



# Elections Yukon investigating low voter turnout in territorial elections

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By Dana Hatherly News Reporter



Main Street is pictured in downtown Whitehorse on Nov. 27, 2025. The downtown riding of Whitehorse Centre saw the lowest voter turnout in the 2025 territorial elections compared to other electoral districts. Elections Yukon is looking into voter turnout. (Dana Hatherly/Yukon News)

During the 2025 territorial election campaign, Keith Jacobsen, who ran unsuccessfully under the Yukon Party banner for Whitehorse Centre MLA, came across potential voter names registered at downtown buildings that no longer exist and at post office boxes in commercial buildings.

Jacobsen said his political team contacted about 40 per cent of eligible voters in the district. Jacobsen's team struck off close to 400 names from his version of the voter registry provided to the official candidate by Elections Yukon.

By his account, Jacobsen figures voter turnout in his riding is actually higher than the rate reported by Elections Yukon.

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The Yukon's chief electoral official is trying to better understand the factors behind voter turnout including why the final overall rate of 53.09 per cent was even lower than expected in the 2025 territorial elections.

Although a low proportion of possible electors turning out to vote was expected, based on interest and energy leading into and during the election campaign, chief electoral officer Maxwell Harvey of Elections Yukon said the numbers were surprisingly low.

“One of the things we committed to is to have a deeper dive into some of the factors that may have caused or be factors in the lower turnout,” he said. He has put together a framework to look at that while soliciting input from the public, academics and political parties, as well as returning officers and their teams, about their observations and feedback from the field and doorsteps.

Generally speaking, rural ridings appear to have had greater turnout than Whitehorse districts, according to an analysis of voter turnout data by riding for the 2025 elections provided by Harvey.

Whitehorse Centre, which includes downtown, saw the lowest turnout at 39.58 per cent, with 853 out of 2,155 eligible electors voting.

It would have taken a couple hundred more voters in Whitehorse Centre to push the turnout in that district over the halfway mark, which is still low, per Harvey. He noted the downtown riding is one of the larger ridings. He said it contains younger people, smaller families and likely a higher mobility population, which refers to people moving in and out more often.

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Harvey suggested the number of registered electors overall may be high. Even though there are no duplicates, there may be electors on the registry that no longer live in the territory or have changed districts. Additionally, there may be some inaccuracies. Furthermore, the list doesn't take into account electors who are eligible but aren't registered and show up to vote at the polls on polling day.

"I think our coverage is good. We've got most electors, and we know that because of the numbers that actually register during polling day, that come in and say, 'Oh, I didn't get a VIC card. I'm new'," Harvey said.

"We certainly do not have duplicate electors."

Elections Yukon previously shifted from enumeration, where staff went door to door to take a census of the population to create a voter list for each election cycle, to a permanent registry. The 2021 elections were the first held using an ongoing registry that is updated using data shared from Elections Canada, municipalities, the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, the Department of Health and Social Services, and the Department of Highways and Public Works.

Harvey said enumeration tends to undercount the electorate whereas a permanent registry is more likely to increase the number of voters and potentially lead to an overcount.

He agrees that there was likely overcoverage this time around.

"The biggest error or that's causing inaccuracy would be electors who have moved and we don't know about it because of the lag times of updates," he said.

Elections Yukon's goal is to maintain an accurate, current list of voters with solid coverage, according to Harvey.

Harvey noted there wasn't a full enumeration or a major targeted revision of the voter list prior to the recent elections due to a small team of Elections Yukon workers with a big mandate, a heavy workload and a short period of time to deal with two new districts, boundary changes, a plebiscite and school board elections that coincided with the general territorial elections.

He noted the territory has seen considerable population growth as voter turnout has declined.

Beyond the voter registry, Harvey wants to uncover what other factors may have contributed to voter turnout such as means and access to vote as well as the political landscape and personal reasons.

"What is different about this election than other elections?" he wonders.

"Hopefully we will create some discussion about democracy, because turnout is a major element in the democratic right to vote and be a candidate."

Harvey said lower voter turnout seems to be part of a trend globally and nationally, despite some spikes such as the "good turnout" for the 2025 federal elections held April 28. On the other hand, Harvey pointed out less than half of eligible electors voted in the Nunavut and Nova Scotia elections, the latter of which saw the lowest turnout in history at just under 45 per cent.

Harvey said Election Yukon's investigation will culminate in a report that will be publicly released and tabled in the Yukon Legislative Assembly in spring 2026.

He noted Elections Yukon isn't responsible for turnout but does have a role to play in ensuring public education and access to vote.

"Obviously, we encourage and promote participation. We think it's very, very important. If you don't vote, you're not represented. Your voice isn't being represented. It's not being heard," Harvey said.

"Higher the turnout, the better representation for the candidates that are selected."

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