

Standing Committee on
Procedure and Privileges



Report on Electoral Participation in the Northwest Territories

20th Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Chair: Ms. Kate Reid

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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**

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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).

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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.

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

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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

Kate Reid
Chair, Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges

August 1, 2025

Re: Request for Further Information on Options to Improve Voter Turnout in the Northwest Territories

I am writing in response to your letter of June 19, 2025. I have responded to the questions posed under each heading as it was in your letter.

1. Accessibility and Special Voting Opportunities

Elections NWT continues to offer expanded opportunities for voters to cast their ballots. After the introduction of online voting in 2019, we expanded options further in 2023 by trialling the “Vote Anywhere” model in the Offices of the Returning Officers in Fort Smith, Hay River, Inuvik and Yellowknife. This model allowed voters from any electoral district to cast a ballot in those four returning offices.

While it was not a widely used option with only 20 voters taking advantage of it, the feedback we received was positive, especially for those voters who were out of their district for prolonged periods, including for medical travel or connecting through regional centres on holiday. We are planning on promoting this option more widely in the lead-up to the 2027 election.

For reference, the districts that cast the most ballots using the “Vote Anywhere” trial are:

Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh	6
Nunakput	4
Mackenzie Delta	3
Dehcho	2

There are some legislative amendments that will be required, as under the current Act, the multi-district poll has more limitations, including only having a specific week of the election period when a multi-district poll can be held. I did use my authority under the Act to vary the provisions as it was a trial, however moving forward it would be better to have clearer legislative authority. Another challenge was the necessity of using write-in ballots for the multi-district poll. Legislative amendments would allow for a ballot-on-demand system, where the Returning Officer would be able to print the ballot for the voter’s district, thereby ensuring the voter using the multi-district poll has the same voting experience as a voter in the district on election day.

Mobile Polls are another method of voting that we offer, which is designed in legislation to serve any voter “who, by reason of disability, is unable to attend the polls to vote...”¹ We worked with the NWT Disabilities Council to promote this option, and Returning Officers proactively reached out to institutions in their districts that serve elders or other voters who may have mobility issues.

Across all districts, there were 85 votes cast through mobile polls, representing a 21% increase over the 70 votes cast in 2019. This is despite a 22.5% overall drop in total votes cast in 2023.²

The districts that cast the most ballots using mobile polls are:

Thebacha	32
Nahendeh	15
Mackenzie Delta	13
Yellowknife Centre	12
Hay River North	11

There are legislative amendments required to make mobile polls more accessible. Under the current Act, voters requiring this option may only apply between the 14th and 11th day before the election, with the polls delivered the following week, between the 7th and 4th day before the election. I am proposing that the application period commence before the issuance of the writs and extend through to a date as determined by the CEO. This will grant us the greatest flexibility in allowing these more vulnerable voters to cast their votes.

Allowing absentee voters to cast their votes online remains a popular option. In 2023, only Nunakput had no voters using the online option. In a survey conducted for Elections NWT in 2024, over 96% of the voters who used the online option expressed being satisfied with the process, and 75% said it was very important to them that Elections NWT continue to offer online voting as an option. A key finding for me is that over 42% of the respondents said that without this option, they likely would not have voted otherwise.³

I will be proposing legislative changes, including that the timeframe to apply for the absentee ballot should be extended to a date determined by the CEO. The rationale for greater flexibility is that as we introduce more technology at the polls, we will be able to strike voters off in real time as they vote, which may allow for an even longer period of time to apply for the online ballot in the future.

¹ Elections and Plebiscites Act (EPA), s.138(1)

² Part of the overall drop in votes cast is due to acclamations in the more populous districts of Kam Lake and Yellowknife South in 2023, whereas in 2019 Hay River North and Mackenzie Delta were acclaimed. However, most districts did see a drop in votes cast in 2023, the exceptions being Nahendeh and Hay River South.

³ The full survey results can be found on our website:

https://www.electionsnwt.ca/sites/electionsnwt/files/2023_internet_vote_survey.pdf

2. Voter Education and Information Campaigns

It is difficult to quantify what impact our efforts had on voter turnout, and what impacts the evacuation and later election date had. Comparing 2023 and 2015, when both elections occurred in November, there is a significant drop in votes cast⁴ in Nunakput and Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh, with significant increases in Frame Lake, Great Slave, and Inuvik Boot Lake.

Another method to compare voter engagement is to look at total votes cast per electoral district or community in federal and territorial elections. Comparing the 2015, 2019 and 2021 federal elections with the 2015, 2019 and 2023 territorial elections, more votes were cast in territorial elections in Dehcho, Tu Nedhé-Wiilideh, Mackenzie Delta and Nunakput in each election. In Sahtu and Nahendeh, only 2015 saw more votes cast federally than territorially. In Monfwi, the 2011 federal election had half as many votes cast as the 2011 territorial election. The July 2021 Monfwi by-election had 935 votes cast, compared to the October 2021 federal election's 683.

Comparing Fort Smith, Inuvik and Hay River is more complicated, as any year with an acclamation must be excluded, however, asides from 2015 when each community saw more votes cast federally, the territorial election has seen more engagement by voters in 2011, 2019 and 2023 in Thebacha and Inuvik, with slightly less turnout territorially in Hay River.

Where there is a big difference between federal and territorial election turnout is in Yellowknife. While 2023 had two acclamations territorially, we can look at 2015 and 2019. In 2019, more than 1300 additional votes were cast in that federal election than across the 7 territorial districts in the city. In 2015, that increases to over 3400 additional votes federally.

To approximate votes cast, the table below takes the votes cast from the most recent election in the acclaimed districts (Monfwi 2021 by-election, 2019 Kam Lake and Yellowknife South, 2023 Mackenzie Delta and Hay River North). This is an imperfect measurement, but for the sake of comparison, the table below does show a difference in votes cast federally, ranging from +564 in 2021/23, to +5,435 in 2015. However, most of this difference is coming from Yellowknife and the regional centres.

Year	Federal Votes	Territorial Votes	Acclamations	Territorial Adjusted
2021/2023	14250	10797	3 (2889 votes)	13686
2019	16588	13238	3 (1823 votes)	15061
2015	19077	12707	1 (935 votes)	13642

⁴ For the purposes of this comparison, significance was determined as a +/-15% change in total votes cast between 2023 and 2015.

From this, I can take a couple of points. The first is that voter engagement in the small communities is better territorially than federally. This could be due to smaller districts, and more locally known candidates, resulting in greater familiarity and a higher intention of going to vote. In the larger communities, the federal election sees better engagement. This could be due to greater news coverage of federal elections in national media, and the binary/trinary choice between political parties, as opposed to individual candidates. In territorial elections, voters must spend more time learning about their candidates, and in the multi-district communities, may be more likely to spend time learning about candidates in neighbouring districts in addition to their own.

Given that removing barriers to participating in the electoral process is a key area for an election agency, this tells me that there may be a gap in understanding about territorial elections amongst voters, particularly in Yellowknife. To address this, we are planning for a general information mailer to be sent out in the spring of 2027, to raise awareness of the upcoming election, encourage voters to update their voter information, and to place Elections NWT as the trusted source of information about the election process. This will be supplemented by a greater media campaign, including through paid advertising and promoted social media posts during the pre-election period (the months leading up to the issuance of the writs) and continuing throughout the election. We are also planning on expanding the availability of materials in Indigenous languages as one of our key goals in our 2025-2029 Strategic Plan.

3. Youth Engagement and First-Time Voters

According to a report from Apathy is Boring, 74% of Generation Z use social media to follow news and current events.⁵ The same report lists reasons for eligible young voters not voting in the 2019 federal election as falling under two themes, motivation and barriers. For motivation, respondents listed not trusting the candidates, unable to decide whom to vote for, no interest in voting or do not like politics. The barriers listed include being too busy, sick/medical reasons, being out of town and not getting a ride.

One of the factors that contributed to young voters participating is an understanding of civics and the democratic process. One of the findings in this report that resonates with me is:

“...the results suggest that civics education in high school makes a positive difference. The more Canadian youth report learning about democracy and institutions in high school, the more highly they rate their knowledge on this topic, and the more satisfied they are with how democracy is working today.”⁶

⁵ Canadian Youth Perspectives on Democracy, Global Issues and Civic Engagement, May 2021
https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/apathyisboring/pages/687/attachments/original/1620929654/AiB-Youth_Perspective_on_democracy_vENG.pdf?1620929654

⁶ Ibid, page 28

One of our goals in the 2025-29 Strategic Plan is to promote education about elections and democracy. To that end, we have been developing a presentation aimed at high school students to help foster an interest in democracy and voting. I am hoping to be able to present in schools across the territory while travelling with the Electoral Boundaries Commission this winter.

We are also finalizing a job description for an intern position focussing on education and outreach. If approved, this position would be for two years, starting in the spring of 2026, and provide a dedicated person to focus on voter outreach, and particularly younger voters, including by using the social media platforms that are commonly used by younger people to inform them of the voting process and the different ways they can vote.

I will be proposing legislative amendments to the mandate of the Chief Electoral Officer. Currently, I am mandated to “implement a program to disseminate information about elections”.⁷ A narrow interpretation of that provision is that I can only speak about the election process, without any broader implications on civic education or democracy. I will propose broadening that mandate to speak about democracy, civic responsibility and elections.

4. Candidate Diversity and Representation

It is important to note that it is my responsibility to remove barriers to participation, but not to promote one group over another. I am required by law to “ensure the impartial administration of elections”⁸, and this would include remaining impartial in informing potential candidates about the requirements of the Act. My office has participated in the Campaign School for Women run by the Department of Executive and Indigenous Affairs, but that participation is limited to providing information to prospective candidates about the requirements of the Act, the responsibilities of the Official Agent, the financial reporting and candidate rebate program. We would provide the same information to any initiative trying to promote candidates, be it women, men, youth, lawyers or welders. However, it would be inappropriate for my office to lead any of those initiatives, as it may appear that my office is then favouring prospective candidates from the target demographic to the detriment of others. That would violate our requirement to be impartial.

Visibility and a sense of belonging are important factors in feeling that your vote is important, that it matters, and that it can make a difference. One area that we can look into is our reporting on candidate demographics. Currently, the nomination papers do not

⁷ EPA, s.8(1)(c)

⁸ EPA, s.8(1)(a.1)

include gender, ethnicity, employment status, or age of the candidate. As such, we are not able to report on these demographics. If we were to start including this information as part of the nomination process, we could look at providing the gender breakdown, average age, common ethnicities, and common types of employment. I would note that we would not provide any individual information of candidates as part of this breakdown. This may provide a better understanding of who is standing for office in the Northwest Territories, and whether there are barriers to others of which we are not currently aware. This may be an area that would benefit from legislative changes, as the nomination paper requirements are heavily prescribed. Including a provision allowing the CEO to include other such information as determined would grant me the clear authority to gather this demographic information.

5. Funding Constraints and Budget

As part of the response under Youth Engagement, I mentioned that we are finalizing a job description for an intern. One of the priority areas that we have identified for this position is to do additional outreach and education on elections. If it is approved, I will be seeking funding in the 2027-28 fiscal year for that position to be present at major community events, such as the Great Northern Arts Festival, the Hay Days Festival, Folk on the Rocks, Wood Buffalo Frolics, and the Open Sky Festival. These are opportunities, especially in an election year, to raise awareness, promote voter registration, and provide information to prospective candidates.

Absent an increase in the scope of responsibility for my office, I don't see this position as being filled permanently once the internship is concluded in spring 2028. With a four-year election cycle, there is limited value in promoting an election that is 3 years in the future. Should my office take on increased responsibility for municipal elections at some point in the future, then there may be more opportunities for targeted outreach in communities with upcoming elections.

Other initiatives that I am considering include co-hosting common election terminology conferences with interested Indigenous governments. One of the gaps we have identified in our Indigenous language materials is that direct translations from English do not always reflect how the concepts would be explained in an Indigenous language. Some feedback I received from Returning Officers was that while the Indigenous language posters on voter identification were understandable, it was not written in a way that would be used by a speaker of the language.

I am interested in working with Indigenous governments to come up with a list of common election terms that would be commonly understood by speakers of the language. As an

example, the word “vote” in Dene Kédé has been translated variously as “k’etets’erevé”⁹, “ʔelehk’éteʔets’edéwe”¹⁰, and “Ełek’étəts’əwəw”¹¹. Recognizing that there are different dialects, I want to make sure that the materials we produce are reflective of and understood by the communities we serve. As Indigenous governments also conduct their own elections, it is my hope that we can use the same language as used by those governments in our election materials. As a first step, I will be reaching out to the Gwich’in Tribal Council and the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation leadership this fall to see if there is interest in partnering with us on this initiative. If the reply is positive, I would then proceed with working with those governments on how best to remunerate the knowledge keepers identified by the Indigenous government to work with us, ideally in a workshop setting, likely in Inuvik.

A longer-term initiative that I am interested in pursuing is inspired by Elections BC’s Democracy in a Box. This is an activity kit provided to educators in British Columbia to help a class explore democracy and voting. It includes fun activities and resources, including to run a mock election, a timeline of voting rights in that province, maps and trivia. There are resources available for both primary and secondary schools, which is provided free of charge.¹² Advancing this initiative would likely involve working with Education, Culture and Employment to ensure that the contents complement the curriculum and are designed to be accessible for the target age-ranges. This work would not take place prior to the 2027 general election and would hopefully get underway in 2028.

6. Register of Territorial Electors

In 2022, the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* was amended to enable the Chief Electoral Officer to request the personal information held by a public body for any resident who is a Canadian citizen, over the age of 18 and a resident of the Northwest Territories, and that the public body shall provide that information.¹³ This broadened my ability to gather information for the Register of Territorial Electors, which previously had been limited to information sources gathered under the *Medical Care Act* “insured persons”, *Student Financial Assistance Act*, and inmates as defined by the *Corrections Act*.

⁹ Shúhtaqt’ine Dictionary – Tulita,

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1AZk9Lx9pdilq45MPye2U7oHpcSTtNaRp/view>

¹⁰ K’ashógot’ine Dictionary – Radl̥h Kóé https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qR_Fmibda1cRmow2O9-aSWFrz0Ow62WN/view

¹¹ Sahtúot’ine Dictionary Dél̥ne Kédé -

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1gKiOxSwLGypumniSukBRbDP0Alykh_Wr/view

¹² Elections BC – Democracy in a Box: <https://elections.bc.ca/2024-provincial-election/outreach-and-education/democracy-kit/>

¹³ EPA, s.55.1 and subsections.

My office first reached out to the Department of Infrastructure in February 2024 to inquire about signing an information sharing agreement. We were advised that no information could be shared prior to the amendments then underway to the *Motor Vehicles Act*. My office followed up once Bill 11 had received assent in March 2025, at which point we were informed that the information sharing agreement template had to be approved by the Department of Justice, which to date has not occurred. I have not sought legal advice over whether section 55.1 of the *Elections and Plebiscites Act* would prevail over section 311.2 of the *Motor Vehicles Act*, and have been waiting for the Department of Infrastructure to complete the work required to sign an information sharing agreement.

In July, my office began working with Housing NWT on an information sharing agreement, which will hopefully be signed in the fall. The information sharing agreement that we have with the Department of Health and Social Services will expire in December of this year, and we will be renewing it under the provisions of the agreement prior to its expiry.

I hope that this letter has answered your questions. Should the Committee wish, I would be pleased to appear and discuss any of these areas, or other changes to the Act that I will be proposing.



Stephen Dunbar
Chief Electoral Officer

c. Committee Members
Committee Staff