



# ***Local Authorities Election Act***

## **2023 Engagement Summary**

Municipal Affairs | February 14, 2024

Alberta 

## Overview

The *Local Authorities Election Act (LAEA)* establishes the framework for local elections in the province for 332 municipalities and 60 school boards. The *LAEA* governs processes and procedures for election workers, voters, and candidates during the nomination, election, and post-election periods. The *LAEA* also regulates campaign finances, third-party advertising, and the Chief Electoral Officer role in local elections.

Local general elections occur every four years. In the 2021 local general elections, there were more than 3,700 candidates provincewide. The next general election will take place in October 2025.

Typically, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs reviews the *LAEA* after each local general election. For this review, Municipal Affairs designed a robust engagement plan to capture the perspectives of impacted stakeholders.

Ten topics were identified as potential areas for changes within the *LAEA*. Three of these topics were previously engaged on in 2022 and were out of scope for the 2023 engagement:

- elector privacy;
- third-party advertisers; and
- ballot recounts for elections using tabulators.

Seven new topics in scope for this engagement were:

- proof of elector eligibility;
- elector lists;
- rules for election postponement in case of unforeseen circumstances;
- political parties;
- advance voting;
- special ballots; and
- runoff elections for chief elected officials.

All other topics related to the *LAEA*, or any other legislation held by Municipal Affairs, were out of scope.

Possible amendments to the *LAEA* aimed at improving public confidence in local elections will be considered in 2024, to avoid encroaching on statutory timelines for the next municipal general elections in 2025.

## Methods

The engagement used three methods: a virtual engagement session with municipal associations and the cities of Edmonton and Calgary; an online public survey; and written submissions. Written submissions included formal feedback from the virtual engagement session stakeholders.

## Advance Voting

Eighty-seven per cent of survey respondents (Table 1) and written submissions supported maintaining advance voting. Advance voting, including the ability to vote outside of their ward or municipality, was seen as a positive mechanism to support voting as advance voting provides more opportunities for voters to cast their vote.

Sixty-eight per cent of survey respondents indicated they participated in advance voting, and out of those respondents, the majority felt their experience was positive.

In the open answer survey responses, the largest theme that emerged was related to improving access to advance voting. This included timelines, locations, expanding eligibility criteria, technology, and information accessibility. Some respondents expressed preferences for paper and/or in-person advance voting and expressed concerns about advance voting verification, security, and tabulation processes.

TABLE 1. ADVANCE VOTING: RESPONSES

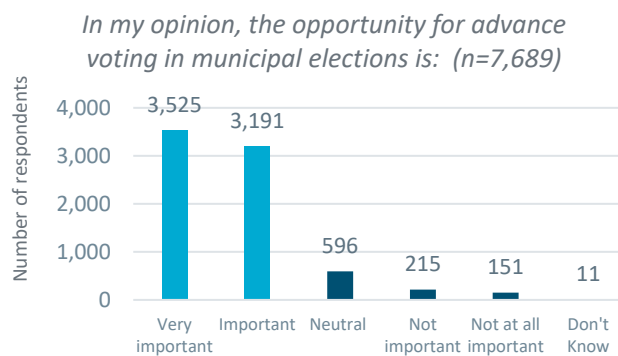
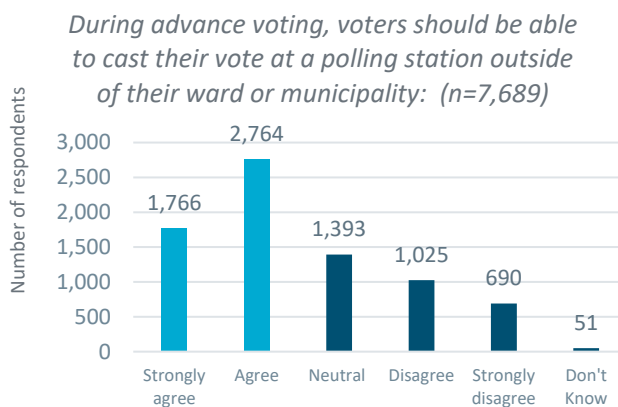


TABLE 2. ADVANCE VOTING OUTSIDE OF WARD OR MUNICIPALITY: RESPONSES

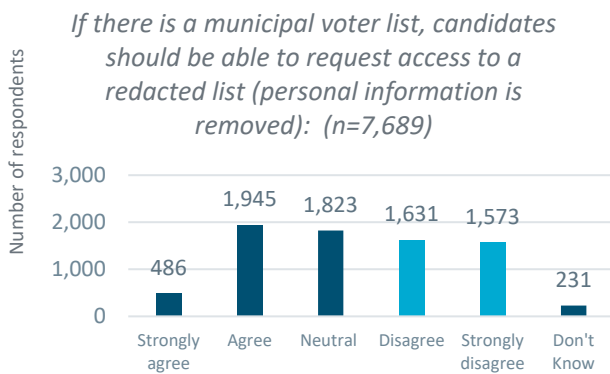


## Municipal Voter Lists

Forty-two per cent of the survey respondents and the majority of written submissions showed indifference or opposition toward sharing a redacted voter’s list with candidates (Table 3).

The Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA) felt that candidates are able to campaign without having access to a municipal list of electors, while the Alberta Municipalities (ABmunis) felt providing a redacted list to candidates would weaken public trust in municipal elections. Municipalities indicated there would be a significant administrative burden to develop and manage voter lists.

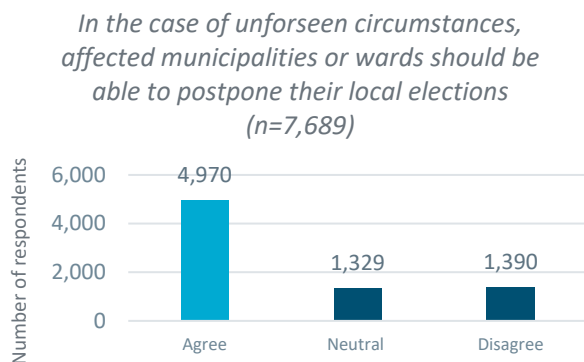
**TABLE 3. VOTER LIST ACCESS: RESPONSES**



## Rules for Election Postponement in Case of Unforeseen Circumstances

Sixty-five per cent of survey respondents and all written submissions supported postponing elections when natural disasters impacted the ability to vote (Table 4). In the open answer responses, the most prominent reason to postpone local elections was natural disasters, such as wildfires, flood or extreme weather. The second most prominent theme was emergency scenarios that posed a risk to human life.

**TABLE 4. ELECTION POSTPONEMENT: RESPONSES**

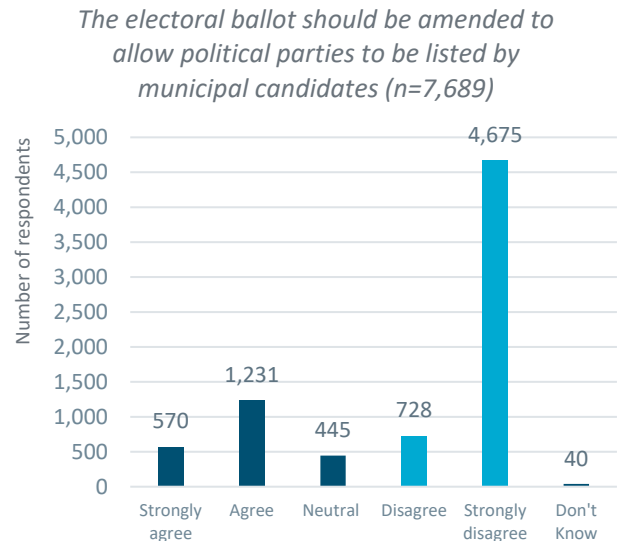


## Political Parties

Seventy per cent of survey respondents and most written submissions expressed opposition or reservation to the inclusion of political parties on local election ballots (Table 5). Many of the concerns identified by survey respondents in the open answer question focused on erosion of local representation and potential impacts to the consensus-based model of local government.

For the written submissions, some municipalities were neutral on the matter but expressed reservations. The associations did not support the inclusion of political parties on local election ballots. ABmunis passed a resolution at its 2023 fall convention to maintain non-partisan municipal elections. RMA felt locally elected officials have the responsibility to work together regardless of political alignment, and allowing political party affiliation would add an administrative burden to local election offices.

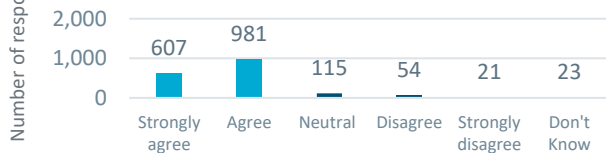
**TABLE 5. POLITICAL PARTIES LISTED ON ELECTORAL BALLOT: RESPONSES**



The subset of survey respondents who ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ (n=1,801) were asked if political parties at the municipal level (if permitted) should be required to follow the same financial rules as provincial political parties. Eighty-eight per cent agreed or strongly agreed (Table 6).

**TABLE 6. FINANCIAL RULES FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AT LOCAL LEVEL: RESPONSES**

*Political parties at the municipal level (if permitted) should be required to follow the same financial rules as provincial political parties (n=1,801)*



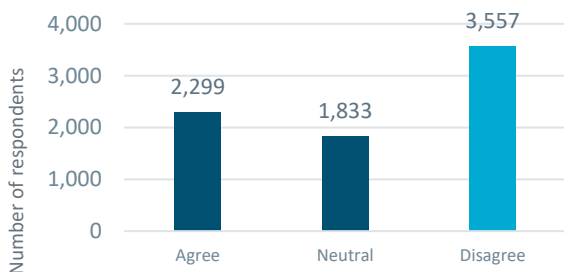
### Vouching and Attestation

Forty-six per cent of survey respondents did not support removing vouching and attestation from the LAEA (Table 7). Written responses indicated it was seen as important to allow all Albertans the ability to vote. All written submissions indicated support for maintaining the ability for an elector to attest for another elector. Those that agreed (30 per cent) that vouching and attestation should be removed felt it was essential in stopping election fraud.

A small proportion of survey respondents (eight per cent) indicated they participated in vouching, and out of those respondents, the majority believed the experience was positive, simple, and important.

**TABLE 7. REMOVAL OF VOUCHING AND ATTESTATION: RESPONSES**

*A voter's ability to attest or vouch for another voter should be removed from the LAEA? (n=7,689)*



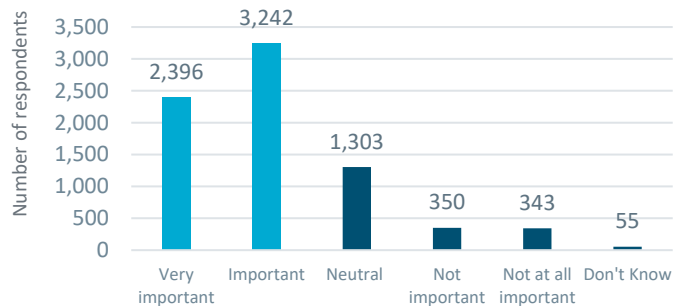
### Special Ballots

Seventy-three per cent of survey respondents (Table 8), and the majority of written submissions, supported the option to vote by special ballot. Half of survey respondents disagreed that special ballot criteria should be removed; however, many respondents indicated that expanding special ballots could increase participation in local elections (Table 9).

A few survey respondents (10 per cent) indicated they used a special ballot in a previous municipal election. Out of those respondents, the majority had a positive experience.

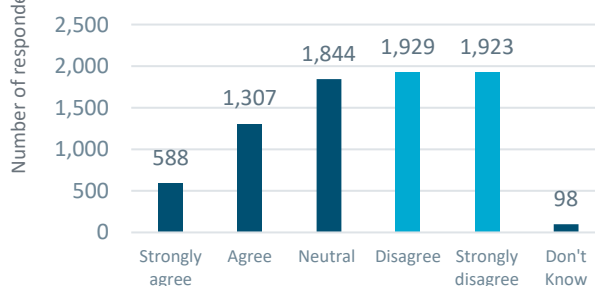
**TABLE 8. SPECIAL BALLOTS: RESPONSES**

*In my opinion, the option to vote via special ballot in municipal elections is: (n=7,689)*



**TABLE 9. REMOVAL OF SPECIAL BALLOTS: RESPONSES**

*Special ballot criteria should be removed so any registered voter can choose to vote by special ballot (n=7,689)*



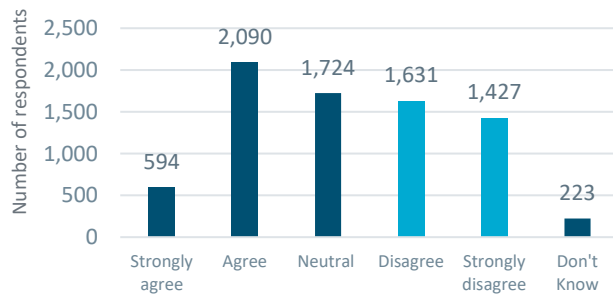
### Runoff Elections for Chief Elected Officials

Forty per cent of survey respondents (Table 10), and all written submissions did not support a runoff election system and were critical of the adoption of a runoff election system.

A prominent theme in the survey's written responses was higher costs for municipalities, taxpayers, and candidates, as well as lengthening the voting process and increasing the workload of municipalities. The second most prominent theme was the possibility of low voter turnout due to voter fatigue, apathy, and loss of interest in the electoral process.

**TABLE 10. RUNOFF ELECTIONS: RESPONSES**

*In a municipal election with more than three candidates for Mayor or Reeve, there should be a runoff election (n=7,689)*



## Profile of Survey Respondents

Survey respondents were asked to provide select demographic information.

### Municipality Type

While there are some differences between the survey sample and the general population, the general population was roughly reflected in the survey sample. The majority of survey respondents lived in a city with a population of 20,000 or more (68.3 per cent). This reflects that the majority of the population of Alberta, approximately 69 per cent, live in this municipality type.

### Geographic Location

Survey respondents were asked to provide the first three digits of their postal code, and Graphic 1 shows this information.

### Respondent Role

Ninety per cent of respondents identified as ‘Albertans with an interest in the topic,’ as opposed to ‘municipal elected officials’ (4.7 per cent), or ‘municipal administrators’ (4.2 per cent).

### Respondent Age

The survey reached a broad range of age groups. Despite the reach, some age groups were under or overrepresented in the sample. Specifically, Alberta’s young population was somewhat underrepresented in the survey respondent population (18-35 years).

GRAPHIC 1: GEOSPATIAL VISUALIZATION

