

**Results of a study on third parties spending extracted from a letter sent by the Chief Electoral Officer to Mr. Peter Adams, Chair, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, on February 5, 1998.**

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*“1997 Canadian Election Study and the Third Parties Expenditures*

The members of the Committee had also expressed an interest in the results of the 1997 Canadian Election Study. Members will recall that Elections Canada had negotiated with a team of academic researchers to include certain questions in the 1997 Canadian Election Study. This study was primarily funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and was coordinated by André Blais (Université de Montréal), Elisabeth Gidengil (McGill University), Richard Nadeau (Université de Montréal), and Neil Nevitte (University of Toronto).

The Canadian Election Study is comprised of a three wave survey of the Canadian electorate. The first survey was conducted during the election campaign period and 3,925 interviews were completed by telephone. The second survey was conducted in the period following the election and 3,163 interviews were completed, also by telephone. The third study was a self-administered mail-back survey; 2,500 questionnaires were sent and approximately 1,850 were returned.

It is interesting to note that the post-election sample is a subset of people who participated in the campaign period study, and that the mail-back questionnaire was sent to those post-election respondents who agreed to it. Consequently, the randomness of the sample is affected by an attrition effect; the decision to participate in the second and third waves of the study appears not to be entirely random. The result is that the mail-back component of the study is slightly over-representative of well-educated individuals who tend to be more interested in electoral matters. These differences are considered to be relatively small and do not detract from the importance of the findings.

Elections Canada's questions focused on four main issues: elector participation, third party activities, electronic voting, and issues of representation (the electoral process and referendums). Elections Canada's agreement with the 1997 Canadian Election Study team provides us with ownership of our own questions and the background items. The agreement also provides that the remaining data are owned by the Canadian Election Study team and may not enter the public domain in any form for a period of one year from the date of the election (June 2, 1997).

Members of the Committee had expressed a particular interest in the issue of elector participation. Following the three waves of the study, we received the complete data base in December of 1997 and we are currently analyzing it in this regard. We will report back to the members of the Committee with the results of our analysis.

As the issue of third party spending is of particular interest to Parliamentarians, I am pleased to share with you the overall results of our analysis of this matter. The results presented here are based on the mail-back component of the survey. The sample size is 1848 and the margin of error is approximately 2.3%. The approximate margins of error for the provincial/regional samples are as follows: Atlantic, 7.5%; Quebec, 4.6%; Ontario, 3.7%; Manitoba/Saskatchewan, 8.5%; Alberta, 7.3%; and British Columbia, 6.7%.

In order to determine the degree to which Canadians support limits on candidate and political party expenditures, survey respondents were asked, "Do you think political parties and candidates should be allowed to spend as much as they want in an election campaign or should there be a limit on what they can spend?". The results demonstrate strong support for limits on party and candidate spending; 93.8% responded that there should be a limit, 4.3% indicated that there should be no limit, and 1.9% were not sure. There are no major differences by region.

In order to assess public attitudes toward the participation and spending of third party electoral participants, survey respondents were asked: "Which comes closer to your own view: only political parties and candidates should be allowed to advertise during election campaigns" or "advertising by other individuals and groups should also be allowed during election campaigns". The response was as follows: 35% indicated that only political parties and candidates should be allowed to advertise during election campaigns; 50.1% responded that advertising by other individuals and groups should also be allowed; and 14.9% were not sure. The results by region are as follows:

#### **Who Should Be Allowed To Advertise During Election Campaigns**

<b>Region*</b>	<b>Only Parties &amp; Candidates</b>	<b>Individuals and Groups Also</b>	<b>Not Sure</b>
National result	35	50	15
Atlantic	27	58	15
Quebec	51	35	14
Ontario	31	54	16
Man./Sask.	29	58	14
Alberta	28	50	22
British Columbia	32	58	10
Territories	20	60	20

\* Regional groupings are based on sample size and margin of error.

Residents of Quebec are the least supportive of allowing interest groups to participate in election campaigns (35%).

Respondents were also asked: "If individuals and groups other than candidates and political parties are going to advertise during election campaigns, should there be a limit on what they can spend?". Overall, 82.7% answered yes, 10.7% answered no, and 6.6% were not sure. The results by region are as follows:

**Should Third Party Spending be limited?**

Region*	Yes	No	Not Sure
National	83	11	7
Atlantic	86	9	5
Quebec	92	5	3
Ontario	78	13	9
Man./Sask.	85	10	5
Alberta	78	14	9
British Columbia	80	13	7
Territories	75	25	-

\* Regional groupings are based on sample size and margin of error.

In order to obtain a sense of the type of spending limit that Canadians would consider fair, respondents were asked the following question. "Suppose individuals and groups can advertise, should they be allowed to spend: less than candidates, the same as candidates", or "more than candidates". The responses are as follows: 48.1% indicated that third parties should be allowed to spend the same as candidates; 31% responded less than candidates; 3.8% responded more than candidates; and 17.7% were not sure. A large majority of respondents are of the opinion that third parties should not be permitted to spend more than candidates (79%). The following data suggest that Canadians are divided on this question by region:

**Should Individuals and Groups Be Allowed to Spend Less, the Same, or More than Candidates**

Region*	Less Than	Same As	More Than	Not Sure
National result	31	48	4	18
Atlantic	31	52	4	13
Quebec	43	39	1	17
Ontario	25	51	5	19
Man./Sask.	33	46	8	14
Alberta	26	49	6	19
British Columbia	24	54	3	18
Territories	25	50	-	25

\* Regional groupings are based on sample size and margin of error.

These results are consistent with those of a study conducted for the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing. According to that study, when faced with the choice of having spending limits for all participants, including third parties, or limits for

none, 90% of Canadians opted for controls (Blais and Gidengil, RCERPF research volume 17, 1991: 84-89).”