

Standing Committee on  
Procedure and Privileges



# Interim Report on the Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election

20<sup>th</sup> Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly

Chair: Ms. Kate Reid

**MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES**

**INTERIM REPORT ON THE REPORT OF THE CHIEF ELECTORAL  
OFFICER ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2024 TERRITORIAL  
GENERAL ELECTION**

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## STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND PRIVILEGES

### REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE 2023 TERRITORIAL GENERAL ELECTION

#### INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to subsection 266(2) of the *Elections and Plebiscites Act*, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) must report on the administration and event initiatives seen through that office within six months following a Territorial General Election. The report has any matters the CEO thinks should be brought to the Legislative Assembly's attention. It also includes recommendations on how to improve election administration alongside any suggested amendments to the Act.

The Speaker tabled the CEO's report on May 21, 2024 in the Legislative Assembly and was subsequently referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges (Committee) for review and response.

Committee sought public feedback on the CEO report from September 2, 2024 to September 27, 2024, receiving two written responses (Appendix A). On September 27, 2024 Committee held a public briefing with the CEO Mr. Stephen Dunbar and Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Ms. Charlotte Digness.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Aleksi Toiviainen of Vote16 Canada also provided testimony at the public hearing speaking specifically to the recommendation from the CEO to lower the Northwest Territories Voting age to 16.

#### Background

Due to the wildfire evacuation of almost 70% of the Northwest Territories population, which represented 14 of the 19 electoral districts, the Legislative Assembly passed *An Act to Postpone Polling Day* for the 2023 General Election on August 28, 2023.<sup>2</sup> This Act moved the previously established September 3,

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<sup>1</sup> Public Hearing on Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pZpBAHkQLQE&t=2888s>

<sup>2</sup> Elections NWT. "Territorial General Election 2023 Official Results Report". [https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/td\\_9-201\\_elections\\_nwt\\_territorial\\_general\\_election\\_2023\\_official\\_results\\_report\\_.pdf](https://www.ntlegislativeassembly.ca/sites/default/files/legacy/td_9-201_elections_nwt_territorial_general_election_2023_official_results_report_.pdf)

2023 expiration date of the 19<sup>th</sup> Assembly to November 14, 2023. The Commissioner of the Northwest Territories ordered the CEO to issue the writs of election on October 16, with the prescribed 29-day campaign period.

On election day, 34 polling locations opened across the territory for the 16 electoral districts. In total, 10,797 votes were cast, representing a 52.54 percent voter turnout.

Committee wishes to thank the CEO and staff of Elections NWT for both the management of the 2023 Territorial General Election and their work on their report. The challenges faced by Election NWT following the were unprecedented, however the election process occurred as seamlessly as possible due to their hard work and dedication to their roles.

### **Repeal and Replace the Elections and Plebiscites Act**

The current *Elections and Plebiscites Act* was developed following the 2003 territorial election, and first used in the 2007 territorial election. It has been substantially amended five times since: in 2010, 2014 (twice), 2018 and most

recently in 2022. The *Elections and Plebiscites Act* has not been holistically reviewed since 2007. Given that previous amendments to this Act are often made to address specific issues, the CEO, throughout their report, has noted many inconsistencies, contradictions, or limitations to appropriately and flexibly support the elections processes in the Northwest Territories.

Although the mass evacuation of the Northwest Territories highlighted some obvious vulnerabilities within the current *Elections and Plebiscites Act*, including a lack of direction and guidance for emergency management situations, this is supplemented by other challenges faced by a lack of modernized legislation.

Clarity is required as modern society grapples with more varied uses of social media. This is impactful not only for advertising guidelines or the use of third-party advertisers but also for the growing use of artificial intelligence. A more modern regulatory framework that better reflects the operating reality of our everyday communications should be better reflected in the *Elections and Plebiscites Act*.

The CEO's report also outlines the need for more concrete guidelines for mobile polling stations, absentee ballots, and special voting opportunities. The need to ensure that more people have access to and options for their ability to vote is a

concern that both the CEO and Committee members agree with. Beyond that, updated guidelines for provision of food during candidate events or the removal of the elimination nomination deposit can be changed to better reflect national best practices in those areas.

The list of suggested amendments is extensive, however, it reflects the nature of how this important piece of legislation is ultimately updated, and requires that at a certain point a more complete update must occur. Addressing specific amendments does not necessarily ensure that more comprehensive legislative or policy goals can be addressed which has led to a lengthy list of clean-up, modernization, and consistency concerns required to be addressed throughout the current Act.

**Recommendation 1:** The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that the Legislative Assembly direct the Chief Electoral Officer to undertake a repeal and replace of the Elections and Plebiscites Act before the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Assembly.

### **Expand Elections NWT Mandate**

The CEO's report highlights Elections NWT's capacity and willingness to do more to support all election activity within the Northwest Territories. Expanding the mandate of Elections NWT to include local authorities would allow for greater collaboration and support for logistics, voter list management, a more comprehensive Register, improved information sharing, and to refine the capacity to deliver on election activities.

Allowing Elections NWT to support local authorities has the potential to better streamline and capture important information that then feeds into more complete data sets of all communities, regardless of the type of election occurring. It also creates opportunities to reduce duplication of materials and build broader capacity throughout the Northwest Territories for election activities. The CEO's report highlights that they can and wish to play a larger role in all elections, similar to how other election bodies run throughout Canada.

**Recommendation 2:** The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges recommends that Legislative Assembly direct the Chief Electoral Officer to engage with the Northwest Territories Association of Communities to determine how to better support local authority election activities.

## **Reduce the Voting Age to 16**

Voter turnout in the Northwest Territories remains very low and as noted in the CEO report, particularly low for voters under the age of 30. Committee wishes to continue their investigation into the request of the CEO to lower the voting age to 16 and will provide a separate report in the 2025 Winter sitting of the Legislative Assembly on their findings and the response to this recommendation.

## **CONCLUSION**

Committee again wishes to thank Elections NWT for their hard work, dedication, and support to not only candidates of the election but also the residents of the Northwest Territories.



## **APPENDIX A**

- Canada16 submission
- City Councillor submission

# Vote16 Canada Submission to The Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges

September 23, 2024

## Summary

In line with the recommendation contained within the [Report of the Chief Electoral Officer on the Administration of the 2023 Territorial General Election](#), this submission covers the case for extending voting rights to 16- and 17-year-olds in territorial and municipal elections in the Northwest Territories.

In Canada, the minimum voting age is currently 18 across all jurisdictions. 14 Canadian municipal councils and school boards have passed motions in support of extending voting rights to 16-17s, or studying the policy.

- Pickering City Council, 2004
- Lethbridge City Council, 2015
- Edmonton City Council, 2016
- Edmonton Catholic School Board, 2017
- Edmonton Public Schools, 2017
- Calgary City Council, 2018
- Strathcona County Council, 2018
- Winnipeg School Division, 2018
- Victoria City Council, 2019
- Vancouver City Council, 2021
- Vernon City Council, 2021
- Saanich City Council, 2021
- Whitehorse City Council, 2024
- Penticton City Council, 2024

The Chief Electoral Officer's recommendation presents an opportunity for the Northwest Territories to become the first in Canada to allow 16- and 17- year-olds the opportunity to vote. This summary includes an overview of the evidence supporting the extension of voting rights to 16-17s, drawing from cognitive science, political science and young people's experiences.

## Electoral Competence of 16- and 17-Year-Olds

Across the world, [17 countries](#) have a voting age of 16 in elections for at least one level of government. These countries are Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Malta, Nicaragua, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United States, and Wales. The three Crown Dependencies (the Isle of Man, Jersey, and Guernsey) also have a minimum voting age of 16.

As the list of jurisdictions with a minimum voting age of 16 expands, a consensus is growing in the neuroscientific and social science literatures that 16-year-olds are sufficiently mature, informed and ready to exercise the right to vote. Research by scientists including Dr. Laurence Steinberg, a world leading expert in adolescence, has shown that the critical cognitive ability needed for voting—the ability to make decisions in unhurried and non-impulsive contexts—[reaches maturity by 16](#).

Further research from [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), and [Germany](#), three countries that have extended the voting age, shows that 16- and 17-year-olds also match adults in the quality of their vote choice. This research demonstrates that 16-year-olds make their voting decisions as effectively and as competently as adults.

In Scotland, an analysis revealed that 16- and 17-year-olds do not merely adopt the voting prescriptions of their parents. Along with having sought out comparatively [more sources of information](#) than their non-enfranchised peers in the rest of the UK, more than 40% of Scottish 16-17s voted differently from their parents during the country's independence referendum.

Canadian scholars have found that 16-17s are not less politically developed than adults, and, depending on the aspect being looked at, they are [more knowledgeable or as knowledgeable as adults](#). Compared to 18-20s, they know as much about political institutions, the campaign promises, and the candidates.

[Research by Elections Canada](#) has found that 16- and 17-year-olds are just as interested, if not more, in participating in various forms of political activity, including voting and non-electoral civic activities.

During Prince Edward Island's referendum on electoral reform in 2016, [the province allowed 16- and 17-year-olds the right to participate](#). During this referendum, 16-17s voted at a higher rate of turnout than those aged 18 to 44.

## **International Experience**

Before they were allowed to vote for the first time during Scotland's 2014 pilot, public support for letting 16-17s vote stood at approximately 35%. After the election, when the views about youth as political actors had evolved, [public support increased to 60%](#) and the Scottish Parliament voted unanimously to make the change permanent.

There is a positive, lasting effect on turnout from extending the voting age. Social science research confirms that the “habit of voting” develops in a citizen's first one or two elections, meaning that a boost in youth voter turnout [will continue into the long term](#), as citizens continue voting over the course of their lives.

The Northwest Territories' chief electoral officer has [recommended](#) that the territory extend the voting age to 16 for this reason.

*In jurisdictions where the voting age has been lowered to 16, the voting rate for 16- and 17-year-olds is higher than older first-time voters between the ages of 18-24. This may*

*be partly due to still being at home, and being able to have conversations with parents, teachers, and peers more easily than when one is away or navigating the first challenges of adulthood. By allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to participate fully in the electoral process, it is demystified, removing a barrier to future participation in elections.*

The federal Chief Electoral Officer has also said that extending the voting age to 16 is “[worth considering](#)”, stating:

*“We know that Canadians who vote early in their lifetime will continue to vote, and those who don't vote in the first few elections will tend not to vote later on. So there's a real benefit to making sure that Canadians vote early, and voting when you're 16, there's an opportunity to reach out to them.”*

## **Youth Support**

In 2020, the Government of Canada commissioned 90 youth consultation sessions hosted by youth-serving organizations and youth facilitators. These sessions heard from a diverse cohort of young people on the priority areas established in Canada's Youth Policy.

Nearly 1,000 youth from all over Canada contributed their experiences, perspectives, insights and expertise. This work culminated in Canada's first-ever [State of Youth Report](#), which included a set of recommendations brought forward by youth under each of these priority areas. In the words of the report:

*[Y]outh want to be more involved across governments and have more opportunities to grow as leaders and sustain leadership opportunities. Furthermore, youth want to participate in the decisions that affect them and want those in the government and others to acknowledge and recognize their agency and autonomy.*

One of the five recommendations under the “Leadership and impact” heading was for the government to

*“Urgently prioritize lowering the voting age for youth from 18 to 16.”*

Supportive youth-led and youth-affiliated organizations [include](#) Apathy is Boring, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, Children First Canada, For Our Kids Canada, Generation Squeeze, Métis Nation of Ontario Youth Council, New Majority, Toronto Foundation for Youth Involvement in Politics, UNICEF Canada, Young Canadians Roundtable on Health, Young Politicians of Canada, and Youthful Cities.

In line with growing multi-partisan and grassroots support for this policy, a 2020 Elections Canada survey found that 50% of 16- and 17-year-olds actively [support the idea of having the right to vote](#), with an additional 21% expressing no opposition to it.

## **Conclusion**

As Canada's population ages and youth voter turnout rates remain low, extending voting rights to 16-year-olds becomes an increasingly critical policy. By enacting this change, the Northwest Territories can become a national leader in our country's democratic revitalization.

For more information, please contact Vote16 Canada General Coordinator Aleksi Toiviainen at [aleksi@vote16.ca](mailto:aleksi@vote16.ca).



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