

YUKON NEWS

The big question: Yukoners see electoral reform ballot for the first time



[Talar Stockton, Local Journalism Initiative](#)

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Maxwell Harvey is the chief electoral officer of the Yukon. (Talar Stockton/Local Journalism Initiative)



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As summer draws to a close, Yukoners may be focused on relishing the last few lake swims, or canoe trips, or mountain bike adventures. The contribution they can make to the territory's history this fall may be further from mind.

On Aug. 7, the Yukon government announced the question on electoral reform being posed to all Yukoners in a plebiscite accompanying this upcoming territorial election.

The plebiscite is asking Yukoners if the territory should change the way it elect MLAs. However, the vote is non-binding.

The plebiscite “provides an opportunity for the public to offer input on electoral reform before any final decisions are made,” reads the YG release.

The question that will be answered in ballot boxes across the territory is “Should the way members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly are elected be changed from the current system of first past the post to a different system of ranked vote?”

The plebiscite comes at the recommendation of the Yukon Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform. Their recommendation in favour of adopting a ranked vote as a system of voting was tabled in the Yukon legislature as part of a report in October 2024.

The ranked vote asks voters to rank their preferred candidates: to win, a given candidate would need to have more than 50 per cent of the vote in their favour. If no candidate reaches that threshold, then the candidate with the least amount of votes is struck from the list. The next preferences of people who voted for that eliminated candidate would be redistributed among the remaining candidates until someone had more than half the vote.



The Yukon Citizens’ Assembly on Electoral Reform also recommended the question posed to Yukoners on adopting a ranked vote be “Do you support the adoption of a Ranked Vote system replacing the current system?’ Yes or No.”

Yukon chief electoral officer Maxwell Harvey said that Yukoners will receive two ballots in this year’s territorial election.

One will have, per usual, candidates for the member of legislature of each district.

The other will possess that question of “Should the way members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly are elected be changed from the current system of first past the post to a different system of ranked vote?” and the options “Yes” or “No.”

The plebiscite is part of the general election, Harvey said.



Whenever the election takes place, the plebiscite will go along with it. When Yukoners register to vote in the territorial election, they'll automatically be signed up for the plebiscite as well, Harvey said.

Harvey said he's thrilled that the question is now out there, noting the work it's taken to get here.

“There hasn't been a plebiscite in the Yukon at a territorial level for over 100 years,” Harvey said. “We had to develop the procedures.”

Keshah Austin, a spokesperson of executive council office, told the *News* via email that the executive council office developed the question based off of the citizens' assembly recommendation and consultation with Harvey. She said cabinet then had the opportunity to approve the question as part of the regulation governing the plebiscite.

PLEBISCITE BALLOT

Bulletin du Plébiscite

Should the way Members of the Yukon Legislative Assembly are elected be changed from the current system of First Past the Post to a different system of Ranked Vote?

☐

YES / OUI

Devrait-on changer le mode d'élection des membres de l'Assemblée législative du Yukon, qui est actuellement le mode de scrutin uninominal majoritaire à un tour, pour adopter un mode de scrutin préférentiel ?

☐

NO / NON

The question that will be asked of Yukoners as part of the plebiscite on electoral reform as shown in the back of this mock-up ballot, which has been cropped. (Submitted/Maxwell Harvey)

The regulation also determined that if over 50 per cent of ballots are cast in favour of changing the electoral system, then that is the threshold which indicates territorial approval of electoral change, Harvey said.



"It was very precise," Harvey said of the regulation, "and that's our formal authority to say, OK, now we can talk about the question. Because until it was released, we didn't, we couldn't be sure that would be

the final question, because it had to be approved.”

Elections Yukon is a non-partisan, independent office of the Yukon legislature in charge of running elections.

The latest the writ can be dropped and the election launched is Oct. 3.

In the meantime, Elections Yukon is doing outreach: they did a “soft launch” of its pre-plebiscite awareness campaign in May.

Next steps for outreach include an online voter information guide, household guides sent to every home in the territory, and advertising. They’ll also be training their poll workers to help provide voters at the polling station with information on plebiscites.

As the plebiscite nears, Harvey said the political parties could declare a stance on the question, as could certain interest groups.

“We encourage people to do look, to do investigate, to explore, to learn, to ask questions of the different sources, keeping in mind that there may be some bias or there may be some other which is fine, obviously as people have different perspectives ” Harvey said.

Elections Yukon has been in a state of preparation since the 2021 election, Harvey explained. Because the Liberals held power with a minority government, there could be an election at any point, he said.

“It may be a time for Yukoners to enjoy the summer and do all the things,” he said. “Elections Yukon has been very consumed with election readiness for the last four years.”

This upcoming election is legislated to occur on Nov. 3 but can be called at any time before that, Harvey said. He said that this election will also include two school board elections and it will be the first election with [new territorial electoral districts](#).

People can find out what their electoral district is via the Elections Yukon website, he said.

Elections Yukon is still looking for elections workers for polling stations, Harvey said. The positions are paid, and anyone can apply through the Elections Yukon website. Applicants will be contacted for training when the election is called.

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