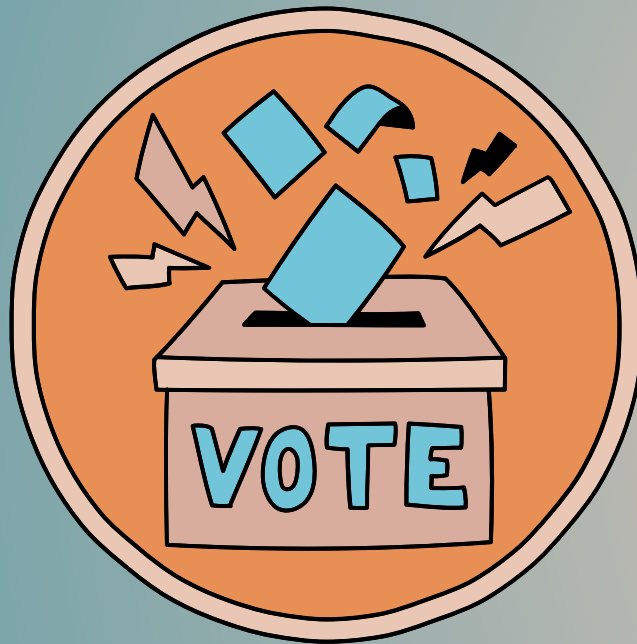


Expand the Vote

in Nova Scotia

Expanding Municipal Voting Rights
to Permanent Residents
&
Lowering the Municipal Voting Age
from 18 to 16





Expanding Municipal Voting Rights in Nova Scotia to Permanent Residents & Lowering the Municipal Voting Age from 18 to 16

Nova Scotia is a growing and increasingly diverse province that would realize many benefits from expanding municipal voting rights to Permanent Residents and lowering the municipal voting age to 16. Increasing civic participation, viewing policy issues from different perspectives, and fostering inclusion are just some of the potential positive outcomes of expanding the vote. Nova Scotia could be a leader in this regard, setting an example for other regions considering similar policies.

Expanding municipal voting rights will support greater inclusion and participation, which may contribute to higher rates of retention of youth and Permanent Residents in our communities. In a context of an aging population, and with regions across the country vying to increase their own populations, developing policies that increase engagement can only foster a community in which everyone feels they have a stake, and are working together for the overall betterment of all residents.

Join us in calling on the provincial government to amend the Nova Scotia Elections Act to extend municipal voting rights to Permanent Residents and to lower the municipal voting age from 18 to 16.

Lowering the Municipal Voting Age from 18 to 16

Benefits

Increased Civic Engagement

Allowing youth to vote at 16 encourages early engagement in the democratic process. It promotes a sense of civic responsibility and encourages them to become informed and active citizens from a younger age.

Education and Awareness

Involvement in the electoral process at a younger age can lead to increased awareness and understanding of political issues, government functions, and the importance of voting. This could potentially foster a more politically informed and engaged population, and would provide the opportunity for schools to be more invested in the process by engaging in the process and supporting students to take advantage of their right to vote.

Representation

Lowering the voting age ensures that the interests and concerns of youth are better represented in the political decision-making process. It acknowledges that young people have valid perspectives and stakes in the future direction of their communities and countries.

Long-term Political Participation

By starting to vote earlier, youth are more likely to continue participating in future elections, establishing a habit of voting that persists throughout their lives. This could contribute to higher voter turnout rates overall and a more representative democracy.

Addressing Issues that Impact Youth

Allowing youth to vote gives them a direct voice in shaping policies that affect their lives, such as recreation, transit, and infrastructure (roads, sidewalks, trails, bike lanes, bus stops). It empowers them to advocate for policies that reflect their concerns and priorities.

Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion

Lowering the voting age promotes inclusivity and diversity in the electoral process by ensuring that the voices of younger generations, who may have different perspectives and experiences, are heard and considered in decision-making.

Social and Economic Justice

Extending voting rights to youth helps address inequalities in representation, particularly for marginalized communities where youth may face disproportionate barriers to political participation. It promotes a more equitable distribution of political power and resources.

Alignment with International Standards

Lowering the voting age to 16 aligns Nova Scotia's electoral practices with a growing international norm and standard. Many regions around the world already allow 16-year-olds to vote in local, regional, or national elections.

Expanding Municipal Voting Rights to Permanent Residents

Benefits

Increased Civic Engagement

Granting voting rights to Permanent Residents encourages them to become more engaged in their communities and the democratic process. It promotes a sense of belonging and investment in local issues and decision-making.

Representation

Allowing Permanent Residents to vote ensures that a broader range of voices and perspectives are represented in municipal decision-making processes. It acknowledges the contributions and interests of Permanent Residents in shaping the communities where they live.

Integration and Inclusion

Extending voting rights to permanent residents fosters a sense of inclusion and integration into Canadian society. It sends a message that their voices matter and that they are valued members of their communities. It can also contribute to higher rates of retention, with PRs experiencing an increased sense of belonging in the community.

Community Building

Giving Permanent Residents the ability to vote encourages community involvement and collaboration. It strengthens social cohesion by empowering all residents to participate in shaping the future of their communities.

Enhanced Local Governance

With a more diverse electorate that includes permanent residents, municipal governments may benefit from a wider range of perspectives and expertise in decision-making processes. This can lead to more informed and inclusive policy outcomes that better reflect the needs and priorities of the entire community.

Alignment with Democratic Principles

Extending voting rights to Permanent Residents aligns with democratic principles of fairness, equality, and representation. It recognizes that residency and contribution to a community, and economy, are meaningful indicators of civic engagement and deserving of political participation.

Addressing Disparities in Representation

Granting voting rights to Permanent Residents helps address disparities in representation, particularly for marginalized communities who may have limited access to citizenship or face barriers to naturalization. It promotes a more equitable distribution of political power and influence.

Legal and Social Recognition

Providing Permanent Residents with the right to vote in municipal elections affirms their legal and social status within Canadian society. It acknowledges their stake in local governance and their role in shaping the communities where they live and work.

Sweden as an Early Adopter of Non-Citizen Suffrage

Benefits

In 1976, Sweden introduced noncitizen suffrage, allowing non-citizens, including Permanent Residents, to vote in local and municipal elections. This groundbreaking policy change aimed to promote inclusion, representation, and democratic participation among immigrant communities in Sweden. Outcomes included:

Increased Political Participation

The introduction of noncitizen suffrage led to a significant increase in political participation among immigrant communities in Sweden. Voter turnout among noncitizens in local elections rose notably, indicating greater engagement and interest in the democratic process.

Enhanced Political Representation

Noncitizen suffrage contributed to enhanced political representation of immigrant communities in local government. Immigrants gained a stronger voice in decision-making processes, leading to a more inclusive and representative democracy.

Policy Responsiveness

Following the introduction of noncitizen suffrage, policymakers became more attentive to issues affecting immigrant residents, leading to the adoption of policies aimed at addressing their concerns.

Social Integration

Noncitizen suffrage played a role in fostering social integration and cohesion within Swedish society. Affording immigrants a stake in the political process promoted a sense of belonging and inclusion, contributing to greater social harmony and solidarity.

This case study provides compelling evidence of the positive outcomes of Sweden's noncitizen suffrage policy. By expanding political participation, enhancing representation, and promoting social integration, noncitizen suffrage has strengthened democracy and advanced the principles of inclusion and equality in Swedish society. It's a valuable example for other regions considering similar reforms to promote immigrant rights and civic engagement.

Regional and National Initiatives in Canada

Permanent Residents

Municipal Voting Rights

In Canada, there are ongoing initiatives to expand voting rights for both non-citizens and youth. New Brunswick aims to implement municipal voting rights for Permanent Residents by 2026. Kingston City Council heard from local Permanent Residents in 2015 on expanding voting rights (and participation on city committees). The Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM) has advocated for expanding municipal voting rights to Permanent Residents. Municipal councils in Halifax, Toronto, and Calgary have explored the possibility of granting voting rights to Permanent Residents.

Public Advocacy

Various media outlets have featured opinion pieces and discussions advocating for voting rights for Permanent Residents.

Policy Briefs and Discussions

Organizations like the Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) have produced policy briefs discussing municipal voting rights for Permanent Residents.

Lowering the voting age

Policy Submissions

Organizations like UNICEF Canada have submitted proposals for electoral reform, advocating for lowering the *federal* voting age from 18 to 16. Their submission highlights the importance of engaging youth in the democratic process from an earlier age.

Legal Challenges and Debates

There have been constitutional challenges and debates regarding the voting age in Canada. Initiatives like the Voting Age Challenge, led by organizations such as Justice for Children and Youth (JFCY), aim to challenge the current voting age requirements and advocate for lowering the voting age.

Research and Reports

Organizations like Children First Canada have published reports advocating for lowering the voting age in Canada. Their report highlights the benefits of engaging youth in the political process and calls for action to lower the voting age to 16.

Research & News Articles

Expanding Municipal Voting Rights to Permanent Residents

Municipal voting rights for permanent residents likely coming in 2026

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/nb-permanent-residents-non-citizen-voting-rights-1.6468599>

UBCM: Allow Permanent Residents to Vote in Municipal Elections

<https://www.ubcm.ca/convention-resolutions/resolutions/resolutions-database/allow-permanent-residents-vote-municipal>

Citizens in every way but one: My ballot box issue is voting rights for permanent residents

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/opinion-gurpreet-kaur-bolina-voting-rights-permanent-residents-1.6817066>

ISANS Briefing: Municipal Voting Rights for Permanent Residents

<https://isans.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Municipal-Voting-Rights-August-2021.pdf>

Halifax council looking at Mi'kmaw seat, voting rights for permanent residents

<https://www.saltwire.com/atlantic-canada/news/halifax-council-looking-at-mikmaw-seat-voting-rights-for-permanent-residents-100911842/>

Kingston City Council - Motion to Consider Permanent Residents for Appointments to City Committees and to Expand the Vote to Permanent Residents (2015)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-XBtOioq1V0>

Research & News Articles

Lowering the Municipal Voting Age to 16

UNICEF Canada submission for electoral reform

https://www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2016-10/UNICEF%20Canada%20Submission_Voting%20Age%20Final.pdf

Voting Age Challenge (Canada) - Constitutional Challenge, 2021

<https://jfcy.org/en/cases-decisions/vac/>

House of Commons debates lowering voting age for Canadians

<https://globalnews.ca/news/8808934/house-of-commons-voting-age-canada-elections/>

Lowering the Voting Age in Canada (Children First Canada - 2020)

https://childrenfirstcanada.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/VotingAgeReport_aug28-1.pdf

Countries where under 18's can vote

https://archive.crin.org/sites/default/files/crin_voting_ages_compiled_0.pdf

Research & News Articles

Case Studies

Canadian Civil Liberties Association - Non-Citizen Voting Rights (2019)

<https://ccla.org/get-informed/talk-rights/non-citizen-voting-rights/>

Voting Age Status Report (US)

<https://www.youthrights.org/issues/voting-age/voting-age-status-report/>

Inclusion and Public Policy: Evidence from Sweden's Introduction of Noncitizen Suffrage

<https://karevernby.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/ajpsoldversion.pdf>