

Standing Committee on
Procedure and Privileges



Report on Electoral Participation in the Northwest Territories

20th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Chair: Ms. Kate Reid

MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES

Kate Reid
MLA Great Slave
Chair

Hon. Vince McKay
MLA Hay River South
Deputy Chair

Julian Morse
MLA Frame Lake

Denny Rodgers
MLA Inuvik Lake

Kieron Testart
MLA Range Lake

Alternates

Shauna Morgan
MLA Yellowknife North

Hon. Lesa Semmler
MLA Inuvik Twin Lake

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Mr. Speaker:

Your Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges is pleased to provide its *Report on Electoral Participation in the Northwest Territories* and commends it to the House.



Kate Reid

Chair, Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES**

**REPORT ON ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN THE NORTHWEST
TERRITORIES**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 2
ABOUT THE STUDY 2
ACCESSIBILITY AND SPECIAL VOTING OPPORTUNITIES 3
VOTER EDUCATION AND INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS..... 6
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT..... 7
CANDIDATE DIVERSITY..... 9
REGISTER OF ELECTORS..... 9
VOTING AT 16..... 10
PREPARATION FOR AN ELECTION: OFFICIAL AGENTS 10
CONCLUSION 11
ENDNOTES 12

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES

REPORT ON ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION IN THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with subsection 266(2) of the *Elections and Plebiscites Act*¹ (“the Act” or “EPA”), the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) must submit a report on the administration of territorial elections within six months of polling day. These reports outline key operational developments and challenges, identify matters the CEO considers important to bring to the attention of the Legislative Assembly, and provide recommendations to strengthen election administration and, where appropriate, amend the Act.

The *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election*² reported that a total of 10,797 electors cast ballots, representing 52.5% of the reported eligible voters across the 16 contested electoral districts. This was the lowest number of ballots cast in a territorial general election in 30 years, despite newly introduced expanded accessibility mechanisms.

While voter turnout in the 2023 election was notably low, several contextual factors warrant consideration. The election took place shortly after wildfire evacuations, and some electors may have experienced evacuation fatigue. Additionally, ongoing challenges related to enumeration and the accuracy of the Register of Electors in NWT remain relevant when interpreting voter participation. Committee does not attribute the decline in turnout to these factors, but notes that they provide context for understanding the 2023 election results.

ABOUT THE STUDY

On February 11, 2025, the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges (Committee) read its Committee Report 21-20(1): *Report on the Review of the Chief Electoral Officer’s Report on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election*³ in the House. The report recommended that low voter turnout be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges for a broader study of legislative,

policy, and administrative factors affecting electoral participation in the Northwest Territories.

Committee questioned whether lowering the voting age to 16, as proposed by the CEO, would be sufficient to increase voter turnout in the NWT. Committee therefore explored a broader range of factors which affect electoral participation. This included legislative constraints within the EPA and operational practices within Elections NWT.

The study focused on five key areas: accessibility and special voting opportunities, voter education and information campaigns, youth engagement, candidate diversity, and the Register of Territorial Electors.

Committee's work focused on identifying where amendments to the EPA may be required to modernize election administration, improve data, and address low voter turnout, as well as where policy, program, or funding changes could support Elections NWT in improving accessibility, awareness, and engagement across all eligible age groups and regions.

As part of its study, Committee considered public feedback received during its earlier review of the CEO's 2023 Report. Between September 2 and 27, 2024, Committee invited public input and received two written submissions.

Committee's review also included analysis of the CEO's 2023 statutory report, correspondence from Elections NWT, a public hearing on September 27, 2024⁴ with representatives from Elections NWT and Vote 16 Canada, Internal research on Canadian electoral practices, and comparative examples from other jurisdictions.

ACCESSIBILITY AND SPECIAL VOTING OPPORTUNITIES

Committee believes that accessibility remains one of the most significant factors influencing electoral participation in the NWT. In recent elections, Elections NWT has expanded the range of voting options available to electors, including online absentee voting, mobile polls, advance polls, and a 2023 pilot project that allowed electors to vote outside their home electoral district ("Vote Anywhere"). These measures intended to reduce logistical barriers, particularly for electors facing challenges related to mobility, work schedules, geographic distance, or time away from the territory.

In his August 1, 2025, submission, the CEO identified several areas where the EPA limits accessibility. Committee focused on three specific areas where legislative

amendments are required: the Vote Anywhere model, mobile polls, and online absentee voting.

Vote Anywhere Trial and Ballot-on-Demand Authority

During the 2023 Territorial General Election, Elections NWT piloted a “Vote Anywhere” model across the four regional centres, allowing electors to vote at designated locations outside their home electoral district. Uptake was modest, with 20 electors using the service, but Elections NWT reported positive feedback. The CEO identified the model as a promising option for mobile workers, travellers, and electors temporarily away from their home communities, like youth who are attending a post-secondary institution.

Broader implementation would require amendments to the EPA, including authority to:

- explicitly authorize ballot-on-demand systems so Returning Officers can securely print district-specific ballots in real time; and
- Update existing multi-district poll provisions, including statutory timing windows, to support expanded use of Vote Anywhere” opportunities during advance voting.

Similar “Vote Anywhere” systems are used in larger Canadian jurisdictions. Elections BC’s new voting model allows voters to cast ballots at any voting place in any electoral district, supported by electronic voting books, tabulators, and ballot printers that produce the correct ballot for out-of-district voters.⁵

Recommendation 1: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* be amended to formalize and expand the “Vote Anywhere” model, including clear authority for ballot-on-demand technology and the expanded use of multi-district polls beyond current statutory limits, along with associated security and counting procedures.

Mobile Polls

Mobile polls, which bring the ballot box directly to electors unable to attend a polling station, are another option for improving accessibility. In the 2023 Territorial General Election, 85 votes were cast through mobile polls, representing a 21% increase over the 2019 election, despite an overall decline in voter turnout.

Comparable practices exist elsewhere in Canada as a standard accessibility measure, with examples from Elections Alberta⁶ and Elections Canada.⁷ Across Canada, mobile polling is recognized as a standard means of ensuring voters in care facilities, hospitals, or those with mobility challenges can vote where they reside.

The CEO noted that current statutory timelines and administrative constraints can limit access to mobile polls, particularly for elders, persons with disabilities, hospitalized residents, and electors in supported or remote living environments. Consequently, Committee recommends:

Recommendation 2: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* be amended to extend statutory timelines and broaden eligibility criteria for mobile poll applications, to improve access for elders, persons with disabilities, hospitalized residents, and electors in supported or remote living environments.

Online Absentee Voting

Online absentee voting remains one of the most impactful accessibility measures in the NWT. In 2023, Elections NWT reported 96% of users were very satisfied with the online voting process. Additionally, 42% of online voters indicated they would not have voted if the online option were unavailable.

While no Canadian province has yet adopted online voting for provincial general elections, municipalities across Ontario⁸ and Nova Scotia⁹ now routinely authorize online or electronic voting, demonstrating that such methods can be successful when implemented together with appropriate security measures.

Based on this evidence, Committee supports legislative amendments to improve access to online voting, including extending application periods and enabling the use of secure, scalable authentication technologies. Committee therefore makes the following two recommendations:

Recommendation 3: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* be amended to modernize the provisions governing absentee ballots, including extending application windows for online voting, and enabling the use of secure authentication technologies.

Recommendation 4: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* be amended to provide Elections NWT with appropriate administrative flexibility to pilot and evaluate new voting accessibility measures and to adjust procedures when emergencies or community disruptions affect voter access. These flexibilities should be in place before the 2027 Territorial General Election.

VOTER EDUCATION AND INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

Voter education and information campaigns are essential to ensuring electors understand when, where, and how to vote. While Elections NWT has made recent improvements, awareness gaps persist, particularly in Yellowknife, where turnout in territorial elections remains lower than in federal elections. The CEO has emphasized that Elections NWT's ability to deliver sustained, territory-wide voter education is constrained by existing budget and staffing resources, and that the EPA does not mandate or fund ongoing voter education, Indigenous-language resources, or pre-writ public information campaigns.

Public Awareness Campaigns and Pre-Writ Information

Early, direct communication with electors is widely viewed as an effective way to improve awareness of election timelines, voting options, and the role of territorial institutions. In the NWT, voter turnout data indicates that in Yellowknife participation in federal elections consistently exceeds turnout in territorial elections. This suggests that some electors, particularly in regional centres, may be less aware of territorial election processes, timelines, or their significance.

During the study, Committee received feedback in support of a territory-wide voter-information mail-out for the 2027 Territorial General Election, as well as an expanded pre-writ media campaign. Such approaches were identified as practical means of improving awareness of when, where, and how to vote.

The CEO has indicated that Elections NWT plans to issue a general information mail-out in Spring 2027, followed by a broadened pre-writ media campaign with paid advertising and promoted social media posts throughout the pre-election period. The CEO also notes that many electors, especially younger voters, receive civic information primarily through digital platforms, underscoring the need for clear, non-partisan messaging delivered consistently on the channels electors use most. Elections Canada's research also supports this.¹⁰

Recommendation 5: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the Chief Electoral Officer continue to plan and implement early, consistent, and non-partisan public information and civic education initiatives in advance of territorial elections. These initiatives should reflect best practices in Canadian election administration and may include territory-wide voter information mail-outs, expanded pre-writ media and advertising campaigns, and sustained use of digital and social media platforms to ensure electors understand when, where, and how to vote.

Indigenous Language and Culturally Relevant Materials

Ensuring the availability of Indigenous language and culturally relevant election materials was a key issue raised during Committee's public consultation. The CEO has indicated plans to expand Indigenous-language voter information resources for the 2027 election cycle. This work is especially important in the NWT, where many communities are predominantly Indigenous and where English-only instructions can present barriers to participation for some electors. Elections Canada, for example, produces voter information in 49 languages, to ensure electors understand voting procedures regardless of linguistic background.¹¹

Reaching electors in smaller and remote communities often requires partnerships with local organizations and community-based media. Elections NWT already uses similar strategies. During the 2023 Territorial General Election, Elections NWT shared information through regional radio, and Returning Officers circulated updates on community Facebook pages. In remote communities such as Tsiigehtchic, Elections NWT partnered with the local municipal government to ensure election materials were delivered despite transportation and delivery challenges.

Committee believes that formalizing and expanding these partnerships will improve the delivery of voter information and ensure that election materials are accessible, culturally relevant, and responsive to regional circumstances, and recommends the following:

Recommendation 6: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the Chief Electoral Officer continue to expand and formalize collaboration with Indigenous governments, Indigenous language authorities, and community-based organizations to support the development and delivery of accessible, culturally relevant election information. This should include the expansion of Indigenous-language election materials and strengthened partnerships with community media and local organizations, particularly in smaller and remote communities.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth engagement can influence long-term voter turnout. Turnout among voters aged 18–30 is consistently lower than older age groups in the NWT, partly due to high mobility for school and work, which can disrupt access to election information. Committee identified opportunities to strengthen youth engagement through expanded civic education, school-based outreach, and improved digital engagement.

For the purposes of this section, "youth" generally refers to newly enfranchised electors, typically aged 18-30. While some measures to improve participation among this demographic begin before age 18, the focus here is on building voting habits and civic awareness in advance of, and at the point of enfranchisement.

Civic Education Programs

The CEO has proposed increased collaboration with schools beginning in 2026, including classroom presentations and outreach activities. Elections Canada's research indicates that early classroom civic education or participation in mock elections can build awareness of electoral processes and support participation in first elections.

Elections BC provides a widely used *Democracy Kit*,¹² which offers teachers lesson plans, printable materials, and activities designed to introduce students to how elections work. CIVIX's Student Vote Program,¹³ delivered nationally, including previously in the NWT, produces high civic engagement outcomes, with over 90% of participating students reporting greater understanding of voting.

The CEO noted that Elections NWT has previously undertaken youth-focused civic education initiatives in partnership with external organizations. In 2011, Elections NWT engaged CIVIX to deliver a Student Vote-style youth election simulation in several NWT high schools, and the 2019 "Truant No More" youth awareness campaign similarly aimed to increase first-time voter participation. However, the CEO reported that neither initiative produced a measurable increase in turnout among new voters. These past experiences informed the CEO's view that future efforts must be more sustained and better integrated with territorial education systems. Committee therefore recommends:

Recommendation 7: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the Chief Electoral Officer collaborate with school boards and relevant education partners to expand civic education in schools, including classroom presentations and accessible learning materials for young people.

Social Media and Digital Outreach

As noted in this Report, youth primarily receive civic information through digital platforms. Elections NWT currently maintains a social media presence but lacks the staffing capacity to deliver sustained youth-focused digital campaigns. Committee believes that adding a new position to Elections NWT would address this gap.

Recommendation 8: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the Chief Electoral Officer create a new position within Elections NWT to support digital engagement, school-based civic education and community outreach activities, recognizing that this capacity does not exist within Elections NWT's current base budget.

CANDIDATE DIVERSITY

A representative democratic system depends on a candidate pool that reflects the diverse voices, experiences, and community perspectives of the electors it serves.

In accordance with its mandate, Elections NWT must remain impartial and cannot encourage or recruit candidates from specific demographic groups. However, it *can* support transparency by ensuring that that neutral, accurate, and accessible information is available to individuals considering running for office. The CEO identified a legislative constraint in this area, noting that the EPA does not currently permit candidates to voluntarily provide demographic information for aggregate reporting following each election.

Recommendation 9: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* be amended to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to collect optional demographic information from candidates, including age, gender, occupation, and racial, ethnic and cultural identities, for aggregate-level reporting following each territorial election.

Recommendation 10: The Standing Committee on Procedures and Privileges recommends that the Chief Electoral Officer publish an aggregate candidate diversity report following each territorial election to support transparency and long-term tracking of representation trends. This aggregate candidate diversity report should be included as a section in the Reports on the Administration of the Territorial General Election.

REGISTER OF ELECTORS

An accurate and up-to-date Register of Territorial Electors is essential for election integrity, assessing enumeration, efficient service delivery, and reducing barriers to participation. Although Elections NWT has strengthened the Register in recent years, including making amendments to the EPA in 2022, gaps in data access and information-sharing agreements continue to limit its completeness, particularly for young, mobile, and northern electors.

Legislative Authority and Information-Sharing Gaps

The 2022 amendments to the Act provided the CEO with authority to request information from public bodies such as Housing NWT, Health and Social Services, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Infrastructure. However, the CEO has

indicated that several information-sharing agreements required to operationalize this authority remain outstanding or pending renewal.

These delays limit the CEO's ability to fully utilize the authority already provided under the Act. In some cases, enabling consistent data sharing may require additional legislative or regulatory amendments beyond the EPA, such as amendments to the Motor Vehicles Act or departmental policies regarding data sharing and privacy.

Recommendation 11: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories prioritize and expedite completion of outstanding data-sharing agreements between Elections NWT and relevant departments, including the Department of Infrastructure, and consider any legislative or regulatory amendments required to facilitate timely information-sharing.

VOTING AT 16

Voter turnout among residents under 30 remains low across the NWT. In his 2023 statutory report and in follow-up correspondence to Committee, the CEO recommended lowering the voting age from 18 to 16 as part of a broader strategy to strengthen long-term civic participation.

The CEO emphasized that voting early in life can build lasting democratic habits, particularly when supported by strong civic education and accessible voting options. He further noted that other jurisdictions, such as Scotland, Austria, and Wales, have successfully implemented a voting age of 16 and have seen promising participation rates among newly enfranchised youth.

After carefully considering the available evidence, Committee does not recommend lowering the voting age.

PREPARATION FOR AN ELECTION: OFFICIAL AGENTS

Committee raised concerns with section 87(3)(c) of the EPA, which prohibits any employee, as defined in subsection 1(1) of the *Public Service Act*, from acting as an official agent for a territorial candidate. Committee observed that the *Canada Elections Act*, as well as many provincial jurisdictions do not expressly prohibit public servants from serving as official agents (or financial agents). Additionally, it was noted that several Canadian jurisdictions use a discretionary approach where any necessary limitations or guidance related to political activities is set out through the Public Service Code of Conduct and administered by the applicable Deputy Minister.

Recommendation 12: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that section 87(3) of the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* be amended to remove the prohibition on public servants serving as official agents for territorial candidates during elections.

Recommendation 13: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories amend the *Public Service Act* remove the prohibition for an employee, as defined in subsection 1(1) of the *Public Service Act* to serve as an official agent for a candidate in a territorial election.

Recommendation 14: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories add guidance to the Public Service Code of Conduct under “outside activities” addressing public servants who serve as official agents or financial agents for candidates in territorial elections.

CONCLUSION

This concludes Committee’s review of electoral participation following the review of the *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election*. Committee looks forward to receiving the Government’s response outlining how it intends to address the recommendations directed to it.

Committee is grateful to all witnesses and organizations who appeared before Committee or provided written submissions throughout the course of this study. Committee would further like to once again acknowledge and thank Elections NWT for their hard work, commitment, and support to election candidates and to residents across the NWT.

Recommendation 15: The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to the recommendations in this report directed to it within 120 days.

ENDNOTES

¹ Government of the Northwest Territories. (2006). *Elections and Plebiscites Act, S.N.W.T. 2006, c. 15* (administrative consolidation).

<https://www.justice.gov.nt.ca/en/files/legislation/elections-and-plebiscites/elections-and-plebiscites.a.pdf>

² Elections NWT. (2024). *Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the administration of the 2023 territorial general election*.

https://www.electionsnwt.ca/sites/electionsnwt/files/2023_ceo_report-web_version.pdf

³ Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. (2025). *Report on the Chief Electoral Officer's report on the administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election*. Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories.

<https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/Committee-report/2025-05/2025-02-11%20Feb%20Session%20SCOPP%20Committee%20Report%20on%20Voting%20Age.pdf>

⁴ Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories. (2024, September 27). *Public hearing on report of the Chief Electoral Officer* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZpBAHkQLQE>

⁵ Elections BC. (2024). Guide to voting and counting.

https://elections.bc.ca/docs/8008790_Guide-to-Voting-and-Counting.pdf

⁶ Elections Alberta. (2023). *Guide for Mobile Voting: Supportive Living, Long-term Care, and Hospitals*. <https://www.elections.ab.ca/uploads/207-Guide-for-Mobile-Voting-Supportive-Living-Long-Term-Care-and-Hospitals.pdf>

⁷ Elections Canada. (n.d.). Voting at seniors' residences and long-term care facilities.

<https://www.elections.ca/content2.aspx?document=index&lang=e§ion=sen>

⁸ Alhmidi, M. (2022, October 9). Many Ontario municipalities using online voting despite lack of provincial standards. Global News. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9181770/ontario-online-voting-no-standards/>

⁹ Halifax Regional Municipality. (n.d.). By-law A-400: Respecting alternative voting.

<https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/legislation-by-laws/By-lawA-400.pdf>

¹⁰ Elections Canada. (2023). Youth voting trends in Canada. Retrieved from

<https://electionsanddemocracy.ca/canadas-elections/youth-voting-trends>

¹¹ Elections Canada. (2025, May 1). *ID to vote*.

<https://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=ids&document=index&lang=e>

¹² Elections BC. (2024). Democracy Kit. <https://elections.bc.ca/2024-provincial-election/outreach-and-education/democracy-kit/>

¹³ Student Vote. (2025). Student Vote. <https://studentvote.ca/>

APPENDIX

Letter from CEO