

Municipal Voting Rights for Permanent Residents

Background

Municipalities around the country are exploring opportunities to extend voter rights to [permanent residents \(PRs\)](#) in their communities. Many municipalities across Canada – including Vancouver, Toronto, Hamilton, and Calgary – have requested that their provincial governments change the provincial elections acts to include PRs on the voting list. In Nova Scotia, Halifax Regional Municipality initiated a request to the province in 2014 to change HRM’s Charter to include permanent residents as qualified electors, which would enable them to vote in municipal elections and to nominate a candidate for municipal office (read the council report from November 10, 2015 [here](#)). [A private member’s bill](#) is now before government requesting permanent residents’ voting rights.

Why are Municipal Voting Rights for Permanent Residents in Nova Scotia Important?

They would demonstrate that immigrants are welcome and that we value their perspectives, experience, and contributions.

- Municipal voting rights would be a wonderful way to say to immigrants: “We want you to stay here. You pay taxes, you volunteer, you create jobs, you work in our communities, you are good neighbours, and we think you should have the right to vote in your local community.”
- Permanent residents have the knowledge, experience, perspective, and commitment to help elect decisions makers in our communities.

They would strengthen our institutions and democratic processes, as well as enrich our communities.

- Immigrants bring new ways of thinking about communities and living in them. Their active engagement in our political process would strengthen our political institutions and enrich our discussions on local community issues.
- Municipal voting rights would encourage permanent residents to become Canadian citizens especially as, in some cases, people may not have had the right to vote in an election before. Voting helps build participation in the democratic process.

They would encourage retention and make Nova Scotia stand out as one of Canada’s more inclusive provinces.

- Municipal voting rights help make our province unique. Retaining immigrants in our community is more challenging than in other parts of Canada. If we gave permanent residents municipal voting rights in Nova Scotia, not only would it encourage permanent residents to stay here, but Nova Scotia would also stand out among other provinces by saying to immigrants: “You have the opportunity to vote in municipal elections on matters that directly affect you and your family.”

They would build democratic participation.

- The sooner immigrants become engaged in the democratic life of their communities, the more likely they would be to keep voting, stay connected, and become active citizens – in turn passing this experience and knowledge on to their children.
- Canadian citizenship offers many benefits, including a Canadian passport; the right to run for public office at the municipal, provincial, and federal level; and the eligibility to vote in federal, provincial, and municipal elections. The right to vote in municipal elections as a permanent resident would not diminish the benefits and responsibilities of becoming a Canadian citizen.

Overall Benefit to Our Province

If given municipal voting rights, permanent residents would be encouraged to contribute their experience and perspectives in the decision-making process of local governments through voting. By extending the vote to permanent residents in our communities, engagement in our democratic processes would be strengthened overall.