

## How does our provincial government represent the provincial population?

It can be discouraging to see governments make decisions that you disagree with, especially when you do not feel like your interests are represented in governmental discussions. Poor representation in government can make us feel helpless, voiceless, and doomed to watch as others' decisions affect our lives.

Where does the power of the people reside?

In a democracy, governments represent people and communities as they decide how to distribute funds, social services, and other supports across the population. Elected officials step up to, supposedly, serve the people in their communities and ensure people have access to the things they need.

However, it does not always feel like our government is working for the interests of the people. Hence the discouragement.

I think this is (at least partially) a representation issue.

### *Consider: the 2024 Provincial Election*

The last provincial election in Nova Scotia was called and took place within one month, shortly after a municipal election in the province, and despite promises from the Premier that the next provincial election had a fixed date for July 2025.<sup>3</sup> Voters were likely caught off-guard with this election and given little time to make an informed decision with their vote.

In November, the Progressive Conservative (PC) Party won the 2024 election in a supermajority, with 43 out of 55 seats in the Legislature.

With 43 out of 55 seats, the PC Party has 78% voting power in the Legislature, meaning that they can essentially pass whatever bills and resolutions they want. Non-PC MLAs only have 12 seats combined, which does not outweigh the PC Party's 43 votes.

43 seats in the Legislature suggests that, in theory, the PC Party is supported by roughly 78% of Nova Scotia's population. In turn, the NDP would represent the opinions of 16% of the population (9 out of 55 seats), and so on.

Ideally, the make-up of the Legislature would be proportional to the opinions and concerns of the Nova Scotian population, meaning that when a party campaigns on a particular issue, the number of votes they receive is representative of how many people agree with their stance on that issue. However, this logic is not realistic for a few reasons.

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<sup>3</sup> Jean Larocche, "Nova Scotians heading to the polls Nov. 26 after early election call," *CBC News*. Accessed 29 March 2025. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-election-houston-chender-churchill-1.7363229>.

First of all, the Legislature is only representative of the people if most of the population votes.<sup>4</sup>

In the 2024 provincial election, there were 356,308 ballots cast out of 788,427 registered voters in Nova Scotia.<sup>5</sup> **That's about 45% of registered voters actually voting.** Less than half. The population of Nova Scotia was around 1,072,545 as of April 1, 2024,<sup>6</sup> so that means that about 74% of the population is registered to vote and around 33% of Nova Scotians cast a ballot in the most recent provincial election.

**33% of the population voted. That means that the elected officials represent roughly one third of Nova Scotians.**

When we break that down even further, the 78% majority of the PC government is the result of the third of the population that voted. In theory, 78% of this third voted PC, meaning that about 23% of the Nova Scotian population voted for a PC MLA.

Let's look at some other numbers.

Here are the number of total votes for each political party in the 2024 election:

Registered Parties	No. of Candidates Elected	Total No. of Valid Votes	% of Popular Vote
Green Party	0	2,940	0.82%
Liberal	2	80,849	22.69%
NSNDP	9	79,068	22.19%
PC	43	187,045	52.49%
Independent(s)	1	4,220	1.18%

*Table 1. Adjusted from Elections Nova Scotia.<sup>7</sup>*

This table shows that the PC party received 52% of the total votes cast. This number is very different from the 78% voting power majority in the Legislature. **52% of support from voters means about 17% of the NS population voted for a PC MLA.**

Only 17%. And yet, this government has 78% influence on decisions made in the NS Legislature.

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<sup>4</sup> Even if everyone voted, representation could still be skewed by drawing advantageous riding boundaries. This is called gerrymandering. You can learn more about gerrymandering here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mky11UJb9AY>. Accessed 29 March 2025.

<sup>5</sup> *Elections Nova Scotia*. Accessed 29 March 2025. Available at

[https://electionsnovascotia.ca/GeneralElection\\_42nd](https://electionsnovascotia.ca/GeneralElection_42nd).

<sup>6</sup> This number comes from the Nova Scotia Economics and Statistics archives, available at

[https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive\\_news.asp?id=20027#:~:text=Nova%20Scotia's%20population%20was%201%2C072%2C545,%20outpace%20births%20\(+2%2C073\)](https://novascotia.ca/finance/statistics/archive_news.asp?id=20027#:~:text=Nova%20Scotia's%20population%20was%201%2C072%2C545,%20outpace%20births%20(+2%2C073)). Accessed 29 March 2025.

In Nova Scotia the voting age is 18. According to the 2021 Census, 14% of the NS population is under 14, and with the numbers I calculated an estimate of 19% under the age of 18. These calculations are taken from a population total of 969,380. Assuming a similar age distribution today, this suggests that of the estimated 26% of people who are not registered to vote in NS, about 19% of them are ineligible due to age. What about the other 7%?

The census data is available at <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Nova%20Scotia&DGUIDlist=2021A000212&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>. Accessed 29 March 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Available at <https://results.electionsnova.ca/Summary.aspx>. Accessed 29 March 2025.

Another strange aspect of this election is that the NSNDP party received fewer total votes than the Liberal party, and yet NSNDP has nine MLAs and the Liberal party has two. This difference is an excellent example of how the borders for riding districts can change who is given a seat in the Legislature.<sup>8</sup>

If we want the government to represent the voting population, then there are many issues here. For one, not enough people are voting. (We all knew that already.) Secondly, this data shows the provincial election did not give us a clear representation of what the people of Nova Scotia want and need. When a government has a majority in the Legislature, as the PC Party does now, it is not necessarily a true representation of the population's interests because, in this case, only 17% of the population voted for that Party. What does the rest of the population want?

### ***How am I represented in government?***

This rough analysis shows that people who want their interests to be represented in the Legislature cannot depend on their vote in an election to do that job. There are many other ways of engaging with one's government that do not require any specialized knowledge or a ton of time. In our provincial structure, the MLA represents everyone in their riding whether or not a person voted for them. In theory, the MLA is your voice in the Legislature and should represent your community in discussions and debates. (It is worth noting however that when an MLA is part of a political party, this representation is likely skewed towards party interests.) Any individual can email, phone, or meet with their MLA to have their voice heard.

Another, more direct, form of engagement is to present to Bill committees while new Bills are being considered.<sup>9</sup>

However, a government with a huge majority of voting power in the Legislature (say, 78%) does not have to seriously consider any of these inputs. With the recent proposed amendments to several Bills, including Bill 6 with regards to natural resource extraction, many concerns were raised by the other political parties in the Legislature,<sup>10</sup> by public protest,<sup>11</sup> and presentations to the Public Bills Committee.<sup>12</sup> Despite each of these engagements, the PC government voted in favour of their original amendments for Bill 6.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See the above note on gerrymandering.

<sup>9</sup> More information can be found here: <https://nslegislature.ca/get-involved/democratic-participation/presenting-to-committees>. Accessed 29 March 2025.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the General Assembly notes from Feb 18, 2025. Available at [https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/hansard-debates/assembly-65-session-1/house\\_25feb18](https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/hansard-debates/assembly-65-session-1/house_25feb18). Accessed 29 March 2025.

<sup>11</sup> For example, the protest on March 5, 2025. <https://www.saltwire.com/nova-scotia/halifax-rally-protest-ns-government>. Accessed 29 March 2025.

<sup>12</sup> The Public Bills Committee proceedings are public and can be accessed online (via video). The Public Bills Committee on Bill 6 (among other Bills) is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waUnSIvEjlc&list=PLGn3UOvEam0sLvpqXaZ0zWl-Vohms-LUx>. Accessed 29 March 2025.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to the amendments to Bill 6, Houston undid his previous commitment to fixed elections in Bill 1. See Bill 1, 4th amendment: "Section 29A of Chapter 5 of the Acts of 2011, the Elections Act, is repealed," available at [https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/65th\\_1st/3rd\\_read/b001.htm#text](https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/65th_1st/3rd_read/b001.htm#text). Section 29A outlines the rules for a fixed election date in NS, scheduled for the third Thursday in July four years after the previous election.

## ***Bill 6***

While the results are frustrating, it is worth noting that these actions are not unless. Public opinion *does* play a role in governmental decision-making. For example, the PC government was likely worried about how their amendments to Bill 6 would come across to the public since environmental protection is a hot topic in Nova Scotia. As such, they needed a strategy to get these changes through without too much fuss.

I can imagine that the amendments to this Bill are what the Premier was referring to when he called the election in 2024 and said that “Nova Scotians should have their say” before his government made “significant investments to improve affordability and the housing crisis.”<sup>14</sup> Governments typically follow an election cycle in their decision-making—the more controversial decisions are made when they are first elected so that people will forget the unpopular choice by the time the next election rolls around. With this in mind, it was smart to call a snap election in order to have the support they needed to make these controversial decisions at the beginning of their time in power.

The PC government also came out very strong as they started in the Legislature with a strategy to demonize and exclude any persons or groups that might oppose their natural resource extraction plans. They have used a lot of rhetoric to separate ‘us’ (for progress) from ‘them’ (anti-progress), called out so-called ‘special interest groups’, and insisted on their plan as the only way forward by saying ‘we want you to join us’ without leaving room for alternative solutions or discussion.

This is close-mindedness is concerning with the voting data in mind. How many people in Nova Scotia would actually vote in favour of the current decisions being made by our government when only around 17% of our population voted that party into power?

Again, our individual voting power is not a good marker of representation. Public consultations and public engagement with government are probably a clearer indication of public opinion on different issues facing our province. Yet so far, it seems like the current government is not prepared to listen to anyone who does not agree with their proposals.

As a final, and perhaps most important note, the Nova Scotia government is but one governing body in our province. We live on unceded territory. If the decisions of government are affecting the land, I think we should question their authority to make such decisions without permissions from the true stewards of this place.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Jean Laroche, “Nova Scotians heading to the polls Nov. 26 after early election call,” *CBC News*. Accessed 29 March 2025. Available at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/nova-scotia-election-houston-chender-churchill-1.7363229>.

<sup>15</sup> As of 29 March 2025, the authority of the Assembly of Mi’kmaq Chiefs has so far gone unrecognized on this issue. See <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/fracking-uranium-mining-assembly-of-mikmaq-chiefs-tim-houston-1.7495996>.