



# PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT VOTING AND RESULTS REPORTING

2023 GENERAL ELECTION

As planned, the official results have now been posted to the Elections Manitoba (EM) website. In addition to the summary results provided on election night, results are now provided by voting area. The institutional votes that were counted after election day and a few small, remote and northern communities which faced weather and flight challenges are also reported in the official results.

Official results are posted following the final tally process which reviews the counts from election night.

#### A few numbers:

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- **488,979** Manitobans voted out of **884,853** eligible voters, **55%** turnout
  - **80%** increase in advance voting
  - **97%** of results were reported on election night
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As you know we faced several issues on election day and election night reporting: the stormy weather that knocked out power at some polling stations, firewall issues with our website and the learning curve associated with the introduction of new processes and technology in the field. Here's a quick look at a few key areas:

## Website

Our website faced challenges from the start of voting on election day and throughout the day, and those challenges continued as election night results were being reported. There had been considerable work internally and with external experts to review and protect our digital systems as it is known that elections are a target for malicious players. Despite this work and testing, a firewall went down, and our systems had to be rebuilt and redeployed on election day. We are engaging external subject-matter experts to determine what exactly happened and what additional steps are needed to protect the site in future. The website issues are a serious matter that must be fully reviewed and addressed.

It is worth noting that at no time were vote counting machines or voting results compromised. We can reassure all Manitobans that the issues we experienced with our website did not affect the integrity of the election. Vote counting machines feature many levels of security to maintain the integrity of voting. For example, voting machines are not connected to the Internet and each machine goes through rigorous testing to ensure they are in proper working order. Despite this, the delays we experienced were inconvenient and regrettable, and we are working diligently to address them.

## Voting

EM had three types of service delivery for advance voting and election day: full technology with a computer system and vote counting machine; computer system with manual counting; and traditional manual polls in smaller locations. For all three models, the focus is delivering uninterrupted services to voters. We build in contingency plans to respond to any issues that arise.

One of the contingency plans involved using an auxiliary ballot box should a vote counting machine be inoperable or another problem arose such as a power failure. Voters could continue to vote, and their ballot securely placed in the auxiliary ballot box. For both advance voting and election day voting, the auxiliary boxes were used far more than anticipated, and resulted in more manual counting than had been anticipated, which takes more time.

## Counting and Reporting

### Election Day

A large and long-lasting storm started election day with power outages and some delays. Voting proceeded across the province until the close of polls at 8:00 PM. At that point election day counting began. This consisted of:

- Uploading the advance voting results from vote counting machines to EM's result reporting system.
- Running the results tape from the vote counting machine in each election day polling location and entering the results into the EM laptop, or in a few cases calling in the results to the local election office.
- Entering in the results from all manual counts of election day and advance voting.
- Manual counting of the auxiliary boxes from both election day and advance voting and entering these numbers into the results system. This manual process affected more polling places than anticipated, largely due to the storm.
- On election night 97% of the results were in and reported.
- Our website experienced service disruptions on election day, which at one point led to intermittent problems including an approximate 30-minute delay in results being updated on election night.

### Advance Voting - Reporting

There was an 80% increase in advance voting – a significant uptake from voters. For reference, counting this volume of advance votes by hand would have taken until approximately 3:00 am before results would have been reported. The unexpected increase in using the auxiliary ballot boxes for advance voting did increase manual counts. The use of auxiliary boxes was largely a result of staff getting used to using new technology and processes. While those issues were sorted, voting continued using auxiliary boxes. On the evening of September 27th, we did run a number of these advance ballots through the vote counting machines, but there remained a number of ballots that needed to be hand counted.

A key learning for us this election concerned the reporting of advance non-resident votes. Each electoral division had to tabulate and report the non-resident votes (those who voted early outside their home electoral division) from each of the other 56 electoral divisions. These results were reported separately for the first time this year. In some cases, there were zero non-resident votes to count. For example, the Agassiz electoral division received zero non-resident votes from the St. Vital electoral division. In those cases, zeroes should have been entered, which would have displayed results as counted on our website. Unfortunately, in some cases those fields were blank, which meant the system appeared to show some non-resident votes were yet to be counted when in fact there were zero votes to count. We are now examining ways to eliminate this procedural error for future elections.

We could have made this process clearer to the public, candidates and parties as we worked through confirming the zero counts. Results matter and we take the time needed to ensure accuracy, and it does indeed take considerable time.

## New Processes and New Technology

The introduction of new technology and processes affected voting officials very directly. As in previous elections, we have some take-aways on training and streamlining processes to make it easier to deliver services. We will be consulting with staff in the weeks ahead to gather more ideas and suggestions.

Initial observations suggest that more technology be used, particularly for print-on-demand ballot printers and to look at the processes that speed up service. We expect to hear more as we work through our debriefs and assessments.

## Official Results/Declaration of Candidate Timing

In this election we allocated 10 days, as compared to seven days, for the final tally for two reasons. One was to acknowledge the Thanksgiving weekend and allow staff to take a bit of time off. The timeline was discussed and agreed to by Advisory Committee members and was noted in the Notice of Election posted in all local election offices. The other was a take-away from the 2019 general election. With a permanent voters list, we can update voter information during voting and during final tally. In 2019, we learned that updating voter information and ensuring voters who voted are struck from the list took longer than anticipated but is still a worthwhile effort to ensure the final voters list is current, complete and accurate. Before the permanent voters list, this type of work didn't occur until after the official results were declared. With technology, we can do it more immediately and therefore more accurately, but that does require more time during the final tally process.

## Process Audits

EM decided to take the initiative to conduct three process audits on October 11 and 12 in the electoral divisions of Waverley, Lagimodiere and Brandon West, which had the lowest pluralities. While all ballots in these electoral divisions were manually counted, it was not a formal recount. We wanted to check how our new processes performed, particularly the accuracy of the vote counting machines. Scrutineers and candidates from the parties involved in each of the electoral divisions were invited to witness the process, and approximately 12 scrutineers watched the three audit processes.

As a result of the review, there were minor changes in numbers, which is not unusual. The elected candidate in each electoral division did not change.

## Next Steps

Elections Manitoba will prepare a statement of votes, the annual report and be ready to appear before the all-party Legislative Affairs Standing Committee following the tabling of the annual report, or when determined by the committee. Those reports will reflect the continued analysis and review the organization will undertake in the months ahead, and include any recommendations for changes or updates.

Elections Manitoba is committed to transparency in reporting results and reporting on the activities of the organization. This does require time and careful attention to detail to ensure the work is done correctly.

As an organization, Elections Manitoba will continue to listen and learn to better serve Manitobans.

We are confident that the election was free and fair. We thank Manitobans for their participation in the general election.