identification requirements in general; half saw these at least somewhat often (50%). Slightly over one in 10 (12%) witnessed problems related to use of the VIC as ID; six in 10 of these (62%) saw this happen at least somewhat often. Just under half (48%) agreed it was harder to observe the election because of COVID-19-related safety measures at the polls.

Attitude Toward EC

Three-quarters (76%) of candidates said Elections Canada ran the election fairly, just under what was reported in 2019 (81%). This includes four in 10 candidates (42%) who believe EC ran the election very fairly, 10 percentage points lower than in 2019 (52%). Two in 10 think it was unfair to some extent (20%).

Most respondents (83%) had a very or somewhat high level of trust in the accuracy of the election results, including over half (55%) who had very high trust. These proportions are similar to the level of trust in 2019 (86% overall, 54% with a high level of trust). Just over one in 10 (13%) said they had low or very low trust in the accuracy of election results, similar to 10% in 2019.

Nine in 10 (90%) expressed some level of satisfaction with their interactions with the RO, with three-quarters (73%) being very satisfied. These results are similar to how candidates felt in 2019 (89% overall satisfaction, 70% very satisfied). A strong majority of candidates expressed some satisfaction with the overall quality of Elections Canada's services (86%, similar to 89% in 2019); nearly half (47%) report being very satisfied, unchanged from 2019 (51%).

Close to six in 10 candidates provided at least one suggestion to improve EC services. The top suggestion was for EC to provide more timely or accessible information (12%); across all three elections since 2015, this has been the most prominent suggestion. Fewer than one in 10 made any other individual mentions; these include improving the website or portal, improving communications, simplifying paperwork and additional staff training.

Elections and Technology

Close to six in 10 candidates (56%) felt that the spread of false information online was a problem in this election, lower than the two-thirds (64%) who felt this way in 2019. Nearly four in 10 (38%) of those reporting the spread of false information online as a problem thought it had a major impact on the election outcome.

Nearly four in 10 (38%) believed foreign countries or groups using social media or other means to influence political opinions of Canadians was a problem, slightly less than in 2019 (44%). Nearly four in 10 (38%) of those reporting this as a problem in 2021 felt it had a major impact on the outcome of the election.

One in 10 (10%) thought foreign countries or groups hacking into the computer systems that support the election was a problem in this election, similar to the previous GE (8%). Just under half (46%) of the those who felt that hacking by foreign countries or groups was a problem said it had a major impact.

One-half of candidates were asked for their opinions about technology at the polls: Of these, just over four in 10 (44%) preferred paper voter lists, just under three in 10 (28%) preferred computerized voter lists, and two in 10 (22%) expressed no preference; these proportions are comparable to 2019. The other half of candidates were asked about their preferred ballot counting method: six in 10 (62%) preferred hand-counted ballots, considerably higher than in 2019 (46%). One in six (17%) preferred machine counting, lower than the three in 10 (31%) seen in the previous election. Approximately the same number of candidates had no preference for how ballots are to be counted (16%), unchanged from 2019.

A minority of just under four in 10 candidates (38%) said electors should be able to vote by using the Internet, comparable to 2019 (35%). A majority (56%) of candidates in 2021 felt voting online is risky, lower than was the case in 2019 (67%). Just three in 10 said voting online is safe (31%, 9 percentage points higher than the 22% seen in 2019).

Attitudes Toward Democracy in Canada

Over half of candidates (55%) are satisfied to some extent with the way democracy works in Canada, a slight increase since 2019 (50%). One-quarter report being *very* satisfied (24%, up from 16% in the 43rd GE). Just over four in 10 (44%) are dissatisfied to some extent, with two in 10 being not at all satisfied (20%).

The top reasons provided by those who were dissatisfied with the way democracy works in Canada were the lack of proportional representation (29%) and that first-past-the-post does not reflect voter preferences (21%). Additional reasons are the belief the system is unfair (17%) or that there is too much media bias or censorship (16%).

F. Political Neutrality Statement and Contact Information

I hereby certify as a senior officer of Environics that the deliverables fully comply with the Government of Canada political neutrality requirements outlined in the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada and the Procedures for Planning and Contracting Public Opinion Research. Specifically, the deliverables do not include information on electoral voting intentions, political party preferences, standings with the electorate, or ratings of the performance of a political party or its leaders.

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Supplier name: Environics Research Group
PWGSC contract number: 005005-201001/001/CY
Original contract date: 2021-03-26
For more information, contact Elections Canada at rop-por@elections.ca

Availability of GE44 POR Datasets and Reporting Dates, by Survey (as of April 20, 2022)

Survey	Last day of data collection	Datasets	Topline Reports (for internal dissemination – unilingual)	Publication on EC Website/Library and Archives Canada (LAC)
Labour Force Survey	October 26, 2021 ✓	Mid-February, 2022 ✓	“The Daily” – February 16, 2022 ✓ Supplementary Report - Late April, 2022	May 2022
National Electors Study	October 27, 2021 (focus groups) ✓	Early January, 2022 (integrated) ✓	– Voter Information Campaign Evaluation: May 2022 – Voter Experience: June 2022	June 2022
Candidates	November 18, 2021 ✓	December 2021 ✓	End of April 2022	May 17, 2022
Recruitment officers	December 29, 2021 ✓	Early January, 2022 ✓	End of May 2022	July 2022 on EC website (Not subject to LAC publication requirement).
Outreach Stakeholders	January 17, 2022 ✓	Late January, 2022 ✓	Mid-May 2022	July 2022 on EC website (Not subject to LAC publication requirement).
Official Language Minority Communities	November 29, 2021 ✓	Late January 2022 ✓ (transcripts)	End of April, 2022	May 27, 2022
Election Officers	January 17, 2022 ✓	Mid-February, 2022 ✓	End of May 2022	July 16, 2022

Note: Dates are subject to change.

✓ indicates that the milestone has been completed.

Bank holidays spring 2022:

- Friday April 15
- Monday April 18
- Monday May 23
- Friday June 24